

“Expressive Hatred, Magnificent Injustice”: Ion Vinea’s Pamphlets

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*“The pamphlet is the concave
side of poetry.”*
(*Ion Vinea*)

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IN ROMANIAN literature, the name of Ion Vinea is associated with the promotion of the historical avant-garde and with the experimentalism cultivated by the modernist journals. Alongside poetry and prose, a major component of his creation is represented by his newspaper articles: from 1913, the year of his debut in the review column of the *Rampa* (The Stage), and until after World War II, Vinea wrote for the newspapers almost on a daily basis, experiencing various bans on the journals for which he wrote, the interventions of the censorship office, general mobilizations, and even the arrest of newspaper owners and of his fellow journalists.

Ion Vinea’s journalistic activity seems to be naturally structured into decades, just like the generations of our post-war fiction: 1922–1932 at *Contemporanul* (The Contemporary), 1924–1934 at Eugen Filotti’s *Cuvântul liber* (Free Speech), at *Adevărul* (The Truth), *Cuvântul* (The Word), *Dreptatea* (Justice), and 1930–1940 at *Facla* (The Torch), bought from the former master N. D. Cocea and turned into a socialist newspaper.

Vinea's activity as a political journalist coincides with a time of historical effervescence, in the aftermath of World War I. Events took place in rapid succession, journalists saw the information of the public as their primary task, and the high circulation of newspapers turned journalists into celebrities of their time. The press was no longer in its infancy, and opinions, information, and fictional series were no longer featured on the same page. Professional informative genres reports or investigations, began to appear in the written press. The names of some great reporters of that time, from F. Brunea-Fox to Marius Mircu, became synonymous to the journalistic art and craft. Commentaries, personal notes, articles of opinion in general began to appeal to many of the great literary personalities of the time, who descended among the people and learned the craft of writing for the press. The discipline of the genre and the direct contact with objective reality, such as it was, instituted concision and authenticity as the main features of both information and opinion articles, favoring a "live" experience of the real.

Ion Vinea remained connected to this effervescence for at least two decades. His editorials, political commentaries, his pamphlets and his unflinchingly democratic-socialist views made him an authentic doctrinarian of the left, one of the few leftists of that time capable of separating between utopian designs and the Romanian priorities. Like any competent pamphleteer, Ion Vinea no longer wondered (unless for rhetorical purposes) who was to blame. Instead, he understood and argued that blame should be evenly distributed. It would seem that this is the perspective of all pamphleteers: they need no court ruling or direct confession; they just know those responsible and point them out, cultivating the image of disappointed prophets. Apart from the power of their words, pamphleteers also have this other power: they bestow upon themselves the right to decide who is guilty or not! Still, as opposed to poet Tudor Arghezi (who saw the whole world as flawed to the core, showing in his pamphlets the desperation of one who knows that nothing can be done and that his own words are utterly futile—hence, maybe, the bitter and devastating lyricism of *Poarta neagră* (The black gate), for instance), Vinea focuses his pamphlets on a specific target, fundamentally responsible for the evils of the world: the political system. Yet another difference has to do with the fact that with Arghezi the injustice, the mistake, the violation of codes may or may not have already taken place; as the world is itself fundamentally flawed, then a strict chronology is immaterial: even if it has not happened yet, the mistake will most likely occur in the future. Arghezi would write political pamphlets criticizing political events that had not yet taken place, just like he could write an ad hominem pamphlet without knowing the person in question. For Vinea, the political pamphlet is always post festum; the political system, ultimately responsible for the great

injustice of the social world (and only of the social world!), is minutely dissected, in all of its manifestations and components: the parliamentary system, government power, the electoral process, party journalism (and its consequence, the subservience of the press).

Pamphleteering Poetic Arts

THE ART of Vinea's pamphlets reflected the spirit of all modern poetic creations, not so much in terms of direct confessions (a sort of *ars poetica* adapted to the journalistic style), but rather through the constant cultivation of a certain kind of pamphlet, unchanged during Vinea's entire career. His unflinching vehemence is doubled by an unchanged formal model, almost identical in all of its manifestations. In the majority of cases, Vinea's pamphlets are "normal," sound, and blunt, colorful and unbound, moving freely between ghastly portrayals (which sometimes do not even spare the dead) and the animated scenes from editorial offices and cafés, sarcastically exposing the *scriveners* who gave the profession a bad name.

Quite possibly, Vinea turned to intellectual pamphlets when his nature sought to separate itself from the journalistic profession, when his poetic writing spilled into the other registers. From contemporary accounts we know that he wrote with difficulty, altering the text time and time again, a toil hardly comfortable with the agitated environment of newspaper offices. His finely tuned pamphlets could also be a personal response to this unbearable way of life, they might be seen as the outbursts of a delicate bohemian meant to counterbalance the desire for a comfortable and easy life with a cure of vehemence and scatology. In Vinea's writing we do find this aggressive side, this revolt that ignores the imperatives of decency and suspends intellectualism in favor of the naked truth.

