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THE JOURNALISTIC WORK OF ION BRAD

PhD THESIS ABSTRACT

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Keywords: Ion Brad, journalism, journalistic work, press, Communism, democracy, newspapers, magazines, culture, reporter.

This thesis „The journalistic work of Ion Brad” aims at collecting and commenting upon the journalistic work of journalist and writer Ion Brad. Known in the Romanian postwar cultural environment, the author collaborated with many newspapers and magazines present in the second part of the 20th C, continuing his editorial activity after the big political changes following the fall of the Communism. In terms of the methodology used, we used two approaches: identifying all published articles and commenting on them. In the first part of the thesis, we structured the articles based on the newspapers and magazines in which the author had published, in the second part of the thesis, we collected and commented upon the books he had written and then published in the press, whereas the third part of the thesis consists of a list of all the articles he published and critical bibliography regarding his activity. Obviously, we did not forget to talk about the illustrations, documents and photos (as documentary evidence) which provide different views about the author and to which we paid special attention. It is worth mentioning that his volumes are non-fiction books consisting of his journalistic work (first he published his articles in the press, then gathered them in a book). We did not analyze his poems or novels, but focused specifically on his articles.

Obviously, when you speak about the journalistic activity of a journalist, one cannot ignore the context in which they published their articles. It is known that totalitarian regimes have always gained and imposed their power and control through communication channels, whereas opinion leaders were (and still are) supported for their biased positions. Mihai Eminescu worked hard in his articles for the emancipation of the Romanians, I. L. Caragiale ironically criticized stupidity and demagogy, whereas Ion Brad – keeping the proportions – was an active observer of the economic and social changes after Second World War in Romania, being directly involved in the press and in the cultural environment. As far as his affiliation to the Communist beliefs and attitude is concerned, we should not see it as a singular case, a large group of the writers from his generation – some of them being hugely appreciated in the literary world – shook hands with a certain regime. For these reasons, we deemed appropriate to advise the readership on the historical context in which the author carried on his activity, as the specific time and political influences put a strong mark on the beliefs of the journalist.

My thesis consists of 16 chapters, some of them – as needed – being split into several parts, each being assigned an Arabic numeral. The thesis is symbolically split into two parts: the author’s activity during the Communism and his activity during democracy. If during the Communism the author gained prestige and acquired positions by (also) publishing “praising

and applauding” articles, things were quite the opposite during democracy: he regained the freedom of speech but he lost some of his former prestige. This thesis is very novel as nobody has ever approached such a theme related to the author. It is also rare when someone has the initiative to analyze and approach such a subject, at national level.

In the foreword, I explained how and why I chose to approach such a subject, I talked about how I had met Ion Brad and I provided information about the favorable academic environment which really made possible the appearance of the thesis. Last but not least, I offered a few biographical details about Ion Brad, thus transitioning to Chapter II, in which I outlined the writer’s portrait. I provided biographical information about his place of birth, education, professional path, books he published and last part of his life.

In chapter III, I presented the methodology and the research tools used. This includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as content analysis. We decided to highlight this aspect from the beginning so that it is easily and better understood which method of work we had in mind. We talked about the goal of this paper and the problems we came across along the way: I here refer to the identification of the pseudonyms used by the author, identification of articles and thematic classification – this is all placed in a context in which critic and history of journalism are going through a critical time, newspapers and literary magazines are published quite seldom and are hard to track, as they are not sent to the libraries to be indexed.

After offering information about Ion Brad in the first chapters, we carried on in chapter IV to figure out the historical context in which the writer had made his debut as a journalist, what Cluj looked like in the second half of last century and the importance of the newspaper in which he published for the officials of those times (*Lupta Ardealului*). This is how we managed to track his debut article back in March 11, 1949. His signed the following headlines: *V. M. Molotov turns 60* [vice president of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union]; further headlines: *Let’s complete our daily production goals, The Great festive Assembly in the Capital in honour of the „International Women’s Day”*. *Comrade Ana Pauker, secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Worker’s Party and president of U. F. D. R. spoke or 9 years since the death of Breiner Béla*. Ion Brad makes his debut with an article about a *circle of freshmen studying at the Faculty of Letters of „Victor Babeş” University*, taking into consideration the title of the article. He signed the article as I. Brad, following the trend of the times (George Călinescu signed G. Călinescu), mentioning:

