

**BENE MERENTI**

## *Camil Petrescu's Complementarities between Philosophy and Literature*

*Ștefan MUNTEANU*

*George Bacovia University in Bacau, ROMANIA*

**Motto:** "As a philosopher,  
Camil Petrescu proves himself in no way  
inferior to the quality of writer  
but, maybe, on the contrary."  
(Edgar Papu)

Camil Petrescu was one of the great figures of modern Romanian culture, whose work we still have much to learn. Born in Bucharest on April 22, 1894, he grew up as an orphan of both parents being cared for by a nurse. After secondary courses he continued his studies at the College "Saint Sava" and at "Gheorghe Lazar". In 1913 he enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Department of Philosophy, but he will hold the license only in 1919, when he returns from the front. The papers presented at the graduation exam: *Syllogistic figures, and their value and functioning* and *A brief indication of the origins of Kant's philosophy* were appreciated as "magna cum laude" by Constantin Radulescu Motru panel of PP Negulescu and I. Radulescu-Pogoneanu. After a stop in Timisoara, as a teacher and journalist, he returns to Bucharest, where he acts as journalist, essayist, and theatre columnist and as a theorist who started to challenge and always receives complaints. He still managed to get closer to great writers, such as Liviu Rebreanu, Tudor Vianu and George Calinescu. He was publishing war poetry, theatre, and in 1928 he printed in a single issue the first exposure on *Substantialism*. In 1934 he became a collaborator and later (1940-1942) editor of the magazine *Royal Foundations*, where he published several studies, which will be compiled in 1936, in the thesis and antithesis. In 1937 he delivered his PhD with the work of *The Aesthetic modality of the theatre*. The Doctoral committee composed of C. Radulescu-Motru, PP Negulescu, I. and D. Radulescu-Pogoneanu Caracostea granted the adjective "summa cum laude". In the same year the theses was published in "Foundation for Literature and Art". In 1939 he occupied the position of director of the National Theatre.

After 1944 he was elected member of the Romanian Academy and his other honours and distinctions would be awarded to him. Camil Petrescu died, irreconcilable with the world and with himself, in 1957. There remained unfinished novels, and "The Philosophy of substance" will be published posthumously only in 1988 by Florica Ichim and Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu, at the urge of Constantin Noica. So, commenting on Camil Petrescu work is to meditate, insistently, on the counterpart of the pursuit of between the absolute and the turmoil of everyday life. There should not be forgotten that he grew up as an orphan and the war experience, are issues to be correlated with the temperament of the writer-philosopher. **Poet** (*Versuri. Ideea. Ciclul morții* – 1923; *Un luminiș pentru Kicsikem* – 1925; *Transcendentalia* – 1931; *Din versurile lui Ladima* – 1932), **drama writer** (*Jocul ielelor* – 1918; *Act venețian* – 1918-1946; *Suflete tari*, - 1921; *Danton* - 1924-1925; *Mitică Popescu* - 1925-1926; *Mioara*, - 1926; *Dona Diana, comedie în gustul Renașterii în zece tablouri după Moreto*, - 1938; *Iată femeia pe care o iubesc* – 1943), **novelist** (*Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* – 1930; *Patul lui Procut* - 1933; *Un om între oameni* 1953 - 1957, remained unfinished), **philosopher** (*Teze și antiteze* - 1936, essays; *Modalitatea estetică a teatrului* - 1937, PhD thesis ; *Husserl – cu o introducere în filozofia fenomenologică*, a chapter from *The History of the modern philosophy* - 1938; *Doctrina substanței* - 1940, edited entirely after his death, in 1988, philosophic essays) **short-stories writer** and powerful **publicist**, Camil Petrescu is recognized as the initiator of the modern novel, as valuable as a playwright and ambitious philosopher. However, the philosophical vocation and spiritual formation have influenced his literary creation. However, Ion Ianoși made an observation that reinforced the point of view of the present work. He said: "Praised as a writer, Camil Petrescu was, as a philosopher, long time unknown and it is unknown by many professionals today, even after the publication of his treaty, *The Doctrine of Substance*" [1, 179].

