

HE LIVED TO WRITE, HE WROTE TO LIVE – MARIUS MIRCUCU**Carmen Țâgșorean, PhD Candidate, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca**

Abstract: Some of the most important names of Romanian cultural life belong to the writers of the Jewish community. Whether we refer to the interwar or postwar period, their talent is illustrated both in the press and in the literature of the time. One of the existential dilemmas they had to face was that of their double identity. They belonged to the Jewish community, but, at the same time, to the Romanian society. Many of the Jewish writers put their thoughts on paper either in Romanian or in German (the Jews from Bukovina). Although slightly known in 2014's Romania, but highly valued and praised in Israel where he was nicknamed "the senior of the Romanian writers", the journalist and writer Marius Mircu was part of the elite group of Jewish intellectuals. His contribution to the preservation of the Jewish history in Romania (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) is still valued by the Jewish community. Marius Mircu's cultural identity has been created by the blending of three cultures: Jewish, Romanian, and French (he lived and studied in France between 1929 and 1932). Through this study we aim to clarify if the writer was haunted by the anxieties of his cultural identities.

Keywords: Marius Mircu, Romanian or/and Jewish writer, cultural identity, journalist, press

Marius Mircu was one of the lucky people whose childhood dream came true. "Since I was a child I was curious, scouting, sneaking, investigating, – I was born a reporter" (Mircu, 1981, 17). Moreover, he became one of the most prolific Jewish journalists and writers of Romanian ancestry. But this was not happenstance, but the result of a sustained effort, a life-long struggle. He courageously took on the hardships the times were stacking against him, both in Romania and France, between the two world wars "when journalism was a big, multicolor feast" (Mircu, 2002, 19) followed by WW II and the communist takeover of Eastern Europe, (during which he felt only contempt for the official press because, as he put it, "I lived through that kind of journalism, but it was not a torrent anymore, but just a marsh-please don't even mention it to me" (Mircu, 2002, 19). When he was writing, he seemed transported into a world dominated only by harmony and understanding, far away from the every-day injustice of the new reality. His entire life was dedicated to writing. "I sleep well: I fall asleep in the evening and I wake up in the morning, most of the time, without interruption. It's a time that I fully use by dreaming. I'm not in a mood to waste my time even in my sleep ... I dream of the past, present, and future" (Mircu, 2002, 7).

His debut into the world came on a Tuesday, June 9, 1909, in the home of a Jewish family of tailors in Romania and ended 99 years later, in Israel. An important indication of his bicultural upbringing that shaped his personality and gave him a different perspective of the world comes from his brother, Solomon Marcus, who said that, although their parents spoke Hebrew between them most of the time, they always spoke Romanian to their children (Spandonide, Paun, 2010, 38). The life of this great man of culture can be compared to an action-adventure novel, sometimes easy, some other times unpredictably hard, that he confronted with much courage and an honest desire to help others and create new things. He never lost his sense of humor, his positive spirits, and his subtle irony that was so typical of him. "It is not humor that drives me, but irony. It's not my merit, though, but the era's. We are

the beneficiaries of a very stimulating world in this respect; it is as if it was created for irony” (Mircu, 2002, 62).

His drive to write, but, most importantly, to see his writings published and read by many, was so compulsive that he founded and published his own magazine *Globe*. It was a hand-written flyer, only one monthly issue that he used to lend – not sell – to some of his buddies in exchange for books to read. About that experience, the author will say later, “It was the only school of journalism I ever attended, in fact, I am a self-taught man. The idea endured, and two decades later I will found a real magazine, the same format and the same number of pages – four (*Jurnalul copiilor – The Children's Journal*)” (Mircu, 1981, 53). It was an unforgettable experience and years later he will found his own publishing house and give it the same name: “I named it the same – *Globe* – dreaming that one day I will publish a totally new reporter's magazine, I registered it under my name so that nobody else could use it” (Mircu, 1981, 233). This experience was the cornerstone of his activity as a journalist. What followed were moments of pride and satisfaction when the newspaper *Rampa*, that was looking for correspondents in the country, published one of his short takes, on page 3, *Bacăul (The Bacău)*. It was just the beginning of a long cooperation. Another publication, in 1925, when he was 16, that accepted his articles was *Sănătatea (Health)*. In this, he will publish *Cancerul, boală molipsitoare (Cancer – a Contagious Disease)* in three consecutive issues. A year later, in the summer of 1926, the newspaper *Cotidianul (The Daily)* will publish on the front page one of his articles, unsigned, about the inauguration of the statue of Saint Francis de Assisi. An article that triggered a negative reaction was one he wrote about the spa resorts because in these reports he made public the identities of those going there, including those of some of his classmates' families and other acquaintances (Mircu, 1981, 63-73). Another publication that carried his writings was his own high school's, *Încercări (Attempts)*, in which *Scurtă privire asupra presei și întemeietorilor ei din Bacău (A Glimpse at the Bacău's Press and Its Founders)* will appear (Budău, 2004, 253). His seven years of high school education ended up in failure, but he saw it as a chance to avoid following a career that his father had chosen for him. Flunking the graduation exam, he would have one full year to figure out what to do with his future, a year during which he would publish numerous articles in *Sănătatea (Health)* and *Ziarul științelor și al călătoriilor (The Science and Travel Magazine)* (Mircu, 1981, 94-96).