„student, volunteer correspondent”. Of great importance for the year 1949 – years in which Romania was packed with Stalinism – are the studies approached by students: *The role of personality in history*, by Plehanov (Gheorghe Valentinovici Plehanov, Russian revolutionary and Marxist theoretician; one of the founders of social movements in Russia), *What's to be done?*, by V. I. Lenin, *Ludwic Feurbach and the end of the Classical German philosophy*, by Fr. Engels ș. a. In terms of the critic, his name was first mentioned in his capacity as participant in a *Literature Circle of the students of UTM in Lupta Ardealului*, V, no. 806, 7 April 1949, p. 2; also the article *Cultural sitting organized by ARLUS Cluj* (written by Gheorghe Stelea, in *Lupta Ardealului*, V, no. 806, 7 April 1949, p. 2).

Chapter V consists of all the author's journalistic work during the Communism. It is worth mentioning that after his debut in *Lupta Ardealului*, he would also write for the newly founded magazine *Almanahul literar*, from Cluj. What was happening at the Transylvanian magazine would become, in the spirit of those times, of cultural importance, being a magnet for personalities such as A. E. Baconsky, Aurel Rău, Victor Felea and others. We succeeded to establish the activity of the author for the main magazines he worked for: *Almanahul literar*, 1949-1955 (we stressed how the magazine came into being, what the context was, what articles he published and why he left); editor-in-chief with *Cravata roșie*, 1956-1958 (format and history of the magazine, who else was asked to join the team after his arrival, political figures most promoted in the magazine, information about censorship and self-censorship, the author's articles and reasons for his departure); in reference to the same period of time, we showed that the author had also acted on the destructions happening in historical Blaj, especially concerning schools, this remaining a constant preoccupation in his journalistic activity; further on we traced his activity back to newspapers such *Luceafărul* or *Scânteia tineretului*, we mentioned that his debut in the political journalism happened with the first publication, whereas the latter was just a follow-up to refine this skill. It is in those times that he concentrated most intensely on political subjects (like we said, we also discussed about his rise up the political ladder which made possible his entry into the world of diplomacy and culture); after Nicolae Ceaușescu became president, it is needless to say that we had to present general information on the context of the time, we then focussed on the things he did as vice editor-in-chief with *Gazeta literară*, this moment in time being the end of his career as a journalist in the classical sense during the Communism. It is here that we also studied the journalistic work of the author while he held various high-ranked positions within the Romanian state (in the cultural or diplomatic environment) in the period of time 1965-1989.

In chapter VI, we showed how Ion Brad was pictured in the archives of the Party and the Security, in the context in which people talked about his writing value. In chapter VII, we briefly presented his journalistic activity after 1989 – the fall of Communism in Romania, a crucial moment for his journalistic work – further chapters approach this more comprehensively. We refer to his collaboration with magazines such as *Adevărul literar și artistic*, *Cultura*, *Flacăra lui Adrian Păunescu* and others or the foundation of others such as *Acasă* (he was the director of this one); it is also a must to mention the magazine *Blajul*. As a final step in his journalistic activity, the author had gradually collected all his articles and published the most important ones in volumes. This is why we decided to present all those over 20 volumes in terms of the themes and genre they fall into. Consequently, we ended up having 5 main chapters and further short ones: memoirs about Greece, his epistolary calling, interviews, finding the national or literary history and the „last chapter”.

