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SCIENCES

*Publicistica lui Marius Mircu*  
*(Marius Mircu's Published Works)*

*Ph. D. Thesis Summary*

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**Key words:** Marius Mircu, journalism, communication, interwar, reportage, children’s literature, communism, Jewish community

The doctoral thesis *Publicistica lui Marius Mircu (Marius Mircu's Published Works)* aims to bring back into public eye one of the most prolific Romanian writer and journalist of Jewish origin, little known to today's public, rarely mentioned by critics, but who made a real difference in the Romanian culture in his time. The writer was among those who valued intelligentsia's contribution to the development of the Romanian society, stressing any time he had a chance the importance of preserving this memory: "They say that every man that dies is a destroyed library, a pulverized archive, an unfinished novel, a line of ancestors vanished forever, unless somebody cares enough to perpetuate them by remembrance"<sup>1</sup>.

Almost two decades after he passed away, his contribution looks fragmented to the eyes of a reader. Our research represents not only an attempt to bring back into public view the works of a great writer of Jewish origin, but also to commit an act of culture. Our work is an invitation to discover the past through Marius Mircu's lenses, the one who spoils us intellectually and spiritually, giving us the vantage point of a witness to the events he presented. The articles and volumes are a lot more than short-lived news that can't surpass time. His works can be viewed as snapshots of real life, valuable to any scholar who has the curiosity to look beyond official documents.

Marius Mircu's life unfolded like a tornado, influenced in the first place by historic events that he lived through directly, sometimes actively, some other time passively, recording the changes that came from the political decisions used to trigger. The journalist used his entire creativity to support the causes he believed in (his underground activity when he used to write a series of anti-fascist article) sometimes risking his own life to get first-hand information (he went to Iași, Moldova's capital, right after the pogrom). A fine observer of events, the journalist records and puts into expressive text, giving life to key moments between the wars, from the communist beginnings, as a reporter, but also as a eye witness, doing a great service to the community he belonged to. In his life he experimented with different professions (School of medicine in France, Law school in Romania), but also jobs for which he was overqualified (like salesman in a deli shop, sailor, tailor, editor, distributor of pharmaceuticals, demolition worker, reporter and writer), always equally fascinated by daily life, but also by art, research, and travel.

The main objective of our research is to present Marius Mircu's publishing activity, plus a few secondary objectives like a bird view of the Romanian press and how the press evolved over time, a closer look at the Romanian press reality between wars and communist

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<sup>1</sup>Marius Mircu, *Uite-așa se petrecea atunci ... Povestiri de necrezut*, Editura Glob, Bat Yam, 2001, p. 66.

periods (including the Jewish community's), to identify the peculiarities of the children's press, a general view of the Romanian Holocaust as perceived by survivors and, finally, an analysis of communist takeover and Jewish involvement in it. At applicative level, we established a link between the topics and the political and historic context to highlight the artistic means employed by the writer to emphasize the message and clarify some complex aspects, but we also classified the author's main topics, his literary genres and established similarities between his works and other researchers'.

The thesis is made up of 12 chapters that illustrate the journalist's interests, completed by our interpretation of the texts. We set out to emphasize the less-known aspects of Mircu's press works and we structured the material according to this criteria.

Marius Mircu's press activity is marked by two aspects. In the first place, we took into account the political and historical context, which influenced and sometimes limited the choice of topics of the writer. From this standpoint we can identify four periods: interwar, WW II, the communist regime, and the stretch 1987-2008 (when he lived in Israel).

The second aspect, just as important, is the journalist's professional evolution, his mastering of the art of writing, conditioned by the social-economic interactions. Our option comes to help the reader, as he/she can notice the different approaches, but also the author's expressive style in his evolution in choosing the topics and investigating capabilities. The quotations used to exemplify enable us to go back in time, but also to demonstrate the writing qualities of the author, who doesn't fall short in using strong epithets, irony, self-irony, or sarcasm, all weapons that the Romanian language held at his disposal.