Vinea's pamphlets lie between the bohemian refusal to become a literary scrivener and a firm ideological choice. The components of the pamphlets seem to come from both directions: the political pamphlets, directed against the liberal institutions, the parliamentary system, sometimes the monarchy, are joined by the gallery of portraits sketched by a pamphleteer skilled in the art of stylization, artistic caricature, and the grotesque. The rhetorical mechanisms of the pamphlet underlie both types; the intellectual drive, if at all present, is chiefly related to the insertion of a lyrical element in order to create a contrast and unleash the discourse.

The Journalistic Genre and the All-encompassing Lyricism

AS IN most cases, Vinea's pamphlets pre-dated his theoretical attempts and statements of intent. The journalist first wrote his pamphlets and only afterwards, after analyzing what had been published, came to theorize on the features of the genre. As an apprentice of T. Arghezi and N. D. Cocea, Vinea learned that pamphlets can be written even in the absence of a consecrated recipe or technique. Furthermore, the work of the eternally censored Cocea must have shown to him that openly calling oneself a pamphleteer could cause personal complications, from imprisonment to house arrest. It would have been therefore wiser to show discretion in his pamphleteering attacks or, at least, to avoid any negative consequences by adopting a more cautious position. But this was not something that Vinea was willing to do.

While his first pamphlets practically coincide with his debut as a journalist,¹ the first tentative poetics of the genre came relatively late, at a time when he had already gained a reputation as a journalist and had properly learned the lessons of Arghezi and Cocea. Vinea's early considerations about the art of the pamphlet, albeit manifestos veiled in avant-garde rhetoric, are similar to Arghezi's short pieces on poetic art: written as advice for beginners or for the occasional enemies, their sharp irony concealed underneath a string of metaphors, these professions of faith are praiseworthy first and foremost for the *honesty* of their programmatic nature.

The lyricism of the daily newspaper did not remain a mere rhetorical device for Vinea, whose poetic art described everything as one great poem: prose, poetry, and journalism alike. His understanding of the pamphlet is grounded in two axioms: the pamphlet was a literary genre (pamphlets were literature because, as most representatives of the avant-garde argued, journalism was literature, more so than any novel²), and it was fundamentally lyrical in nature. We see here once again the dual nature of Vinea's fiction: on the one hand, the spirit of the avant-garde, on the other hand, a broader literary modernism, which alters the paradigm and restructures the criteria for the recognition of works according to genre.

By including the pamphlet among the other literary genres, Vinea demonstrated, at least in part, his manifest support of avant-garde poetics. We know that the representatives of the avant-garde expected the journalistic genres to replace the slow and reactionary traditional novels, and lyricism, in its brutal sincerity, became the only form of expression: "I'm writing out of sheer exasperation with life," claimed the young Geo Bogza, while Vinea himself, in a text that was to become one of the most famous manifestos of the Romanian avant-garde, set the terms of the substitution: "THUS: the death of the epic novel

and of the psychological novel / the anecdote and the sentimental novella / realism, exoticism, epic / shall remain the province of skilled reporters (A good daily report can today supplant any long adventure or analytical novel).³³ If in poetry and prose Vinea is far from assuming the program of a true avant-garde artist,⁴ his position with regard to the pamphlet could also be inferred from his decision (made in the spirit of the avant-garde, at least) to include journalism among the fields of literature.

Seen as a “body meant to participate, with all of its senses, to the rhythms and the rumors of unanimous life,”³⁵ journalism belongs to literature by virtue of two essential coordinates—one regarding the changes in reception (a report is enough to quench the public’s thirst for stories and facts), and another that comes to individuate the text (with a recovery of *style*). The former has to do with the substitution mechanism mentioned in connection to the avant-garde manifesto of 1924: journalism deals with *events* and *facts*, previously the province of prose (chiefly of the novel), but which readers no longer look for/identify in the great literature, as they are provided by newspaper reports: “Factual histories are no longer of interest, because they have been successfully replaced by the reports of the daily newspapers. The public appetite for stories is fully satisfied in this fashion . . . The news reports are the great competitors of the novels.”³⁶ Following up on the avant-garde slogan “Let the Reporter come!”, the previously non-literary genres are granted a new status, within a logic whereby a paradigm that privileged the *grand récit* is replaced by another, of rapid, concentrated, and rhythmic information. One avant-garde manifesto turned the elementary school exercise (*Underline the subject with one line and the predicate with two lines*⁷) into an entire poetics: the exclusion of the non-functional descriptive and of the digression, the placement of action, of dynamism, before anything else (the verb gets the “two lines”...), the maximum concentration of expression in the skeleton phrase. We can easily see in these features the elements required of an informative piece. Hence the conclusion bluntly stated by Vinea: “Nowadays, the report has become a literary genre. The series, the adventure novel, and the realist tale belong to it, and enjoy the same advantages... Today, a reporter is not expected to exceed the qualities of a novelist, whose equal he must be in terms of imagination and astuteness of observation.”³⁸ The movement is obviously an act of reparation: the newspaper report catches up with the “great” genres (consecrated by practice and by literary historians), grounded in the same structures and circumstances (imagination and astuteness of observation); still, it has all the chances of turning into a movement of complete substitution: “A literature can splendidly exist even in the absence of novels.”³⁹

