

## THEATRE IN THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL PRESS - BETWEEN REPORTING AND THEATRE CHRONICLE

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### **Abstract:**

One of the most common questions when talking about theater in press is whether that approach is literature or journalism. In the period immediate following 1989, the distinction was hard to make because people who wrote about theater were not trained in the cultural field, coming from journalism or outside it. Before 1989, it was thought that a person with theatre studies was able to become a theater critic. After 1989, the link between the theater specialization and the newspaper articles was significantly reduced, increasing the number of literary chroniclers who have gone to the theater chronicle. Simultaneously, with the increasing number of cultural publications and general information newspapers, the texts about theater have begun to transform into informational journalism: news stories or developed stories. For this reason, I believe that a broad approach of the two genres: narrative and dramatic chronicle is necessary, to understand the distinction between these two.

**Key words:** journalism, culture, theatre, chronicle, news

The present article is a part of a larger research about theatre journalism in Romania between 1990 – 2000. Here below I make a discussion about the main journalism species, their characteristics and a review of Romanian authors' opinions about journalism related to theatrical field.

Between an accredited journalist for theatre and a theatre columnist there is a certain distinction: an accredited journalist is enabled legally to access information from institutions, while a columnist must learn new profession writing about the theatre life and shows. From this distinction we can begin the discussion about two journalistic styles, namely opinion or information journalism which are related with the chronicle and a journalistic report respectively. Another question when we speak about writing on art in media is if we deal with journalism or literature. Sorin Preda states that these two are

interrelated: the writer likes to have permanent editorial in a large journal while the journalists write thinking to collect his reports or chronicles in books. The literature and press seems to be connected by an underground system of communicating vessel (S.Preda, 2006, 17).

In Romania, in the beginning of 90's many of those who wrote about theatre had not formal instruction in the field coming both from the general press and from outside. Before 1989, it was considered that graduated of university section theatre was a suited person to become a theatre critic. Afterwards, the connection between the theatre department of universities and papers theatre chronicles loosened. In the same time, the number of publication increased and texts about theatre spectacles became closer to information journalism, news or short reporting. For this reason I consider necessary a broader approach of these two journalistic genders, to better understand where from come the distinction and the reason why theatre journalists need not only a special training but also understanding vision and a critical eye about the spectacle in peculiar. Houdebine states that we can define the text as a being or a linguistic fact, which is susceptible of a practical analyze and sends to other annalistic types of language (Houdebine, 1980, 283-284).

The journalistic text is defined by its capacity to present as many information as possible in few words that means to be informative and concise. On the contrary, the literal text use linguistic ornaments, metaphors, comparison in the propose of creating esthetic emotion as in all arts. Sometimes specific elements of literary style are found in journalism as well, especially when it's about art. According to Doina Rusti the journalistic articles might be grouped in two categories: narrative species (short news, reportages, serial, and portrait) and non-narrative species (program, manifest, essay, commentary, chronicle, pamphlet, interview, review, polemics, and open letter) (D.Rusti, 2002).

There are several criteria to differentiate types of journalism. One of the most common is to divide it in information journalism (news, report, interview, and story) and opinion journalism (editorial, chronicle, comment). The information journalism may present to other types according to the inquiry and exposition methods: interpretation journalism and investigation journalism (C.Popescu, 2003). For Claude Jean Bertrand the western direction and the Russian journalistic direction are different and the western journalism may be divided according to its means of diffusion (agency journalism, media journalism, broadcasting journalism, TV journalism, and online journalism) and its functions (information journalism and opinion journalism). The Russian version of dividing types of journalism comprehends: informative species (news, interview, reportage, story, informative correspondence); analytical species (analytical correspondence, editorial, problematic articles, review, chronicle, press review, letter, and analytical comment); and literary journalistic species (the sketch, portrait, profile, essay, pamphlet, parody) (J.C.Bertrand, 2001, 46-49).

The two types of journalism and their species have distinct rules that do not allow their intersection. In the opinion journalism as a consequence of expression freedom the independent press should consider any opinion available if it is not contrary to the general public interests or to the right of image or private life, but should start from correct and verified information and the author should be except of any interest conflict.

