

THE WOMEN WHO LIVE IN CĂTĂLINA FLORINA FLORESCU'S *CORP DE TEATRU ÎN CINCI ROCHII STRĂLUCITOARE* (THEATER BODY IN FIVE SHINING GOWNS)¹

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Abstract:

Cătălina Florina Florescu, a Romanian scholar and professor at Pace University in New York, publishes her second volume of plays in Romanian in 2024, further establishing her presence as a diasporic writer in her native country. Continuously engaged with how the major themes of humanity and literature are reflected in Romanian society, Cătălina Florescu persists in writing in her mother tongue and seeking connections with the Romanian audience beyond geographical boundaries. Corp de Teatru (În Cinci Rochii Strălucitoare) [Theatre Body (In five shining gowns)] is yet another significant addition to the contemporary Romanian theatrical scene, featuring plays that have been nominated for and awarded in the field.

Keywords: Cătălina Florina Florescu; Romanian contemporary dramaturgy; Romanian female playwrights; diaspora.

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Cătălina Florina Florescu graduated from the Faculty of Letters (Romanian and English-American Studies) at the University of Bucharest. She left Romania at 23 and holds both a master's and a PhD from Purdue University in the United States—her doctoral specialisation in comparative literature, focusing on humanistic medicine. After 25 years in the USA, she writes in Romanian and English. She is currently a Professor at Pace University.

In the author's preface to the volume *Corp de teatru (în cinci rochii strălucitoare)/ Theatre Body (In Five Shining Gowns)*, Cătălina Florina Florescu confesses that she had questions about her relation to the Romanian language after leaving Romania and using English more in her social and professional life until she discovered that the language changes with her, is enriched with new forms and will never disappear: "I confirmed to myself that a native tongue travels with, inside me and in what I leave after me, and this calmed my anxiousness". (Florescu, 2024, p.7)

The second volume of Romanian theatre by Cătălina Florescu draws thematically from the space to which it is intended, yet its message, beyond geographical conditioning, remains universal. The women who live in her texts can be imagined typologically in any space. However, the play on words, sometimes every day and sometimes not, ties them to the Romanian context, proving that the author has distanced herself from Romania only in her day-to-day life while refusing to ignore the problems and mentalities of different social environments in her homeland. This is also evident in her careful suggestions and multimedia directions offered to directors, paying particular attention to the embodiment of her plays beyond the text.

The meanings of the words and expressions manage to explore a socially stratified universe linguistically, only in appearance, highlighting the necessity of communication as individual or group healing. Whether referring to communication between ages, genders, or teacher-student relationships, the author relies on the therapeutic value of words for the audience (reader or viewer), who will undoubtedly find themselves in one of the situations in the plays. Furthermore, Cătălina Florescu once again expresses her affinity for humanistic medicine through how she constructs theatre. Traumas are not healed without being brought to light, without being “(well) spoken,” and the body of theatre imagined in this volume wears shining garments precisely through the verbal illumination of all kinds of traumas. The voice of Professor Cătălina Florescu resonates through her approach to formal education and her suggestion not to equalise students' individuality into an amorphous mass, disregarding the story behind each one and denying the story within each.

Corp de teatru (în cinci rochii strălucitoare)/ Theatre Body (In Five Shining Gowns) includes five plays. The first play, *Femeia care tot uita să se nască/ The Woman Who Was Forgetting to Be Born*, was a finalist in the contest for the Play of the Year, 2019, organised by UNITER and won in 2021 in the project Theatre, benefitting of a dramatic lecture at the National Theatre of Iași, in the International Festival of Literature and Translation Iași. The second play, *Am aflat...azi/ I've found today*, won second place in the Comedy Contest organised by the Comedy Theatre of Bucharest in 2019 and was part of the winning project in the national financing program, the Administration of National Cultural Fund. It was also staged following cooperation between Asociația “Georgina Rusu”, the amateur theatre company of The National College for Arts “Regina Maria” and the Educational Multifunctional Centre for Youth “Jean

Constantin”, Constanța. The third play, *Vecinele/ The Neighbours*, is set in the postcommunist working-class residence areas during the Great Union centenary, celebrating the national state. The fourth place, *O poveste fără sfârșit/ A never-ending story*, is dedicated to the writer's father, who died in 2005 on Christmas Eve; he is the one who convinced Cătălina Florescu that men who love their families are not a myth. (Florescu, 2024, p. 196). The last play in the volume, *Ultima bacantă/ The Last Bacchante*, is “dedicated to the Goddess of Comedy, Thalia, in the hope that women's writing is as complex and intense as a laugh that begins on a Monday and ends on a Sunday, on a day of celebration”. (Florescu, 2024, p. 257)

Cătălina Florescu's plays have universal underlying themes, which, despite her physical distance from Romania for such a long time, perfectly represent contemporary Romanian society and its daily struggles, especially regarding women's condition and life. All the plays in the volume may be a treasure for the Romanian companies if they direct their attention toward contemporary national playwrights in the country and diaspora. Dramatical lectures may be a beginning, but the audience also needs to connect to authentic experiences, question societal standards and biases, and find answers for change.

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