“Cursing Is the Most Difficult of All Language Arts”

GENERATED MAYBE in part by the journalistic fashion of that time,¹⁰ the “meta-narrative” articles, performing a sort of internal analysis of the genre, are quite frequent in the work of Ion Vinea. Their forms vary: pieces that are fully devoted to pamphleteering and which any pamphleteer feels he must write in order to legitimize his craft,¹¹ but also fragments on invective, for instance, or simply on cursing, found in his political or literary pamphlets. They coalesce to form the image of the genre as it was understood by its staunch practitioner. Just like Arghezi, Vinea reflected upon the mechanisms governing the genre of the pamphlet; still, as opposed to the author of the *Icoane de lemn* (Wooden icons), he left few direct confessions, few pieces that clearly highlight his personal style, deliberately or playfully.

Vinea never referred to his writing in the first person, avoided “confessions” and seemed to have little appetite for them. Always concerned with professional ethics and with the status of journalism, he wrote few texts that offer an insider’s view, in a strongly subjective vein, of his own profession. Could we be dealing here with the same “carelessness” that got him involved in one of the most widely debated Romanian literary “enigmas,” the permanent refusal of the writer to publish his literary work? Critics have long discussed this refusal, seeking to explain why the author of *Ora fântânilor* (The hour of fountains) and of *Lunatecii* (Lunatics) long neglected to publish his writings in volume format, to take care of their editing and especially of his “image with the posterity.” Several hypotheses have been formulated: from the alleged indulgence in a masculine-sensual bohemian attitude, to the proud refusal to become a “classic,” from the (underestimated) image of the mediocrity of his own literature, to the impossibility of breaking free from the agitated world of daily journalism. Rumors circulated at the time about brilliant poems polished and further refined on a daily basis, mention was made of the hundreds of articles whose writing prevented Vinea from pursuing his literary interests, while others talked about a mysterious proxy or about a book that was to be published only several decades after the author’s death.¹²

The rare verbs in the first person found in his articles are also a rhetorical mask, sometimes exposed in a gesture of self-irony, otherwise intended to highlight the convention, ruthlessly dubbed “rhetorical hypocrisy.”¹³ When featured under the guise of “myself,” in a deliberately ambiguous fashion the character of the pamphleteer seeks to reduce the excesses, to strive for moderation, to abandon violence for a moment: “of course, when it comes to the Brătianu brothers, only their death shall set us free. *Calm down! This is not an instigation to murder! I am too prudent to issue such an exhortation and too knowledgeable to*

believe that anyone would really listen to me."¹⁴ It is seemingly a recovery of the moment before the adoption of the conventions of the pamphlet: before becoming "he who speaks firmly in our behalf, for all of us," he wanted to be just a moderate and gentle "I." But it is all a game of anti-sentences: the exaggerated care for pointing out the differences and for taming the discourse ("I am too prudent...") is a clear indication of the fact that his words have the exact opposite meaning, feigning innocence merely in order to highlight the seriousness of the discourse.

Vinea's opinions on the pamphlet (found in his *ars poetica* pieces or simply stated whenever "the point needed to be made") reveal the image of a genre defined by an overflow of expressiveness. This seems to be the existential condition of the pamphlet, the fundamental way in which it can gain distinctiveness, and the only chance of avoiding the "non-journalistic" (and therefore, for Vinea, "non-literary") types of discourse, such as the denunciation, the pornographic or obscene text, verbal aggression. But what is actually this expressiveness and how come Vinea chose it as the defining (and sometimes fully sufficient) feature of the genre?

