

RUXANDRA  
CESEREANU

## Spite: The Romanian Extreme Right

---

*In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the much touted Romanian tolerance was notably absent as a character trait, at least at the political level.*

---

### Ruxandra Cesereanu

Associate professor with the Comparative Literature Department of the Faculty of Letters belonging to Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Poet, prose writer, essayist. Author, among other titles, of the books **Imaginarul violent al românilor** (The violent Romanian imaginary) (2003) and **Decembrie '89: Deconstrucția unei revoluții** (December '89: The deconstruction of a revolution) (2004).

### Besmirching the Writers

**D**URING THE interwar period and during the Second World War, Romanian society became itself ill with the far right sickness that was raging across Europe. The Romanian press became violently anti-Semitic, language became perverted and twisted, and personal attacks and invectives became accepted journalistic norms. In their turn, Romanian writers were also caught by the wave of history, splitting into two camps. The anti-Semitic ones became aggressive and proceeded to write horribly vituperating pieces, with pamphleteering cynicism. At times, the opposing camp itself resorted to verbal abuse. In what follows, in the form of a short history,<sup>1</sup> unfolding like a movie script, I shall present a few pieces selected from the press of that time and featuring violent exchanges between writers, as well as attacks against writers, cultural personalities, and others.

In 1932, in *Calendarul*, writer Camil Petrescu was attacked by Toma Vlădescu, who called him an “old maid,” a “ludicrous idiot,” “catastrophically stupid,” “imbecile,” “frighteningly cre-

tinous.” In 1933, in *Axa*, the writers and, in general, all intellectuals who had not endorsed the anti-Semitism of the far right Legion of Archangel Michael were described as the “manure of democracy,” “scum,” “poisonous mushrooms,” polluters, animated corpses. In 1934, in *Credința*, Sandu Tudor accused two writers belonging to the Criterion group (Petre Comarnescu and Mircea Vulcănescu) of homosexuality and called them “filthy,” “masturbators,” crooks, barren and, of course, perverts. The conflict had started for political and cultural reasons, and the occult interests behind it burst out in a most disgraceful fashion. In the same periodical and also in 1934, Zaharia Stancu called the two “knights of Courland” (“cur” meaning “ass” in Romanian), hinting at their homosexuality (interestingly enough, the phrase was rediscovered in 1990 and copiously used in the pages of the extremist periodical *România Mare*; the only difference is that Courland changed into Kurlandia). In a 1936 issue of *Revista mea*, Radu Gyr also attacked the members of the Criterion group, whom he saw as pale and forlorn individuals, stumbling around in total disarray. In 1936, in *Vestitorii*, the same Radu Gyr called E. Lovinescu the “lubricious hag of corrupt writing” (because Lovinescu had allegedly challenged the myth of Eminescu); later on, Nicolae Roșu was to call Lovinescu an “old bastard,” while in 1940, in *Sfarmă-piatră*, the same critic was portrayed by Ovidiu Papadima as a “chubby fellow” driven by the “rapacious claws” of the Jewish circles. Also in *Sfarmă-piatră*, in 1937, critic Pompiliu Constantinescu (phonetically nicknamed “Fonfilă” and “Fonfilică Prostantinescu,” roughly in the sense of “blabbering idiot”) was described as the “spawn” of “Oegen Lovinescu.” In 1936, in the pages of the periodical *Gândirea*, Nichifor Crainic talked about the widespread “debauchery” present in Romanian literature as a consequence of the Jewish influence, while in 1937, in an issue of *Buna Vestire*, Toma Vlădescu expressed his pleasure at seeing Romanian literature cleansed of its pornographers—writers such as, for instance, Geo Bogza (who had been placed under arrest). During the same year, in *Sfarmă-piatră*, Ovidiu Papadima described the alleged pornographers as “humongous pigs, lucid pigs . . . selling swill for literature just like others sell sausages”; the same writers were also called “traders in excrement.” In 1937, in *Gândirea*, Nichifor Crainic called C. Rădulescu-Motru the “philosophizing dummy” of all “lewd writers.” That same year, in *Buna Vestire*, Rădulescu-Motru was dubbed “Rădulescu-Mortu” (dead man) by Toma Vlădescu. G. Călinescu had been called “greedy scum” in a 1932 issue of *Axa*. In 1939, in *Porunca Vremii*, he was described as a “gravedigger,” a “soloist of the ghetto” and a “pornographer,” writing for the “Haznal” (“Cesspit,” the nickname given to the *Jurnalul literar*), because his monographs had allegedly diminished the myths of Eminescu and of Creangă, and also because his own fiction was seen as obscene. In 1936, in *Sfarmă-piatră*, Tudor

