

RUMOR TRACKS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN DRAMA

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Introduction

There is no study on the ABC of the press without an inventory of the mass-media functions, meant whether to shed light on various approaches specific to celebrated media schools, or, in the words of Claude-Jean Bertrand, to emphasize the dysfunction-pair for each of the listed functions. We shall briefly comment on the manner in which the subject is dealt with in several works by media researchers.

Functions of the Media

So as to establish a minimal correspondence, we list the functions enumerated by Bertrand: "surveillance of the milieu; presenting an image of the world; cultural transmission; the forum hypothesis; promoting consumption; stimulating entertainment" (Bertrand 2001: 117).

Coman identifies the following functions, while operating restrictions in the naming process: *informing, interpreting, "connecting", dissemination of culture, entertainment* (Coman 2004: 37). It is quite obvious that the *informing* function identified by Coman corresponds to the *surveillance of the milieu* (Bertrand). Similarly, we can establish the following connections: *interpreting – presenting an image of the world, "connecting" – "forum," dissemination of culture – cultural transmission, entertainment – stimulating entertainment*. Of the six functions acknowledged by the French theoretician, only five can also be found in Coman's list. For the purpose of integrating the *promotion of consumption*, Popa identifies a sixth function of the media: the *advertising* function (Popa 2002: 71).

Although most works on the topic attribute only a secondary place to this particular function, setting it under that of informing, Popa finds solid arguments in favour of the division: he approaches advertising first from an economic perspective, then from a historical one, making then a short presentation of the structure of advertising industry. Finally, the researcher insists on the importance of choosing the suitable distribution vehicle by the buyers of advertising space.

We cannot overlook the presentation made by Popescu in his *Dictionary of Journalism, Public Relations and Advertisement*, where the concept of *function* is seen as diffuse, interpreted in various manners, but always in close connection to another concept: *effect*. It is not mere coincidence that Claude-Jean Bertrand mentions, in connection to the *forum* function of mass-media, that:

Government officials make their achievements and their projects public. Politicians try to use mass-media to convince the electorate, not without distortions or omissions. Those who steer economy also use mass-media, more discreetly, but more efficiently. That is

why an eminent observer like Jacques Ellul considers that the essential function of mass-media is propaganda

(Popescu 2002: 184).

Popescu gives special notice to Tchakhotine's effort (1939) to explain the hypnotic effect of the Nazi propaganda on the German people, focusing, among others, on a relatively new medium at the time: radio.

The behavioural perspective, according to which the public, as "inert mass," can be spontaneously moulded by the message (the stimulus-reaction diagram), is supplemented by the primary variant of the function-effect line, by the course established by Lasswell (1948), who sees the relationships between media and the social system as being organized on three levels: a) media supervises the environment; b) media correlates the different components of society; c) media transmits the socio-cultural heritage from one generation to the next. We notice, therefore, a "rudimentary" form of the list proposed by Bertrand, where the functions of informing, connecting and disseminating culture can be identified.

Popescu mentions that the function of coagulating different social elements will become the subject matter for the research initiated by the Empirical School (counting celebrated specialists like P. Lazarfield, E. Katz or H. D. Lasswell himself), which will reevaluate the role of the social context to which the individuals receiving the media messages belong. Thus, two paradigmatic models become imperative: the *theory of the limited effects*, the main concern of most treaties on the sociology of communication and the *two-step-flow*.

The theory of limited effects, which maintains that messages are received by way of three filters (perception, exposition and memorization – all selective), started from the idea that media tells us what we should think and what we should do. Additionally, the technological paradigm considers that media designs a thinking pattern for us. The *two-step-flow* theory presupposes the following division: firstly, media influences the leaders (be they formal or informal) who, in their turn, influence the members of the group. In time, the concept is completed by the *multi-step-flow*, a view which starts from the reality that an individual belongs to more than one group (family, church, school, workplace, etc.)

Mihail Sebastian and his *Ultima oră*

As far as *Ultima oră* is concerned, several worlds are ordered face to face, in parallel states of opposition; within these contrasts, the one that opposes the dull reality to the grand dream and symbol of Alexander The Great, stands out firmly.