In the most programmatic of his articles, "Pamflet și pamfletari" (Pamphlets and pamphleteers), we read that

*form generates expressiveness: irony, sarcasm, invective; the common denominator of pamphlets is aggression, and all those interested in maintaining a certain hierarchy and status quo have hijacked this name and applied it to any text that shows the truth. This is wrong. Pamphlets are defined by form, and therefore by their expressiveness. The truth stated in flat sentences is less convincing and active than a well-written infamy. Truth is easily mistaken for cynicism on account of its strong effect on hypocritical minds. It often serves as a foundation for pamphlets, but only in part.*¹⁵

Therefore, we see that the mechanisms of aggression are powerless in the absence of good writing, and this can easily disregard any consideration as to the truthfulness of the stated facts. Just like any other true pamphleteer, Vinea is immune to ethics. The pamphlet is not a product that can be judged in terms of morality; it can only be approached from the vantage point of the "aesthetic autonomy" of expression. Hence its strong literary character: as with Maiorescu's understanding of the work of art, the pamphlet lies beyond good and evil, for its internal law is aesthetic rather than moral in nature. The formal expressiveness mentioned by Vinea tips the balance between infamy and truth in favor of the former; only "hypocritical minds" mistake truth for cynicism, while raw (and only raw) aggressiveness, not cast in an expressive mold, does not make

a pamphlet. Violent denunciations, abominable deeds, human monstrosity, none are sufficient to give substance to the pamphlet, just like a good subject does not necessarily make a good novel. Showing surprising traditionalism, Vinea describes talent as a felicity condition: “*had that twit had any talent, his article would have been remembered by all as an act of magnificent injustice, an aesthetic excuse, a grotesque representation of expressive hatred, a pamphlet of horrors, no less savory than black cherries.* The critical article is a lyrical poem. Hymn or pamphlet—what’s the difference? *It is only its expressive force that engenders and supports it.*”¹⁶ Expressively presented, the injustice becomes magnificent (somewhat less unjust, isn’t it?), and the “pamphlet of horrors” is savory (Vinea’s comparison evokes both savor and scent, and the “horror” is fascinatingly black, like the “mulberry of the breast” in Arghezi’s *Psalm*). At any rate, the “aesthetic excuse” is not just an excuse: it so envelops and supports the text that all opposition between hatred and admiration—between pamphlet and hymn—is cancelled and reduced to a mere difference in intensity (once again, to the advantage of the former): “[the pamphlet] is the concave side of poetry, it is the inner shape of the poetic drive. Its core is *love, to the extreme point where it becomes hatred*, its mechanism is revolt.”¹⁷ It is savor that saves the pamphlet from horror; similarly, lyrically expressed hatred separates it from the mere verbal aggression, turning it into a paradoxical form of love, a sort of unrestricted *amour-haine*.

When the force of expression (which for Vinea, as we have seen, is synonymous to all-encompassing lyricism) is absent, the act of revolt, no matter how energetic, remains futile and ignoble. The young twit Mircea Eliade “has pointlessly wasted his wits, efforts, and learning in the act of writing,”¹⁸ failing miserably: “he poured in enough malice,” but he did it without talent! What we know as an ineffable category becomes thus mandatory: “talent” (probably understood here as the power to create a text defined by style and expressiveness) generates the pamphleteering effect; in its absence, “the aggressor finds under his blade just the shadow of the victim, cast on a fence.”¹⁹ Another proof of ineffectiveness is the absence of an echo: the article about Arghezi’s *Cuvinte potrivite* (Suitable words) will never be remembered, will stir no echo among the public—and this is absolutely essential according to Vinea’s poetics of the pamphlet. The reading public is the ultimate recipient of the pamphlet and the main benchmark for its value: without a reaction (indignation or applause, it matters not, as the difference is merely in degree...) the text fails, in utter impotence. *Manque de pointe*, the main indicator of failure for a genre which seeks to stir rather than inform.

There is an interdependence between the pamphleteer and the reader of a newspaper (and not just because theories of mass communication so claim): if

“the pamphleteer becomes affable when speaking to the public opinion,” he is also “forced to spare the public and believe in them. For instance, in the eyes of the pamphleteer, the reading public must be pure and sacred; otherwise, if the pamphleteer treats the public with outrageous sincerity, he will be cast out, chastised, attacked from every angle.”²⁰ Here as well Vineia comes close to the definition of the genre devised by specialists: in order to be effective, the voice of the pamphleteer must appear related to the voice of the exasperated and revolted “multitudes.” The convention tells us that this individuation within a chorus of alleged malcontents (who do not actually exist, in itself an exasperating situation) is the only source of legitimacy for the pamphleteer: he is the self-proclaimed herald and spokesperson of a revolt and frustration that he and he alone sees as collective: “empowered by no one, always going against the institutional discourse, the pamphlet is the expression of an imperative coming from within.”²¹ If the role is disregarded and the pamphleteer turns against the “masses,” then he basically compromises his own status, losing all legitimacy: if the reading public is no longer “pure and sacred,” then on whose behalf is his attack?