His optimism and his trust in people had been kept up by some generous souls, of both Romanian and Jewish ancestry. It is another proof that in Marcus Mircu's case, the two identities, Romanian and Jewish, supported each other and brought up to light the best in each of them. Among the generous people who helped him, there was the writer G. M. Vlădescu, who, in 1942, will vouch for him to publish *Rango, prietenul oamenilor (Rango, People's Friend)* and under whose name the book was first published. Later on, the same book was published again, but this time under the name of the real author, Marius Mircu. G. M. Vlădescu not only insisted the name of the real author to be revealed, but also gave him the copyrights money he was entitled to. With this money Marius Mircu paid his dues to the army, as men of Jewish ancestry were obligated to do so, or be deported to Transnistria (a territory temporarily occupied by Romania in her war, in alliance with Germany, against the Soviet Union, that had to be colonized). Marius Mircu also expressed his gratitude towards

this generous benefactor in his book *Oameni de omenie în vremuri de neomenie (Kind People in Unkind Times)* (Mircu, 1981, 434).

In Leon Volovici's opinion "in the evolution of the Jewish intellectual life in Romania, there are three major directions, two of them radical – total identification with the Jewish intellectual cultural medium, with no connection to the Jewish identity, and, (the other direction), a pure alternative of a Jewish literature in Romanian language, ideologically justified by the arguments of the national tradition, and a middle one, a lot more complex, pursued by those writers and intellectuals, educated in the process of blending of the two cultures and identities (Volovici, 2005, 160).

We consider that Marius Mircu belongs to the third category. Throughout his career, he published his works in more than 200 publications, both foreign and domestic, to whose success he brought his important contribution: *Curierul israelit (The Israeli Courier)*, *Cinema (Cinema)*, *Moldova (Moldavia)*, *Curentul Bacăului (The Bacău's Trend)*, *Almanahul Atenei (The Athens's Almanac)*, *Alarma Bacăului (The Bacău's Alarm)*, *Vocea Bacăului (The Voice of Bacău)*, *Aviachim, Sinteze (Syntheses)*, *Ateneu (Athenaeum)*, *Realitatea ilustrată (The Illustrated Reality)*, *Voiaj (The Journey)*, *Hasmonaea, Adam, Ecoul evreiesc (The Jewish Echo)*, *Viața evreiască (The Jewish Life)*, *Calendarul (The Calendar)*, *Renașterea noastră (Our Revival)*, *Copilul evreu (The Jewish Child)*, *Realitatea evreiască (The Jewish Reality)*, *Unirea (The Union)*, *Înfrățirea (The Brotherhood)*, *Mântuirea (The Salvation)*, *Luah, Iașul, Opinia (The Opinion)*, *Jurnalul literar (The Literary Journal)*, *Însemnări ieșene (The Iassy Notes)*, *Inzl, Automobilul (The Automobile)*, *Almanah-Flacăra (The Flame Almanac)*, *Diplomat club (The Diplomat Club)*, *Epigrama (The Epigram)*, *Evenimentul (The Event)*, *Flacăra (The Flame)*, *Magazin istoric (The Historical Magazine)*, *Natura (The Nature)*, *Pacea (The Peace)*, *Revista generală a învățământului (The General Journal of Education)*, *România literară (The Literary Romania)*, *Televiziunea română (The Romanian Television)*, *Urzica (The Nettle)*, *Revista cultului mozaic (The Mosaic Cult Magazine)*, *Răspântia (The Junction)*, *Neamul evreiesc (The Jewish Nation)*, *Tribuna evreiască (The Jewish Tribune)*, *Viața evreiască (The Jewish Life)*, *Revista mea (My Magazine)*, *Facla (The Torch)*, *Viața noastră (Our Life)*, *Minimum, Revista magazin (The Store Magazine)*, *Ultima oră (The Last Hour)*, *Buletinul Ierusalimului (The Israeli Bulletin)*, *Ecoul Nahariei (The Naharia's Echo)*, *Hatzionut, Expres-magazin (Express Magazine)*, *Pro și contra (Pros and Cons)*, *Adevărul (The Truth)*, *Izvoare (The Source)*, *Glasul poporului (The People's Voice)*, *Informația (The Information)*, *Lama (The Blade)*, *Leul din Ierusalim (The Lion from Jerusalem)*, *Secolul XX (20th Century)*, *Tribuna magazin (The Tribune Magazine)*, *Kol Israel-rumanit, Mișmar, Moznaim, Actualitatea românească (The Romanian Fact)*, *Shevet Romania, Semnalul (The Signal)*, *Tug morgen jurnal (Prelicean, 2003, 9-10).*

