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**THE GREAT WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANIAN AND  
EUROPEAN LITERATURE: CONFRONTATION OF  
EMOTIONS**  
**PHD THESIS SUMMARY**

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Through the doctoral thesis *The Great War in the context of Romanian and European literature: the confrontation of emotions*, we aimed to highlight the affective universe outlined in the years of the First World War, which marked the evolution of humanity with the beginning of the 20th century. This approach is relevant for understanding the transformations that occurred at the cultural level, but also at the social, economic, political, etc. levels, transformations that have echoes even after more than 100 years from the historical moment in the first quarter of the last century. Regarding the world wars, in the public consciousness the second one seems to have gained greater notoriety, a fact that can be explained, among other things, by the emotional impact produced by the greater number of victims, but also by a stronger media exposure of the atrocities, created especially through propaganda and supported

by the much richer documentary material, due to the development of means of transmitting audio-visual information. Yet, the connection made by historians regarding the causes of the two world wars, the current controversies regarding the events of the Great War and the affective impact that changed the attitude towards armed conflicts are several arguments for the importance of studying the emotional universe outlined in the years 1914-1918.

Through this process, we aimed to highlight the connection between the historical interpretation and the nonfictional and literary text, identifying the features of the emotional field specific to the historical era. The selection of texts creates a European map of the affects of the contemporaries of the events of the Great War, comparing their experiences in relation to the tragedy they went through. Equally, the work aims to highlight the fact that the First World War had a similar impact, in the Romanian affective landscape, to that felt throughout the world. The structure of the thesis is based on five chapters. The first of these, *HISTORICAL APPROACHES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR*, traces the relationship between history and fiction and presents a selection from the historiography of the more than 100 years since the Great War, insisting on the significant historical moments of the conflagration, but also on the emotional universe of era, highlighted by historians. Thus, we established correlations between the historians' vision of the war and the mirroring of the world conflagration in the literary texts, the connecting bridge being represented by the outlined affective universe. This journey through the historiography of the Great War is necessary to synthesize the emblematic emotions of the beginning of the 20th century, but also to highlight how this historical event was received over time.

The second chapter of the thesis, called *EMOTIONAL RECEPTION OF THE GREAT WAR*, deepens the discussion about the affective universe, starting from a brief explanation of the meaning of emotions and their identification mechanisms in relation to the era of the beginning of the 20th century. The impact on the visual arts highlights the connections that are established in the transmission of the message to the public by non-fiction texts, literary texts and cinematographic productions. The films that have become screen adaptations of successful novels indicate the public's interest in literary texts inspired by the First World War era, an interest that has not been lost over the years. The diaries, testimonies, memoirs of the contemporary generation with the First World War have been used as sources of information by historians and have become conclusive for the evolution of humanity's affections.

The parallel analysis of the emotions of the Great War generation highlights the common experiences that lead to affective reactions that become cultural influence. We presented non-fictional texts belonging to notable names of the era, such as Ernst Jünger, Queen Mary,

Alexandru Averescu, I.G. Duca, George Topîrceanu, Grigore Romalo, but also testimonies of contemporaries with the Great War who are not that well known: Lawrence Bodley, Marcel Fontaine, Gerhard Velburg, Gheorghe Caracaș, Filip-Lucian Iorga, Gabriel-Dumitru Culcer. Also, the crucial moments of the war are marked by official speeches given by the leaders of the time: Kaiser Wilhelm II, Emperor Franz Joseph, President Raymond Poincaré. In the Romanian political space, King Ferdinand I addresses the people on August 15, 1916. In the moments of retreat to Moldova, Nicolae Iorga's patriotic speech is meant to emotionally revitalize a resigned nation, disappointed by its own failure. The correspondence of King George V, Queen Mary of Teck of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill captures their thoughts, evokes a generalized emotional state of the moment.