Vinea also realizes the dangers of exaggerated identification:

*However, a pamphlet becomes suspicious when it calls upon the arbitration of the all-too-sovereign masses. Sovereign judges and executioners, as we saw in '89, when after a few brief sentences uttered by Desmoulins the victims were dragged out and hanged by the nearest lamppost. When Marat's obscene words and his tavern eloquence became law for both praetors and crowd. The pamphlet finds a favorable framework in the delicate balance between powers, but in balance nonetheless. Only thus can it maintain the harmony of a literary genre—with immediate effects on opinions and sometimes on actions.*²²

Such statements come to distance the image of the pamphlet from the standards of the genre: first of all, the “all-too-sovereign masses” upset the balance of interdependence—the masses no longer need to be imagined by the pamphleteer, as they are already in a position where they can directly express their revolt. Then, and more importantly, what passes for pamphlet in a context such as that of the French Revolution (with Desmoulins and Marat as the main negative examples) fails to meet the essential condition of expressiveness set by Vineia: the sentences are too “brief,” the words are “obscene,” the eloquence is that of the “tavern.” Only a carefully crafted style, elaborate and rhythmic phrasing, and superior rhetoric are likely to ensure the expressiveness of the pamphlet. Finally, if such a discourse leads to murder, then it violently abandons the autonomous status of a literary genre, monstrously entering the realm

of the “real,” governed by other rules than those of aesthetic harmony. Such a discourse is no longer a pamphlet, it is a denunciation—and therefore despicable. Only “sometimes,” argued Vinea, does the pamphlet achieve immediate effects in terms of concrete actions. What grants it cohesion and stability is its ambivalent nature: a literary genre which is at the same time a genre of opinion.

For Vinea, just like for Arghezi, the main device responsible for the effects of the pamphlet is the “artistic curse.” Granted aesthetic status and creating an effect of silent admiration, like any work of art that knows no ethics, the *expressively phrased insult* was seen by interwar pamphleteers as the supreme measure of poetic talent. Why this fascination for the genre and for its main instrument? Definitely not just because of a modernist fad that made little distinction between the general fascination with *La Charogne*, *Flori de mucigai* (Flowers of mould) and for *Poemul-incektivă* (The invective poem) just because they are all *à rebours* and likely to make the petty bourgeois wince. There is, of course, a certain indulgence in abusing common sense, but this is not enough to justify such a superlative abundance of the genre. Equally unsatisfactory is an ethnic explanation, postulating a Romanian culture fascinated by (self)destructive impulses. We are dealing instead with a fascination with the difficult craft of “cursing in style,” for that test of skill that involves the refinement of the basest linguistic material into authentic literary art. In a literature of shallow encomia that owed little to the heritage of Cambronne,²³ the interwar pamphlet came not just to “spice things up” a bit but also to set a new benchmark for poetry. Postulating the complete identification with the poetic genre, Vinea devised firm hierarchies and performance criteria: “Cursing is the most difficult of all language arts, and its profitable and exquisite practice requires a different individual, a different blood, a different voice, a different tone, a different inspiration!”²⁴ Individual-blood-voice-tone-inspiration: we have here a synthetic portrayal of the ideal pamphleteer, the only one capable of mastering the ambivalent nature of the pamphlet (the *profitability* and *exquisiteness* pair echoing the joint aspects of journalistic genre/literary genre). Personality and temperament, firm rhetoric and, finally, inspiration (an unavoidable requirement for any form of poetry, as definitively postulated by the Romantic artists), these are for Vinea the features of the ideal pamphleteer.

In the absence of these features, the author of invectives remains merely obscene and becomes the object of ridicule. And when such a person happens to be Ion I. C. Brătianu (the liberal prime minister), Vinea responds with an energetic pamphlet on the better usage of invective in politics and in art.²⁵ First of all, cursing is reduced to a symptom of senility: it lacks temperament and energy, it is but a momentary lapse of reason, a reason previously displayed as... silence. The mask of a padishah, of a “somnolent and bloody caliph,”

maintained with the help of a Sphinx-like silence, breaks into pieces: Brătianu loses control in two successive speeches, calling his opponents “dogs” and “mad dogs.” Presently on familiar ground, Vinea the pamphleteer responds as a connoisseur and a master of the art: “Instead of finesse . . . the insulting epithet from the vocabulary of an old wife, dressed in the fanciest of garbs . . . to demonstrate how proud the poor old man was to have come up with such a *trouvaille*. Oh, the utter disappointment! It is like a novel in which the lover finds the maiden to be an abject whore.”²⁶ Being merely insulting, the epithet used by Ionel (Ion I. C.) Brătianu is unavoidably feeble: the expressiveness of the pamphlet requires one to move beyond trivial vulgarity and devise a sophisticated construct (starting from the old principle whereby the figure is defined as a slippage, a “gimmick”). As accusations go, “dogs” and “mad dogs” are so mundane that, according to Vinea, they come to have a paradoxical effect: instead of harming their target, their turn against the one that voiced them and make him the trivial object of contempt.

