

UNIVERSITATEA “OVIDIUS” DIN CONSTANȚA

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Teza de abilitare

**Bridging the Humanities: An Integrative Approach to
Literature, Language, and Culture**

Candidat: ȘERBAN-OPRESCU ANCA-TEODORA

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HABILITATION THESIS

Bridging the Humanities: An Integrative Approach to Literature, Language, and Culture

Summary

Subsequent to graduating the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest in 2001, the systemic educational units that paved the way to an interdisciplinary, integrative approach in my research scope have been two Master Programs, PhD studies and Postdoctoral studies. I envisage my academic route to have been marked by a few milestones. As such, the first important scientific achievement is the completion of my Doctoral studies with the thesis entitled *Constructions of America in the Prose of the Romanian Diaspora after the Cold War*, defended in 2010. The main objective of the doctoral thesis was a critical approach to the discourse of the Romanian diaspora from America (1980-present), more specifically, to see how the American reality is perceived and presented, filtered through the experience of the relocated individual, deconstructed and re-constructed by the various members of the Romanian diaspora. At the moment of the writing of the thesis, little was known about diaspora writers and scholars leaving Romania and already living in America in the '90s and further, not as exiles anymore, but as citizens of the world, marking the beginning of the so-called nomadic turn in transnational studies and contextualized in the case of Romania. The thesis was the first successful attempt to talk about the Romanian diasporic community in the terminology currently used in contemporary transnational studies, stepping away from the paradigm of exile. The study of the diasporic phenomenon extended to an analysis of the American society and culture scape. In fact, such topics as American internal realities and outward manifestation, multiculturalism, identity politics, cultures of U.S. imperialism, American exceptionalism, American foreign policy, nation and identity in the global age, the reconfiguration of national space under globalization, have invited to an interdisciplinary approach to the subject under study.

Following, knitting closely to the Master studies in Communication and Public Opinion, Faculty of Sociology, University of Bucharest and the Master studies in Research and Education for Economists, the area covered by my Postdoctoral studies on *Model of Integrative Evaluation of the Impact of Cultural-Educational Accumulations on Entrepreneurial Behavior*

(2014) brought together, in a well-rounded manner, literary, cultural, and social sciences studies. This trajectory falls in line with the stated attempt to bridge the traditionally conceived gap among the afore mentioned study fields. A third milestone in my research line has been the Fulbright Fellowship award granted in 2017, which has given me the chance to compare and contrast findings obtained during my postdoctoral studies on Romania with their American counterpart in a study looking at the impact of cultural and educational factors in order to analyze and counter balance the cultural and educational acquisitions that characterize US society and Romanian society, to identify sore spots and common points that would create more opportunities for transatlantic relations. The habilitation thesis **Bridging the Humanities: An Integrative Approach to Literature, Language, and Culture** builds on the synergetic effect of the strands approached in my research and teaching. Almost two decades of teaching English for Specific Purposes in an Economics oriented environment has challenged me every step to bridge the gap between the Humanities and Social Sciences, but also inspired the focus of my research endeavors. The outcomes of this intertwining and cross-disciplinary approach, the insights derived from the research process have, in turn, translated into, and enhanced, my teaching and teaching-related activity.

The present venture comprises references to 3 books, 5 chapters and 8 scientific articles, 3 developed projects, as detailed in the bibliography. The thesis is structured into **three** main **Sections**, associated **Strands**, and References.

Section I. Background. Main Areas of Research Interests and Professional Evolution follows three main thematic strands I have focused on: **Strand 1.1 Literary and Cultural Studies - Related Research** and **Strand 1.2. Language, ESP and Communication in Specific Contexts – Related Research**. Within each of the two strands dedicated to main research accomplished, the focus is on studies published as books, then chapters in international and national volumes, and scientific articles indexed in international databases. **Strand 1.3** emphasizes **Project Work and Related Research** and refers to projects I have developed as director and worked on as postdoctoral researcher or team member. They have been integral to my research interests, as either stemming from this research, or closely connected to it. **Section II** is devoted to what I would call with an over-arching syntagma **Service to the Profession** (and administrative work), referring to the series of activities dedicated to the scholar/academic community over the years.

Section III is dedicated to **Plans for Further Career Development**, or what is envisioned for teaching and research.

Upon a closer look, in Section I, Strand 1.1 Literary and Cultural Studies Related Research expands first on the book that builds on my PhD thesis - *Romanian Perspectives on America. Constructions of America in the Prose of the Romanian Diaspora after the Cold War* (2014), and represents a critical approach to the discourse of the Romanian diaspora from America (1980-present), more specifically, to see how the American reality is perceived and presented, filtered through the experience of the relocated individual, deconstructed and reconstructed by the various members of the Romanian diaspora. The study also represents a successful attempt to talk about the Romanian diasporic community in the terminology currently used in contemporary transnational studies, stepping away from the overused paradigm of exile. The study of the individual trying to adapt and become integrative part of the social American fabric allowed for a generous analysis of the American society and its associated phenomena.

Another important piece of research here is the volume coordinated with dr. Sabina Draga-Alexandru: *Cultura românească în perspectivă transatlantică: Interviuuri/Romanian Culture in Transatlantic Perspective. Interviews* (2010). The volume represents an ample proof of exploratory/qualitative research undertaken in a material comprising interviews with well-known members of the Romanian diaspora from the United States, (A. Brezianu, S. Golopenția, Codrescu, N. Manea, C. Moraru, V. Tismăneanu, A. Târziu, to name a few), the first of its kind after the 1989 Revolution, due to the complexity of subjects treated and magnitude of representative individuals interviewed.