The comparative presentation of the affective universe is continued in the third chapter, *AFFECTIVE UNIVERSE IN THE NOVELS INSPIRED BY THE FIRST WORLD WAR*. We only limited ourselves to a few novels, both from Romanian and European literature, including Ernest Hemingway's novel, whose character fights on the Italian fronts. The 12 novels become a map of European literature inspired by the Great War: Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu (*The Dragon*), Camil Petrescu (*The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War*), Cezar Petrescu (*Dimness*), Liviu Rebreanu (*The Forest of the Hanged*), Mihail Sadoveanu (*Lăpușneanu Street*), Richard Aldington (*Death of a Hero*), Henri Barbusse (*The Fire*), Jaroslav Hašek (*The Adventures of Brave Soldier Švejk*), Ernest Hemingway (*A Farewell to Arms*), Erich Maria Remarque (*Nothing New on the Western Front*), Joseph Roth (*Radetzky March*) and Arnold Zweig (*The School of Verdun*). In this chapter, we also identified a reading grid of emotions which, later on, will be applied for the detailed and particularized interpretation of the affective universe proposed by two reference novels from our literature, namely *Dimness*, by Cezar Petrescu and *The Forest of the Hanged*, by Liviu Rebreanu. Thus, in the novels interpreted in parallel, we have identified Emblem emotions and niche emotions, “retired” Emotions, Counteroffensive of human reactions, Defense lines of the affective front, “War of attrition” of adaptation to the new reality, New heroism, Spectacular theater of combat, Withdrawal into safe spaces, Affective Ambush, Emotions in Confrontation, Insignia of the Affective Field, In the Trenches of Disillusionment, Crisis Command for the Prevention of Despair, Shockwave of Fear.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the thesis deepen the destinies of the characters in two of these novels, destinies that we consider emblematic of the lost generation. The destiny of Apostol Bologa, but also that of Radu Comșa, are destinies of the lost generation. What they

obviously have in common is an inability to adapt to the harsh reality of war. A whole generation was like them.

*LIVIU REBREANU - THE FOREST OF THE HANGED*, the fourth chapter of the thesis, follows the emotional path and destiny of the protagonist Apostol Bologa, in relation to the world of war, in order to prove the quality of the Rebreanian hero as an exponent of the times to which he belongs. Our approach is supported both by the author's confessions, from interviews given regarding this novel, and by exegetical opinions expressed by G. Călinescu, Tudor Vianu, Ovid. S. Crohmălniceanu, Ion Rotaru, Eugen Lovinescu, Paul Georgescu, Petru Mihai Gorcea, Al. Protopopescu, I. Negoîtescu, Nicolae Manolescu, Mihai Zamfir, Mircea Muthu, Mircea Tomus. Starting from these perspectives of the critical analysis, I applied the reading grid of the interpretation of emotions, highlighting the connection between the experiences of Apostol Bologa and the affective universe outlined by the comparative approach of the 12 novels, from the previous chapter, but also by the partial conclusions offered by the previous chapters. Apostol and, like him, many other combatants, search for a meaning of existence in the world of war. Rejected emotions redefine their affective universe, triggering the mechanisms to save their own being. The mixer of war undoes states of apparent equilibrium by inducing other states of existential crisis. Internal drama ensues that requires an abrupt resolution. Soul renegotiations no longer allow for latent states, of postponing a decision or ambiguous positioning in relation to the emotional crisis. Like many other combatants, Apostol Bologa begins to understand that the universe of war has definitely left its mark on him, and a reintegration into the world he left when he went to the front is impossible, because he cannot conform to the old rules of its existence in the community. Affective blockage requires solutions for the survival of consciousness, and these end up being equivalent to canceling one's own being

The fifth chapter of the thesis, *CEZAR PETRESCU – DIMNESS*, aims to complete the image of the Great War generation, from the perspective of the emotions that marked it, through the experiences of the protagonist Radu Comşa. As in the case of the Rebreanian novel, the review of critical interpretations establishes some benchmarks of analysis, initiates the discussion regarding the affective structure of the protagonist, which will be extrapolated by reference to the world to which he belongs. Cezar Petrescu's confession, that aimed at translating into text the world he lives in, gives the novel the ability to reconstruct the image of Romanian society at the time. From the critical analysis, we retained the opinions of exegetes such as Mircea Eliade, Pompiliu Constantinescu, G. Călinescu, E. Lovinescu, Al. A. Philippides, Perpessicius, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, Tudor Vianu, Nicolae Manolescu, Al. Piru.