The reception effect is further highlighted in a pamphlet related to the one on Ion Brătianu²⁷: the dominant feature of the speeches made in Bacău and Deva, despite their “fictional and rhetorical glory” which amounted only to the “sudden vehemence of the big boss, unable to restrain himself and obviously slipping into senility,” is taken up by an underling, Chirculescu,²⁸ “congenitally senile . . . , spewing obscenities and shouting infernal threats . . . In politics, Chirculescu would have had the base and sluggish existence of any weak and dull creature, had it not been for this phenomenon of literary extraction that allowed him to ape his boss, pathetically and foaming at the mouth.”²⁹ Spitting and screaming, aping and threatening, the poor Chirculescu could not be farther from the poetic nobility of cursing: his limited means hopelessly confine him to the “base” world of the dull (more than stupidity, this involves the inability to come up with enticing expletives...). Consequently, a pamphlet that initially exposed the pathetic case of “literary” influence ended in an act of justice: those ignorant of the noble art of cursing are expelled with a phrase that mimics the only kind of discourse they know and understand: “Careful, minister! Innocuous verbal outbursts and sudden slips of the tongue are only worthy of a brief and crude response. Do not leave yourself open to that. Go to...!”³⁰ Brief and crude, the naked curse is the basest form of invective. From this ground zero, as vehemence is turned into art, true pamphlets are born.

Interestingly enough, the same naked expletive is also seen by Vinea as defining the ultimate level of the genre—not the level of high lyrical art, but the level that, once reached, brings about the very cancellation of the genre. In a tentative attempt at praising the expressive potential of the Romanian language, Vinea identifies the same blunt, two-word expression, as the supreme level reached by the pamphlet: “Romanian language and sensitivity offer ex-

cellent material for pamphlets. The language also has a blunt synthetic expression, in two and a quarter words. The day a journalist dares use it in print against a political opponent would mark the death of the Romanian pamphlet. It will have reached the highest artistic form of aggression and contempt.”³¹

What is the difference between the crude “Go to...!” and the “blunt synthetic expression” mentioned above? Why is Chirculescu demeaned by the former, while the hypothetical bold journalist achieves thus the ultimate artistic level? What separates between the two expletives—both equally violent, and equally hollow? There is only one possible answer: the second one comes in written form, as part of a discourse structured according to specific rules and methods, in keeping with a specific style (the journalistic style), having a target readership (the political opponent, but also the reading public) and an argumentative order. The inclusion of the two-and-a-quarter words in a written discourse gives them new meaning and rhetorical substance, makes them the object of intellectual scrutiny and forces them to withstand it. We find here the two boundaries of the pamphlet: from the complete absence of expression to its ultimate synthetic transfiguration, in the mandatory presence of discourse.

Becoming a Pamphleteer

IT IS only seldom and with difficulty that Vinea turns himself into the object of fiction; whenever that happens, the features of the alter-ego are so transparent as to render pointless any analysis: Lucu Silion from the novel *Lunatecii*, Jean, the idealistic candidate on campaign from “Tempi passati,”³² the journalist Fabriciu, “my young friend,”³³ all have something of the voice, the habits, the passions and the concerns of their creator. For the purposes of the present study, the most interesting is the latter character: Fabriciu is the character in a story that tells of the early formative years of the journalist. This is as close to a confession as we can get with Vinea (who seemingly abhorred the genre), the only direct one he was willing to make and, quite significantly, the only one in which we read about a pamphleteering tradition with which he identified.

Devised in four episodes,³⁴ this comprehensive confession written in a style reminiscent of Voltaire’s has a manifestly didactic purpose:

Consequently, as far as the reading public is concerned, these notes serve a purely practical purpose: the young men attracted by the shallow glory of daily journalism must be warned against a number of adventures and flights of fancy, otherwise natural at their age, but somewhat more deceptive and frequent in

*the paper landscape of journalism. Should just one individual pay heed to our words, we would think that we have been extremely successful. This because, as we know, ready-made experiences are of little to no use to anybody...*³⁵

The third episode in this meaningful tale about the pitfalls behind the façade of the journalistic profession tells the tumultuous story of the young Fabriciu, employed by a left-wing newspaper as an apprentice journalist to an editor-in-chief “famous for his many political arrests.” The editor in question bears the transparent name of Mihoară (N. D. Cocea used the pseudonym Nicoară al Lumei). Helped by his “extraordinary” talent for polemics—and quickly receiving a fifty percent pay raise—Fabriciu is praised for his pieces, “true masterpieces of the genre,” and rewarded with the professional affection of the energetic editor:

*Presently, his big night was celebrated here and there by handshakes and, invariably, by the always different congratulations of the editor: enthusiastic praise, sudden congratulations, effusions, a hug. Praise with the eyes and the hands raised towards the heavens—the editor was a geyser spewing, in a silvery flow, admiration over Fabriciu. Quiet praise, prostrate praise, pious praise, as if the merry voice of Mihoară sought to tell him: “What can I say? You are amazing! But you left me simply dumbstruck...” Or measured, analytical, and precise praise: Mihoară was once again the theorist, the professional.*³⁶

