

**UNIVERSITATEA DIN CRAIOVA**  
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**PhD THESIS**

*James Joyce – Camil Petrescu. Romancierii de formație europeană*

*James Joyce – Camil Petrescu. Modern European writers*

**ABSTRACT**

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To meet from the start those objections which may rise up against our research, we begin by emphasizing that our intention has been not to place Camil Petrescu in the shadow of James Joyce as a disciple, mimic or even plagiarist. The doctoral thesis, entitled “**James Joyce - Camil Petrescu. European modern novelists**”, aims at putting the two writers in connection with each other as modernist novelists, their interwar novels going through the same process of metamorphosis and renewal (in structure, objectives, purpose and ultimate meaning), in a gesture of synchronization to the European modernist literary current.

Since literature has common types and themes, and all writers report to common schools, currents or literary styles, limits are no longer perceived as fixed boundaries, as well as literary productions are not considered anymore an exclusive privilege of certain Western literatures<sup>1</sup>. C. Petrescu and J. Joyce capture the new spirit of the interwar epoch, absorbing the changes and establishing a canon of literature (more or less at the national level), their texts being thus decreed literary manifests. However, they do not enjoy the same literary recognition, first, due to geographical isolation and language influence, characterizing the Romanian novelist, and, secondly, due to the claim and pretense of Western literature to cultural superiority and originality, applicable to J. Joyce. The editorial publications of the two writers are at distance of only few years, but Western writers believe that any attempt of literary affirmation, coming from outside their circle of influence, is nothing but a mimetic game of the eternal *Western European* model. Nevertheless, Petrescu proves to be a writer too original to walk behind another writer, surpassing the “crisis of inferiority” of the Romanian literature, as seen from the analysis undertaken in our paper.

The thesis is grouped into five chapters. It starts with **Argumentum; Chapter I. Preliminaries; Chapters II and III**, target, in turn, the two authors, J. Joyce and C. Petrescu, which are brought together in **Chapter IV**, where are analyzed in a comparative critical view; the paper ending with **Chapter V. Conclusions** as research results. Chapters II and III, referred as above, are structured into two main parts: first part offers, in general, a vision of the artist / writer, while the second part deals with their works, i.e. the interwar novels. This second part is in its turn divided into several levels: presentation of the novel, themes and main ideas, as well as innovative elements that each author brings forward in the structure and composition of the novel.

**Chapter I, Preliminaries**, with the subtitle **Features of interwar literature**, treats in detail the ideas of **Argumentum**, especially those referring to the situation in the interwar epoch of the Romanian literature as opposed to Western literature.

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<sup>1</sup>This paragraph shows that the Romanian writer can be integrated into universality and analyzed as such in future undertakings. But we stopped to the boundaries of the European continent, thereby recognizing and adhering to the Eurocentrist-modernist concept.

Social and historical changes require reconsideration of old values and affirmation of a modern society, a new horizon of knowledge, thought and expression. Physical and spiritual borders being open, humanity becomes more receptive to interaction, cultural exchange, acceptance of diversity, in terms of different mentalities and national concepts.

At the level of literature literary genres are also reorganized to capture and entertain the public with the literary novelty. If, till the twentieth century, the novel had known the strongest affirmation in Western Europe, now other European literatures, including Romanian literature, are called upon to contribute to the awakening (from stagnation or literary inactivity) and the development of a sense of self-consciousness, to strengthen and boost historical and cultural tradition.

Modernist artists set up a permanent and fluent communication, a community of artistic and human aspirations, beyond all sorts of boundaries; the spirit of innovation is now powerful, liberating the writer of Conventional literary prejudices.

Although C. Petrescu promotes a modern literature, the Romanian writer must surpass many obstacles to demonstrate the innovative and original direction of his prose, the most acute battle is with the domestic denial and with the privilege place occupied by the foreign writers; with the dictatorship of the foreign models over the national literature, dictatorship which sometimes ends into suffocating and even disregarding the literary national manifestations.

**Chapter II** begins with the section dedicated to **James Joyce – The Writer (2.1.)** where we highlight those features which recommend him as one of the most innovative writers, respectively novelists, of the twentieth century. Joyce adheres to this principle early in life, motivated by the desire to express in personal language, as clearly and directly as possible, what he feels about the world around, and (by the desire) to seek and express, in his works, the universal truth. Joyce tries to cover everything through his prose, considering there is a symbiosis between him and the world, him as part of the universe. Above all and everywhere, he finds an infinite number of wonders and perceives a continuous string of miracles. Epiphany is the means to discover the real, being ultimately confessed and captured into speech.