At a closer look at Marius Mircu's publishing activity, we can easily identify other proofs to sustain our hypothesis that his two cultural identities coexisted harmoniously in his personality. Marius Mircu published at the same time in both the Romanian and Jewish press. For example, while he was a correspondent for the daily *Dimineața (The Morning)*, his articles were also carried by *Curierul israelit (The Israeli Courier)*, or, while a correspondent for *Ziarul științelor și al călătoriilor (The Newspaper of Sciences and Travel)*, he contributed to *Copilul evreu (The Jewish Child)*. Moreover, right after WW II, while on staff at *Națiunea (The Nation)* and *Licurici (The Firefly)*, he also published in *Răspântia (The Junction)*,

Neamul evreiesc (The Jewish Nation), and *Tribuna evreiască (The Jewish Tribune)*, etc. Some of the most pleasant moments in his career were those he spent writing for children, either books, daily columns or as editor of the Children’s Library of the Jewish Community of Bucharest, (with no sign whatsoever that he discriminated against children of Romanian nationality). “I am really proud of that time of my life, (as I will, later on, working at *The Children’s Journal*)” (Mircu, 1981, 427). The *Jurnalul copiilor (Children’s Journal)* was a special category of the literary genre that required a lot of responsibility: “We will try in this little journal to choose what we think you will like and what will be useful” (Mircu, 1974, 239), an activity that required a special discourse for the little ones and a competent approach to their universe. Marius Mircu’s complex personality and his split cultural identity proved one more time to be in harmony to deliver a remarkable work for both cultures. Harry Kuller considers that their contribution to the Jewish press in Romania “is proof – and, at the same time, a significant test – of the Jews’ will to integrate themselves into the country’s realities, to become loyal citizens, but still Jews, both from Romania and in Romania” (Kuller, 2004, 7).

Working alongside Romanian journalists and writers, Marius Mircu was perfectly integrated into the Romanian cultural medium, still preserving an interest for his Jewish roots. His criticizing spirit remains an admirable side of his Jewish identity. Also, his pseudonyms were both Romanian and Jewish. Some of these are: A. B. Carmella, Danus, Carmella Marius Mircu, A. S. Mircu, I. Rosidor, I. Sever, I. Scarion (Straje, 1973, 573). According to this author, Marius Mircu also signed as Mihai Bistriteanu, M. Mihail, Danut, G. P. U., Marinella I., I. Marius, Marius, Israel Marius, Dr. Studerus, Styx, Dan Teodorescu, G. M. Vladescu, M. Zaharia (Prelipceanu, 2003, 9-10). We would also like to add some more pseudonyms we found in *Națiunea (The Nation)* that we believe belonged to Marius Mircu: m.m., M. M., Marcel Mircu, m., M. B., Mircu, Marcel. For the Jewish journalist Marius Mircu, “the pseudonym was living proof that he was fully integrated into the Romanian press, in Romanian writing society” (Mircu, 2002, 37). Marius Mircu felt at home in Romanian language, as all 60 volumes of his work were written in this language. We should emphasize that he was the principal story teller of traditions, values, events, both happy and dramatic. He was considered not only “the dean of the Jewish writers in Romanian language in Israel, but also the living memory of the Romanian Jews, who never missed a beat of an important event” (Prelipceanu, vol. II, 2003, 333). Marius Mircu was part of Romanian culture. Everything he did was in Romanian, a language that represented him. Even after he moved to Israel where he published half of his works, he continued to write in Romanian. In 1990, he disclosed to Victor Bârladeanu “I can honestly say that those who all their lives have written in an expressive Romanian language will continue to do it until they die” (Prelipceanu, vol. II, 2003, 401).