In chapter VIII we presented seven volumes about the time the author spent as ambassador of Romania to Greece (1973-1982). These are *Ambassador to Athens. The beginning* (2001), *Ambassador to Athens. Avatars of democracy* (2002), *Ambassador to Athens. Eulogy to recklessness* (2002), *Ambassador to Athens. In the shadow of the Gods* (2003), *Ambassador to Athens. Earthquake area* (2004), *Ambassador to Athens. Extra-time* (2005) and the anthology *Secret encounters in Greece* (2009). These books present in an approximate chronological order the most important activities undertaken by the diplomat – the largest part of the chapter was initially presented in the press and then in the book. His experience in the cultural field would help him do his job successfully. Needless to say that a huge part in the publication of the articles about Elada was played by his endeavor to keep notes, documents and letters, proving that he was not only a diplomat, but also an archivist and journalist who could grasp the importance of such historical events (the coming of the new regime in 1973 in Greece, revolts of the students, his attempts to establish good relations with the Greek officials, of whom he also writes). In this chapter we showed the most prominent themes from the books such as: how he became an ambassador, critical reviews on his 6 books, „Mount Athos”, the visit of Nicolae Ceaușescu and of the presidential family in Grecia, a priority, promoting culture, the desire of Greek students to study in Romania, economic relations with Greece in the author’s journalistic works, problems at the Embassy, attacks against Romania in the Greek press, writing about certain political moments in Greece, signs announcing the end.

Chapter IX carries on presenting the epistolary calling of the author. As after 1989 he started to publish lots of letters he had in the past received from various personalities, he then decided to gradually collect them in books. The times he lived in made this easier for Ion Brad, as letters were the easiest way to communicate in the second half of the 20th C. The informative value is given by the impressions made by those personalities he had changed ideas with in writing. We can thus witness the nature, temperament or character of certain personalities who would be nice and affable towards Brad before 1989, and who, later on, when he was no longer holding a high position, would change their attitude (there were still people who stayed consistent and grateful to Ion Brad for all his involvement and the doors he had opened for them). Most themes to be found in these letters are culture, politics, literature and art related. These letters reveal the issues and problems, as well as the relations present among writers, some better, some not so good, some based on hypocrisy. The first such book which marked the beginning of the series was the one about the librarian from Blaj, Monica Anton, titled Ion Brad, Monica Anton, *Monologuri paralele (Parallel monologues)*, Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999 (a collection of confessional letters exchanged between him and the co-author). Further seven books have been added to the same genre: *Mircea Zaciu. Ion Brad. Epistolary dialogue*. Edition, foreword and comments by Maria Cordoneanu, Curtea veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003; *Here, among Transylvanians*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2007; *Ion Agârbiceanu. Holy father of the Romanian literature. An evocation by Ion Brad*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2007; *On the other side of the mountains*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2008; *Among thousands of letters*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; *Among other thousands of letters*, Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2010; *Of love during the distressing years 1947-1955*, Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. What makes this chapter special is the fact that we counted all the letters presented in books and mentioned the name of the sender for each.

In the chapter X, which is dedicated to his interviews, we focussed on those in which the author replied to people who asked him questions. As a result of the events he took part in and based on the various cultural positions he occupied, Ion Brad offered a lot of interviews for journalists, cultural personalities and writers. Due to his inclination towards conversations with a skilled interlocutor, when he grew older he would offer interviews in which he would narrate in a chronological order crucial moments from his life. His most comprehensive memory exercises were published in 4 books which we analysed thoroughly: Alexandru

Dumitriu, *Pleasant or unpleasant, the truth*, anthology by Maria Cordoneanu, *Ion Brad in interviews*. Last two were undertaken by Ilie Rad, *Conversations with Ion Brad: spring to fall* and *Weekly epistolary dialogues*.

In chapter XI we laid stress on the skills of Ion Brad as a discoverer of the national or literary history. We refer to a constant activity in the field of journalism, which he was involved into since he was just an ordinary journalist, in his attempt to protect his fellow townspeople from various blamable actions, he sometimes would act more than a journalist, requesting the officials' intervention. This is why we drew a line between the two occupations of the author: ambassador of Blaj and the discovery of the history of literature. We highlighted his eagerness to defend the values, people and places from Blaj, all of them to be found in the books he wrote, books which we commented upon and which are connected to these places: *O carte pentru toți românii: catolicism și ortodoxie românească* (*A book for all Romanians: Catholicism and the Romanian Orthodox Church*), *Blajul nostru cel de toate zilele* (*Our beloved Blaj*), *Printre oamenii Blajului* (2006 și 2011) (*Mingling with people of Blaj*), Ion Buzași, *Ion Brad and Blaj, Radu Brateș. Blajul și oamenii săi* (*Blaj and its people*). *An anthology by Ion Brad*.

