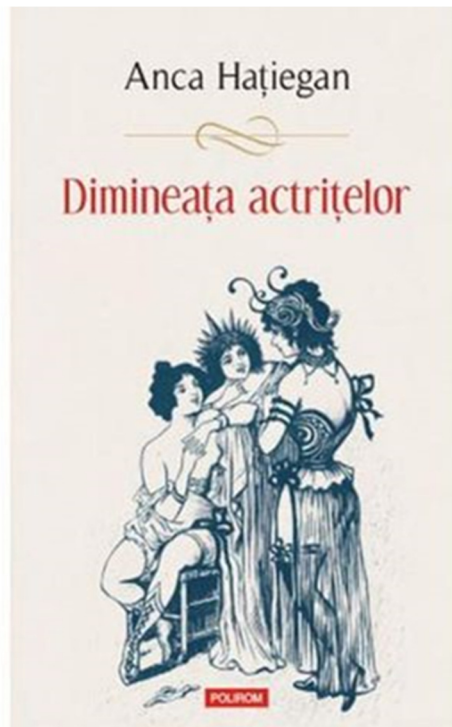


Morning of the Actresses

**Book Review: Anca Hațiegan, *Dimineața Actrițelor*
[*Morning of the Actresses*] (Iași: Polirom, 2019)**



Romanian theatre history is short however the studies, books and research - we mean those worthy to consider - are rare. This is why a book like Anca Hațiegan's *Morning of the actresses* is more than welcome among theatre specialists. But the great contribution comes only now: it is a book about the very beginning of female acting in Romania written in a style full

of warm and humor, so that it can be read by anyone, using a language adapted to the story extraction era to facilitate reading. What the book does is to return the respect for the women at the beginning of the century, that fought to have the recognition of their presence on stage and to give them the recognition that they deserve. Divided into seven chapters the book is trying - successfully I may add - to recompose an era when the calling of being an actress is an obloquy. The picture is a complex one because we have a chapter about the first female critic or a chapter about the female students of the first drama schools from Romania. The big plus of the research is that it's not only a series of portraits, as expected, but it creates an anecdotal atmosphere, full of conspiracy and obstacles put in the way of these women. It follows the destinies of the first females who risked their reputations to play on stage, from time to time in intimate details, that are selected by the author with the purpose of explaining the circumstances - sociological, political, family, perceptions - in which the professional actress appears in Romania and the circumstances that lead to the disappearance of some of them: Romanian women agreed with this hypostasis of "mothers of the nation and family" because it facilitated their penetration into the public sphere.¹

Set in the first part of the XIX century, in a time when exposing yourself publicly could attract public outrage, the research that Anca Hațiegan offers is readable more as novel than a history book, due to the relationship that the author creates between the written plays - elaborated specially containing female roles - and the desire to act and to impose acting as a respectable job not only for men in conjunction with the way these parts are played on stage. The research is a huge one because of the few existing sources, but mainly a thorough one, identifying names on posters and linking them to women of the era, analyzing memoirs or other theatre histories. The book contains also a series of images, from the reproduction of a poster from 1818 announcing a bilingual performance to the reproduction of a stage design draw for the first performance in Romanian language in the east part of the country and images of the first actresses the book refers to, or important men that shaped the destinies of these women. By the way, the author constantly links the

¹ Anca Hațiegan, *Dimineața Actrițelor [Morning of the Actresses]* (Iași: Polirom, 2019), 53.

first actress with their husbands, brothers, fathers, mainly because they facilitated, or they opposed to the idea of their wives and daughters on the public stages. Anca Hațiegan gives an attentive eye to the economic and social details of the first actresses existence, to their expenses with the costumes and makeups, highlighting the death in poverty of most of them.

First and foremost, the book reestablishes the recognition that these women should have had, in a passionate lecture, a little hampered by the analyses of the plays written for them, otherwise necessary for the common reader. By recreating the atmosphere of the time, with gossips, spicy details, but also relevant information, Anca Hațiegan illuminates all interested in the becoming of the Romanian professional actress, on the development of Romanian plays and performances of the time. As the author states, the appearance of (...) the first professional actresses appeared to me as a phenomenon whose implications far exceed the area of interest of the history of the theater and which should concern a much wider audience: historians , researchers of the condition of women in Romanian society, historians of Romanian mentalities². At the end the filling that remains is that there is still more to come on the subject.

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² Hațiegan, 13.

