

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH, YOUTH AND SPORT
“1 DECEMBRIE 1918” UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOLOGY

Ph. D. THESIS
Summary

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

Professor Doctor Mircea Braga

Ph. D. Candidate

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ALBA IULIA

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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH, YOUTH AND SPORT
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**REPORTAGE AND LITERATURE:
DISSOCIATIONS AND INTERFERENCES
IN THE ROMANIAN LITERATURE**

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Key words: reportage, reporting, reporter, literature, journalism, Romania, inter-war, communism, revolution, non-fictional literature, newspaper, paraliterature, writing, reality, narrative techniques, interference, environment, social, politics, propaganda, influence, travel

Reportage and literature: dissociations and interferences in the Romanian literature is not meant to be an exhaustive study, nor to frame the reportage to literature at any price. It would probably be a futile approach as there is a strong and obstinate current to frame the reportage to journalism. A question arises: what is the use of this literary approach to reportage? To demonstrate the vitality of a species (as it is referred by the literary theoreticians who place it on the quicksand of the paraliterature) or a genre (the term belongs, of course, to journalists and media analysts) that constantly reinvented itself throughout its existence in the Romanian culture. For years, the reportage has been, quantitatively and qualitatively, the Cinderella of today press, the genre that fails to impress the reader, to make him feel and live what the reporter has seen and lived.

And yet, for more than a century, or nearly two hundred years, if we embrace George Ivascu's opinion that Gh. Asachi is "*the first Romanian reporter*", the reportage was the writing style that has juggled with the means of both literature and journalism. In this regard, this study intends to promote the reportage as a genre that gained its vitality and chameleonism by loans from literature and by striving to bring the journalistic tumult into literature.

This view of the Romanian reportage does not aim to highlight the works of all the reporters, but to emphasize the always changing faces of reportage. Consequently, this study reveals a few stages in the reportage history. The criteria of the time framing were literal and political because reportage has, consecutively or simultaneously, folded on the tribulations of two worlds: the outer one with its social and political events, and the interior one of literature. Then, each time segment was developed in thematic approaches. Finally, given the continuous reinvention of the reportage, we considered useful to reiterate Geo Bogza's 1934 interviews and started a little investigation concerning the reportage status. Our approach focused on both the present and future status of the reportage; the questions were addressed to reporters, writers and media analysts.

The first chapter of the study, *The reportage, literature and journalism triangle* approaches the relations between reportage and literature and between reportage and journalism. The analysis opens with the controversy aroused by the reportage possible definitions as a journalistic genre (*Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Glossary of Journalism*), as a literary species (Felix Aderca, Truman Capote) or as a creative act situated on the border of the document and literature (George Macovescu, George Munteanu, F. Brunea-Fox). The study emphasizes the fact that the reportage is defined by all the characteristics of journalism: it is written for a particular publication and complies with its rigors and keywords – here, now; reportage implies that the reporter was involved in the described events and that he makes us feel involved through a summum of narrative techniques and processes. These techniques and processes are opposed to the conciseness and uniformisation of the journalistic style, but they define the literary writing style. This style lies at the basis of the relation between reportage and literature. Thus, while discussing style in reportage, we followed two aspects: of the literarity (in a text, the entropy has not exhausted its meanings), and of the fiction (literature contemplates, interprets, recreates and corrects life, while recreation and correction are forbidden in reportage). A conclusion can be drawn: literature is present in reportage by means of architectural intervention, not by fiction.

Reportage-literature connection was also seen from the perspective of several relations: author- character, author - narrator and narrator - lecturer. For example, the author of a reportage can act several roles: he is a character playing the role of reporter

(and thus, he is inside the story time, he does not know the end, he asks questions, he observes and records elements out of which the narrator will afterwards make a selection), he is a narrator that tells the story after the action ends. An author is always a narrator though sometimes he chooses to let speak some indirect narrators, by quoting them or by dialogue reproduction. The third relation that should be discussed is that between author and lecturer, the transmitter and receiver in this communication act. The author is the first reader of what he writes, so he is the alter ego lecturer. The target lecturer is formed, in a first phase, by the newspaper readers, whose general expectations are broadly known.