Already in his young years the author showed a desire to discover the history of literature, so we decided to dedicate a chapter to this aspect. It is a must to mention that as a student Ion Brad became friends with the great writers of the times, such as Ion Agârbiceanu, Lucian Blaga, Emil Isac and others, of whom he would also write. For instance, Emil Isac is the personality he wrote about in his thesis which he published in 1972 as a monograph, *Emil Isac, an orator of new ideas*. He gathered all dedications he had collected in over 60 years of literary activity in the book *Printre mii de dedicații* (*Among thousands of dedications*) or *Comorile unui prieten tânăr: George Corbu-Junior* (*Treasures of a young friend*), a book consisting of and referring to documents of great literary importance. Having undertaken a journey through the documents of his above-mentioned friend, the author searched in his drawers and on his bookshelves for his own memoirs and then published two books *Întoarceri la arhivele personale* (*Return to the personal archives I and II*), in which we also find unique moments from his activity.

His desire to discover facts, ideas and moments of literary history played an important role in the last part of his life when Ion Brad commented upon many books recently published or received from authors. Consequently, the title of this chapter is *Last Chapter*

(XII). It is a collection of 7 books consisting of the reviews, comments and suggestions published in the magazine he edited or with whom he collaborated in the last part of his life: *Cărțile prietenilor mei (My friends' books)*, *Alte cărți ale prietenilor mei (Other books of my friends Vol. I and II)*, *Oameni și cărți (People and books) Vol. I and II*, *Lecturi particulare (Private readings) Vol. I and II*, *Alte lecturi particulare (Other private readings)*. We deemed appropriate to write in the same chapter about the death of Ion Brad as seen in the press, taking into account we noticed a real interest from publications.

Chapter XIII is dedicated to conclusions, whilst last chapters include - chapter XIV – recommendations, chapter XV – bibliography. Last chapter (XVI) consists of annexes and illustrations (the 3 interviews I had with Ion Brad, paperwork from the Security and the Romanian Communist Party, as well as some relevant photos; last but not least, I published the covers of the books published by the author).

Ion Brad lived in turbulent, agitated and unpredictable times, when politics and social changes had a harsh impact on what we generically call culture (the beginning of the Communism and the '90s). He tried, however failed to do it every time, to fight them in writing. He and his generation (period of time 1929-1930) were doomed to live in dramatic times, when a simple piece of poetry deemed to be idealistic or an article published in a controversial newspaper could have led to a prison sentence. The changes in the period of time 1940-1950 were the starting point for lots of dramas when the change just came out of the blue. This was also the indirect situation of the writer Ion Brad who, due to unwanted circumstances (poverty after war, being part of a large family, financial problems) would end up collaborating with the most prominent newspapers and magazines under the control of the Romanian Workers' Party and then the Romanian Communist Party. It is this journalistic work which we studied in this thesis.

As Romania was forced into the arms of the Soviet Union, no wonder that the coming of the Communists brought left ideologies into the press. Young people moving from rural areas into towns and cities, students and workers equally, all eager to have a better life, hungry for progress and peace, wound up enrolling in the Communist Party and also joining the newspapers of the time. Beyond their control, the journalists, writers and artists were conditioned by the times and the context in which they lived could not be avoided. Ion Brad was officially active in the press for 15 years, from 1949 until 1966 (except when he was

secretary of the Writers' Union – 1962-1965), and then intermittently until he passed, in 2019, in various newspapers and magazines, some run by him.

It is this chapter from the life of the journalist Ion Brad that deserves our attention. We owe it to him to critically look at him because we can find within him open wounds linked to the second half of the 20th C, rooted in the madness of history, events in which Ion Brad was actively involved. Both in journalism and in politics, he militated for many important Romanian writers denigrated by the new symbols of „justice” and „freedom” (the sarcasm to be noted) who run Romania since the half of the century. Names such as: Emil Isac, Ion Agârbiceanu, Lucian Blaga and others. It is obvious that not all of his journalistic manifestations have preserved their spirit up to present in accordance with the current requirements of journalism, but when you look back, they all plead for moderation, retrospective and the tradition of the Transylvanian spirit. Placed in the mists of time, his articles gain historical value, showing the tremor and emotion of a journalist who is more or less aware that he witnesses a subject of great importance for the Romanian culture.