But for a more accessible understanding of how philosophy is intertwined with the Camil Petrescu literature, it is good to start from the testimony of the author, since his work was inspired to some extent by his real life. We have in mind the experience of Romanian Army officer during World War I, narrated in the novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* (The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War), experience artistically and philosophically presented in the poems contained under the heading *Ciclul morții*, but we also have in mind the love experiences of the writer-thinker. In fact, the essence of spiritual belief Camil Petrescu is concentrated in the volume "Versuri. Ideia. Ciclul morții". Thus in the poem "Ideea", published in *Sburătorul literar* on 22nd of October 1920 and re-published in this volume in 1923, poetry having the "motto" the meditation "Jocul ideilor e jocul ieilor", the poet expresses absolute experience of transcendental reality [2, 7-10]:

"Libraries with shelves  
and lattice  
They are full  
Of heavy volumes  
Parchment and old priceless collections  
Leather covered,  
Hierarchic laid under chapters and titles  
Thousands and millions of ideas,  
In tens of thousands of volumes, appendices  
And pamphlets

Loaded pages with subtle calculations  
- Arabesques -  
Of dry circles, signs  
And magical characters.

.....  
But in them  
There are only corpses of ideas,  
For all writing  
It's just thinking sear preserved  
And closed under formulas and keys.

.....  
But I,  
It is in there that I saw ideas."

Although he says it in a subtle way Camil Petrescu would have liked to believe himself a philosopher rather than a writer. Remembering the dialogue he had with PP Negulescu at graduation when the teacher proposed to pursue a philosophical career, in an interview in 1943, he says he said "no", because the following reasons: "... I will write up to 25 verses, because it is time for illusions and lyrics; I will write between 25-35 years theatre, because theatre requires some experience and a certain nervous vibration; I will write between 35-40 years novels, because novels require a richer experience and a certain expressive maturity. And only at the age of 40 I will return to philosophy ..." [3, 6-7]. Referring to this response, Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu rightfully observes: "That" **no** "said to philosophy, in 1919, was only a refusal to a university career to which, could hardly headed the young man who campaigned for Romania entering the war, who had fought as a volunteer in even August 14, 1916 (as a test imposed to his own conscience), he was wounded, declared as missing, he lived long months of captivity and in all these years of university studies, of the war and again of studies he continued writing: he wrote poetry, articles, a play. As a young student, "with an astonished consciousness", he had lived in the whirl of events and recorded ardently shattering acts of bravery or cowardice, he had recorded "with hallucinated eyes" images for the rest of life and he could not stay, right then, retired, in -a time when the whole country was rethinking between new borders, when a wide field of hope seemed to had been opening" [4, 5].

Consequently, we must not forget that all hope that Camil Petrescu will not ever forget, was to revolutionize philosophical thought. And then we understand that concern for satisfying these expectations, the philosophical level, occupies an important place in the whole struggle as a writer. We will understand that the intellectualist size of literature that he wrote is a natural extension, even logical, of his speculative thinking. We understand that the fascinating ideas lived by the author deeply marked his intellectual heroes. But we understand and appreciate Adamuț Anton's statement that "Camil Petrescu's literature, is, as the author confessed, an expectation of philosophy, and about how long it will be his life, this would no longer depend on the author" [5, 272]. The fact is that, according to Camil Petrescu, the traditional prose, rationalist and standardized, was out-of-date. For the Romanian writer-thinker time was subjective and the novel supposed an inner consciousness, which was suitable for memory and introspection. These innovations applied throughout his literary work have their roots in his philosophical, creatively, from Bergson's intuitionism and from Husserl's phenomenology, creating what is called "the philosophy of substance". Camil Petrescu's availability for philosophy became apparent in his early adolescence, but they would be seen during university years. The Tudor Vianu's *Journal* we find the following note, on Camil Petrescu: "... we sometimes met at of Motru and Negulescu's courses and seminars. The latter noticed his auditor in the first rows. After reading each seminar paper, Negulescu was asking: "What does Mr. Camil Petrescu think?" Mr. Camil Petrescu always had an unexpected opinion, very original, deliberated by his rapid mind" [6, 39-40]. Further on, Tudor Vianu was noting that while visiting him in his little room, Camil Petrescu kept telling him "I'm going to write a drama and a philosophical system" [6, 39-40]. Serious studies on the merits of Camil Petrescu in philosophy are few. I note only three, which I take into account in these notes. I mention first the introductory text entitled *Introducing study*, which Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu makes in the edition published in 1988 of the *Doctrine of substance*, containing Camil Petrescu's philosophical work. Secondly, I mention Ion Ianosi's analysis, contained in volume *A History of Romanian philosophy*, appeared in 1994. Thirdly, I refer to the work *The philosophy of substance* signed by Anton Adam, in 1997.

