Mihaela Gligor

Cultural and Political Interactions in Interwar Romania

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>
> Saul Steinberg

In April 1977, Elie Wiesel gave a lecture at Northwestern University. It was called “The Holocaust As Literary Inspiration.” In the Introduction, he said: “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.”[1] This kind of “witness literature” can be considered “*the* formative genre of the 20th century.”[2] There are many well-known and unbelievable stories of survival.[3] There are also many unknown stories. Some people had the strength to tell their story and became examples in the history books and characters in novels or movies. Others chose to live in silence, not saying a word about what had happened. Some stories are still hidden; some are beginning to come to light, including in Romania.

It is often said that the interwar Romanian society had a westernized intellectual elite, perfectly connected to what the culture of Western Europe meant at that time. Among the characteristics that defined the intellectual life of interwar Romania were dialogue and the desire to argue elegant-

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ly, eruditely, critically, originally, with interlocutors from different fields of the humanities and/or sciences. Young intellectuals competed in organizing and holding conferences for both academia and the general public. Thus, several cultural associations appeared, and hosted conferences involving free discussions on topics of interest in those years. The Criterion Association[4] was the best known of all the intellectual groups of the young generation. "'Criterion' itself is not a word in Romanian," as Cristina A. Bejan noticed:

> *The Romanian is* ***criteriu****. Clearly the association chose the English version, with a cosmopolitan pretense, symbolically showing the association's intention to reach beyond the Romanian language and traditionalist paradigm, in its effort to engage in global ideas but also in its effort to launch this project of "major culture" proportions.*[5]

Also, in Bejan's opinion, "Criterionists must have been aware of the literary review T. S. Eliot edited, *The Criterion* (1922–1939)." Many intellectuals of the new generation became affiliated to this cultural association, sharing ideas and debating on subjects of interest. An important role in the success of the Criterion conferences was played by Mircea Eliade, who was seen both by his contemporaries and by the researchers of the interwar period as "the head of the '27 generation." Eliade began his academic career in 1933, in the middle of the second autumn session of the Criterion conferences, the month in which he held the conference on "Magic and the Origins of Music,"[6] just a few days after he had moved in with Nina Mareş (who would become his wife), and while still working on the novel *Întoarcerea din Rai* (Return from Paradise), which appeared in 1934. It was a real honor for him to be the assistant to the charming Professor Nae Ionescu (in fact the honorary assistant, as Nae Ionescu himself was an assistant to Professor Constantin Rădulescu-Motru) at the Department of Logic and Metaphysics of the University of Bucharest.

> *For a while they [young intellectuals of interwar Bucharest] successfully balanced their social, cultural and intellectual activities and political convictions. . . . Despite its ultimate failure, the brief success of Criterion in the mid 1930s was a unique moment in Romania's tumultuous interwar period.*[7]

Years later, while living in Paris, Eliade wrote in his *Journal*:

> *If Criterion had had an instrument of expression other than the Romanian language, it would have been considered the most interesting precursor of the French Existentialism of today.*[8]

During the period when the Criterion Association was in full swing on the cultural scene of Bucharest, almost 11 percent of the city's population was represented by Jews. Most of them were artists, craftsmen, merchants, political leaders, bankers, doctors or architects. "The explosion of Jewish cultural and social organizations . . . demonstrates a certain organizational flexibility, a feature of civil society structures." The interactions between the Jews and other minorities with the Romanians were important and potentially indicative of tolerance and understanding. "Some features of the *kehillah* [community] were related to the dynamics of the Jewish world, while others were linked specifically to the Romanian cultural and political environment."[9]

Among those who managed to make a difference, some had a remarkable contribution to the art of the twentieth century, such as Saul Steinberg, Mircea Eliade's colleague at the philosophy courses held by Nae Ionescu at the University of Bucharest. "The story of Saul Steinberg (1914–1999), who later became one of America's favorite artists," is very interesting, and it has a very strong connection to "Palas Street of interwar Bucharest."[10] The Bucharest of his childhood was a vibrant mixture of people, cultures, languages, and religions. But the situation was to change rapidly, and in November 1933, at only 19 years of age, Saul Steinberg would leave Bucharest, a place where Jews "were usually more cosmopolitan, lured by what we could call the mirage of modern society they actually helped build."[11]