Chapter I is a quick review of Marius Mircu's life, completed by a geographical dimension, but also socio-political, necessary to draw a context for some information related to the literary activity of the artist. The chapter also analyzes the double cultural identity of the man. A special place in his biography is occupied by the pseudonyms used to sign his articles with, while a subchapter is dedicated to his translating activity.

Chapter II represents a review of the journalist's publishing debut and an analysis of this activity as a local correspondent to *Cinema* (*Cinema*), *Dimineața* (*The Morning*), and *Curierul israelit* (*The Israeli Courier*).

Chapter III brings us closer to the childhood world. Adjusting without any problem to a style considered difficult, he identified the right topics meant to not only develop the character, but also the imagination and children's vocabulary. His works appear in *Universul copiilor* (*Children's Universe*), *Curentul pentru copii și tineret* (*The Stream for Kids and Youngsters*), *Dimineața copiilor* (*Children's Morning*), *Licurici* (*Firefly*), *Jurnalul copiilor*

(*Children's Journal*) and *Pionierul* (*The Pioneer*), but also in volumes like *Povestea minunată a lui Shirley Temple* (*Shirley Temple's Wonderful Story*) (1938), *Albumul Shirley Temple* (*Shirley's Album*) (1938), *Rango, prietenul oamenilor* (*Rango, Children's Friend*) (signed by G.M.Vladescu, 1938), *Despre câțiva copii* (*About a Few Children*) (1942), *Bingo. Povestiri din junglă* (*Bingo. Stories from the Jungle*) (1945), *Povestea unui copil din zilele noastre* (*A Today's Child Story*) (1947), *Răscoala din junglă* (*Riot in the Jungle*) (1947).

Chapter IV is dedicated to travel journals (inland and outside) that count as the most beautiful of the author's. This chapter offers a double perspective on the journalist's activity. The interwar period coincides with his intellectual and professional maturity, who, from a young, local correspondent becomes a trademark in the field. Influenced by French press tendencies, the reporter got his traveling shoes on to enchant his readers, children and adults alike, with adventures in the most exotic corners of the world. The carousel he got on, moved by his creative spirit, but also the historic events, take us to distant and fascinating shores through his reports published in *Ziarul științelor și al călătoriilor* (*Sciences and Journeys Newspaper*), *Adevărul literar și artistic* (*The Literary and Artistic Truth*), *Universul copiilor* (*Children's Universe*), *Curentul pentru copii și tineret* (*The Stream for Kids and Youngsters*), *Vremea* (*The Time*), *Gazeta* (*The Gazette*), and *Reporter* (*Reporter*). The chapter also includes a review of the volumes dedicated to travel reports (*N-am descoperit America! – I Didn't Discover America!* and *Atlantinia*).

Chapter V dedicated to novel-reports, a genre popular in the epoch, analyzes two of the debut works of the author – *Amintirile unei studente* (*A Student's Memoires*) and *Extraordinara odisee a reporterilor* (*The Reporters' Extraordinary Odyssey*). The first novel is a mirror of university-level study in the time between world wars, while the second is an invitation behind the scenes to have a glimpse at a reporter's profession where he draws the portraits of a few representatives of the genre.

Chapter VI is concentrated on the pogroms that took place in Romania between 1940 and 1942 in Dorohoi, Bucharest, Iași, Bessarabia and Bucovina. Written immediately after the events, based on direct documentation (like in the case of the legionnaire rebellion in Bucharest and the pogrom in Iași), or using eye-witnesses' accounts of the events, his books are vivid snapshots of the atrocities committed during those appalling circumstances. In contrast to his scientific works, his books put the spotlight on people. The books about the pogroms – *Pogromul de la Iași* (*The Pogrom of Iași*) (1944), *Pogromurile din Bucovina și Dorohoi* (*The Pogroms of Bucovina and Dorohoi*) (1945) and *Pogromul din Basarabia și alte întâmplări* (*The Pogrom of Bessarabia and Other Events*) (1947), *Ce s-a întâmplat cu*



*evreii în România. Câte ceva despre masacrarea lor morală și fizică (What Happened to the Jews of Romania. A Few Things about Their Moral and Physical Massacre)* (I<sup>st</sup>, 1996), *Ce s-a întâmplat cu evreii în și din România. Prigoana cea mare (What Happened to the Jews in and from Romania. The Great Persecution)* (II<sup>nd</sup>, 1996), *Ce s-a întâmplat cu evreii în și din România. O altă față a prigoanei (What Happened to the Jews in and from Romania. Another View at the Persecution)* (III<sup>rd</sup>, 1997) and *Oameni de omenie în vremuri de neomenie (Humane People in Inhumane Times)* (1996), all represent historic documents of uncontested value that illustrate troubling moments of national history that Marius Mircu lashes out at with irony as a cover for his real feelings and beliefs.