Overwhelmed by all this newfound glory, like any word crafter, the young Fabriciu (also a mock alter-ego of the other great naïf, Fabrice del Longo) begins to believe in his own omnipotence. One thing puzzles him though: how come that his merciless lightning blasts had no effect whatsoever on the oligarchy they targeted on a daily basis? Where was the power of the fiery word, if nothing actually changed? And then the disappointing explanation:

Mihoară was on almost friendly terms with a number of ministers, deputies, senators, and even bankers, which was more than strange . . . At times, the editor would ask him to ‘go easy’ on someone whom Fabriciu knew for a fact to be an absolute scumbag. Sometimes, such appeals came after a meeting with the intended victim, a minister or a banker. Then the editor would explain: “The interests of the newspaper... We need some support in the Cabinet. A couple of days ago there was talk in the Council of Ministers about a ban on our newspaper... Had it not been for our friend I. G. D., there would have been no issue today!” . . . Still, Mihoară confused him beyond measure. One morning, he would set him against the same friend in government, and after

*yet another visit he would say: "Have you read I. G. D. speech? That slime! Take him apart!" And, resolutely, Fabriciu would spew out invectives under the title The Phanariot.*³⁷

Bitter and deliberately self-ironic, this is the lesson for the apprentice journalists: the rules of the game exclude the ideal of consistency (when they do not completely rule out any ideal). It is a world of survival by way of compromise, stunning the young man confident of his "talent" and of its effects. The revelation of this mechanism once again serves a didactic purpose; furthermore, it also indicates a major stage in the definition of the relation between the pamphleteer and his target: "Devoted to the main goal, the undermining of the oligarchy, of capitalism and of dictatorship, he was less interested in people."³⁸ The abstract nature of his principles, the "high" goals, do not require the pamphleteer to show consistency in his opinions. "Reconsideration" is an intrinsic part of the game.

In the journalistic activity of Vinea, the pamphlets, political or otherwise, occupy the same place as *Icoane de lemn* and *Poarta neagră* do in the work of Tudor Arghezi: the ultimate level of pamphleteering expressiveness and, with it, the completion of a style. Had they enjoyed the fortunate fate of the iconoclastic texts written by Arghezi (which were collected in volume format soon after they appeared in periodicals), their entry into the field of literature would have been faster and more fertile.



Notes

1. If we disregard the rather caustic jabs found in the "Flocăieli" (Dressing-down) column of the *Facla* (no. 32–46, November–December 1913) or the response to an article by Constantin Răuleț, where the polemic exchange turns manifestly into pamphlet, then the first piece of this kind written by I. Vinea is "Inspectorele artelor," *Seara* 4, 1621 (24 July 1914). Cf. Ion Vinea, *Opere IV: Publicistica 1913–1919*, edited with notes and commentary by Elena Zaharia-Filipaș (Bucharest: Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, Academia Română, Institutul de Istorie și Teorie Literară "G. Călinescu," 2001), 356.
2. For a history of the reasons why the genre was excluded from the poetics of an age of the avant-garde, see Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Le surréalisme et le roman* (Lausanne: L'âge d'Homme, 1983).
3. I. Vinea, "Manifest activist către tinerime," *Contemporanul* 3, 46 (16 May 1924).
4. The most comprehensive label applied to his literary work is the one devised by Basil Munteanu: "Vinea sau avangarda elegiacă" (Vinea or the elegiac avant-garde). See *Panorama literaturii române contemporane*, ed. Eugen Lozovan and Ruxandra D.