The first chapter ends with a short debate on the things literature owes to journalism. There are cases in the Romanian literature when journalists become literary characters or the text is transferred and embedded from newspapers to novels or short-stories (e.g. the scene of men reading the newspaper in *Moromeții*, Marin Preda's novel).

Moreover, tools specific to journalists are used by writers for the historical novels or for the literary works that aim to create a historic frame (e.g. Duiliu Zamfirescu's novel *În război/ In War*). Such loans can be found in the Romanian literature in three literary periods: the interwar, the eighties and the contemporary period. This influence was summed up by Camil Petrescu in an article written in 1924: "*The best fiction is a superior form of reportage. (...) I can speak honestly only for myself*". The influences between literature and journalism do not shun the so-called non-fictional literature, a kind of story inside which the reality falls into fiction and fiction enters the real world. Two examples can be quoted: *In Cold Blood*, by Truman Capote, and *Pe urmele destinului/ Following Destiny*, by Romulus Cioflec.

The second chapter, *Foreshadowing the report (from chronicles to travel notes)*, compiles the elements that preceded the appearance of reportage. In the Moldavian and Wallachian chronicles, the reportage elements are present when the chronicler witnesses the events he describes. Miron Costin, Ion Neculce, Dionisie and Ianache Văcărescu illustrate this foreshadowing and the analysis reveals both well-known sequences, such as the locusts' invasion, and less common facts of the everyday life. Reportage elements are also to be found in works that combine the literary and scientific character: *Descriptio Moldaviae*, by Dimitrie Cantemir, and Cezar Bolliac's travels notes. Slices of life presented as symbolic drawings compose *Cântarea României /Song of Romania* by Alecu Russo, and hunting experiences form the basis of the essayistic structure of Alexandru Odobescu's *Pseudo-Cynegeticos*.

The larger part of this chapter is devoted to travel literature: it is well-known that the travel notes have emerged as an Ariadne's thread in the 150 years development of reportage. Thus, the paper deals with the Nicolae Spataru-Milescu's exotic travel notes, with the grave accents dominating Dinicu Golescu's writings, the nature description-based memoirs of Ion Codru-Drăgușanu, Vasile Alecsandri, Iosif Vulcan, the educational travel notes of Gheorghe Asachi, Dimitrie Bolintineanu, Nicolae Filimon and the romantic travel notes of Alexandru Vlahuță.

War texts also contributed to the reportage development. Soldiers who fought in the Independence War and First World War wrote letters and newspaper articles, but the first writings that have placed personal bellicose experience in a cohesive narrative structure are due to George Topârceanu. He wrote *Amintiri din luptele de la Turtucaia/ Memoirs of The Turtucaia Battle* and *Pirin-Planin*, after he spent two years in war. His reportages reveal an author able to combine the poet's passion with the reporter's keen sense of observation. First World War experiences were mentioned also in some notes published by Camil Petrescu and Octavian Goga. A conclusion can be drawn about the

role held by these writers –soldiers: they were journalists, but went to war as soldiers. They were not simple witnesses, they told their very own story. The history of reportage has dealt with relatively few instances in which the author was engaged in action as character.

The third chapter outlines the setting of reportage as a journalistic genre during the inter-war period. In the Romanian culture, reportage development is due to the frenzy of avant-garde representatives who urged writers and publishers to conquer unknown, peripheral worlds. Thus, reporting was understood as an instrument of social order. This conclusion is also obvious in the interviews realised by Geo Bogza in “Vremea”, in 1934. N. D. Cocea, Mircea Eliade, F. Brunea-Fox, Felix Aderca and N. Davidescu answered Bogza’s questions.