Chapter VII se focuses on the communist era, our selection including his cooperation to 14 periodicals, two of them Jewish: *Victoria (Victory)* (1944-1946) and *Răspântia (Crossroads)* (1945), *Realitatea evreiască (Jewish Life)* (1946), *Unirea (The Union)* (1945-1947), *Națiunea (The Nation)* (1946-1947), *Licurici (Firefly)*, *Jurnalul copiilor (Children's Journal)* (1947-1949), *Pionierul (The Pioneer)* (1949-1950), *Universul (The Universe)* (1950), *Viața Capitalei (Life in the Capital City)* (1950-1951), *Filatelica (Philatelic Magazine)* (1956-1969), *Informația Bucureștiului (Bucharest Information)* (1958-1959), *Cuvinte încrucișate (Crosswords)* (1960) și *Revista cultului mosaic (The Review of the Mosaic Creed)* (1968-1973). This period is highlighted by two peculiarities. For the first time, the journalist signs two articles supporting the communist ideology and the implementation of their reforms. Enjoying the freedom of expression of the first years of communism (provided one didn't write against it!), the journalist published a series of articles related to the history of the Jewish community, about the Filantropia Cemetery, but also about the Holocaust that had taken place only a few years back. He was compelled to adapt his style and content to the times' requirements, both in topics and language. The new style in press of this period is obvious in his writings. Our study includes the time after he was excluded from the party when he concentrated his energy and enthusiasm on artistic works and published eight books: *Drama unui umorist (A Humorist Drama)*, (Haifa, 1973), *Trimis special. Memoriile unui jurnalist (Special Envoy. Memories of a Journalist)* (The Romanian Book Publishers, Bucharest, 1974), *Șapte momente (Seven Moments)* (Haifa, Glob Publishers, 1977), *Alte șapte momente (Other Seven Moments)*, (Haifa, Glob Publishers, 1978), *Croitorul din Back (The Tailor from Back)* (The Romanian Book Publishers, Bucharest, First Edition, 1979), *M-am născut reporter (Born Reporter!)* (The Romanian Book Publishers, First Edition, 1981), *Alte șapte momente (Seven More Moments)* (Haifa, Glob Publishers, 1981), *Încă șapte momente (Again Seven Moments)* (Haifa, Glob Publishers, 1983).

Chapter VIII is dedicated to the publishing activity in Israel (1987-2008), who concentrated on writing books, all 23 of them, the majority reconstructing the image of the Jewish community in Romania in its historic development in which he also touches its contribution to the progress of Romania. We mention here *Croitorul din Back (The Tailor from Back)* (1988), *Iar o dată șapte momente (Again Seven Moments)* (1988), *Numai oamenii norocoși au noroc (Only the Lucky People Have Good Luck)* (1989), *Ultimele șapte momente (Last Seven Moments)* (1989), *Dosarul Ana Pauker (Ana Pauker File)* (1991, edition I and II), *Alte ultime șapte momente (Other Last Seven Moments)* (1992), *Șapte buclucuri de scriitor (Seven Troubles of a Writer)* (1993), *Treizeci și șase de stâlpi ai lumii (Thirty-Six Pillars of the World)* (1994), *Oameni de omenie în vremuri de neomenie (Humane People in Inhumane Times)* (1996), *Ce s-a întâmplat cu evreii din România (What Happened to the Jews of Romania)* (1996, I<sup>st</sup> and II<sup>nd</sup>, respectively 1997, III<sup>rd</sup>), *Boroboațe de sărbători (Funny Games during Holidays)* (2000), *La noi, la Bacău (At Us, in Bacau...)* (2000), *Strălucitul meu secol blestemat (My Bright Damned Century)* (2000), *Uite așa se petrecea atunci (This Is What Was Happening Then)* (2001), *Am visat să fiu scriitor (I dreamed Being a Writer)* (2002), *Idișul cântă și încântă (Hebrew Chants and Enchants)* (2003), *Povestea presei evreiești din România. Povestea evreilor din România (The Jewish Press Story in Romania. The Story of the Jews in Romania)* (2003) and *Cele 60 de cărți ale mele (These Sixty Books of Mine)* (2005). Because most of his books were presented in the previous chapters, we are going to focus on Marius Mircu's books in Israel: *Am visat că sunt scriitor (I Dreamed Being a Writer)* (2002), *Povestea presei evreiești din România. Povestea evreilor din România (The Jewish Press Story in Romania)* (2003) and *Cele 60 de cărți ale mele (These Sixty Books of Mine)* (2005).