Arghezi was attacked by Vintilă Horia, who wrote about the “pornographic quagmire” found in the book of poems called *Flori de mucigai* (Mildew flowers) and described Arghezi’s verse as “disgusting and muddy,” delineated by “rotting fences.” One year later, in *Rânduiala*, Arghezi was described by Victor Puiu Gârcineanu as a “guinea pig” of the Jewry, a “degenerate,” a diabolical “pornographer” and a “moral monster,” prostituting himself and “rotten to the bone.” Arghezi was similarly portrayed in 1948 by Sorin Toma in the series called “Poezia putrefacției sau putrefacția poeziei” (The poetry of putrefaction or the putrefaction of poetry), this time from the vantage point of the communist doctrine. During the period in question, one of the main targets of vituperating criticism was writer Mihail Sadoveanu. In a 1936 issue of *Porunca Vremii*, N. Crevedia called him an “unparalleled yokel, a teller of tall tales, a cowherd, a pig herder,” making fun of his plump figure (“an ass the size of a truck”). Also in 1936 and in the same newspaper, Sadoveanu’s corpulence is once again mocked (he is “fleshy”), he is deemed to sport the belly and the fat neck of a Freemason and is called an “apostate,” readers being urged to stone and jeer him. In 1937, the same periodical called Sadoveanu “Jidoveanu” (“jidov” meaning “kike”) and invited readers to burn his books. As to the writer himself, he was to be branded on the forehead and pilloried. They also called him a poisonous “asp,” arguing that libraries needed to be cleansed of his books. In 1937, in an issue of *Sfarmă-piatră*, A. Gregorian claimed that Sadoveanu had sold his soul to “Beelzebub” and mocked his corpulence: “obese apparition,” with “several chins,” a “walking corpse”; in a sick hyperbole, Sadoveanu is called the “aurochs of Moldavia, his belly filled with straw, and maybe even circumcised.” In the same year and in the same periodical, Ovidiu Papadima painted a beastly portrait of Sadoveanu, presenting him as a “chimpanzee drumming into a pigskin with a club wrapped in cotton,” and also as a “tame beast, hungry for corpses.” In 1937, in *Buna Vestire*, Toma Vlădescu also mocked Sadoveanu the “dummy,” deconstructing his body into Masonic symbols and claiming that his chubby cheeks would be better suited on another part of the body. Nicolae Iorga was himself attacked, not so much as a writer or historian, but rather as a politician. In 1940, the senior editor of *Porunca Vremii*, Ilie Rădulescu, called him a “moral hangman” and a “crucifier” of the young generations. During the same year and in the same newspaper, I. P. Prundeni vehemently dehumanized him and painted a sordid beastly portrait, seeking to degrade the scholar: Iorga was, thus, a “rubber man,” “a bearded apparition with an umbrella,” possessed of a “jelly-like” character. In the bestiary register, Iorga is described as an “ichthyosaurus,” then as a monster “who wanted his slimy wrists licked and his fleshy, wrinkled parts kissed,” a “jellyfish lying flat on top of the nation, sucking away its life and honor with every day that passed.” Also

present are the religious, irreverent overtones: he is an “apostolic rag” or a hideous prophet “walking over the nation, his eyes protruding in anger.” As an Orthodox fundamentalist, Radu Gyr saw modernist trends as a “plague,” a “cancer,” a “spittle.” On many other occasions, modernism is described as “rot,” “thicket of thorns” and as a poisonous “slag” that had to be eliminated as it was completely barren. Sometimes, the vicious attackers besmirched one another. Thus, at one point Toma Vlădescu violently criticized his former mentor, Nichifor Crainic. The virulently critical article he published in 1937 in *Buna Vestire* is entitled “Pentru cel mai trist cadavru: Disecția lui Nichifor Crainic” (To the sorriest corpse: The dissection of Nichifor Crainic). In it, we read that “indeed, for quite some time Nichifor Crainic—as clearly he is the one we are talking about—has been exuding a foul, unbearable stench, and while this is the only harm he can still do, from the point of view of public hygiene we are nevertheless well advised to drown this smell, this carcass, this corpse into a bit of clean ink . . . What does he want now, this lousy and pitiful ghoul, this old, impotent wreck?!” Throughout the lengthy piece in question, the image of Nichifor Crainic is constantly degraded: “the unfortunate tramp of lost ambitions wanders through marshes and spews out his harmless venom,” etc. The end of the text confirms that the piece written by Toma Vlădescu was intended to prepare the corpse for burial: “Even those who have already seen, on the parade ground of an army barracks, a man demoted, his rank insignia removed, devastated, staring into nothingness, scorned and deprived of dignity, jeered from all sides by righteous people, even they could not imagine the burden of terror and despair taken to his grave by the sorriest corpse I have ever seen.” I have copiously quoted from the article written by Toma Vlădescu first of all because he was one of the most vehement journalists of the period in question, and then because he introduced and consecrated the technique of attacking an individual by suggesting public stoning (with the required preparation for burial). This procedure was specific to the Romanian far right, and was later taken up by the communists.