This increasingly anti-Semitic climate of Romania was something Saul Steinberg, among others, would remember all his life: "Anti-Semitism was one theme he did not fail to mention, as if it were an inseparable part of his native geography. He treated it with disgust."[12] The same description appears in many memoirs about those times. Here is just another one, from a Romanian Jewish student, Jacob Pesate:

> *There was a native fascist party in Romania; it was the Iron Guard, and from a very small unit, it became a threat to democracy. They were going around in Nazi-style uniforms and they attacked meetings of the parties who were in power. So the Iron Guard was all over the place, in small numbers but active, aggressive and mimicking the German Nazis. The leaders were sent for training in Germany and they returned with programmes which were no different from* **Mein Kampf** *under Hitler.*[13]

On several occasions, the political discourse was transferred to the cultural and scientific areas. Identifying the deep roots of anti-Semitism in the political and cultural life of interwar Romania can provide a broad framework for understanding the actions of the elite of those times. Unfortunately, the effervescence of the interwar period also contains the sad story of a brilliant young generation which fell prey—intellectually—to the destructive passion of politics. Discovering the truth is crucial for two primordial reasons: we can have a complete image of the generation and we can solve the historical mystery of interwar Romania.

At the beginning of 1937, being part of the Iron Guard had come to represent for Mircea Eliade the true conclusion of his generation: "None of the revolutions that . . . took place were as completely under the sign of the spiritual as that of the Romanian youth . . . If it succeeds to the end . . . it will be the greatest revolution of the century."[14] Eliade's gesture and his attachment to such a movement would be followed by other intellectuals of his generation. Their search for philosophical, spiritual and political renewal directed them towards fascist doctrines, while their concentration on ethnic, nationalist, Romanian Orthodoxy led them to the legionary movement and anti-Semitism. The political components of the thinking of the elites of the 1927 generation can't be isolated from culture, the philosophy of history, or the broad theme of nationalism. In fact, personal experiences as authentic facts, elements that often appeared in the discourse of the interwar intellectual generation, turned into a real deluge of verbal extremism and anti-Semitism. The suspicion against foreigners, justified by external dangers, was directed especially against the national minorities. The regime, unable to ensure the welfare of the country, sought a scapegoat and found one in the person of the Jew, the stranger within, who, in the opinion of the intellectuals and the middle class, was responsible for the poverty of the whole people.

However, beyond the Romanian cultural tradition, the anti-Semitic discourse was common in interwar Europe. More than that, many of the Romanian statements used in order to justify the preference for the anti-Semitic discourse were European. The confluences of ideas and the differentiations between the academic and the political levels in approaching the symbolism of anti-Semitism offer an important perspective on this subject and accentuate the role of elites in promoting these ideas (since the elite groups had access to latest studies and trends of the time). But, with all these external influences, the Romanian anti-Semitism and the far right movement had very important and unique elements. Anti-Semitism in interwar Romania was particularly violent. The Jews were considered an "inferior and degenerate race," and were often blamed for the "alteration" of Romanian culture and for the nation's socio-economic problems. As early as 1927, politicians such as Octavian Goga, among others, blamed the Jews for everything that was bad in the country and described them as "impure secretions of Galicia"[15] that threatened the very existence of the Romanian state. A. C. Cuza continued, in 1928, in the same direction and considered the Jews as

> *a corrupt and degenerate nation, sterile, without land and which does not form a complete, productive social organism . . . thus living, from the beginning to the present day, superimposed on other nations, by exploiting their productive work, therefore as a parasitic nation.*[16]

Anti-Semitism was, as expected, a central element of the Iron Guard ideology. In 1937, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu wrote in his Circular no. 119: "The historical mission of our generation is to solve the Jewish problem."[17] This was the goal of the entire generation, as Theodor Lavi commented in a 1981 letter to Mac Linscott Ricketts, Mircea Eliade's American biographer:

> *This generation actually created the Iron Guard—which was anti-political, but not a-political. It was against the political establishment, but it created a political leader, with a totalitarian, dictatorial structure, tyrannical, and according to the results of its short government, thirsty for blood (not only Jewish!).*[18]

Another path to the exclusion of the Jews from the local economy, and consequently from Romanian society, was soon to be found: denaturalization. In this respect,

> *Decree Law no. 169 for the Revision of Romanian Citizenship (adopted by the Goga government on 21 January 1938), aimed at just that, by denaturalizing Jews who had become citizens "illegally" in the aftermath of World War I. As a result of this legal provision, 225,222 Jews, who had enjoyed political and civil emancipation for less than two decades, lost Romanian citizenship.*[19]

Anti-Semitism was not only directed against the Jews, but also against the "Judaization" of Romania, and especially against the politicians who had been corrupted by the Jews and allowed them to "take over" the country. It also glorified the spiritual struggle and the morality based on the mystical images of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The studies written by Radu Ioanid[20] and Carol Iancu,[21] among others, focus on these aspects. Writing about the legal status of the Jews in Romania, Radu Ioanid explains that "the roots of anti-Semitism in Romania, as in most of Eastern Europe, stretch deeply into history."[22] He presents the main perspectives and concludes that "the legal underpinnings of tolerance would not long survive the arrival in power of the radical anti-Semitic right—represented by the minority Goga–Cuza cabinet of the National Christian Party—in December 1937."[23]

In culture, as in all aspects of life, the symbolism of the interwar period gravitates between tolerance and intolerance. On the one hand, there are the examples of good coexistence provided by the Criterion conferences; on the other hand, we have the later anti-Semitic outbursts, the violent demonstrations and crimes against the Jews, which occurred during the Legionary Rebellion of January 1941. Timothy Snyder expresses the same opinion:

> *Romania's policy to deport and kill Jews began during the Second World War in connection to a trauma of lost lands. Romania did not lose statehood during the war, but it did lose state territory. Regaining that land would become the central political obsession in Bucharest.*[24]

Things deteriorated rapidly and eventually led to the terrible violence of 1941. Mihail Sebastian's *Journal* also captures this degradation and intolerance: "In the evening we gather early at home. With the shutters drawn and the telephone out of service, we have a growing sense of unease and anguish. What will happen to us? I hardly dare ask."[25] A few days later, Sebastian wrote about

> *A decree of the Buzău mayor's office: Jews cannot move around between 8 p.m. and 7 a.m., do not have a right to enter cafés, are forbidden to visit one another, even if they are friends or relatives . . . So much for my wrong impression yesterday that the anti-Semitism tension is declining. Whenever I go into town, I come back feeling even more depressed than before.*[26]

Romania's policies regarding the Jewish problem would change according to different influences. In July 1941, Romanian troops joined the German army in attacking the Soviets. While recovering the previously lost territories, the troops killed a large number of Jews. As Snyder points out, "from the perspective of Bucharest, this anti-Jewish campaign was an attempt at the ethnic cleansing of one of several enemies of the Romanian state." But in 1942,

> *Berlin wanted the remaining Jews under Romanian control sent to Auschwitz, but none were. Bucharest's refusal had to do with calculations of sovereignty. Romania was deporting and murdering Jews on the basis of its own reasoning and for its own purposes.*[27]

In this context, only a few young Romanian Jews managed to emigrate to France or Italy for studies or to find better jobs and thus saved their lives. Saul Steinberg was among them. First, in 1933, he traveled to Milan and applied to the Regio Politecnico to study architecture. In March 1940, Steinberg passed his exams at the Politecnico and received his diploma in architecture the following month. But the diploma is made out to "Saul Steinberg . . . of the Hebrew race."[28] Being a Jew was a problem everywhere in Europe of those years.