**Sub-chapter 2.2, James Joyce-The novelist**, starts with the radical transformations operated by Joyce within the traditional novel: he appropriates and develops in depth the concept of inner monologue; from psychology, he borrows and applies the concept of “stream of consciousness”; he “assumes” the subjective point of view, of the narrator or main personage, which no longer identify with each other or with the author (as it was met within the structure of the traditional novel); following Bergson and Proust's steps, he operates the separation inner existence as opposed to exterior flow; finally but not lately, he expresses in an authentic manner, edited in a

sterile and dry style.

In his books, Joyce is anxious to allow the reader to step into his consciousness, the latter being unaware of the fact he/ she is present in subtext even before reading it. Yet, Joyce does not provide any code to facilitate the decryption and the right understanding of his literature. The text abounds in hints; therefore the process of reading is always a dynamic movement. Promoting *impersonality in art*, Joyce manifests interest in text or “New Criticism” age, and also interest in reader, orientation characteristic of the twentieth century.

We start with his first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, appeared in 1916 and announcing the transformations of the interwar literature. The novel detects, through the main personage, the false and conventional values of contemporary Ireland. Intellectual, aspiring to reaching the absolute, the personage-artist sees redemption in art. Critics identify the storyline of a manifesto-novel, betraying within the lines the aesthetic creed of J. Joyce, claiming the fact that the narrative micro-structures interwoven with episodes of writer's personal history.

The book makes part of the “Bildungsroman” category, being a “portrait” of the process leading towards artistic maturity. The author recovers, from the maze of memories, more exactly from his haunted past, through constant losses and retrievals of lucidity and faith, the history of formation of a “young artist”. So the novel, constructed through the alternation of times, rarely reveals the secret of its narrative architecture.

In another chapter (2.2.2.), we analyze the novel *Ulysses (1922)*. Masterpiece more *praised* than read, with an intricate and complex design, *Ulysses* revolutionizes the technique of the novels, introducing literary characteristics of other genres and species, such as literary poem, drama, essay, farce etc. The book is constructed through language and, at the same time, beyond / (from) the language.

*Ulysses* reconstructs the story of Homer's *Odysseus*. The theme of Joyce's novel is the same of the journey, a symbol of knowledge and personal revelation. Transposing the ancient myth into modern times, the writer produces parody effects where the subject is the author's contemporary society, Dublin, which had lost the values once exalted by the classical epic. Language is here of lucid and merciless sarcasm.

The action of the novel is focused around three main characters: Leopold Bloom, his wife Marion (Molly) Bloom, opposite Penelope, and young Stephen Dedalus (Telemachus), 7 Eccles Street replaces Ithaca. The characters are ordinary people. Thus, Joyce starts from the belief that ordinary things can have mythical meaning, that one ordinary day may symbolize the life of a universal man.

Harassed with regrets, remorse and hesitation, mimicking weak action, unable to pursue a

specific purpose, Joyce's characters wander through Dublin. The content of his work betrays a tragic impotence to sustain a sense of human dignity, especially when mankind has a chaotic organization and a sterile mentality. Joyce neither seeks justifications, nor thinks of the non-sense of reality, in his work melting art and life, symbolism and realism, classical and contemporary world, aesthetic living and daily life, order and anarchy, as result of the dialectics of the opposites (Coincidentia oppositorum).

**Chapter III**, dedicated to **C. Petrescu**, is larger than the one dedicated to J. Joyce. This is because our approach is to demonstrate C. Petrescu's European formation, first in writing literary theory, then in practicing literature.

The offset in this approach is the subchapter **Camil Petrescu - writer** (3. 1.) which presents C. Petrescu as an author, possessed by a desire to accede to universal knowledge.

In **Camil Petrescu, theoretician of the novel**, we target C. Petrescu's confidences regarding literature; his efforts to overcome national inequalities (when reported to Western modern literature), by promoting the same new European literature, which focuses on praising literary authenticity, absolute sincerity and spontaneity in writing. His interviews, testimonies, conferences and various theoretical articles (the essay "New structure and work of Marcel Proust"), diary pages, his two interwar novels are parts of the so-called "critical support"; the Petrescu-novelist being doubled by Petrescu-the theorist of the novel. Resorting to radical innovations, he feels the need of introducing meta-functional structures which explicit work and thus facilitate its correct public reception.

The literature of authenticity orientates writers towards certain literary species, such as diaries, which record continuously lived events and are thus a mirror reflection of personal portraits. *Last night of love, first night of war (1930)* or *Confessions of an intellectual in his youth*, is a novel about war and love, in two parts, anti-traditional or modern in technique, written from a first World War combatant's point of view, Ștefan (Stephen) Gheorghidiu. Throughout the two parts, drama is enhanced by the adoption of the person first narrative. The personage-narrator, Stephen Gheorghidiu occupies and dominates the entire space and time in the novel. His personal ego affirms its singularity and distinction becoming its own object of study. The others are always an undefined mass, existing only insofar as he mentions them. Continuously, Stephen operates comparisons and separates himself from the world.