From a thematic point of view, inter-war reportage focused on several categories: social and sensational stories (miners’ lives, children forced to work, workers’ protests, thieves and prostitutes), travel reportage, war reportage, political and propaganda reportage. The social engagement of literature and journalism has acquired political overtones and, therefore, inter-war reportage must be framed inside the historical-political context of the time, not only inside the cultural one. The political context is responsible for the propaganda and pro-Soviet travel reportages of these times. Two reasons are responsible for these two new categories: the first one deals with a pro-Soviet current, very active in Europe, and the second one – with the obsession of young Romanian intellectuals “*to take the country out of provincialism and make it universally*”. This statement belongs to Marta Petreu and it captures the general spirit of the youth. According to Marta Petreu, the Romanian intellectuals felled into three groups: one - loyal to the extreme right political orientation (Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade), the left extremists or the communists (Radu Miron Paraschivescu, Alexandru Sahia) and a group oscillating between apolitism and Democracy (Petru Comarnescu). Considering all these, a research sequence deals with investigative and partisanship reportage. Another research direction follows the travel reportage dedicated to USSR and the propaganda writings. Idyllic visions on totalitarian countries are outlined in reportages written by Panait Istrati, Liviu Rebreanu and Emil Cioran. Propaganda-replica reportages of Emil Huszar are intended to provide a counter-balance to the writings praising fascism and Nazism. Propaganda reporting is not related only to foreign countries, but also to the legionary sympathies theorized and promoted by Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Polihroniade and Constantin Noica.

Three short subchapters are devoted to the analysis of the concept “ideology”, promoted and illustrated by Felix Aderca, to the involvement of women in reportage writing and to war reportage, illustrated by Virgil Gheorghiu and Miron Radu Paraschivescu. Travel stories analysis closes the chapter by dealing with *Rapid-Constantinopol-Bioram*, by Camil Petrescu, *India*, by Mircea Eliade, *Chipurile și priveștiștile Americii/ America Faces and Landscapes*, *Chipurile și priveștiștile Europei/ Europe Faces and Landscapes*, by Petru Comarnescu, and the travel notes of Nicolae Iorga, Ion Petrovici and Calistrat Hogaș.

Within our study we dedicated two chapters to the reporters F. Brunea-Fox and Geo Bogza and the motivation lies both in their nomination as founders of the great Romanian reportage, and in the influence they have had, by theme and style, on the next reporters’ generations. Thus, the fourth chapter is dedicated to Geo Bogza and it opens with the reporter’s views on reportage, literature and journalism. This theoretic frame is useful since statements like “*Reporting is not just meant to be the most sensitive seismograph of today life, but it is meant to be one of the tools that will help future,*

feared transformations on Earth” (Geo Bogza) were illustrated in Bogza’s creation. A first series of reportages, those inspired by Cadrilater, Bessarabia, Danube Delta and Spain – show the hardships of common lives. The writing scheme is simple: facts and images, clips of the real, are internalized in a manner that heavily contributes to increase the aura of unreal. Following this pattern, reportages emphasize the osmotic relationship between man and nature on two levels: the organic attachment and the fight between the unequal forces of man and nature. For example, a descent in the mine is something common for miners, but it is perceived as Dante’s descent into hell by the writer.

In another series of reportages, the writer enters the urban life of several million poorly fed, poorly dressed people, who toil in silence, for the sake of a few thousand privileged people. Ridiculous living conditions, sordid existence in the suburbs, social stratification and social outcasts are revealed in these writings. In terms of construction, these writings are dominated by the technical method of enhancement a detail. For example, cold is used in order to draw a panorama of the social strata: in cold nights, cold becomes a painful social problem. Coldness measured in Celsius degrees speaks about people suffering from hunger. A technically innovative author is Geo Bogza once again when writing about the thief named Tata Moșu: his life is presented in short fast going sequences of a surrealist film.

In time, Geo Bogza’s writing style changes allowing beautiful and delicate features, memoirs and portraits to replace the hell-like images; thus the reportage grows more alike a poem in prose: *Delta Dunării/Danube Delta* and *Cartea Oltului/ The Book of the Olt* are suggestive examples. The starting point of these writing is that of exaggeration. A brief analysis of the style and construction techniques of Geo Bogza reportages concludes this chapter.