It is worth pointing out that the novelty of this thesis resides in the fact that such a paper has never been experienced before and all of Ion Brad's published articles have not been updated as a whole. Why? We cannot leave out political reasons, hard to digest immediately after 1989, when prejudices were still trending. A lack of interest could be another reason. Further reasons could be the shallow attitude of literary historians, a decrease in the importance of the press in society or more accurately a decrease in the studies made about press.

These aspects from the activity of writer, journalist and diplomat Ion Brad are not known by the large public (the first paper makes a portrait of the writer, the second one deals with proper names found in his novels and dramaturgy, the third with the artistic elements found in the poet's poetry), so the novelty of the thesis is exclusive. In order to go through with the study, the approach is as follows: identification of all the articles written by Ion Brad, analyzing the articles in terms of the jobs he held at the moment (for instance: *Scânteia tineretului* – 1960-1962; *Gazeta literară* – 1965-1966 etc.) and the theme, all of this in the context of what the critics wrote about Ion Brad, where required.

We tried our best not to turn this into an accusatory document or a romanced monograph, but instead to show with honesty and objectivity how the author chose to place himself in his journalistic work. In parallel, we showed the rise of Ion Brad into the high

positions of the Romanian state. In those times, an official could hardly if not at all avoid such positions.

We enjoyed thoroughly browsing through newspapers and double-checking this information against historical data and various testimonies. This allowed us to make really important discoveries that helped us place the author in the recent history of Romania. We accurately discovered what was the debut article of the author in the press (it is not the one published in Alba County, in the magazine *Gând tineresc*).

As we chronologically studied the articles, we came across things of great importance: a fruitful period in the press from Cluj as a young student, something which Ion Brad would avoid to bring up in interviews, his attitude as defender of Blaj against the destructions of the regime or his anti-royal attitude at the beginning of the '60s and others.

Another document exclusively presented in the thesis refers to the documents kept in the Archives of the Romanian Communist Party and of the National Security Council. Based on these, Ion Brad was considered a great writer in the Greek Catholic community, he knew the realities of the times he lived in, nonetheless his positions, conduct and censorship stopped him publishing more critical articles against the regime (he would still do it by taking some steps back from his debut articles from the '50s, just like writer Dan Deșliu, a friend of Brad's, opposing the system more subtly). Ion Brad did not see the documents and he said he was not interested in such a thing just to stay out of unwanted surprises, but this comes to point out the attitude he had in the challenging times of his life.

Most of the themes Brad approached in his journalistic work refer to writers and literature, various celebrations, commemorative themes, newspapers and magazines, reviews, travel, spiritual, political matters or different other themes, hard to classify. He was not keen on sport, for example. As far as the journalistic styles are concerned, Ion Brad wrote news, reportage, interviews, narration, comments, critic, editorials or investigations. Publishing such articles, the author would carry along (it was not always in the right direction, which separated him from the '80s) the expectations of the postwar generation, in terms of social equality, wellbeing, righteousness and justice. His hunger for cultural subjects is not unusual. Having a philological education and being encouraged since adolescence by personalities like Mihai Beniuc, Pavel Dan, Liviu Rebreanu, Timotei Cipariu and others, he would enlarge his area of interests in the cultural field and would become in just several years, under favorable circumstances, secretary of the Writers' Union - Cluj Branch and editor-in-chief with the

children's magazine *Cravata roşie*. In his books, mostly published after 1989, he put together all his articles published in the post-revolutionary press, this being why we paid attention to them.

A big issue to be traced during his professional activity, a possible cause being his line of education, is a lack of scientific rigor (failure to mention the source, exact dates etc.) in his articles and documents. Doing our research, his profile is now much better outlined, being objectively structured; he was better known before in his capacity as writer or politician. It is worth mentioning that his words uttered in the last part of his life – „another forgotten writer” – do not apply to him.