Student at Philosophy, without money or talent, he seeks to reach absolute love. To the extent that the subject of love and the individual does not become as One, the Absolute cannot be achieved and the experience fails.

The novel is a mix of literary techniques. First of all, it is a novel with scholar background,

the personage proving a vast culture, always aware of the new publications and discoveries in science, thus justifying the vocation for new and modernity. The novel shows also a classic side, which is meant to reveal the deep intellectual drama of those who live in a world which despises the real values of the spirit. C. Petrescu avoids exaggerating the heroic actions as in traditional war literature, here war is used as a mean to reveal the essence of the individual.

The novel, *The Procrustean Bed* (1933), uses authentic and raw material emerging from real experiences, which the novelist has rearranged to serve and reflect his philosophical attitude towards life. In the center of the events there are four main characters: the unnamed Mrs. T., Fred Vasilescu, the actress Emilia Răchitaru and the poet George Demetrescu Ladima which all confess in first person. These are joined by the author himself, a character within the text, serving to trigger and directing the intricate flow of confessions. The author-personage's footnotes represent his own novel which he writes in parallel, in order to discover the meaning of the existence.

The prose writer opts for few central personages to study them thoroughly. The characters live with unique intensity; they are captured in the moral dynamic and organic living and give the impression of genuine life, fugitive and irreversible. When self-defined, personages string gestures and habits, obsessions and manias. For C. Petrescu, a personage is not an individual, “a person”, but the expression of a trend, a way of seeing the world, a social category or temper, an Idea. The personage is Essence. Through Fred or Mrs. T., the novelist clarifies his conception about the novel. Also, through Fred Vasilescu, the author reconstructs two love stories. Fred is writer's literary self and point of intersection of all the other characters. He lives in emotional memory and recomposes life events of the others, avoiding as such to analyze his drama. Multiplying perspectives and voices as compared to the previous novel, C. Petrescu wants to give us the guarantee of truth, lacking in the former novel, but it is nevertheless an illusion.

The novel treats the personages, involved in his love stories, the same way travelers were shorten or lengthen in Procrustes' bed, in order to adjust to the sizes of the bed. His characters get victims of the psychological Procrustean bed, symbol of love and life. One is “shorter”, the others are “taller” than the fixed dimensions of the bed. Enlarging the meaning of the symbol, it can be applied to the intellectual's situation in an unjust society, which tries to cut off the wings of talent and intelligence, by promoting mediocrity and compromise of any kind.

C. Petrescu takes from modern literature, at the level of modern techniques, those which fit his requirements regarding modern writing. The narrative construction is claimed from Proust (the need for radical changes in structure) or Stendhal (raw claim of writing), *the fragmentation of narrative time* from Bergson, *stream of consciousness* technique from W. James etc. The two novels differ in structure, number of personages confessing, meta-textual comments, more and more

precise, disguised in footnotes, where the author writes his own novel. *The Procrustean Bed* is a reflection in the mirror of the first novel in terms of love story: the woman is the one in love in *The Procrustean Bed*, while the man runs away, hides and deceives. Great drama of C. Petrescu's personages is given by the contradiction between reality and illusion.

The first subdivision of **Chapter IV** is a brief summary of the most relevant critical opinions regarding the two novelists. The sub-chapter, **Modern vanities (4.2.)**, studies the analogies and differences between the two novelists.

The two writers betray the same interest in writing urban novels, pursuing, beyond the depiction of the cities, into the mind and soul of the personages, their development (or perversion) over the time, approaching more what happens at the level of inner life, because it provides a sense of reality and authenticity to the narration. Their novels are of analysis; they reflect real problems and cases, taken out of experience and moral crisis. To serve their purpose, authors choose intellectual heroes to populate their novels, as the heroes excel not only in self-analysis, but they are also able to see themselves as object and subject at the same time.

Heroes are not good or bad; they are made of light or gray shades to give credible quality to their struggle between reality and illusion; ownership and revolt; courage, ambition and social conventions, trying to understand and perhaps survive. Joyce, maybe, more than Petrescu, concentrates to portray in-depth the personages and the interwar society.

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)* and *Last night of love, first night of war (1930)* are novels written from a singular perspective, of the main heroes, Ștefan Gheorghidiu, respectively Stephen Daedalus. The form the two Stephen give their stories approaches either confession or autobiographical narration. The novels record processes of self-consciousness, the main characters' metamorphoses and processes towards maturity. Experiences shape personalities and are seen as tools of personal development, thus novels entering the category of the *Buildungsroman*.