Chapter IX concentrates on the image of the Jewish community in Romania, with the author trying not only to preserve the memories, traditions and customs, but also to bridge the gap between Romanians and Jews. Written in Romanian, his books become bridges between past and present, but also between the two communities. The books dedicated to this purpose reveals his love for people. Of the books in this category we will focus on: *Boroboațe de sărbători (Funny Games during Holidays)* (2000), *Un cimitir plin de viață. Filantropia. Panteonul evreilor din România (A Cemetery Full of Life. Filantropia. The Pantheon of the Jews in Romania)* (2001) and *Încă o dată șapte momente din istoria evreilor (Once Again Seven Moments in the Life of the Jews in Romania)* (1988). Snapshots of the Jewish community can be also found in books like *M-am născut reporter! (Born Reporter!)* (1981),

*Croitorul din Back (The Tailor from Back)* (1979), the works dedicated to pogroms, *Idișul cântă și încântă (Hebrew Chants and Enchants)* (2003) and *Treizeci și șase de stâlpi ai lumii (Thirty-Six Pillars of the World)* (1994). Some of the chapters in these books were initially published during his cooperation with periodicals like *Adam, Ziarul științelor și al călătoriilor (The Newspapers of Sciences and Travels)*, *Revista cultului mozaic (The Review of the Mosaic Creed)* and *Minimum*.

Chapter X aims to uncover another side of writer's personality, who was obsessed with famous people's biographies since he was a child. From this standpoint, the author was an exceptional biographer, bringing us an entire gallery of national and international role models. For the national celebrities, he is brave enough to bring into spotlight a controversial figure like Ana Pauker to whom he dedicates five editions of her biography. He focuses on her private life trying to improve the image of the one whose contribution to the communist takeover was essential. Trying to make an accurate portrait of the communist leader, we supplemented Marius Mircu's work with information from other scientific sources and documents from archives. It is important to know that the biographer did not make a scientific attempt, but had a journalistic approach on the issue.

Chapter XI presents the biographical novels *M-am născut reporter! (Born Reporter!)* (1981, edition I and 1998, edition II) and *Croitorul din Back (The Tailor from Back)* (1979, edition I, respectively, edition II).

Chapter XII reveals aspects of the effigy in posterity.

The last chapter is dedicated to the conclusions of our study.

This thesis goes deeper than before into Marius Mircu's works by analytical research and providing a bibliography. Our research brings to light new elements of his vast work, especially his contribution to the press. This aspect is totally new to readers and exegetes alike. Another innovation in our work was to classify the articles based on topics and ideas and we also tried statistics of the published articles in each periodical. The results of our study add a plus of objectivity to the autobiographical book *M-am născut reporter! (I Was Born a Reporter!)* and to the collection *Marius Mircu văzut de... (Marius Mircu Seen by...)*. Our research adds an innovative element through the identification of the periods and the importance of his collaboration to different publications. The journalist gives us details about these collaborations, but not always with the year and, in some cases, he tends to be subjective as far as his activity goes. Our approach was very careful regarding these issues and we raised a red flag whenever the author went into a tailspin. Another point in our originality was to

signal throughout the thesis whenever the writer republished, entirely or partially, his articles either in periodicals or in books.