The role of opinion journalism should be to help the public to orientate in his daily political, social, economic and cultural life and to help the public to create its own value scale and criteria.

### **1. Reporting – an information journalism species**

Reporting was defined as a narrative longer than the news, written at the third person referring to real facts aiming a selection of the most important information from one event field, and without any personal, emotional or value consideration from the author (Balbaie, 1997, 140). Reporting is in fact a more complex and elaborated news which offer larger explanation on an event. It is situated between the news and reportage presenting information according to the journalist selection. In daily press on 90's reporting was badly defined because often it was a mix of journalistic styles and genres: in the same article named story one could find elements of news, opinion, reportage, even interview. In the professional definition of the report, the presence of the journalists at the place and time of the event is mandatory, without any collateral describing the weather or portrait or even any form of humor. The journalist simply writes as possible the basic elements from the place, what happened, how it happened, who was there and a short timeline.

To make a good report from whatever event (political, economic, cultural, sport etc.) the journalist needs specific professional abilities and competences: good observation, capacity to keep neutrality, good documentation, transparency). He must understand to make himself understood, he must see to make things visible, he must hear to make him heard of, he must know to make things known for the readers (Balbaie, 1997, 141). In the same manner as for any other material to be published, for the report the journalist must make the same mandatory steps: pre-documentation (about general information, participants, circumstances, issues); documentation (participation at the event and investigation on all its aspects); and post-documentation (including other information in a larger perspective and collateral information). The journalist makes not a simple recording but must obtain supplementary information by investigation paying attention to all contexts, nuances and participants on the event. The story starts with the basic questions of all journalistic texts (what?, who?, when?, where?, how?, why?) but a good journalist must go beyond them and note every unpredictable element which can modify the preliminary view. From the whole field of information at disposal he must be sensitive to those new elements which written in a text could become interesting for a public not participating directly to the event.

## 2. Next day story

While reporting presumes an exposition of facts without intention to be developed in a larger item and with the precise aim of informing, the story is built on a narrative developed or not, in a subjective discourse with the intention of creating an emotional state or a message connected with it (D. Rusti, 2002, 16).

In every simple reporting we have a presentation and description of facts, events and their finalities, but reporting may be the base for a larger text which describes with a subjective implication the events in which the author was present. In the process of next day story the event modifies subjected to a reconstruction with narrative and esthetic intentionality. For Claude Bremond, the next day story is not just a complex of events and roles organized following rules which are foreign to it but it's another story which enrolled the narrative (C. Bremond, 1981, 401).

In what concern the textual structure of the story, this must answer the basic questions and is a medium size text of maximum two pages. The story becomes a mixture of information and testimony or, as named by Curtis MacDougall, in fact it is a next day story. As every narrative it has three major parts: introduction, named professionally lead, the content or the field of text and the ending which must not be closed but let conclusions to the public. For Sorin Preda the lead must avoid useless introduction and the plan of the text does not impose special rigors. The most used type of plan is the free one (mosaic type) and it would not be advisable a chronologic or demonstrative plan. The most important would be information ranking and the correct and expressive management of details (Preda, 2006, 154).

When reporting from a theatre spectacle some information are mandatory, like the title of play, the author, interprets, date, place, the time of show and the type as a dramatically gender. The difference from simple cultural news is that the story should contain details about the content of the spectacle or the public reactions but without any subjective comment to avoid sliding in opinion journalism as is a theatre chronicle. For Mariana Brandl-Gherga the story is a journalistic species between *mimesis* and *diegesis*: if the receipted reality is vague, certain relativity will be found in the journalistic text too. The journalistic text lives often in a dangerous hermeneutical ambiguity (Brandl-Gherga, 2007). In the same time some questions appropriated to literature texts are available for the journalistic texts as well, because even if they are different from a compositional and stylistic point of view, they both try to reconstruct reality in the intimate texture of the language. For the same author, the complete separation of text genders is a utopia and the story is in the heart of this dichotomy, being a text between description and narrative, between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. These two terms were stated by Platon as two basic principles in literature: *mimesis* (imitation) is the descriptive part of the text or event and *diegesis* (story) is a narrative about the event. In the next day story we have both

compositional modalities in such a way we can name it descriptive narrative (Brandl-Gherga, *ibidem*).