Structured differently, the main heroes belong to the same literature of solitude and desolation. The writers' heroes are always and exclusively interested in their own personalities. They occupy and dominate the main space and time throughout the novels. The other characters are always an undefined mass, for which they harbor a mixture of mistrust and contempt, and exist only if they mention them. As events occur and are reflected in their memories, and memories are triggered by selective memory, the characters' place in the story is given according to the importance of the moment.

Heroes swing between past and present, in search of *lost time*, with the double meaning: the recovery of memories and the recovery of time which has elapsed, identified as wasted time. The

process of “free association” requires these heroes to place themselves as observers of the own selves, and, in a cold manner, always read the surface of own consciousness. Heroes have to honor the absolute honesty in writing and to include everything in their narration, no matter unpleasant, insignificant, random or accidental would seem to the subject of the story. The artist has to follow the lead of spontaneous thought, “only caressing the surface of their consciousnesses”.

Love is present within their novels. Art or love is for them a result of the spirit. Stephen Daedalus, and Stephen Gheorghidiu believe that mind and imagination dictate and separate what worth seeing, through a multistage process of crystallization on the subject or object of the “passion”.

Psychological correspondence to Proust's novels, common ideas, and memories brought to light from subconsciousness, rely on the same mysterious process that triggers heroes' reactions, as well as writer's personal thoughts. In order to write *The Procrustean Bed*, respectively *Ulysses*, both authors inspired from classical literature, more exactly from Greek-Latin mythology. Joyce takes over the myth of Odysseus, after the legendary King of Ithaca, while Petrescu focuses on the myth of Procrustes.

The portraits of the heroes cannot be drawn by a single brush; they do not possess one characteristic as they are complex characters. They all betray spiritual deformities. There are successive abandons and returns of the own self. Characters are never what they seem at first sight. The authors want to impose us their own views or even to induce to adopt their position regarding the personages.

The core of the novels include events happening one day (in Joyce's novel), two days or one afternoon (in Petrescu' s novels). There are times or days, not only very rich in occurrences, but powerful in revelation and meanings. Revelation points to the surface all the frustrations and all the problems of the novels' substrate.

Reputation has brought writers into scandal caused by pornographic allegations as their novels become an art of “indiscretions”, exploring intimacy. Modern novel is a novel where intellectual inhibitions disappear, where humans are exposed to the excitement. The authors leave heroes to live their lives, thus allowing insertion of fragments of sexual intimacy into the text, and causing the unfortunate echoes in the epoch.

Joyce' s sexuality is by far less moderate than Petrescu' s. Percentages reflecting sexuality and pornography are nevertheless lesser than those absorbed into the pages of contemporary fiction. In this direction, they could be claimed as precursors, with a more complex perspective on sexuality.

Their novels are exercises of virtuosity used to express real life. We are dealing with the



emotional turmoil of life where all begins and nothing ends. Because of this psychological fluidity, novel has slipped to pure living. It appeals to first-person narrative more suited for the assumed subjective perspective, able to reflect personal existential crisis.

Through Joyce and Petrescu, modern novelist is interested in the inner self. The personages' comments are noted and passed through personal filter. Radiography of the social environment is operated from the point of view of an inner, subjective and limited narrator.

Modern novelist cannot assume subjectivity, comparing with a personage that simply remembers his/ her life without literary concerns. Such a novel operates with elliptical expressions, phrases and punctuation, untidy phrase constructions dethrone concerning of belletristic style, as a literary impediment to express genuine consciousness. With the modern novelist, language undergoes deformation. It suppresses punctuation and juxtaposition of facts, it must create the impression of a real life, moment by moment, without logic concerns. The narrative is deconstructed to include the spontaneous chain, the unguided involuntary memory, i.e. the inner monologue. Thus it changes the category of time: the continuous present includes past and future.

We are no longer talking of architecture in modern novel, starting from a structure or theme, or a particular topic. The novel develops and grows along the process of writing. By *tearing* time, hereby suggesting a messy succession of the events, a certain depth of destiny, the novel becomes a puzzle for the reader, unaware of the fact that he/ she is involved in the creative process right from the beginning,.

Doomed to live in a time of great turmoil, the writers know only the anxieties and crises of their own work and artistic personalities. They devote their entire lives to the writing activity. Their novels represent only a compromise they reached with themselves and the publishers in order to be printed. The writing is, for them, something which never ends, nor never ceases. Their art is shaped throughout life, as a personality, which sums up new experiences, undergoing successive transfiguration. "The (personal) Ego is always in the process of building. He is not a finished product, he always develops", Jung. The two writers conceive the image of truth complex, contradictory and constantly dynamic.