

Seeing Battle, Knowing War: Feminist Re-Visioning in Hortensia Papadat-Bengesçu's "The Man Whose Heart They Could See"

By Jon Dietrick

Abstract

As an exploration of the themes of disillusionment and the failure of language, Romanian writer Hortensia Papadat-Bengesçu's "The Man Whose Heart They Could See" would seem to share much with better-known men's writing on the war such as Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* or Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu: Journal d'une Escouade*. But a careful reading of the text reveals some crucial differences from these works. Treating the subject of war not in terms of an easily definable "scene of battle" or "war front" but instead as a deeply entrenched cultural logic in which varied aspects of society are both affected and, in an important sense, complicit, "The Man Whose Heart They Could See" mounts a critique of language far more radical and modernist than that found in most war literature, one which explores the extent to which questions of historical memory are inextricably bound up with issues of gender and power.

Key Words: *women and war, feminist literature, Papadat-Bangesçu*