Although Camil Petrescu was, even during the student years, a cultivator of ideas in the literary creation, he dared with a delay to develop philosophical texts, too, in the full sense of the word. Researchers noted, in this respect, as first moment, the year 1937, when the philosopher-writer delivers his doctorate thesis with the work *The aesthetic manner of theatre*, designed to become a chapter of the treaty (only partially implemented) *Quidditate of dramatic representation*. We note that since the theatre aesthetic way is directly used substantial research method, which is based on the postulate "spatiality psychosocial time in the region," which results postulated the idea that "most essential and structural reasons of the past found in existing structures ". *The aesthetic manner of theatre* is followed by *The artistic manner of theatre*, which remained as an unfinished work.

An important moment for shaping Camil Petrescu's philosophy is the year 1938, when he published in Volume III of the Treaty of history of modern philosophy, coordinated by N. Bagdasar the study *Husserl - an introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. Then the study would be published independently, and in 1988 would be included in Volume II of the *Doctrine of substance*, edited by Florica Ichim and Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu. In this study, Camil Petrescu starts from the work *Logical researches*, published by Husserl in 1900 (vol. I) and in 1901 (vol. II). Referring to Camil Petrescu's option, valuing Husserl's research in the field of logic, Edgar Papu writes: "The Romanian philosopher retained here, as essential fact, an analysis of Edmund Husserl applied to the constituted idea of a pure formal logic. It is the result of an accurate and patient recording of a long and tense Husserl's dispute among logicians".

They confronted by unrelenting arguments of rare sharp, of one side and the other, the supporters of formalism with those of psychologism. From this stemmed the above mentioned analysis of Husserl where Camil Petrescu sees the pinnacle of European thought" [7, 43]. Camil Petrescu's appreciation is also maintained when referring to the work of *Ideas about a pure phenomenology*, where he discovers Husserl's intuitionism he will to himself also in an original way.

Referring to this work, the Romanian philosopher writes: "If the same unusual powers of investigation will have helped him in determining the specific structure and possibly of the absolute coordinates of the " infinite explanatory ideas " idea, about which he was talking with excitement in *Cartésiennes Meditations*, we can not hide the feeling that we are facing a systematization that exceeds most of the philosophical thinking until nowadays" [8, 316]. Such considerations lead us to believe that Husserl was to Camil Petrescu, an important starting point of his philosophical edifice, a starting point of his philosophic creation. A creation called *The Doctrine of Substance*.