> *In 1941, like many other Jews, Saul Steinberg had a short stay in one of the concentration camps (***campi di concentramento***) set up by Mussolini to hold illegals and undesirables. . . . On July 13, 1941, after two years of frustration and fear, endless troubles, and a very long and exhausting journey, Saul Steinberg arrived in the Dominican Republic. He was among the lucky ones: between December 1, 1940 and October 15, 1941, only 210 other foreign Jews managed to leave Italy.*[29]

From there, he arrived in New York on 1 July 1942. He would return to Romania only once, in 1944. It was the last time he set foot in his homeland. "The memory of these places of sadness, of suffering, but above all of great emotions, is spoiled by seeing them again. It's better to leave certain things in peace, just the way they are in memory."[30]

Exile has specific political connotations, for it presupposes the actions of the authorities toward those whom they banish, and the actions of those who, given the nature or the outcome of the political struggles in their country, either chose or were forced to leave. Whether imposed or voluntarily chosen, exile was a condition, a real location in the cultural, political, social and geographical spaces.

Many Jewish intellectuals (of Romanian origin) immigrated to Palestine (later, Israel) and to other countries from the Western world, seeking freedom and a dignified life. Most of them founded, in the countries they adopted, numerous Romanian-language magazines (literary, political or ideological), as platforms for disseminating ideas about freedom of speech or their own tragic stories from interwar Romania. This is the case of Theodor Lavi, who studied psychology at the University of Bucharest, where he was a colleague of Mircea Eliade, and attended the courses of Professor Nae Ionescu. In 1934, Lavi obtained a doctorate in pedagogy. For many years he was the director of the Jewish school in Ploieşti. In 1950, alongside other Zionist leaders, Lavi was arrested and spent five years in prison. He was released in 1955, and immigrated to Israel in 1957. He became a researcher at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, and carried out a special activity in terms of recovering the history of the Jewish community in interwar Romania. Lavi was also an important witness in the Eichmann Trial. Between 1972 and 1977, Lavi edited the *Toladot* magazine, dedicated to the study of the history of Jews in Romania, which became famous after the publication, in its first issue, of what is known as the "Mircea Eliade File." He was also the first director of the Center for Research on Romanian Jewry, founded in 1973 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The publication of the "Mircea Eliade File" quickly raised questions and generated heated discussions in intellectual circles, especially in Israel. If at first he refused to explain himself, Eliade eventually tried to defend his reputation. In 1972, in a well-known letter to Professor Gershom Scholem of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Eliade recalled that "in the years 1938–1940 . . . I was 'on the right'; I was in the 'nationalist' tradition of Eminescu, Maiorescu, Iorga."[31]

This aspect of Eliade's biography has been intensely studied and raised many questions.[32] In a letter to Theodor Lavi, in 1981, while documenting the book dedicated to Eliade (*Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots*[33]), Mac Linscott Ricketts informed his correspondent that

> *A week ago I went to Chicago to visit Prof. Eliade, to tell him about my visit to Romania and to ask him questions. I asked him about his articles from* ***Buna Vestire*** *and he did not remember at first. When I spoke to him about one of these, "Why I Believe in the Victory of the Legionary Movement," he exclaimed, "I never wrote that!"*
>
> *He told me that the editor (Polihroniade?) asked him to write on that subject, but he refused; and then he saw the article in the newspaper! It was written by the editor. However, Eliade said he did not protest because he did not want to embarrass the editor, who was his friend. I do not know if you can accept this story, but I think it's true.*
>
> *He also told me that he never joined the Legion. When he was arrested in July 1938, he was asked to give up the Guard, but he refused because it meant that it belonged to him . . . which was not true. So he was locked up for 4 months.*[34]

Theodor Lavi's answer was prompt, but he raised a delicate question, for which an explanation is still being sought:

> *Regarding the statement of M. E. that Polihroniade would have written his articles on the legionaries—it might be true. However, would this legionary and fanatically anti-Semitic journalist have done such a thing had he not known M. E. to be close to the ideas expressed in the article?*[35]

In was just the beginning of a larger controversy. In his 1991 essay in *The New Republic*, called "Happy Guilt,"[36] Norman Manea, born in Bukovina,[37] also wrote on Mircea Eliade's connection to the extreme right movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Manea rightly highlights the shocking contrast between Eliade's violent fascist prejudices and "the free play and dreamy compassion of his writing." The professor teaching the history of religion at the University of Chicago was difficult to reconcile with the champion of the Iron Guard. However, there were also reasons why Eliade might have been attracted to fascism. He believed in the appearance of the sacred within the profane, seemingly secular modern world; fascism, he seems to have thought, could be a potential source of sacredness. When Manea's essay about Eliade's fascism was published in Romania in 1992, it sparked a campaign of hatred against Manea. Eliade, whose rehabilitation began during the latter half of the communist era, had become a hero. His critical stance toward the Romanian right-wing intellectuals opened the way to an active international debate about this still sensitive subject.