These were but a few examples of the spiteful exchanges occurred between writers, journalists and others, largely for ideological reasons, but also because of professional and personal rivalries. Unfortunately, during that period many brilliant young minds rallied to the cause of the far right. In a famous letter sent to Tudor Vianu in 1945, Eugène Ionesco mentioned the other members of his generation who had been infested by the ideology of the far right Legion: Mircea Eliade had “a lot to answer for,” Constantin Noica was an “imbecile” and a “hypocrite,” while others were scum, cocky fools or trash. All of them had been influenced by Nae Ionescu, the “despicable departed.” Cioran,

partly forgiven in the letter to Tudor Vianu, had been labeled a “demonized cockroach” in a previous letter, sent by Ionesco to Ionel Jianu in 1938.

## **A Radical “de-Judaization” for the so-called Salvation of Romania**

**T**HE VIOLENT discourse of the Romanian far right encompasses nine different registers, seen as characteristic for the Romanian mentality: sub-human, cleansing, criminal, beastly, religious, putrid-scatological, funereal, lubricious, xenophobic. Quite possibly, these representations touched upon every sensitive spot of the Romanian mentality, upon all of its complexes, inhibitions, and upon the need to compensate for the latter by finding a scapegoat and an ideal target in the Jews, in keeping with the European trend (manifest during the heyday of the far right). The venting of frustration took extreme and sometimes redundant forms.<sup>2</sup> Alongside the Jews, the very idea of democracy was challenged in countless ways. Generally speaking, the contesters described political parties as “rusty” “carcasses” or “crawling earthworms,” while politicians were presented as a “rabble” living a parasitic life on the body of the nation, as “scum” and “filth,” representatives of an old and confused Europe. This alleged political agony was deemed utterly disgraceful. The Constitution was labeled an “ignoble bastard,” while democracy was seen as “debauchery” and “filthy anarchy,” and also as a “corpse.” This rejection of democracy generated within the far right the idea of a necessary and comprehensive cleansing. Its militants argued that “Jewish bacilli” had infested the body of Romania, and therefore announced a program of sanitation through anti-Semitism, as living alongside the Jews was both horrendous and a way to spread the contagion. Terms like “fountain of vice,” “cancer,” “leprosy,” “plague,” “infection,” “gangrene,” “purulent wound,” “syphilis” (all afflicting the Romanian nation) were used increasingly often. Consequently, the representatives and the supporters of the Legionary Movement, first and foremost, sought to become the “surgeons” that would excise the “national cancer” represented by the Jews, stressing the need for immediate purification and cleansing. An ever increasing beastly repertoire is applied to the Jews and to those related to them: worms, caterpillars, lice, cockroaches, monkeys, swine, hyenas, crocodiles, sharks, jackals, donkeys, snakes, cats, asps, octopi, geckos etc. Epithets such as “animal” or “beast” were also liberally used. The violence of the discourse of the Romanian far right truly matched the level of the physical violence employed by the Legionary Movement in the elimination of its political opponents or of

those who took repressive action against it. Various theorists of the Movement (most of them amateurs, and only a few of them theorists in the proper sense of the word) sought to legitimize assassination as a political tool (aimed at prevention and at ensuring security), but also as a way of life (part of the ethnic construction process). In their own fashion, the legionnaires saw themselves as founders, as the prophets of a new religion (an approach later borrowed by the Romanian communists): the members of the Legion who carried out assassinations were presented as heroes and martyrs, the idea of murder being somehow inserted into their Christian religiosity. Christianity was hijacked precisely in an attempt to create a new religion: in a twisted way, Christianity became strictly subsumed to the legionary doctrine, despite the fact that, in this fashion, it broke with the official canon of the Church. Consequently, the Jews were often accused not so much for being those who crucified Jesus in a distant past, but especially for an alleged second crucifixion of Jesus, this time embodied in the pure Romanian nation, in the Legionary Movement, or even in the person of its leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.