My interest in the transatlantic space did not stop at the Romanian perspective. The book *Cultural Parameters of 21st Century American Challenges. Opportunities and Discontents* (2014) is reflective of the close study of the American society and observed realities. The study tries to grapple with, and answer, questions revolving around globalization, the end of the nation-state, global diasporas, new modernities, state and foreign politics, cultural politics, contemporary manifestations of the space geographically and culturally known as the United States of America.

The Chapters published in international volumes display my interest in studying the myriad and intricate ways of society dynamics. Starting with a meta-analysis of Romanian society through fables (as a literary genre), the chapter entitled “Images of Society and Cultural Patterns of Behavior in Romanian Fables” (2020) turns to Romanian fables as pretext to deconstruct and reconstruct ways of being, adapting to the characteristics and particularities of Romanian society. Further, I chose to stop at the chapter entitled “East and West, or the

Creolization of Cultural Spaces: An Exploration of Domnica Rădulescu's *Black Sea Twilight*" (2020). The analysis here revisits some of the concepts explored in the Doctoral thesis, that of the migrant, of the culture shock and cultural clash, of Romanian and American spaces as homelands and hostlands, both through the eyes of the main protagonist in Domnica Rădulescu's *Black Sea Twilight*. The themes discussed are not new, they permeate all of my other research endeavours; yet, this time, the analysis acquires feminist and gender undertones, as the whole setting and action is seen through, and set in motion by, a young adolescent girl on her own trajectory to womanhood.

It is furthermore important to highlight that the kit and tools used within the framework of Literary and Cultural Studies have always underpinned my research interests. This aspect has been keenly analyzed in a volume chapter entitled "Multiculturalism as a Study Methodology for Romanian Economic Personalities and Institutions" (2012), where this framework has been extended beyond the area of literature studies and into the social and economic ones. This chapter marks my ongoing servitude towards both fields of study and research: The Humanities and Social Sciences and my belief that a cross-disciplinary, integrative approach and/or perspective offers complexity and completeness to any and every piece of research.

The initial parameters of the in-depth study of Romanian and American settings approached from a comparative angle have been set out in articles such as "From Exile to Diaspora and from National to Transnational Binds under the Driving Forces of Globalization" (2013), "Thinking Beyond the Nation from a Romanian Perspective" (2010), or "Overview of Romanian Emigration to America during Communism and Postcommunism" (2012), which dealt with the change in paradigms when discussing contemporary movements of people, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Prompted by the Master studies in teaching and research, furthered by my postdoctoral studies, as well as my actual professional activity developed within higher education as a system, Strand 2 is dedicated to 1.2. Language Teaching, ESP and Professional Communication in Specific Contexts. Here, I will briefly mention two Chapters featured in prestigious international outlets, namely Wiley Publishing and Palgrave Macmillan. The two chapters account for an awareness of the intricacies of higher education context, of the challenges faced and opportunities provided. The first chapter entitled "When More is Not Necessarily Better: Insights into Romanian Higher Education" (2018) in *The Wiley International Handbook of Educational Foundations* is a result of my work during my Fulbright fellowship; the study stands for a close look at Romanian higher education, as seen

from both inside-the-system and outside-the-system; an informed, yet both subjective and objective perspective on the Romanian higher education system. In “Cultural and Educational Imprints on the Entrepreneurial Mindset: Romanian Insights” (2020), the research hypothesis departs from the assumption that at the core of the propensity for certain future personal development stand the cultural and educational inputs that young people are exposed to.

Closer to every-day teaching activity, the section dedicated to teaching English, ESP and professional communication. As stated before, I consider the two main components of activity in higher education to be teaching and research. It is common practice in higher education for teaching to inform research and vice-versa. Under this idea, I mention two main articles, “Academic Communication in Higher Education. Key Factor for Scientific Value” (2016), “The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Academic Communication” (2022). If the article of 2016 looks at popular aspects discussed in the area of communication for professional and career development in higher education, the 2022 one marks the change in communication paradigm prompted by COVID-19 pandemic on all levels: student, scholar community, administrative and even informal-related.

Throughout my career I have been guided by the firm belief that there are close interdependences between the Humanities and Social Sciences as study and research fields. As a Philology graduate, teaching English to future economists, working and researching in an Economics permeated environment, I have tried to find ways to mix and match the two domains, both at individual and at institutional level; I have likewise always believed that it is important to integrate research into practice and to conceive study and research in a cross-disciplinary, integrative framework. Hopefully, I will convincingly demonstrate this belief in the present undertaking.

My sustained commitment to philological training constitutes a defining feature of my professional trajectory, functioning as a deliberate ‘form of resistance’ within a context dominated by economic and business-oriented paradigms. This commitment has underpinned my work as Director of the American Studies Center at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) for two years, as well as my ongoing role as Director of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication (2017–present). During my tenure, the Center became a platform for promoting literature and philologically-oriented events (as detailed in the thesis), while the Department, under my leadership, founded and currently runs two accredited philology programs at undergraduate and master's level (also presented in the thesis).