More recently, Professor Moshe Idel, in his book on Eliade, had the courage to make these statements:

> *In my opinion, Eliade was indubitably a member of the Iron Guard and made legionary propaganda in 1937. However, since I see in the Guard not a fascist movement but an Orthodox ultranationalist one, there is no reason to see in Eliade a fascist in a specifically technical sense of this term.*[38]

In any case, after 1945, Eliade was clear in his disapproval of both Marxism and Fascism, but he avoided the details of his own past complicity.

Other important witnesses to what happened in interwar Romania are Wilhelm Filderman,[39] Simon Schafferman,[40] and Isac Ludo.[41] Their correspondence is extremely important for the recovery of some important moments of Romanian interwar history. Many files and letters are still inaccessible, some were lost, but many have been recovered from archives (personal or institutional archives from Israel or other countries), and they complete, with success, the tumultuous history of those times.

In a letter dated 30 May 1973, George Rosiano[42] wrote to Simon Schafferman:

> *Some aspects that took place behind the scenes of the Romanian political arena between the two world wars, and have been revealed only now, regarding us, the Jews who lived there, become a harsh indictment for those concerned. And this would be desirable for the Jews to understand when asked for material support for the publication of the* ***Toladot****.*[43]

The correspondence of the Jewish intellectuals of Romanian origin sheds new light on the elite's role in the rise of Romanian nationalism, and offers important details about their fall into history and exile and, essentially, about their intellectual or personal interactions on the delicate issue of (in)tolerance.

An important characteristic of the interwar period was, as Marius Turda observed, "the fixation on the nation." In many parts of the country, "sub-cultures were predominantly determined by the internal ethnic dynamic, multilingualism, multi-confessionalism and interculturality."[44] All these elements can also be traced in the correspondence or in the memoirs that cover the interwar period. But, at the same time,

> *The interwar period reflects the overlapping and tangled relations between Romania's ethnic communities, not only in terms of shared cultural and political history, but also in terms of common eugenic predicaments.*[45]

Marius Turda goes further and explains that

> *Interwar Romania not only provides examples of well-articulated regional eugenic sub-cultures but, more importantly, of eugenic sub-cultures, such as the Romanian one, which ultimately became the dominant eugenic culture of the entire country.*[46]

Alongside the classical writings on interwar Romania,[47] some more recent studies have examined nation-building as a multi-faceted phenomenon.[48] These offer important details about the role of interwar ministries and parties in shaping cultural policy and political interactions in interwar Romania.

Many intellectuals of interwar Romania became important personalities in their field. Mircea Eliade is one of them.

> *Historian of religions, Orientalist, ethnologist, sociologist, folklorist, essayist, short story writer, novelist, dramatist, memorialist—here are just a few of the multiple sides of his activity. And by all these, and many others, he changed, and continues to do so, the lives of those interested in his legacy.*[49]

Another one is Saul Steinberg.

> *The shy boy from Palas Street transformed into the cosmopolitan intellectual who found inspiration from a wide variety of sources, such as architecture, maps, children's art, calligraphy, postcards, rubber stamps, and underground comics, and transformed all these into masterpieces. A Romanian by birth, restless by inclination, Saul Steinberg became a recognized artist around the world. His view of the world from Palas Street became* ***View of the World from 9th Avenue****, a correspondence between two sacred geographies that were synonymous with his life. Saul Steinberg lived a fabulous existence, and his legacy is more than impressive.*[50]

Members of the same generation, they both left Romania and pursued international careers in the humanities and the arts. However, their lives illustrate different characteristics of the cultural and political interactions in interwar Romania. One was deeply involved in the politics that forced the other to leave Romania. Two sides of the same story, their personal experiences, and the way they related to the events of Romania of those years, offer important perspectives on a particularly difficult period in the country's history, as well as on their own history.