*The Doctrine of Substance* was conceived and written between 1938 and 1941. Although he did not like to give interviews, however by 1939 he accepted a friendly conversation with Anișoara Odeanu, an old acquaintance. During those discussions he explained his absence from the literary life for he studied for three years mathematics in order to better understand the philosophy. In 1941 he concluded the first version of *The Doctrine of Substance*, which he deposits in 1942, at the Vatican Library, convinced that his philosophical doctrine will build up a career only when it will be understood, that is over several generations. This is another gesture, along with many others, proving that the philosopher-writer lived with intensity, but soberly, the one who was refused drama. In fact, at one point he says: "I work mainly in opposition to something, stirred up to oppose my own vision, to an insufficient vision, inaccurate or false altogether." [9, 493]

On *The Doctrine of Substance*, Camil Petrescu said that the work "has two parts: some critical examination of previous systems and then a constructive part. What I can say is that the critical lead to a denial of all philosophers since Aristotle. In order literary substance doctrine is a denial of national character and traditional doctrines; past feeling, that's a given substantially, does not justify a traditionalist ideology as metaphysical sense of existence does not justify the metaphysical systems. National specificity seems denial national substance itself. The choice between both: one excludes the other. As you have seen my work has nothing in it of national or traditional, precisely because it is the very Romanian substance" [3, 7].

In Camil Petrescu's opinion, substance "conjugates quantity with quality", that is the physicalism rationalist with intuitionism and phenomenology. The substance is quality, which is in indefinite quantitative growth and current becoming exists simultaneously, by the dimension of necessity and by size Nooses dimension. Substance is the creation of man, as a culture, and of the Nooses (spirit), in history, just as it is alive and natural. In short, "substantialism" is the intuition of essences.

According to Camil Petrescu, all there is - there is essence and is given absolutely. Substantial method follows to integrate the essences into concrete, which is defined by quidditate - ability to remove other meanings, to reach the essence. *The Doctrine of Substance* is theorized in eight chapters: A. (*The Ontology of the Concrete*); B. (*The Substantial Method*); C. (*Knowledge, Ontology, and Substance*); D. (*General ontology*); E. (*Orthogenesis*); F. (*Annexes to Orthogenesis - History*); G. (*Theory of values, Ethics, Noocratia*).

The general lines of the philosophy of substance are traced within the two chapters, but the following ones are as important as the previous ones. Within the limits of this text I can but do some brief references. Certain are the fact that we are facing a project, which could be brought to a unitary shape only in part by the author. The patient reader will discover some differences between intentions and achievements. It is without doubt that the Romanian philosopher hardly intended to re-born the importance of ontology within the philosophical background of the first half of the 20th century.

To the achievement of this objective it is fully committed the very first chapter, entitled *The Ontology of the Concrete*. In Camil Petrescu 'opinion, ontology has been forgotten, that was replaced by gnoseology and logic, whereas the modern age thinkers, from Descartes to Kant and Hegel, ignored "concreteness".

The Romanian philosopher thinks that philosophy became committed to some idealisms and subjectivity of which it can not be saved but only through the substantial skyline of the concrete. Underlining this, Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu notes: "The reorientation towards ontology involves the repudiation of logicism, from here appearing the critics of the traditionalist rationalist philosophy on the one hand and on the other hand the effort to build a philosophy of concrete. The dissociation of logical reasoning is performed in an explicitly opposition to Kant" [4, 22-23]. Why? Here's Camil Petrescu's answer: "substantialism supports a new definition of 'reason'. Reason is no longer a vague faculty "to produce concept", as for Kant, it is not the faculty to recognize the logical necessity, the logical causality, such as for the rationalists. The reason is precisely the ability to recognize the need for external world as opposed to the internal world, is the recognition of the external necessity, of the concrete substantial necessity (just the faculty to distinguish fiction from real) - suitability to real. In this respect animals have reason though they do not "reason logically while a madman who is reasoning often perfectly logical lacks mindless". [8, 102]

But for a summary outline, sufficient to this text, regarding the details of Camil Petrescu's philosophy, I also appeal to Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu: "Aiming to build a philosophical system, Camil Petrescu enrol himself by his effort on the creative line of Romanian philosophy and not to the strict one as a teacher. Although from this system does not miss the gnoseologic issues, the orientation to the ontology and sketching it constitute his definite aspect. In developing the substantiality ontology, Camil Petrescu is influenced by Bergsonian spiritualism and not by phenomenology, which is decisive first of all for the methodological dimension of *The Substance Doctrine*, but not for the ideatic one, as it was considered up to now.