F. Brunea-Fox, setting a pattern, is the fifth chapter and it provides the first overview of the reportages published by F. Brunea-Fox during the interwar period. His views on reporter and reportage, and his contribution to the development of the Romanian reportage are pointed out in the beginning. For example, Geo Bogza said the “*Talking to Mr. Fox means talking to the reporter himself, because in our media, the notion of reportage is linked to his name*”. A second subchapter outlines the social landscape of Brunea-Fox’s writings through the story of the girls who give birth under bridges, through the stories of those who hosts five six, eight or ten people in small rooms full of damp etc. Beyond theme, these reportages show the writer’s ability to juggle with the plans and the parts he acts. For example, Brunea-Fox plays the part of a good listener who hears and retells all the stories, or the part of a character involved in action.

The sensationalism of Brunea-Fox’s reportages has often been talked about, but it ought to be mentioned that he never sought the cheap sensational and that the sensational arose out of the unusual theme: discovering the humanism of those considered inhuman (people suffering from leprosy, beggars and prostitutes). *Cinci zile printre leproși/ Five Days Among Lepers*, *Rondul de noapte/ Night Watch*, *A murit Sbhonghici/ Sbhonghici’s Death*, *Ulița babalâcilor, Lăzărică și Jurnalul unei razii/ A Raid Journal* are suggestive examples and each of these writings is in fact a drama presented not from the outside, but from within.

In the same sphere of the social outcasts, of the prostitutes, can be placed some other reportage series: *Aventuri malteze/ Maltese Adventures* and *Provinciale/ Provincial Stories*, in both of them the journey is a pretext to study people. In the end, a brief analysis of Brunea-Fox’s writing style reveals an author who has always struggled between the simplicity of style and the complexity of literary techniques. For example, in

many writings, the action is developed as in a novel. The author stuns with a variety of incipit formula (references to literary works, rhetorical questions, and paragraphs from letters, newspapers, etc.) ingenious similes, epithets and personifications.

“Write, lads, write. Within the limits of socialist realism.” This seems to be the dictum that ruled over four decades the Romanian literature, during the communist regime. Reportage was one of the favourites species because, by definition, it had the weapons to reflect as real a non-existent reality, or it was able to maintain the total confusion between “*what-it-exists and what-it-is-said-to-exist*”, as Carmen Musat stated. This is the starting point of Romanian communist reportage analysis in the sixth chapter of this study. Writers and journalists who went to villages and towns to write the next reportage were eulogized, but most often their writings proved to be carbon copies inspired by the political precepts. Beyond the overwhelming number of reporters and reportages, Communism reportage was one the most talked-about species. Magazines and newspapers extensively wrote about the Communist goals of reportage or organized meetings to talk about it. The explanation for all these lies in the fact that „*the reportage was the first school of teaching lies about the Communist society*”, Eugene Negrici believes. In the context of this socio-cultural gap, reportage can be approached only through the historical, political and literary conditions of the time. Newspapers were obliged to publish reportages written by both well-known and young reporters: Brunea-Fox, Geo Bogza, Petre Dumitriu, Dan Deșliu, Maria Banuș, V. Em. Galan, Ilie Purcaru, Traian Coșovei, Nicolae Dragoș, Nicolae Ada, Neagu Udroi, Pop Simion, Petre Dragoș, Constantin Mitea, Victor Bărlădeanu, Victor Vântu, Paul Anghel, Eugen Barbu, Traian Filip, Vasile Nicorovici, Viniciu Gafița, Alecu Ivan Ghilia, Valentin Hossu-Longin, Mihai Negulescu, Veronica Porumbacu, Nina Casian, Eugen Jebeleanu, Oscar Lemnar. Given the multitude of names and reportages, one might think that the literary frame was rich in topics, but still only few topics were agreed with and promoted. Consequently, the inspiration was sought in the industrial environment (*Orașul flăcărilor/ City of Fire - Vasile Nicorovici, Pământul oțelului /The Land of Steel – Traian Filip, Lumină!/ Light! – Radu Cosașu*), the rural world (*Victoria de la Oltina / Oltina`s Victory– Paul Anghel, Cununa de spice/ Ear Wreath*), among the workers building socialism (*Expres`65 - Romulus Rusan, Port dunărean /Danubian Port – Eugen Teodoru, Ca un clopot sună lutul– Dona Roșu*) or in recent discovered worlds (*Farmecul genezei /Genesis Beauty – Traian Coșovei, Scrisori din Bărăgan/ Letters from Bărăgan – Alecu Ivan Ghilia, Periplu moldav/ Moldavian Journey – Grigore Ilisei etc.*) This thematic quartet is completed by propaganda reportage, inspired by travelling in the USSR. Not often the Romanian literature has so much (ab)used of epithets and superlatives, as when the writers and publicists have travelled to the „heavenly kingdom of the USSR”. The pattern was set by Alexandru Sahia in his 1936 volume *URSS azi/ USSR Today* and flourished in the communist period, both in the number of works and in their encomiastic style. In 1946, Sadoveanu is one of the first writers who uses the apologetic tone of the travellers to the USSR, and a similar reaction is obvious in Geo Bogza`s propaganda reportage: *Meridiane sovietice/ Soviet Meridians*. Here, the reading key is provided to the reader from the very beginning: the book opens with the prologue *Lenin*. Cezar Petrescu, Zaharia Stancu and Ion Pas are three other writers who follow the political dicteum while writing on the USSR. On an opposite position stays G. Călinescu`s series of reportages as the author shows the normality of the Soviet society.

