

Universitatea “Petru Maior” din Tîrgu Mureş

Facultatea de Ştiinţe şi Litere

Domeniul: Filologie

TEZĂ DE ABILITARE

ABSTRACT

**AMBIGUITY, AMBIVALENCE, AND LIMINALITY IN
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

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I.A. ABSTRACT

The habilitation thesis entitled *Ambiguity, Ambivalence and Liminality in American Literature and Culture* describes my scientific, professional and academic interests and achievements in the postdoctoral period (2000), as well as my plans for future scientific research and professional and academic growth.

The thesis is a synthesis of the evolution and development of my academic, scientific, and professional career, and shows the originality and relevance of my contributions. It attests to the continuity of my preoccupations and research in the field of literary studies, as well as the interdisciplinarity of my approach.

My scientific work consists predominantly of critical studies in American literature and culture, with an emphasis on the contemporary novel and short story. It has focused on dichotomy, ambiguity, double consciousness, ambivalence, and liminality seen in the context of three complex areas of exploration: N. Hawthorne Studies, Gender Studies, and Ethnic/Immigrant Studies.

The interdisciplinary and intercultural character of my research has derived from my conviction that any exploration of a literary phenomenon implies its connectedness with various extra-literary factors, such as culture, society, language, ideology, education, etc.

In discussing each research area, I mentioned the list of relevant publications and illustrated my most significant, original and impactful contributions to the academic field. My scientific interests and research have gone hand in hand with my professional and academic activities. They were reflected in the content and approach to my teaching and academic life, as well as in my professional development pursuits.

I am a good educator, as well as good researcher, and throughout my career, I have tried to connect the two, since I believe in integrating education and research. My research activity has been thus a reflection and an extension of my teaching and

professional training and vice-versa. I have tried to incorporate the results of my research into the academic curriculum. Also, motivating my students into reading and researching beyond the classroom requirements, has impacted this connection.

The thesis consists of **four sections**. **The first section** contains an abstract that presents a synopsis of this work. **The second section** presents the trajectory of my career. It has three parts: 1. Academic and Professional Achievements, 2. Scientific Achievements, and 3. Research Areas, Directions and Contributions. **The third section** discusses my plans and goals for future research and academic and professional growth. **The fourth section** contains all the bibliographical references associated with the content of this thesis.

2.1. Academic and Professional Achievements

In 1979 I obtained my BA in Philology at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca with a double major in English and French Language and Literature. Subsequently, in 2000 I was awarded a PhD in Philology/American Studies from Babes-Bolyai University with the distinction *Magna cum Laude*. The title of my PhD thesis was *Moral Ambiguity and Bipolarity in N. Hawthorne's Fiction*.

My academic teaching experience started in 1990 at “Petru Maior” University of Tîrgu Mureş as an adjunct professor at The Faculty of Engineering. After obtaining my PhD degree, I have advanced professionally from the post of adjunct professor to that of assistant professor, and, since 2002, to that of associate professor of English at the Faculty of Sciences and Letters.

Through the years, in these capacities, I have created and taught a great variety of **courses and seminars** on American Literature and Culture at both the BA and MA levels. Many of them have been directly tied to my areas of scientific research, namely 19th and 20th c American novels, short stories and films; Gender Studies and Ethnic/Immigrant Studies. *Images of Women in American Culture*, *Screening Ethnicity in the Classroom*. *Interpretative Essays, Perspectives on Gender*. *An Anthology of Short Fiction* and *Immigrants to USA in Literature and Film* were among the courses

highly appreciated by the students. These courses provided groundwork for further student research, which consequently led to the publication of collaborative volumes of student essays.

I have also had the opportunity to participate in several short teaching exchange programs as a **visiting professor** in American literature (in Spain and Holland). These experiences improved my teaching methods, as well as my research skills. They have also enhanced my professional visibility since I had the occasion to meet and collaborate with likeminded professionals.

2.2. Scientific Achievements

My scientific achievements and discoveries led to solid knowledge and expertise in the field of American Studies. This section details all my scientific and professional activities and achievements, which have brought me both national and international recognition. In it I describe a) my published research, as well as b) the national and international visibility and professional recognition of my work.

a) Published Research

I have 148 published works at 27 Publishing Houses from Romania and at 13 Publishing Houses from abroad: 2 monographs, 2 books, 1 ISI review (Transylvanian Review), 11 chapters/articles in books, volumes, journals from abroad (USA, Germany, France, Italy, Czech Republic), 36 chapters/articles in books, volumes, journals from Romania (București, Tg. Mureș, Timișoara etc.), 30 articles in (ISI) Conference Proceedings (Tg. Mureș, Cluj-Napoca, Galați, Germany, Canada, Târgoviște, Iași, București, Turcia, Timișoara), and 40 non-indexed articles in scientific bulletins, university annals, scientific, cultural and professional reviews, etc. (Tg. Mureș, Bucharest, A. Iulia, Constanța, B. Mare, Oradea).