The cultural and political interactions in interwar Romania are far from being fully deciphered. This paper offers an overview of some interactions, following the main cultural events and their most important participants. Further research will complete the portrait of a tormented time that changed the life of those who lived it.

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Notes

1. Elie Wiesel, "The Holocaust As Literary Inspiration," in *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University*, 2nd edition (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 15.
2. Michael Bachmann, "Life, Writing, and Problems of Genre in Elie Wiesel and Imre Kertész," *Rocky Mountain Review* 63, 1 (2009): 79.
3. Among them, the well-known stories of two Nobel laureates: the Romanian-born Elie Wiesel (as remembered in *Night*), and Imre Kertész (as depicted in his trilogy: *Fatelessness*, *Fiasco*, and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*).
4. Its full name, rarely used, was the Criterion Association for Art, Literature, and Philosophy, but it was commonly known as Criterion.
5. Cristina A. Bejan, *Intellectuals and Fascism in Interwar Romania: The Criterion Association* (N.p.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 85, note 1.
6. Between 30 September and 17 December 1933, a series of conferences on "The Great Moments of Music" took place, with the participation of musicians and musicologists (among others, Dimitrie Cuclin and George Breazul). For his November conference, "Magic and the Origins of Music," Mircea Eliade appealed to several young musicians who exemplified, musically, his theories.
7. Bejan, 4.
8. Mircea Eliade, *Journal I 1945–1955*, translated by Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 38, entry of 1 November 1946.
9. Liviu Rotman, *The Romanian Kehillah: The Pulse, Character, and History of the Jewish Community in Romania*, translated by George Weiner, edited by Lenn Schramm (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 2015), 99, 101.
10. Mihaela Gligor, "View of the World from Palas Street: The Dynamics of Cultural Memory in Saul Steinberg's Representation of Interwar Bucharest," in *Memories of Terror: Essays on Recent Histories*, edited by Mihaela Gligor (Frankfurt am Main: CEEOL Press, 2021), 151–153.

11. Oana Soare, “The Memory of a Hurt Identity: Bucharest’s Jewish Sub-Culture between Fiction and Non-fiction,” in *Identities In-Between in East-Central Europe*, edited by Jan Fellerer, Robert Pyrah, and Marius Turda (London: Routledge, 2019), 92–109.
12. Norman Manea, “Made in Romania,” in Norman Manea, *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 180.
13. See the declaration of Jacob Pesate in Lyn Smith, *Forgotten Voices of the Holocaust: True Stories of Survival—From Men, Women and Children Who Were There* (London: Ebury Press, 2006), 37.
14. Mircea Eliade, “O revoluţie creştină,” *Buna Vestire* (Bucharest) 1, 100 (27 June 1937): 3.
15. Octavian Goga, *Mustul care fierbe* (Bucharest: n.p., n.d. [1927]), 395–398.
16. A. C. Cuza, *Doctrina naţionalistă creştină. Introducere: Cuzismul (Definiţii, Teze, Antiteze, Sinteza)* (Iaşi: Tip. Coop. “Trecerea Munţilor Carpaţi,” 1928), 12–17.
17. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Circulări şi manifeste* (Madrid: Colecţia Omul Nou, 1951), 199.
18. Theodor Lavi to Mac Linscott Ricketts, letter of 10 December 1981, in *Theodor Lavi în corespondenţă*, edited by Mihaela Gligor and Miriam Caloianu (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012), 338.
19. Ştefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to “Romanianization,” 1940–44* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 35.
20. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944*, with a foreword by Elie Wiesel, and a preface by Paul A. Shapiro (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). In this volume, Radu Ioanid offers an accurate perspective on Romanian policies of racism, anti-Semitism, and Jewish extermination.
21. Carol Iancu, *Les Juifs en Romanie (1919–1938): De l’émancipation à la marginalisation*, foreword by Pierre Guiral, afterword by Gérard Nahon, (Paris–Louvain: Peeters, 1996).
22. Ioanid, 4.
23. Ibid., 13.
24. Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust As History and Warning* (London: Vintage, Penguin Random House, 2016), 229.
25. Mihail Sebastian, *Journal 1935–1944*, translated by Patrick Camiller, with an introduction and notes by Radu Ioanid (London: Pimlico, 2003), 370. Entry of 22 June 1941.
26. Ibid., 378. Entry of 9 July 1941.
27. Snyder, 232–233.
28. Mario Tedeschini Lalli, “Descent from Paradise: Saul Steinberg’s Italian Years (1933–1941),” *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History: Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 2 (October 2011): 333–334, accessed 15 March 2021, https://www.questcdecjournal.it/descent-from-paradise-saul-steinbergs-italian-years-1933-1941/.
29. Gligor, “View of the World from Palas Street,” 159.
30. Saul Steinberg and Aldo Buzzi, *Reflections and Shadows*, translated by John Shepley (New York: Random House, 2002), 41.