The merits attributed to Cezar Petrescu are mainly related to the fact that he managed to capture the atmosphere of the Great War and the years that followed, offering a believable image of those times. The protagonist is, in this novel, the war, and the author builds this world in a believable manner, close to the one depicted by the newspapers of the time.

The loss of the illusions with which he had started the fight, the desensitization in the face of atrocities, the physical and emotional suffering determine the need to justify the personal sacrifice. Comşa had believed, like Apostle Bologa, that his role was to fulfill his duty as a soldier. Like Bologa, he would understand that this belief is not compatible with modern warfare, where the combatant's most important mission is to survive. They are victims of an epic entanglement, for which there are no solutions given by previous experiences. Raised in a society that forced the military to be brave, to be a "man", they come to know emotional traumas that they don't understand because no one has experienced them before. In order not to live with the feeling that their sacrifice is in vain, they imagine that the historical moment in which they find themselves marks the beginning of a fundamental transformation of society, and they are the pioneers of this revolution of mentality. Comşa's drama is even stronger when he understands that post-war society prefers to heal from the past, to resume its old habits and rules. The frustration of the former fighters for the country accumulates, but their revolutionary starts collide with the inertia of the world in which they are trying to reintegrate. Cezar Petrescu's protagonist illustrates the drama of the lost generation regarding their inability to find their place in the world they separated from during the war.

Recovering the affects of a certain era simultaneously involves a defragmentation and a reconfiguration of the emotional picture. The initial approach, to identify emotions reverberating over time that were imprinted in the deep layers of collective consciousness, provided, through research, a reading grid of the emotions of the Great War and, at the same time, an overview of the emotions that became "common good". Post-war pacifist attitudes, claimed especially in France, become a constant in the politics and diplomacy of Great Britain and the USA in the 1920s-1930s. Efforts to find a peaceful way to resolve another potential conflict, institutionalized forms of humanitarian actions, rapid and vehement international reactions to aggression against other states or marginalized populations are becoming a constant of modern politics. At the same time, in art and in some philosophical directions, after the war one reaches the experience of alternative realities, idealization or, in contrast, the loss of trust in humanity, including the idea of the annihilation of one's own being. Interwar public discourse abounds in elements of violent language, and the media is invaded by aggressive images, signaling the dehumanization and sense of devaluation of human life.

Equally, for many veterans war has become the norm, the long years spent in combat irreparably imprinting their psyche. Violence becomes a constant in society. Nationalist movements are gaining momentum, and are expanding more and more in interwar Europe. In such a climate, the subjective perspective and emotional experiences become important, becoming the main means of artistic communication, a telling example being expressionism. Militancy under the umbrella of socialism-communism or capitalism, the nostalgia of the old order, the old, lost glory, activates the myth of the leader of the nation, able to revive the hegemonic status of his people and capitalize on the qualities that place him above other nations. Society undergoes dramatic changes, because it broke irreconcilably from the old norms, customs, values. Dadaism manifests itself as a protest of the generation contemporary with the Great War against classical values. Nonsense, chance, nonconformity and arbitrariness are raised to the rank of art. The attraction created by the world of technology will lead to even more rapid industrial development after the war. In parallel, the development of mass media creates significant changes in cultural practices. The cinematographic and television show is gaining momentum. Technological concepts also seep into art, which emphasizes functionality and modernity. In 1919, the Bauhaus artistic current appears, where art and technology meet in a minimalist style; Art Déco stands out for the eclecticism of the style, the optimism of the technological future of the world and the brilliance. Jazz, swing are also manifestations of radical changes in taste, leading to the standardization of tastes and mass consumption.