Besides their contribution to the literary research field, these publications have become study instruments for both BA and MA students, and they confirm my interest and passion for American Studies.

b) The National And International Visibility and Professional Recognition of my Work

The recognition and visibility of my work were also a consequence of the professional and administrative expertise I gained through various leadership roles I assumed over the years: department head, director CCLASC, director of Linguistic Competency Examination Center, director of the English resource library, contact person for the USA Embassy and the American Corner, founder and coordinator of the American Circle on Transatlantic Perspectives, ARACIS evaluator, LCCI international oral examiner, president/member of BA, MA and educational specialists examination and didactic committees.

My numerous scholarships, research projects and grants, professional affiliations, certificates, licenses and academic trainings attest to the vitality of my commitment to all the aspects of my profession.

- I have obtained 5 fundraising course contracts with an educational focus; I have submitted/coordinated 8 scientific **research grants**. I have also been involved in 6 research projects.

The most impactful professional qualification of my career has been the certificate obtained as a result of my participation in the grant (The Study of the US Institute for Scholars on American Civilization), sponsored by The Multinational Institute of American Studies, New York University (2009). I was one of 18 renowned scholars chosen from a worldwide competition to participate in this intensive six-week academic exchange program. This program has greatly enhanced the scope and depth of my research, which in turn translated in the development of quality teaching materials for my students.

Two **library development grants** offered by the USA Department of State and successfully obtained by competition in 2013 and 2015, greatly contributed to the growth of the Resource Room of American literature and films.

- I have coordinated and co-authored numerous **interdisciplinary research projects** in collaboration with BA and MA students and younger faculty. They consisted of writing joint articles with BA and MA students and teachers from different departments, which were later published in scholarly journals; for instance “Blanche Du Bois – the Vicious Woman Caught between Death and Desire” and “The Metaphor of the Circle in the Writings of N. Hawthorne and L. Georgescu”.
- My scientific and professional recognition has facilitated my collaboration with academic scholars through **teaching exchange programs**, and with the USA Embassy and the American Corner through **round tables, workshops, mini-conferences and videoconferences** with cultural, literary and political personalities.

The teaching exchange programs consisted of **guest lectures** on topics related to Gender and Ethnic/ Immigrant Studies: *Gender: a Protean Notion* (M. Mudure from Babes-Bolyai University), *Gender Equality: Between Good Practice and Malpractice* (Simon Edwards from the University of London), *Cultural Anthropology in Literature and Film* (Colin Swatridge, England).

Some of the activities I have done in collaboration with The USA Embassy and The American Corner related to my research focus are: *Women in the Workplace: USA Laws Regarding Gender Based Discrimination and Harassment* (videoconference), *Native Americans* (videoconference), *An Immigrant's Writer's Perception on Americanism* (debate), *Round table on American Studies* (round table).

- I have participated as a **speaker and moderator** in numerous national and international conferences organized by prestigious professional organizations (MESEA, ESSE, HAAS, MLA, ARA, etc.) from home and abroad (Chişinău, Bochum, Barcelona, Aarhus, and Torino) as well as Romanian universities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iaşi, Constanţa, Timişoara and Tîrgu Mures). My affiliations in 10 **professional organizations** brought about my nomination as a moderator of scholarly conferences (RAAS, ESSE).
- I obtained 7 **certificates** and **professional licences** through academic trainings and examinations.

- I **reviewed** articles in 2 specialized journals, one from Romania (RJES/ Romanian Journal of English Studies) and one from the US (JLAS/Journal of Literature and Art Studies).
- My work has been **cited** and I had biographical mentions in 35 databases, dictionaries (*Dictionary of Romanian Anglicists and Americanists; Mures Scholars. 200 Biographies*), encyclopedias (*Hubners' Who is Who in Romania*) and libraries.

2.3. Research Areas. Directions and Contributions

The third subsection details the three main areas that have been the focus of my postdoctoral scientific research: Hawthorne Studies, Gender Studies and Ethnic/Immigrant Studies. In each area one can trace the scientific relevance and the degree of originality of all my research.

The section entitled “**Scientific Research. Impact and Relevance**” consists of an overview of the critical, literary and cultural theories used as a framework for my scholarly work and their intersections with the three lines of research already mentioned. It highlights my original findings and contributions as well as the impact of my work in the scholarly field.

One of my contributions consists of highlighting and explaining the progression from binary oppositions (native/black and white, male and female, colonizer and colonized, victor and victim, etc.), which existed in the work of more traditional writers, to the blurring of categories, the ambivalence and polarity, which inhabit the liminal spaces of contemporary literature and culture. Another one of my contributions consists of the fact that, throughout my research, I pointed out the interdisciplinary nature of literature, which follows the premise that literature itself is a liminal space where other domains of reality, such as history, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and media find expression and intersect.

As shown in this section, all of my research identifies clear intersections between theory, interpretation, and pedagogy. My interpretation of the literary works (novels

and short stories) and films is based on a solid foundation of literary, cultural and critical theories, which also informs the content and methodology I use in my teaching.

3. Future Academic, Professional, and Scientific Plans

The future research and professional development plans are the object of third section of the habilitation thesis. They constitute both a logical continuation and an enrichment of my past research and professional activity.

4. Bibliographical References

The last section of the thesis contains all the bibliographical references.