The story about theatre show should take into account all these considerations: a too short text could be tedious but a text with too many personal opinions would be beyond the border of informational journalism. Therefore the journalist specialized in the cultural field should in the same time keep his objectivity but should be able to make and offer well founded value opinions to make comparison and be acknowledged of the collateral information, even anecdotic in which the cultural field is rich (S.Preda, 2006, 161).

### **3. The theatric chronicle – specie of opinion journalism**

The name *chronicle* comes, etymologically, from the ancient Greek *chronos* meaning time. The technical meaning is relating and commenting a development in time of facts and events as for example in the syntagma Romanian chronicle or the Moldavian chroniclers. This term was subjected to many semantic modifications, sometimes abusively confused with a critic article or a reporting. For Jose de Broucker the chronicle implies a debating discussion upon a fact even trivial, and should prove originality and erudition in a relaxed non-ostentatious manner, being a proposal of thoughts connected with the actuality even connected with the most peculiar aspects of social, moral or artistically life (Broucker, 2006, 186).

The chronicle is a journalistic specie in which the author reports, describes and comments in the same time the spectacle; it's propose is to inform but in the same time the journalist becomes a guide and a potential opinion trainer. The chronicle addressed a possible sensitive receptor but opens the reception understanding of an artistic act. The dramatic chronicler tries to understand the relation between the actual *mise and scene* and the dramatic text written by the author, following in the same time the peculiarities of direction, scenography and the way in which the spectacle transpose the literary text in a living show. For the director the text is just a pretext, an initial idea for creating a new artistic work bringing his own understanding and new meanings.

Theatre columnist should have a complex culture in literature and in theatre art as performance. When he writes about a new play he must make consideration on the subject and would write as a literature columnist implicitly. When he writes about classic plays with a new *mise and scene* his endeavor would focus on novelty of directing vision, actors, play, scenography and other details worthy to be revealed. His task is double: to inform the potential public about a new spectacle and on the other side, to reveal for the competent public the pluses and minuses of the show in an appealing mode (C. Popescu, 2004, 147). In other words, he should pay attention to all details like a terrain journalist but must value the spectacle like a dramatic critic. Not always those who write about theatre fulfill all these requirements, many chronicles are written by unspecialized journalists or by culture people coming from other fields (literature, art).

Marian Popescu noticed two pernicious tendencies in the theatre chronicle during the last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of century 21. On one side the spectacular writing using epithets from tabloid press (amazing, gorgeous etc). On the other hand a closer personal relation of the columnist with the people implied in show business can lead to biased sentences and judgments (M. Popescu, 2012).

A dramatic columnist guides the taste of the public making evaluations and writing about the cultural context of the spectacle, he works on the public education. Apparently, many journalists doesn't consider too difficult to write theatre chronicle. On the contrary, the life of a theatric columnist seems to be nice and easy: one has not anything to do to see spectacles every day and then write about them. This is why so many unspecialized journalists write about spectacles and their opinion have no major impact. When we speak about specialized chronicles things are different. Not only information, but talent, culture and knowledge are necessary, because in the second instance chronicles are supposed to be the major cultural feedback expected by director, artist and all the theatre team (the first feedback instance is the public reaction in the spectacle hall) (D. Popa, 2002).

After the chronicle feedback, the director and actors can modify parts of their vision and sometimes the chronicle may indicate the good or bad parts which can be improved. The theatre chronicle is an opinion journalism species and therefore it is characterized by subjectivism in the freedom to choice the item, the tune, freedom in using first person in writing and freedom to express personal opinions and judgments. On the other hand, a columnist should subject not to publicist and deontological rules: he should make his article read but in the same time in his opinions he should respect what he consider being right and truthful about spectacle.

In many journals, the chronicle is permanent rubric, in the same place, page and day of the week. The public and the show business give feedback to chronicles: it can increase the audience of publication or, on the contrary, it can decrease it. In this context, the columnist should be an authorized receptor and his opinions can make the difference in the public appreciation and in value judgments about the show (Moiescu in Parhon, 2006, 5).