The negative effects of Communist reportages began to be revealed and an alarm signal appeared at the beginning of the `70s in the Romanian literature. This signal and the literary relative freedom gained after 1965 paved the way of subversive themes in

literature. Journalistic and literary voices managed to circumvent the official propaganda or paradigm: reporters like Cornel Nistorescu, Dan Mucinic, Sânziana Pop, Fănuș Neagu and Nicolae Prelipeanu avoided using a fade scheme and a tasteless language. Though embedded in the socialist-realist themes, Sânziana Pop approached reportage by means of a linguistically changed registry: she wrote about working places, literary meetings, working-class circles and villages, but none of her words were obsolete, apologetic. The key used is that of a constant reference to herself; the outside is recreated from an inner perspective, avoiding thus the confusion doublet “*what-it-exists and what-it-is-said-to-exist*”.

Far from apologetic themes and emotional demagoguery, but full of sensitivity and humanity are the books signed by Cornel Nistorescu. He is the reporter who rediscovers the common humanity in the stories of ordinary people. Thus, an omniscient author introduces us in Mary`s world, the woman who waited 40 years to bury her fiancé; afterwards we spend several days in hospital; we meet doctors who implanted thousands of pacemakers; we travel in Bucharest slums, where people raise cows and pigs; we meet prostitutes and convicts.

Among those who managed to avoid the political dogma, should also be remembered Fănuș Neagu, a sports journalist who succeeded to incorporate reportage techniques in his writings. Escaping the apologetic style, Ioan Grigorescu resized the classic travel notes and enriched them with social themes. Mircea Malița`s, Tudor Vianu`s, and Al. Rossetti`s travel notes share the same characteristic: the abundance of scientific and touristic details. Instead, Eugen Barbu`s and Ana Blandiana`s postcards can be assigned to reportage only tangentially. Far from the traditional travel memoirs is Tudor Arghezi`s *Cu bastonul prin București*. This is not a guide for visitors who arrive by train and car, but rather a succession of impressions, the fruit of an internalized journey made both in time and space.

“*Is reportage dead? We see it today, but it does not exist*”, “*Many reporters, few reportages*”. These are the headlines displayed by the cultural magazines when post-1989 reportage issues are under debate. But this happens quite rarely. Few literary theorists and journalists focus on the reportage current condition and a first explanation lies precisely in the rarity with which to write the story as today. This is the opening point of view of the 7th chapter: *The reportage revolution*. There are few journalists who dare to write reportage and the writers who do it are even fewer, but let`s not forget that the reportage belonging both to journalism and paraliterature is largely due to writers.