Another accent put on originality comes from the identification of pseudonyms that used by the reporter, but never mentioned in sources. Last, but not least, we paid special attention to the children's press – a key chapter – that comprises a number of specifics of this genre.

Marius Mircu wrote for people, his love for life engraved in every line he put on paper. His creative flamboyance materialized in his collaboration to over 100 periodicals and also his works gathered in volumes. He loved Romania that was home to him in very difficult circumstances, but also in his happiest times, and where he reached intellectual and professional maturity. Here, he laughed, he cried, he was praised, but in the end he was pushed aside as the politics changed. He was a hard critic of some things, but eulogized those that were worthy of his attention, giving us a complex picture of the Romanian society for his time, but also for the generations to come, both Romanian and Jewish. In contrast to many representatives of intellectuality, he was strong enough to admit that he lent a helping hand to communism in its initial stages and regretted it later on when the promises for a democratic society were broken one by one.

In everything he wrote, Marius Mircu took into account the public's interests, needs, and culture, considering his role more than that of a middleman between events and audience. Marius Mircu was fully aware that, in the end, the reader is the supreme judge of his articles or books. His writings were supposed to trigger changes, to mobilize consciences, to educate and develop the creative spirit. His works are flamboyant, like an old brandy whose aroma you discover over the long haul. The journalist managed to raise to art level some of the tools of the trade that the Romanian language provided him with, two of which stand out: humor and irony, used together or separately. Both had the merit to emphasize the message. The reporter learned how to deliver it in the right dosage so that the message would still be understood loud and clear. At times, when the subject was the writer himself, he knew how to turn that into self-irony with great effects.

As for the topics he employed, they differed in the long run, adjusting to the demands of political, economic, and social context. A criteria was the place where events unfolded, with two categories: in the country and outside it. The majority of articles are on the national events, though. Another criteria was time. There were events from the past that he picked to debate, or those just unfolding. Another criteria to judge his works by is the topics: social, economic, or political. Within these categories we can identify subcategories. He was

preoccupied by education, culture, entertainment, infrastructure, petty crime, tourism, history, Romanian press, and snapshots from the Jewish community. Depending on the newspaper's orientation, he tried most of the topics, but those with a social tilt were his favorite. In contrast to his press articles where he debates various topics, the books are entirely dedicated to life in the Jewish community. Reading his books gives the reader at least one advantage. The Jewish reader can return to the past of his community and find out things that no longer existed, like childhood thrills, but also hardships of a population who lived through persecution and war. For the rest of the readers, the books represent a treasure trove of information for intercommunity relationships, culture, costumes and traditions. They can be used as documents by historians, ethnographers, and sociologists. Marius Mircu's books will charm anybody with a taste for old time Jewish life in mythical Moldova.

The articles can be divided into three journalistic categories: articles, reports, and investigations. Regardless of the category, the author paid special attention to documentation, which he did himself, turning a piece of news into an eyewitness report.

As far as topics are concerned, Marius Mircu's articles varied based on the period they were written in. If in the interwar times he concentrated on travel reports, education, culture, social issues and crime, after the communist takeover he published propaganda materials and issues of the Jewish community. Infrastructure was also a mainstay, along with education, culture, and leisure. In the third period (as resident of Israel), he writes about the Jewish press and issues related to the Romanian language. As for his books, we see three periods: the debut (1932-1942, children's literature and travel journals (1944-1987, the Holocaust and children's literature), and 1988-2008 (the Jewish community's image, the Holocaust and his memoirs-novels). Except for *M-am născut reporter (I Was Born a Reporter)*, *Croitorul din Back (The Tailor from Back)*, and *Peste 50 de ani (Fifty Years from Now)*, Marius Mircu's books look more like journals than fiction. In his books, the author's rigor is often sloppy, his sources remaining unknown when he quotes from other authors.

Marius Mircu was born to be a reporter and his legacy is his honest soul and his hard work to fulfill that dream. For his dedication and professionalism he should be an example for any young man willing to follow his dream.