According to American journalism school, a columnist should take into account some questions he must answer when writing an article:

- Do I know well the item I'm writing about?
- Do I like or not the item?
- If I don't like it or I don't know it, why I'm writing about?
- Do I know enough to tell others about it?
- What the readers know about the item?
- What readers expect reading this article?
- How long the article must be?
- What is the main interest of the reader? Which is the main information?

- What I underline in text? What I have to omit?
- How to organize the text; with what to begin and to finish?
- How technical or accessible should be the language?
- How much I can perform stylistically?
- How much can I be present in the text as author?
- Did I write with pleasure or not? (S. Preda, 2006, 187)

For Doina Rusti a chronicle should respect some structural necessities:

- Who, where and when?
- A short presentation of the item
- A short two or three notes about the general vision offered by show
- On what elements the artistic vision is based (scene, interpretation, scenery, costumes etc)
- What is new in the artistic vision in comparison with others similar?
- General appreciation, subjective or quoting other opinions
- The public attitude (number of spectators, applause, short comments in the hall) (Rusti, 143).

In every theatre chronicle we can speak about some essential elements. First are the quality and specificity of information as in all journalism texts. The second is the purpose of the chronicle as description or analysis or judgments about it. The third one is the public to which the chronicle addresses. In general press the addressability is wider and the language is simpler. In cultural publications the language, the style, the cultural references, comments and even the purpose of the chronicle is different, taking into account a more cultured and educated audience.

#### **4. Chronicle or theatre critic?**

Sometimes is difficult to make a clear distinction between theatre chronicle and theatre critic. Making a synthesis of different definitions given by different authors (Coman, Preda, Popa, C. F. Popescu, Rusti) we can conclude that an article of theatre critic is an outline of the event followed by personal opinions of the author, or, in other words, it is a mixture of review and analyses having as purpose to promote lecture. In Romanian press the critic has a privileged place in the editor's board and in the cultural life of the community; eventually he can impose or exclude names, influence awards and recognitions. Sorin Preda enounces the differences between critical texts and the chronicle:

- Critical text has not the rhythm of a chronicle
- The lecture is focused on the present work
- There are more quotes and examples
- It values, it gives a diagnostic and make sharper judgments (Preda, idem, 29).

While the chronicle is “a comment text more or less specialized published regularly by the same person in the same layout” (Husson and Robert, 1991, 52), the critic appears sporadically and is addressed mainly to a narrower public. For Dinu Chivu the main reason why spectators don't trust the chronicles and critics are imprecision of views, liability of criteria and lack of authenticity besides scholarish digressions and a complicated style with many quotes, sometimes these texts “floats in an irreproachable ambiguity” (D. Kivu, 2009, 128). Some chronicles pay more attention to the self-image of the author than to the event and they are built on a simple receipt combining a mixture of contradictory observations and appreciations which end by reciprocal annulation. Another critical point of the same author is that sometimes instead of sending people to the spectacle, the critic make larger references to the dramatic texts. Among other defects, the author notes: to many quotes, the mania of epithets, lack of arguments in sentences or even bad intentions and lack of talent (ibidem, 130).

For the ordinary reader, the chronicle or critic article is more or less informative, but for the theatre people the opinions of a columnist or critic values as professional opinions which could be taking into account for improving performance. There is a close connection between the actors implied in the performing art and the critics in both critical articles and chronicles. We can say that both of these sides make part of a single cultural whole represented by the totality of participants related to theatre. In this totality, all parts are both active and passive and the roles interchange in time: the dramatic author is active in writing the text but afterwards becomes “passive” when the text is dramatized letting a place of activity for the director, scenographers, actors, which are active in the conception and performance; but afterwards they enrolled passivity, while the critic, which was a simple receptor, becomes now active by writing the text for a public who apparently is always passive, but in fact represents the ultimate aim and purpose of the whole cultural act. All these interplay has finally one single purpose: to move the spectator. In this chain, the press has its specific role: it informs the public, it guides the public, it reflects the opinions and established certain artistically standards for this cultural field.

In the present article I tried to make a review of the main journalistic species correlated with the cultural field of theatre underlying the specificities of each type and making considerations about how these were perceived in the end of 90's, their different definitions and the critical opinions about what should be and what actually was.

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