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***GURA SATULUI* SATIRICAL MAGAZINE AND ITS  
ILLUSTRATIONS  
Ph D THESIS ABSTRACT**

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**Key Words:**

Gura Satului, press, cartoon, magazine, Transylvania, satire, humour, irony, satirical press, the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

**Abstract**

Ion Breazu said: „The press of Transylvania has been, for one whole century, the huge laboratory of the national consciousness”.<sup>1</sup> This metaphor, as penetrating as it is truthful, shows the indisputable role that the Transylvanian press has had in achieving the ultimate goal of the Romanian people of Transylvania, namely, its struggle for social and national liberation.

In those years imbued with crucial events that have decisively determined the fate of the Romanian people, as the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, the life of the Romanian press was truly thriving due to the wealth of the topics discussed in the pages of the newspapers of the time and its role was essential in objectively mirroring the realities of the epoch.

The present study is an interdisciplinary approach that blends history, art history and literature with the aim of providing a clear image on the way these areas are working together for successfully publishing *Gura Satului* satirical magazine, newspaper whose articles and cartoons significantly illustrate the social, political and economic realities of the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century in Transylvania.

This scientific research is structured into six chapters which are intended to highlight the indisputable role that the satirical press has had over one of the most troubled periods in the history of the existence of the Transylvanian Romanian people. At such times, the only way that Transylvanians could remain united in thought and feelings and strengthen their power to fight for national liberation, territorial autonomy, speaking the Romanian language and, finally, for the reunification of the Romanian people was press and its exponent, *Gura Satului* magazine, then played a key role. Through its articles, most often audacious through the frankness of the published issues but especially through its cartoons, this magazine displays a militant character that has represented the moral, cultural and ideological support of the struggle of the Romanians of Transylvania in maintaining their existence as a social, cultural and national entity during the dualistic regime (1867-1918) and which, therefore, entitles it to a careful and thorough analysis.

In such an effervescent period from a political, social and cultural viewpoint as it was late XIX<sup>th</sup> and early XX<sup>th</sup> century, *press* was the one that assumed the role of displaying in the most direct and veridical manner the realities of the time. Press then represented the most important means of informing and educating the public, the mirror of all the events occurred or that were to take place. This vital function that press performs in the life of society is impressively well captured in the words of the great poet

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<sup>1</sup> Ion Breazu, *Literatura Transilvaniei: Studii. Articole. Conferințe.*, București, Ed. Casa Școalelor, 1944, p.11, apud Mircea Popa, Valentin Tașcu, *Istoria presei românești din Transilvania de la începuturi până în 1918*, București, Ed. Tritonic, 2003, p. 254.

Octavian Goga, who said: "I have always seen in press a lung that breathes public awareness and, at the same time, a means of guiding masses ".<sup>2</sup>

The same essential role was played by press all over the world, first in England, France or Germany of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, where it showed its first signs of life, then all through the rest of Europe, so that, only around late XVIII<sup>th</sup> century - early XIX<sup>th</sup> century, it made its presence felt in the Romanian space, too, delay due to the tumultuous events that our history has witnessed ever since immemorial times.

Fulfilling multiple roles, press, in general, and satirical press, as its important branch become, for the Romanians, means of informing, educating, raising awareness on the realities of time, entertaining and perhaps above all, tool of combat and support of the struggle of the Romanians to acquire national liberties and unity in a time when our nation's fate has decisively been decided. This troubled period, namely the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and early years of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, is to be first described in terms of history, of all political, social, cultural and economic events that were essential to those times, in order to build a clear background of the context in which the Transylvanian press took shape and to provide a full understanding of the place and importance of its exponent, *Gura Satului* magazine.

Crucial historical events in the life of the Romanian nation in Transylvania such as the Revolution of 1848-1849, the conclusion of the Austro-Hungarian agreement regarding the creation of the dualistic state of Austro-Hungary in 1867, the setting up of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and Romanian People's Culture (ASTRA) in 1861, the setting up of the Romanian National Party in 1881, the elaboration of the "Memorandum" in 1892 as well as other events of political, cultural, religious or economic importance testify the effervescence of the last decades of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and sketch the complex profile of a landmark century in the history of Transylvania. These moments of historical significance as well as many others constitute the object of the study achieved in Chapter I, entitled *Transylvania in the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century* that aims at shaping the historical and political context of the life of the Transylvanian Romanians in the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting key aspects of the Revolution of 1848 in Transylvania, of the neo-absolutist period (1849-1860), of the events that took place between the liberalism and the Austrian-Hungarian dualism and of the harsh dualistic period. Also, this first part of the scientific research studies the socio-cultural and economic context of Transylvania during this period in order to provide a complete picture of all aspects of the life of the inhabitants of the Romanian land heart, of their courageous struggle to win national freedoms within which, one of the major pawns was press.