As regards the relation with the phenomenology, Camil Petrescu individualizes himself within the Romanian culture by the fact that he does not limit himself to its exposure and application, but he assimilates it and tries to overpass it and develop it within his work. From his orientation towards ontology there are linked anti-logicism and anti-apriorism, founded up to a certain point, which will be found in his literary work also. Rich in deep intuitions, his large philosophic work carries the mark of an unfinished work also through the argumentation, sometimes too brief, and thus non-convincing, but also through the systematic feature of the exposure style. The objective difficulty of the creation of philosophic systems under the circumstances of the accumulation of a huge amount of knowledge is seen especially in his social-political visions, abstract as ideal and poor in concrete solutions. In spite of these lacks, *The Substance Doctrine* remains through its intentions and achievements a book which will impose itself in front of the specialists in the field of philosophy and literary criticism" [4, 44-45].

I also add Constantin Noica's opinion: „If someone hesitates to rank Camil Petrescu among the greatest representatives of the Romania culture, then they should read *The Substance Doctrine*" [10, 5]. And here is further on the opinion of a researcher, who not only read, but also he analyzed the Substance Doctrine. It is about the Anton Aamut, a university life representative from Iasi and who writes: „The idea of concrete did not lack to philosophy, but on the contrary, it was a permanent and faithful companion. This idea was also demonstrated in the previous periods of the medieval realism, in Descartes' philosophy, the monadology and the concept of force together with all romantic philosophy. To the last one can also add the idea of organicity, a dynamic one, raised not from reason and being unique in its existentiality. Organicity becomes correlative to the concrete, through the philosophy of life as well. This devastating diversity can be originated, or totally closed, within the Hegelian philosophy of the concrete. It is obvious that Camil Petrescu is an heir. This was ungrateful and sometimes illegal. About this illegal situation speaks the present book". [5]

This means that, in the end, Ion Ianos's observation proves to be fair: Camil Petrescu was one of our most contradictory authors, in a paradox way: and he is continuing to tangle the exegetes" [11, 182]. And in this addition Ion Ianos states: „The creation of a new conscience in the world was the greatest Camil Petrescu's vanity. That is why he intended to compare his works with a system of thinking. That is why he over passed art for a philosophy which he considered to be scientific and that he wanted to found on mathematics. He wanted to be a new Aristotle of the conscious, indispensable to the whole concentrated intelligence of the world. All converted for him in „ personal expressions" [1, 207]. An attitude long waited by some literary critics. I mention here the statement of Romulus

Demetrescu, made in issue 9 of the literary pages magazine in 1936: „For us, just this philosophic care of the critic is precious and from it we are waiting strong fruits” [12, 327].

It is no doubt that Camil Petrescu belongs to the great family of Romanian writers from the interwar period, imposing himself through his intellectual presence and though the innovator character of his work. He was a special personality just because of his paradox attitudes. He was a special personality, conquering admiration from the part of his contemporaries. He was interpreting the literary creation, including his, from the point of view of the theoretic support. He did not conceive any authentic literary work without a philosophic vision. He was confessing to Eugen Jebeleanu by telling him that the intellectual investigation means are so rudimentary that is no worth making literature. In the study „The new structure and the work of Marcel Proust”, Camil Petrescu illustrated the contribution of the French writer in realizing a link between the science and the philosophy of his period and the literature he practiced.

Now, at the end of the readings and of these notes, I can notice that the problematic of the relationship between Camil Petrescu’s philosophy and literature is more complicated then I thought. It was of great help for me the experience that I got following this relationship in the case of Eminescu. But I see that it is of great help is also Camil Petrescu for the understanding of Eminescu’s creation. What is certain is that I started to prove the hypothesis of complementarities between Camil Petrescu’s philosophy and literature and I discovered the existence of a greater infusion of philosophy in literature. All this effort was made for the benefit of both. Here comes another hypothesis that should attentively be researched in future.

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