- Shelden, trans. Vlad Alexandrescu (Cleveland–Bucharest: Crater, 1996), 204–205. Furthermore, the distance between the avant-garde poetical rhetoric and Vinea’s creation is clear from the very beginning, even for his opponents. Thus, in the doctoral thesis of C. Emilian, the first vehement criticism of the Romanian avant-garde, Vinea is one of the few to be relatively spared. For a detailed analysis of Emilian’s position, see Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2007), 308 sq.
5. “Gazetarul biurocrat,” *Cuvântul liber*, 2nd ser., 2, 7 (14 February 1925).
 6. I. Valerian, “De vorbă cu d. Ion Vinea,” *Viața literară* 2, 51 (14 May 1927).
 7. “Prefață,” *Alge*, 1 (13 September 1930).
 8. “Jurnalist și romancier,” *Contemporanul* 5, 70 (November 1926).
 9. Quoted in Constantina Brezu-Stoian, “Prefață,” in Ion Vinea, *Publicistică literară* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1977), 17.
 10. The magazines (literary, but also the supplements to the general ones) surprisingly often include pieces devoted to journalistic genres such as the report, the interview, and the pamphlet.
 11. In Vinea’s case, the best known (and consequently most analyzed) fully programmatic article is “Pamflet și pamfletari,” published in *Cuvântul* 4, 1249 (13 October 1928), reprinted in *Curentul* 2, 459 (29 April 1929), under the title “Diatriba,” and in *Contemporanul* 8, 85 (10 November 1929), under the 1928 title. The following quotations are from *Cuvântul* 4, 1249 (13 October 1928).
 12. For a real image on the genesis of Vinea’s myth see I. Hâncu, introductory study to Ion Vinea, *Săgeata și Arabescul (articole și pamflete)* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1984).
 13. “Un proscris?” *Cuvântul* 3, 935 (23 November 1927).
 14. “Senilitate,” *Facla* 6, 50 (24 June 1925) (italics ours).
 15. “Pamflet și pamfletari” (italics ours).
 16. “Critical,” *Adevărul* 40, 13347 (25 June 1927) (italics ours). The target is the young Mircea Eliade, responsible for an unsatisfactory review to Arghezi’s *Cuvinte potrivite: Cuvântul* 3, 788 (19 June 1927).
 17. “Pamflet și pamfletari” (italics ours).
 18. “Critical.”
 19. Ibid.
 20. “Pamflet și pamfletari.”
 21. Marc Angenot, *La parole pamphlétaire: Typologie des discours modernes* (Paris: Payot, 1982), 39.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Pierre Cambronne, a commander in Napoleon’s guard, gained immortality not just for the famous reply given at Waterloo to British general Colville (“The guard dies, but does not surrender”), but also for what followed after this glorious retort: when the British general insisted—demanding a proper capitulation, sword down—Cambronne said without hesitation: “Merde!” The shameful word is now remembered as *le mot de Cambronne*, showing that rudeness, if heroic, can be seen as less crude.
 24. I. Vinea, “Un caz de influență literară,” *Facla* 7, 64 (10 July 1925).
 25. “Senilitate.”

26. Ibid.
27. “Un caz de influență literară.”
28. Nicolae D. Chirculescu, minister for Labor, Cooperation, and Social Security between 1923 and 1926.
29. “Un caz de influență literară.”
30. Ibid.
31. “Pamflet și pamfletari.”
32. *Cuvântul* 4, 1322 (25 December 1928).
33. “Stânga sau dreapta? (ori Mic tratat de gazetărie) III,” *Cuvântul* 4, 1268 (1 November 1928).
34. Only three were published: episodes I – “Candid: sau mic tratat de gazetărie,” *Cuvântul* 4, 1241 (5 October 1928), III (see supra), and IV “Mic tratat de gazetărie. Stânga sau dreapta,” *Cuvântul* 4, 1275 (8 November 1928).
35. “Candid.”
36. “Stânga sau dreapta III.”
37. Ibid. Fate (or the rules of fiction?) made it so that no pamphlets against I. G. Duca can be found in the outrageously titled column. The only major name targeted during this early period (“left alone,” then “taken apart”) is that of Take Ionescu: after an extremely laudatory piece—“Intransigență,” *Chemarea* 2, 72 (27 June 1919)—, Vinea makes the politician the subject of a pamphlet, sparing no blows: “Haimanaua,” *Chemarea* 3, 330 (3 April 1920). I. G. Duca would be targeted later, when the liberal politician served as minister of the Interior and then as prime minister. See “Criza e deschisă,” *Dreptatea* 2, 132 (23 March 1928), where I. G. Duca is a “cunning handyman of the dynasty, direct heir to the methods of the late Ion, showing his willingness to go to the very extreme,” in “De ce să demisionez?” *Dreptatea*, 2, 133 (24 March 1928), and especially “Sindicul unui faliment politic,” *Facla* 12, 396 (16 February 1931).
38. “Stânga sau dreapta III.”

Abstract

“Expressive Hatred, Magnificent Injustice”: Ion Vinea’s Pamphlets

The paper presents the journalistic activity of Ion Vinea, whose name is chiefly associated with the promotion of the historical avant-garde and with the experimentalism cultivated by the modernist journals. However, alongside poetry and prose, a major component of his creation is represented by his newspaper articles, of particular interest being his pamphlets. Included in the lyrical genre (according to their author, this genre was the only one capable of encompassing all literary aspects of modernity), the pamphlets published by Ion Vinea emerge as a fortunate combination between his temperament, firm rhetoric, and lyrical expressiveness. Only thus do pamphlets acquire the image of a genre defined by boundless expressiveness: an existential condition, a way to gain autonomy and the only chance of avoiding the “non-journalistic” (and therefore “non-literary”) types of discourse, such as the denunciation, the pornographic or obscene text, verbal aggression.

Keywords

literary pamphlet, Romanian interwar journalism, Ion Vinea, poetic art, literary genres