From the moment of the appearance of press, it has held a permanent role of mirror of all types of events, from political, social, economic to artistic and literary ones, because, as Ion Gr. Cherciu well stated, "The press history of a people integrates right into its general history, as a sensitive balance of the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Ion Breazu, *Literatura Transilvaniei*, p.11, apud Mircea Popa, Valentin Tașcu, *Istoria presei românești*, p. 254.

and socio-political life".<sup>3</sup> Consequently, press came from a need for written expression of all these historical events, being a true barometer of political, economic, cultural and literary life in a time when there was an intense struggle for the development of national consciousness and the existence of a political and cultural unity to the Romanians.

The mirroring of the social and historical truths of the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century is achieved in the press, in the most objective way possible, through satire, humour and irony whose merciless arrows criticize social injustices, lash the cunning of the deceivers, correct human vices and wickedness. They are those instruments behind which the press was able to hide the revolt of its readers regarding the injustices of the time and through which the same press could pass it on, elegantly and subtly, just to those that it intends to expose. Consequently, Tudor Muşatescu's words "True satire is like the needle. It pricks not to sting, but to sew"<sup>4</sup> expresses the fact that the ultimate goal of satire is, therefore, a constructive one.

Thus, the second chapter of the present research, bearing the title *The Romanian press of Transylvania at the confines between the XIX<sup>th</sup> and the XX<sup>th</sup> centuries*, aims at providing an image of the Romanian press at that time and of the satirical press as an integrant part of it. Starting from a history of the emergence and development of the press in the world and, especially in Europe, there will be made a gradual transition to a description of the beginnings of the Romanian press, of the way in which it fit into the European or global press, of its emancipation in the sense of its specialization. The study will try to restrict the analysis to a certain type of press, namely the satirical one, stopping on its emergence and evolution, particularizing the satirical press phenomenon to the Transylvanian area and discussing the role it has played in the life of Romanians living there. Also, the first part of this chapter aims at raising the concepts of satire, humour and irony in the press, as means of mirroring the social and historical truth, trying to define each of them and to delineate their role in the press. After clarifying these concepts, there will be approached another artistic way to deliver the satirical message in the press namely caricature. This will be analyzed in terms of its role and its militant character within the satirical press, making specific references related to the place caricature holds within the various satirical - humorous magazines in Transylvania.

Also, this study aims at achieving, through its third chapter, *Gura Satului – illustrated satirical magazine from Transylvania (1867-1881; 1901-1903)*, an analysis of a magazine that is representative for this type of press in Transylvania of the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It is about *Gura Satului* (1867-1881, 1901-1903), which, among the satirical magazines of the epoch, stands out as a thundering one, both through the history of its existence and through the variety of topics discussed and of the modalities of sending its satirical message.

Basic exponent of the Transylvanian satirical press, both through its articles and through its graphical representation, *Gura Satului* magazine is a journal which deserves special attention due to several

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<sup>3</sup> Ion Gr. Cherciu, *Genuri și specii publicistice în presa umoristică românească de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Tudor Muşatescu apud Elena Macavei, *Umorul*, p. 433.

reasons. First, because, despite the historical adversities from Transylvania of the last decades of the nineteenth century, this publication has fiercely been issued, without interruption, for fourteen years and then, resumed after a break of twenty years, out of the same wish to offer the reading public hours of "distinguished delight" and fragments of objective reality. The four periods and places of occurrence of the magazine, that is Pesta (1867-1871), Arad (1871-1879), Gherla and subsequently Gherla and Arad (1879-1881) and again Arad (1901-1903) testify to the consistency and seriousness with which the magazine has left the light of printing. Another reason for appreciating this periodical is due, unequivocally, to the personalities of the time that it has collaborated with and who gave its pages samples of literary-artistic talent, displaying a wide range of topics related to political, social or cultural events specific to various moments, rendered through a variety of epic, lyric or dramatic literary genres and forms, dressed in the cloak of satire with moralizing purposes.

This satirical tone of the writings which emerge from the pages of *Gura Satului* magazine is, on the one hand, left to the interpretation of parodies, cartoons, epigrams, fables, ballads, reports, epistles, etc. and, on the other hand, expressed directly, as a clear intention of the articles' authors, people "always happy and smiling"<sup>5</sup> of spreading their lightning over all cowards and unjust, hypocrites and traitors<sup>6</sup> whose actions they intend to combat through their writings.

Names like Ioan Slavici, Alexandru Macedonski, G. Sion, Grigore Alexandrescu, A. Depărățeanu, Ion Creangă, Iosif Vulcan, M.V. Stănescu, I. Russu-Șirianu etc. are living proof that this magazine has enjoyed literary collaborations with personalities of the finest of the time, many of them doing their apprenticeship in the pages of this paper, and whose value acknowledged them in time among the great classics of Romanian literature.