The specter of death, which has become a constant of life in the trenches, the mass killing of entire generations creates an extensive hero cult in society. Cosmopolitanism, transnational culture first manifests itself through the attitude towards those who have fallen into debt: cemeteries bring together nations, ethnicities, religions, alleviating prejudices and promoting the manifestation of understanding and cohesion. Commemorative practices during and after the end of the First World War will be the subject of a true history of mourning for years to come. The emotions printed in the literary texts that address the theme of the first great conflagration of the modern world are consonant with those that appear in the press of the time, in historical documents or in subsequent studies about the First World War. These emotions create major fluctuations, identifiable in the socio-political-economic dynamics that manifested themselves shortly after the end of the armed conflict, definitively influencing the course of humanity. The modern conflagration brought with it the reconfiguration of humanity's scale of values; it unveiled the cynical mechanisms of industrialization that applied to war. Starting from the attempt to decipher the message of the witnesses of the great conflagration, we arrive at the



emotions that have endured and propagated over time, as a generalized reaction to the challenge faced by humanity at the dawn of the twentieth century.

In other words, in order to be able to get to the essence of the emotions that initially constituted a particular case, to then become contagious, giving shape to the major events of history, the "artifacts" that proved relevant were identified, which defined an important step of humanity. The analysis of official speeches, newspaper articles, intimate diaries written by those who were involved in the world conflagration, but also of artistic productions proves that they are creators of ideologies, makers of conceptions and prejudices, reflections of the self and of contemporaneity in discourse, in a complex relationship between sender, receiver and context of communication. To know the factors that led to the profound ideological changes produced after the Great War, we must therefore have access to History. But this is constituted by an amalgam of histories, interpretations and reinterpretations belonging mainly to scientific researchers, whose approach cannot be eminently objective, being influenced by numerous specific influences of currents of analysis that prevailed in different periods. If History comes to us from the perspective of particular points of view, then the sources that could provide access to data regarding the influence that events had on those who were contemporaries of that reality must be reconsidered.

What was the confrontation of emotions during the Great War? Humanity has lost an idealized perspective on armed conflict and has come to know the cynicism of modern warfare. The conflagrations of the 20th century proved that the old battle tactics, the chivalrous codes of confronting the enemy, had become obsolete. Likewise, war propaganda proved its effectiveness and developed refined techniques of persuasion, but it also demonstrated its limits when the message became trivialized, no longer accepted by the receivers who chose to decode reality by detaching themselves from the official speech. However, the experience of the First World War provided useful information for propaganda to become increasingly effective, evidence of which can be gleaned from the entire history of politics from 1918 to the present day. What today defines the discourse called *fake news* first proved its impact during the years of the Great War. Humanity has become desensitized as a result of the scale of the tragedy of the years of world conflagration. Modern weapons have killed millions of people, and their deaths have grieved millions of families, but it has also created a different perspective on death in war. The huge number of victims trivialized the mass destruction. Also in the First World War, humanity came into contact with labor camps, with genocide, with military actions against civilians, aimed at discouraging resistance to the invader. That is why the wars of the 20th century acquired a pattern of hostilities, and public emotion received a horizon of expectation

that did not involve immediate and vehement reactions. An extensive debate on the fault for the outbreak of the armed conflict, the justifications brought by each belligerent state initiated the post-truth era, whereby the justice of the transmitted information depends more and more on the appreciation of the receiver, on his options in choosing the convenient truth and less on the acuity and the legitimacy of the message issuer.

Our conclusions, in relation to the magnitude of the topic addressed, can only limit to a part of the emotions that make up the affective universe created during the Great War, which had a defining influence on more than 100 years following this historical event. The constellation of emotions that defined the modern era brings together both the experiences of the generation contemporaneous with the war and the way it was perceived afterwards. Even if the reconstruction of that era is necessary and a continuation of the research efforts is required, we could say that the attempt to get as close as possible to the historical truth is less important, what is really relevant is the emotion it conveys, over time, the first modern war in the history of mankind.

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