In addition, Marius Mircu stands up for the preservation of “his” language when foreign vocabulary (after the Romanian Revolution, in 1989) starts penetrating Romanian. “It upset me when a man who thought he spoke Romanian, threw in, soiling it, some foreign words, English mainly. I have nothing against the noble English language, but he should not mutilate neither English nor Romanian, which, he thought he was enriching” (Mircu, 2005, 173). From this standpoint, Marius Mircu may be compared to F. Aderca, who felt “organically tied to the Romanian language, literature, and culture, and who considered

himself all along a Romanian writer of Jewish background”. In other words, a writer completely loyal to the people amongst he lived and was part of, refusing to deny he was either Romanian or Jewish”. He was the man “in whose heart can live two hearts, two norms, two demands” (Aderca, 1999, 30-31). This was a permanent feeling that did not vanish after the artist moved for good to Israel. For Marius Mircu, “the old country is for me –along with Israel- my current country”, and the Romanian language “is in his blood. Not only that I haven’t forgotten it, but I’ve perfected it, I’ve enriched it” (Prelipceanu, vol. I, 2003, 390). The same loyalty that he got us used to he demonstrates when asked by Prof. Ilie Rad if he missed Romania: “If I were in Romania now, I would miss Israel just as much” (Prelipceanu, vol. II, 2003, 457). This is a perfect emotional balance, which, despite all the hardships he had encountered in his life, remained intact, as an integral part of his twin values system. There was a lot of talk at the time whether the Jewish intellectuals thought of themselves as Romanian writers of Jewish origin or Jewish Romanian. There is also another category coined by Mirel Bartes: that of “Romanian Jewish writer” (Askenasy, *The Avatars of Double Identity*, <http://www.Revistacultura.ro php.? article=4198>, 2). In Florin Manolescu’s opinion, the language is one of the basic criteria to evaluate the identity of a writer, keeping in mind that once he moves to another culture he has to master the language of the adoptive country and become bilingual (Manolescu, 2003, 18).

If we take into account the language Marius Mircu wrote in, he can be considered a Romanian writer of Jewish origin. Unfortunately, it is hard to place him in a specific category. Emigration always comes with side effects triggered by what experts call „culture shock” „The emigrant swings for a long time, if not forever, between past and present. In the process of dismantling the old personality and building a new one, among many potential egos, the idea of „double” creeps in, something that will follow him around and represent him on the new social stage. The identity – split in two or more parts – needs a lot of time to regain its coherence and present itself intelligibly in the new existential setting” (Manea, 2006, 199). Because he was an introvert, Marius Mircu showed no signs of big changes in his persona, a fact that can be explained by the very nature of this social category. Writers, philosophers, musicians are usually people who live above the fray, trials and tribulations of every-day strife. They live in their own worlds, where they can afford to create and recreate themselves as many times as they want to and move along coordinates only they know – free of pressure, prejudice or stereotype and where only talent and inspiration govern their destiny.

Felicia Antip identifies and classifies the conditions the Jewish writers of Romanian descent may have lived through as follows: “Each of the Jewish writers lived differently from other writers due to their specific condition. This condition they either assumed and they were proud of; or, they assumed it, but they detested it; it was imposed to them and forced to assume it; some recanted it; others dismissed it as insignificant; some, finally discovered it. All of these attitudes may also present a lot of nuances. Depending on the medium in which they lived and created, on their origin, on personal life experience , on their way of being, on their education and horizon, on their readers reaction (feedback) and many other (factors). It is a matter of personal profile and option, in essence, of free arbiter” (Felicia Antip, 2006, cover 4). Marius Mircu assumed his Jewishness and his condition as a Jewish writer with all the consequences that came out of this. In 1942, he was on the watch list of the “proper authorities” (Manolescu, 2010, 508).

Marius Mircu wrote about Jews, but not only for them. Remembering life in a Jewish community, in its particularities, becomes a duty fulfilled for future generations. Those who lived through that were the best historians, as Marius Mircu put it, „I’m not a historian. I just lived this through” (Mircu, 1981, 338). He had a keen sense of the importance of the times past. Paul Schweiger says in *Viața noastră* (2000) “Marius Mircu’s stories are full of great love for the community in which he grew up” (Preliceanu, 2003, vol. II, 330). His writings give other nationalities the opportunity to peek into a less known community and see for themselves and understand their customs, traditions, and personalities. “I write all the time about moments in the history of Romanian Jews because I want it to become immortal. And to remind Romanians that they allowed to happen what should not have happened and to appreciate at real value the Jews’ contribution to Romania’s growth” (Mircu, 2005, 143). For the Romanian reader, Marius Mircu presents „places and times totally unfamiliar, the destiny of Jewish intelligentsia in Eastern and Central Europe, adapted in its own way to this environment and creating its own niche, learning the culture of the country and contributing to its growth, connecting to the great resources of the Western civilization and bringing into the fold the Jewish heritage, (this intelligentsia) had gotten to become an engine of progress before being annihilated, wiped out from the face of the earth for good” (Antip, 2006, 322).