The alert rhythm and the multitude of media channels determine the existence of a reportage that differentiates itself in style from the inter-war grand reportage. Of course, some perspective changes have been necessary, but the reportage should not abdicate from the essential condition of any literary or journalistic text: to be well written. And yet, this is the Achilles heel of the post-1989 reportage: quality writing. And we might add: public perception and public quality. In such conditions, the debate on the contemporary reportage has a starting point in economy: mass-media companies are now required to economically survive and, thus, the attention of print media moves towards texts that manage to sell the newspaper; unfortunately, reportage is not one of the profitable species. This is one of the conclusions drawn from an investigation initiated in 2006 by „Dilema veche”. The second conclusion points out that the reportage evolution is rather an involution, both stylistically and thematically. Right after the 1989 Revolution, reportage „*mirrored miserable descriptions showing how bad our social and economic state was and the fact that we got no chance of better living*”, the analyst Iulian Comanescu thinks. Then the reportage turned into investigations and surveys, which

abounded in sordid details. The 2000 years brought a new twist: reporters' interest in VIPs' lives.

Today, reportage is dominated by sensational stories, everyday life events and celebrities. This brief typology can be completed with some general considerations: although plenty of publications have special columns entitled *Reportage*, the articles published under this generic rather approach simple or feature stories, instead of reportage. Then, the pauperty of architectural means is a constant, just like the homo narativus vocation. Moreover, the last two decades have marked a shift towards using a more oral and colloquial language in print media. Thus a literary language is clearly undermined by a „*TV and Internet language*”, which tends to tear down the boundaries between the mass media and wants to deceive the public by placing an equality sign between written and visual media. The exceptions are rare because fewer are the cases when the author is building a significant presence in language and narrative. An exception is Ilișoi Viorel, a reporter who manages to act like a reporter, a character and a narrator at the same time.

The *Conclusion* of this study deals with a question: is it possible a reinvention of the reportage, is this the survival chance of the print media? For more than a century, reportage has always sought and found ways of changing and surviving. From Cinderella it turned into a princess, from people voice it turned into the means of politics; reportage forgot its language and invented a new one, it forgot the real reality in favour of a false one, politically created, and thus reportage proved to be one of the protean components of the Romanian culture. Reportage destiny has been marked with all the tribulations inherent to a hybrid species created by two mothers - literature and journalism - who have always fought in claiming it. In this context, a question arises: what is the new face of the reportage? Will it be one linked to literature and thus written on electronic pages or on sheets of paper, like a poem or a short-story or like a pamphlet? Yes, probably reportage will cover both online and print media, because this is the species that reflects reality at the highest peak. In such circumstances, the reportage story can not end here, even if, undoubtedly, it will change its looks again. How will look like the new reportage in the Romanian culture? Opinions fall on two directions: it will continue its migration to feature, by reducing its sizes, or it will return to the values of the past, reinventing itself through literature. Reportage – literature relation is a two-way road: on the one hand, the non-fictional literature becomes more and more a public's favourite, and, on the other hand, a return to the pleasure of reading and hence the pleasure of reading the reportage are expected. However, the reportage revival should be primarily found in newspapers, as this is the species that may contribute to the survival of print media. This resistance would have a double effect: it would keep healthy one of the literary-journalistic species and, equally, would contribute to maintaining the readers' interest in the print media. This line was promoted by the theoretician Jean-Dominique Boucher fifteen years ago and slowly made its place in the Romanian media, through the opinions expressed by Marius Tuca and Iulian Comanescu. It is obvious that journalists and theoreticians promote the same idea: reportage read like a good novel, a reportage that thrills senses and raises questions about itself and people around us, a reportage that tells the story to the end and manages once again to bring literature in newspapers and the journalistic turmoil in literature. Why? Because the trio reality - authenticity - fine writing will determine us dwell upon reportage in order to read reality.

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