*Gura Satului* is a magazine that enjoys an extremely large and diverse public, consisting both of Transylvanian Romanians and Hungarians and Germans in Austria-Hungary, who are responded to in the mail columns in their native language. The social strata the readers of this magazine belong to are fully represented, from the clergy, lawyers, teachers, students, officials, to townsmen, merchants and peasants, too. In their turn, the columns of the magazine are also complex. They approach topics of the most diverse ones, from rendering the socio-political realities through poetry, stories, epistles, sketches or cartoons to advertisements or other types of announcements, or direct mail with readers. The blending, in the pages of the magazine, of creations inspired by Romanian folklore with essentially literary passages and with cartoons whose expressiveness often surpasses the written language grants it an originality that attracts the nowadays reader, too, even more as many of the topics discussed, especially those in the social sphere, find their similarities with realities of our century.

The present scientific approach demonstrates that, through its program, theme approached, literary genres and species present and, not ultimately, through the positive effect it had on its readers, *Gura Satului* magazine (along with other magazines such as *Calicul* or *Vulturul*) marks "the period of efflorescence of

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<sup>5</sup> *Gura satului*, Nr. 28, Gherla, 1880, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

Romanian satirical press in Transylvania"<sup>7</sup> remaining a reference magazine for the Transylvanian press of the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and early XX<sup>th</sup> century but which has got real echoes in our contemporary time.

One of the basic components of the satirical press is illustration, most often caricatural, which forms, together with the word, a humorous - satirical whole meant to harshly criticize, to correct but to cheer up, too. These multiple valences fulfilled by caricature have established it as an artistic but also journalistic genre whose role remains essential in the existence and proper perception of the satirical press. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide a theoretical and practical approach to caricature, as it is represented in the pages of *Gura Satului* satirical magazine, one of the longest and best received illustrated satirical journals of the Transylvanian Romanians during the Austrian –Hungarian dualism.

This is accomplished through Chapter IV, entitled *Caricature and its role in society*, which aims at achieving a shift from theory to practice regarding this artistic genre, through an analysis which will focus on caricature and its role in society, starting from an approach to the caricatural genre from a theoretical perspective of the origin, development, evolution and its spatial expression at both European and world level, of its categories, of the types of comic that it sends and up to the concrete manifestation of caricature in the Romanian space.

Thus, a theoretical approach to caricature is first tried, defining this artistic genre and tracing its origins and its evolution in space and time. So, at first, the role of caricature was to relax, to entertain the viewer and its creator, too, who sketched characters or scenes from the contemporary reality emphasizing aspects of their criticism. Gradually, caricature receives social - moralizing valences which outline to this type of art a completely different status. Regarding the chronology of the evolution of this artistic genre, the first manifestation signs of caricature date from the remote Antiquity but, the birth of caricature in the true sense can be traced in the seventeenth century Italy, followed by France or England, where caricature becomes an art dedicated to people. Later, the success of the illustration is ensured in the nineteenth century by the evolution of the technology simultaneously with the general development met by the countries where the first signs of industrialism are developing. This century represents, in fact, the period of the supreme flourishing of journalism and lithography which acted as a fertile land in the unprecedented development of caricature. In the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, caricature is openly acclaimed for this is the most thriving moment of the illustrated satirical press. This genre continues its representation, with the same success, in the XX<sup>th</sup> and XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries, too, when it continues to be widely practised within press, in addition to the easel caricature and comic strips cartoon which are also practised in a quite non-negligible manner.

Regarding the categories of caricature, one can speak of social caricature, which focuses particularly on the criticizable aspects of society, of political caricature, which addresses issues of political importance in a particular stage of a nation, of the caricature of manners, which aims at the moral conduct

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<sup>7</sup> Livia Grămadă, *Presa satirică*, p. 21.

of the members of a society, of the portrait caricature with entertainment exclusive purposes etc., any of these types of caricature being determined by social and historical events in their sequence rather than by the different stylistic valences.

The work tries, as follows, to stop over the comic of caricature, too, because it means, undoubtedly, an art of laughter. Primarily, caricature highlights physical flaws or character traits worthy of criticism, however, entering its deep meanings, behind displaying these flaws, the caricaturist criticizes, beside a particular human typology, a social class, too, or a social-historical event, a political party etc. Thus, the comic remains the concept underlying caricature, any caricatural drawing lacking comic accents being an incomplete artistic creation.

Regarding the manifestation of this artistic genre in Romania, caricature is born here in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, together with the development of the illustrated satirical press, its tradition being continued in the XX<sup>th</sup> century, too, when they place a lot of emphasis on portrait caricature but nowadays, too.

Passing from general to particular or from theoretical to practical aspects, there has been achieved, through Chapter V, entitled *The graphics of Gura Satului magazine*, a concrete analysis of certain cartoons that are representative for this magazine occupying a distinct place among the publications of its kind in Transylvania of the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. These drawings have been discussed in terms of both artistic and technical details but also in terms of the themes presented and the significance of their message.