31. Mircea Eliade to Gershom Scholem, letter of 3 July 1972. See Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America... Corespondență*, vol. 3, *R–Z*, edited by Mircea Handoca (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004), 131.
32. Among the most important studies on this subject are: Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, foreword by Mac Linscott Ricketts (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); Florin Ţurcanu, *Mircea Eliade: Le prisonnier de l'histoire*, foreword by Jacques Julliard (Paris: La Découverte, 2003); Daniel Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies: Dumézil, Lévi-Strauss, Eliade*, foreword by Robert A. Segal, translated by Martha Cunningham (London–Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2006). See also some of my studies on this subject: *Mircea Eliade: Anii tulburi: 1932–1938* (Bucharest: EuroPress Group, 2007); ed., *Mircea Eliade between History of Religions and the Fall into History* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012); "The Ideology of the Archangel Michael Legion and Mircea Eliade's Political Views in Interwar Romania," *International Journal on Humanistic Ideology* 1, 1 (2008): 111–126; "Eliade's Romanian Past: Religion and Politics," *Theory in Action: Journal of the Transformative Studies Institute* 3, 1 (2010): 51–74. For a complete overview of Eliade's correspondence to and from his Jewish friends, colleagues, etc., see Mihaela Gligor and Liviu Bordaş, eds., *Postlegomena la Felix Culpa*: *Mircea Eliade, evreii şi antisemitismul*, 2 vols. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012–2013).
33. Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots, 1907–1945*, 2 vols. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
34. Mac L. Ricketts to Theodor Lavi, letter of 7 November 1981, in *Theodor Lavi în corespondență*, 334.
35. Theodor Lavi to Mac L. Ricketts, letter of 1 December 1981, ibid., 336.
36. Norman Manea, "Happy Guilt: Mircea Eliade, Fascism, and the Unhappy Fate of Romania," *The New Republic*, 5 August 1991.
37. Norman Manea was deported as a child, in 1941, by the Romanian fascist authorities allied with Nazi Germany, to the concentration camp in Transnistria. He returned to Romania in 1945 with the surviving members of his family. He was forced into exile in 1986. Now he is a Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College, in the USA.
38. Moshe Idel, *Mircea Eliade from Magic to Myth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 257.
39. Wilhelm Filderman (1882–1963) was a lawyer and the leader of the Romanian-Jewish community between the two World Wars, during the Holocaust period, and in the years following World War II. He was also a representative of the Jews in the Romanian parliament. For more details see Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs & Diaries*, edited by Jean Ancel (Tel Aviv: Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, vol. 1, *1900–1940*, 2004; vol. 2, *1940–1952*, 2015).
40. Simon Idal Schafferman (Păstorescu) (1903–1991), journalist, was born in Botoşani. He spent his childhood in Brăila. At a relatively young age, he started to write for newspapers such as *Curierul*, *Expresul*, *Dunărea de Jos*, *Mesagerul*, *Tribuna porturilor*, *Gazeta Meseriaşilor*, *Revista Plugarilor*, *Monitorul Brăilei*, and *Cotidianul*. In 1948