Marius Mircu was an eyewitness of some of the most dramatic moments in the life of the Jewish communities that he described in his memorable books like *Pogromurile de la Iași* (*The Pogroms of Iassy*), *Pogromurile din Bucovina și Dorohoi* (*The Pogroms of Bucovina and Dorohoi*), *Pogromurile din Basarabia* (*The Pogroms of Basarabia*), *Oameni de omenie în vremuri de neomenie* (*Kind People in Unkind Times*), to mention just a few. He had the courage to be the first to bring to light those terrible events. It was one more time that the writer put his talent to work for both of his countries.

There is plenty of evidence provided by the writer himself to back up our hypothesis about his double cultural identity. In number 928 (1984) of *Revistei familia* (*Family Magazine*), Marius Mircu opens up on this issue. Fate made it possible for him to be born in a place where “half the population was Romanian and the other half Jewish, and, as a result, he “absorbed both influences”. This was just the beginning, as these two communities, cultures and identities, over time, will blend to give him a special identity and a very special life. He attended the Romanian school, but was also in the higher levels of *heder*, he fought against fascism “for the liberation of both Romanians and Jews”, he wrote about Jewish and Romanian important people. In the magazine *Cultul mozaic* (*The Mosaic Cult*), he told stories of significant moments in the life of both Romanian and Jewish communities and in his book *Trimis special* (*Special Envoy*) described in detail “notorious moments in Romania’s life”. As we have shown, Marius Mircu stood his ground in the most difficult times in history and, with his proverbial talent and modesty, served both communities. “I rowed in two boats and I danced at two weddings. Was one against the other? Or was it beneficial for both? I’m not the one to answer that. All I can say is that my activities were not opportunistic, but simultaneous, parallel” (Preliceanu, vol. II, 2003, 396-399). It is noticeable that when he talks about his identities Marius Mircu puts the Romanian one first, a generous and respectful gesture of a scholar who accepted unconditionally the Romanian dimension of his personality. It is also worth adding that although he emigrated to Israel, he kept his Romanian citizenship. He was a member of the Union of Romanian Writers and that of the Writers’ Federation of

Israel, supporting and contributing to the Romanian press there, “all of these to promote Romania”. (Preliceanu, vol.II, 2003, 456).

In daily life, an individual is confronted “by two systems of values which determines his decisions, personal or collective. One is a [...] «cultural» system, the other a system of «norms». In modern times, culturally, anybody, Jewish or non-Jewish, may come to accept the system, but it’s different with the norms that are based on traditions, but also laws. It’s a lot harder to deal and accept a set of laws and sometimes these laws exclude specifically somebody who is an «outsider»” (Finkenthal, 2009, 33). Based on our evidence presented here, we can claim that Marius Mircu was able to internalize the two systems and make them work in harmony. Compared to the Jewish generation of the 30’s, for whom the integration into the Romanian culture and the dilemma of double identity caused suffering and inner conflicts that affected their work, Marius Mircu had the skill and the wit to master these anxieties (Ursuțiu, 2008, 130). Marius Mircu is part of a modern generation of Jewish writers who appreciated the cultural richness of his background and managed to materialize it into the creation of a monography of Jewishness, written with effort, humor and charm. This can be considered a grand picture of the Jewish community of Romania. His writings reveal a well-balanced, wise and accomplished man, fully aware of the great responsibility he had in serving his people.

Conclusions

Romanians, as well as the Jews in Romania, were really fortunate to have in their service a personality so complex and well-balanced as Marius Mircu. Born and raised in a bicultural community (half Romanian and half Jewish), Marius Mircu learned from early childhood integration and assimilation that over time turned him into a personality with a great potential to represent both cultures in his writings. His dual identity was not a handicap for him; on the contrary, it gave him a vantage point from which he was able to observe, to extract the essential and to give back a wise and colorful picture of the humanity he lived in. He built a bridge between the two communities, dedicating his talent and energy to the cause of love and understanding among peoples. He did it in both languages, for both cultures. A gifted human being, he lived to write and he wrote to live.

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