Thus, the cartoons on political themes highlight internal political problems current to each moment they are published, from various laws, Diet activity, the non-participation of the Romanians in the political life of the state, certain figures of politicians and the reception of their role in the Transylvanian society, and very rarely, foreign policy matters. The cartoons on social themes, very numerous, are also widely analysed, focusing on caricaturing women and their role in society and highlighting here the superficiality, the hypocrisy, and generally, the weaknesses of most of them, especially representatives of the bourgeoisie. Also, a considerable number of the illustrations on social themes caricature the institution of marriage, satirizing the materialism of youth in choosing partners. Human flaws and bad morals are also brought into focus by the cartoon pen, trying thus their correction. Interethnic social relations are also subject to the caricature drawings of the magazine given the historical period in which it occurs. Thus, trying to live together in the same territory of the Romanians with the Hungarians revealed as great a number of differences in character as to constitute the subject of many of the cartoons in *Gura Satului* magazine. Religion and church-related problems are also not forgotten, especially since the constant attempt of the Hungarians to denationalize the Transylvanian Romanian population was achieved through the church, as well. Due to the fervour of this desideratum, the idea of nationality and national identity preservation are also constant among the illustrations of the magazine in question. Regarding the use of the Romanian language or, rather, the ban to use it, as well as the right of the Romanians to perform an uncensored education in their mother tongue, there have been chosen and commented significant cartoons on this

subject. In addition to these main themes of the magazine numbers, the paper tried to capture other topics approached by illustrations of great expressiveness through their ironic tone.

Important to note is the fact that, the most prolific period of displaying caricature drawing in this publication is that of the first four years of existence (1867-1871), when it was published in Pest, and when, each of its numbers contained on its last page one or two cartoons on current issues. With the move of the editorial office to Arad, the magazine kept its tendency to entertain its readers with caricature drawings but they were fewer in number so that, towards the end of the first period of publication they became a little rarer. The second series of publication (1901-1903) also contained illustrations but not all of them were in a caricatural sense but rather of drawing that accompanied certain dialogues, anecdotes or articles.

So, enjoying a tremendous thematic variety, the cartoons of *Gura Satului* satirical magazine cover almost all areas of the life of Romanians in Transylvania between 1867-1881 and 1901-1903, satirizing all its criticizable aspects, developing their intelligence through their effort to decipher the fine substratum of the drawing, heartening them to fight fiercely to achieve their national, social and political aspirations and, not ultimately, making them smile in times when only humour was their unique and best friend. This close friendship between the Romanian people and humour remains legendary, as it always knew how to taste the satirical – humorous spicy aspects of life, knowing the fact that, behind any joke and implicitly a cartoon, one finds a great undeniable truth.

This is the reason why *Gura Satului* has found a wide echo in the XX<sup>th</sup> and XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries when, after eighty years of silence, the people of Arad, the residents of the realm of this magazine publication, decided to get back again into "the village gossip" ("Gura Satului") through a festival of village satire and humour bearing the same name as the magazine, which became international with time, and whose links with the nineteenth-century magazine are strong and indisputable. This festival has been reiterating for thirty uninterrupted years, the spirit and beauty of folk humour and its relaxing but also moralizing role, the same as in its time, *Gura Satului* magazine was able to relax harshly the faces of the nineteenth century public through its articles and cartoons. The author's participation in the latest edition of this festival, in August 2011, made possible an authentic outlining of the features of this cultural event, a real contact with its organizers, participating personalities, tasting of samples of authentic folk humour which have enabled the achievement of the latter part of this scientific research, the sixth chapter bearing the title *Echoes of Gura Satului magazine in the XX<sup>th</sup> – XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries* and which intends to prove that the atmosphere of the nineteenth century can easily be perceived in present times. The smack of *Gura Satului*, its importance, its role in the national becoming of the Transylvanians last with the help of this festival but also through other clues of Banat that reinforce the idea that the past was not only our ancestors' but it is also ours and it will certainly be our descendants', too. This festival is living testimony that the great achievements of time are not left forgotten.

In conclusion, the present interdisciplinary approach that has blended history, literature, art and sample of authentic culture wishes to highlight a magazine which, rather little mentioned in the special literature, deserves to be evoked because, in a century where the press was the only means by which the

Transylvanian reading public knew, heartened itself, loaded spiritually or liberated itself from the strain of the words that could not be said, *Gura Satului* was a publication which, through its articles and illustrations, called things by their proper names, however painful or pleasant it was for readers, reinforcing, once again, the wise words of the great English novelist Joseph Conrad who said: "A cartoon means placing the face of a joke onto the body of truth."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [www.rightwords.ro](http://www.rightwords.ro)

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