he moved to Bucharest, and continued to write for various newspapers. In 1963 Schafferman immigrated to Israel and became a contributor to several Romanian-language newspapers in Israel: *Viaţa Noastră*, *Mizug*, *Adevărul*, *Revista Mea, Facla Magazin*, all from Tel Aviv. He also contributed to *Toladot* and *Shevet Romania*. He was part of the group of researchers who, under the guidance of Theodor Lavi, developed the *Pinkas Ha-kehilot Romania* (*Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Romania*), published in Yad Vashem in 1968 and awarded the Israel Prize. He published the volume of essays and sketches *Drumuri fără întoarcere* (Roads of no return) (Jerusalem: n.p., 1979), as well as the monograph dedicated to Wilhelm Filderman: *Dr. W. Filderman: 50 de ani din istoria judaismului român* (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1986).

41. Born into a Jewish-Romanian family, Isac Ludo (1894–1973) was a Romanian writer and politician.
42. George Rosiano/Roşianu (1922–2013) was a journalist. In Romania he wrote for several newspapers, such as *Universul Sport*, *Viaţa*, *Tribuna Poporului*, and *Victoria*. In 1960 he left Romania and, after a year in Paris, he moved to the USA, where he wrote for *Micro Magazin* (between 1963 and 1997), and since 1997 for *Meridianul Românesc*.
43. George Rosiano to Simon Schafferman, letter of 30 May 1973, in *Intelectuali evrei şi presa exilului românesc*, edited by Mihaela Gligor and Miriam Caloianu (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2013), 77.
44. Marius Turda, "Romanian Eugenic Sub-Culture and the Allure of Biopolitics, 1918–1939," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 114 (2016): 36. Many of Turda's researches are dedicated to these topics. Marius Turda discussed the development of eugenics and biopolitics in early 1940s Romania in "Controlling the National Body: Ideas of Racial Purification in Romania, 1918–1944," in *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945*, edited by Christian Promitzer, Sevasti Trubeta, and Marius Turda (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2011), 325–350.
45. Turda, "Romanian Eugenic Sub-Culture," 30. Marius Turda is not the only Romanian historian who analyses this subject. See also Vladimir Solonari, "In the Shadow of Ethnic Nationalism: Racial Science in Romania," in *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe 1938–1945*, edited by Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, 2013), 259–286.
46. Turda, "Romanian Eugenic Sub-Culture," 34.
47. Especially the studies of Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, translated by Peter Heinegg (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, National Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca, NY–London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Paul A. Schapiro, "Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church," in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, edited by Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 136–172.
48. Among them, Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and*

the Soviet Union (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Florian Kührer-Wielach, "The Transylvanian Promise: Political Mobilisation, Unfulfilled Hope and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Interwar Romania," *European Review of History* 23, 4 (2016): 580–594; Constantin Iordachi and Blasco Sciarrino, "War Veterans, Demobilization and Political Activism: Greater Romania in Comparison," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 6, 1 (2017): 75–117.

49. Mihaela Gligor, "Reading Between the Lines: The Importance of Eliade's Correspondence," *Theory in Action: Journal of the Transformative Studies Institute* 9, 3 (2016): 10–11.
50. Gligor, "View of the World from Palas Street," 166–167.

Abstract

Cultural and Political Interactions in Interwar Romania

It is often said that the interwar Romanian society had a westernized intellectual elite, perfectly connected to what the culture of Western Europe meant at that time. Among the characteristics that defined the intellectual life of interwar Romania were dialogue and the desire to argue elegantly, eruditely, critically, originally, with interlocutors from different fields of humanities and/or sciences. Unfortunately, the effervescence of the interwar period also contains the sad story of a brilliant young generation which fell prey to the destructive passion of politics. Discovering the truth is crucial for two main reasons: we can have a complete image of the generation and we can solve the historical mystery of interwar Romania.

Keywords

interwar Romania, (in)tolerance, anti-Semitism, intellectuals, cultural and political interactions