This disagreement feeds the real conflict of the plot and seems extremely significant, as it is a primary source for its comicality. The two sides (the former consisting of Bucșan and I. D. Borcea and the latter including Andronic and Magda) are so distant in their way of life and ideas, that they seem to be talking different languages, without understanding each other. In this play, Mihail Sebastian strains the idea that happiness is a continuous fight. Everything that seemed miraculous or fascinating falls apart; it is a world in which the shining crust hides deep human flaws. This might be the meaning of the scenes in the first act, where an artistic, methodical destruction of the written word is being performed, as the fascination of the newspaper page is nothing but a ghost. One must notice that the milieu is not externally described or interpreted as a necessary, plain vivid picture. The play contains dramatic turns of events, chases, pieces of blackmail, and a possible view upon the play as a sensational, detective piece of literature would not estrange the reader from its very essence. In this respect, Tomuş specified:

For the first time in Mihail Sebastian's plays, the visible conflict goes beyond the hidden places of the ineffable inner human nature, raising itself up to the very fact. The

characters find themselves, one after another, in front of one supreme threat; hence, one of the most well polished scenes is that in which Grigore Bucșan schemes apparently sure-footed (one might find a great amount of anxiety under this crust, though), deciding upon the others' fate (our translation)

(Tomuș 1981: 184-185).

In *Ultima Oră* professor Andronic and Magda, his enthusiastic student, win the fight and see their supreme dream come true: a scientific journey following Alexander The Great's military campaign. Further on, Mircea Tomuș observed:

The decisive factor within this denouement is Magda's firmness, she being the first of Sebastian's female characters that surpasses inertia and a certain type of feminine apathy as well. [...] Magda knows what to do, as soon as she understands that Andronic's passion for scientific research will remain useless, unless the active value exists (our translation)

(Tomuș 1981: 185).

Magda interferes between Bucșan and Borcea in their chase after the secret, though she can hardly infer the essence of their dispute. "She defeats them", Mircea Tomuș noted,

bringing the triumph within the dreamers' battalions for the first time. This denouement, in which a graceful feminine hand comes out slyly and firmly, tricking those two experts on blackmail and dubious contrivances, bears visibly enough the label of the sensational fact; still, by its exquisite motif, it brings about a useful wave of poetry (our translation)

(Tomuș 1981: 185).

Many senses can be detected within the plot. First, there is the idea that a fully candid human being is on the edge of the complete wreck and is able to save himself from destruction as he accepts being considered a cheat. Then, there is the idea that for a man to live peacefully, he has to declare himself as a ringleader for a grand conspiracy. Finally, the great owner, mistaking innocence as a reason for venality, accepts being defeated by someone using the weapons of the latter. Also ironic is the fact that Andronic, a solid researcher of the past, knowing well enough that crime has often paved the way for great historical events (he even charges Alexander the Great with murder), is unable to understand what Grigore Bucșan is up to... Here is B. Elvin's opinion concerning the ideas stated before: "The circumstance in which Magda Minu, being in love, continuously mistakes Alexander the Great for Alexander the Tiny, brings about a positive comic effect. In fact, she passionately embraces a ghost, offering the professor the strange love she feels for the emperor" (our translation) (Elvin 1955: 74).

Overwhelmed by the sudden changes his life suffers and being forced to commit humiliating gestures or be part of degrading contrivances, Andronic has attached himself by the image of Alexander the Great, to whom he had dedicated his entire existence. Within the emperor's moral outlines, Andronic sees those things life hasn't gifted him with. Vicu Mândra remarked:

Grigore Bucsan, the man whose name labels all the products in the region, trembles in front of the clumsy Andronic. The professor's strength lies in his unique moral structure, unknown to the great finance owners. [...] Escape from a prison-existence, marked by humiliation and misery, is a major theme of the plot. Its magnitude leads towards depicting the drama of the miserable, as well as courageously describing the guilty i. e. those who bring about the drama itself (our translation)

(Mândra 1971: 150).

Conclusions

Mihail Sebastian's heroes live the melancholy of happiness and the drama of defeat without being part of intense conflicts, depicted in dark shades. The art of the playwright stays in the sphere of poetic fantasy; his characters show lyricism and sensibility. The brilliant speech and the typical situations often render the appearance of comedy. Mihail Sebastian has created a durable, intensely coloured dramatic work.

Sources

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