Generally speaking, all periodicals of the extreme right published pieces promoting the doctrine and the positions of the Legion. With some of them, the anti-Semitic focus is only secondary, while in the case of others it remains the dominant feature. Some resorted to caricature, usually featuring the image of an obese and unctuous Jew, in the process of crucifying Jesus (for a second time), or that of a Jewish Bolshevik soldier (ogre-like, with devilish features). Entire pages were devoted to the visual propaganda of the Legion (the assistance given to communities, its construction projects, the gallery of heroes, the Captain, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, etc.) or to various documents related to the trials of certain members of the Legion, memoirs of leading members of the organization, documents and texts from the time of the Persecution, accounts of the burial ceremonies held for the so-called heroes and martyrs of the Legion, etc. As already pointed out, all of these publications were xenophobic and anti-Semitic, but two definitely stand out in terms of the sheer violence of their discourse: *Porunca Vremii* and *Buna Vestire*.

I shall begin by briefly discussing the latter, as it seems somewhat tamer when compared to the violent anti-Semitic slogans written in huge letters on the frontispiece of *Porunca Vremii* or featured in the titles of its articles, most of which were meant to demonize and mock the Jews. In 1937, employing a counterpoint technique, *Buna Vestire* condemned the “occult Judeo-Mason group,” featuring, in all of its issues, pieces devoted to the “pillage” and the “thefts” committed by the Jews, who became rich at the expense of the Christian Romanians. This cliché would be also taken up by the communists, after 1945, with only one modification: the profiteering and “parasitical” Jewish



“scum” would be replaced by the “petty bourgeois,” by the “kulaks” and, generally speaking, by the “enemies of the people,” accused of alleged acts of financial, commercial, and national vampirism against the exploited Romanian masses. It must be said that, in many cases, the former targets of the verbal and also of the physical violence of the Romanian far right (namely, the Jews) came to take the place of their erstwhile accusers, at least during the first phase of Romanian communism (1945–1952). I see this reversal of positions and this hybrid status of a victim turned executioner (albeit only in a symbolic fashion) as typical for the Romanian mentality. The Pitești phenomenon (occurred between 1949 and 1952), consisting of reeducation through violence (physical, mental, moral) and “brainwashing”, fully demonstrates this. The same is indicated by the huge percentage of the population who served as collaborators or informants for the Romanian *Securitate*, some of them former leading political prisoners (see the outrageous files brought to the light in 2000–2001 by the National Council for the Study of *Securitate* Archives).

Getting back to the 1937 issues of *Buna Vestire*, two articles in particular caught my attention. The first is written by Nicolae Bogdan and is called “Necroforii cadavrelor morale” (Necrophores of moral corpses). One can easily guess that, in this piece, the Jews are automatically assumed to be Romanian-eaters; as necrophores of moral corpses (of society), they spread only pestilence, filth, and decomposition. The second text is signed by the virulent Toma Vlădescu, bearing the title “Trebuie să fim antisemiți!” (We have to be anti-Semitic!). The author portrays the Jews as “famished guests” who “greedily sat at our table, soon became fat, and presently dictate from the depth of their bellies the official policy of the country.” And he continued: “Therefore, we shall be anti-Semitic to the point of extreme fanaticism, even outrageously so, if need be,” as “anti-Semitism was a cleansing imperative in the service of the national idea.” These are the two approaches manifest in the periodical led by Dragoș Protopopescu and Toma Vlădescu. Headlines such as “Sângele creștinului și aurul Israelului,” “Invazia bestiiilor hâde,” “Groparii neamului românesc,” “Export de jidani,” “Obrăznicia iudaică,” “Sub călcâiul lui Iuda,” “Medicii jidani asasinează bolnavii creștini!” (Christian blood and the gold of Israel, The invasion of hideous beasts, Gravediggers of the Romanian people, The export of Jews, Jewish brazenness, Under the heel of Judas, Kike doctors murder Christian patients!), and similar variations, served the propaganda purposes of the periodical.

By far the most vicious and humiliating anti-Semitic attacks could be found in the publication *Porunca Vremii*, led by Ilie Rădulescu (we have investigated its collection for 1936, 1939 and 1940). Apart from the actual articles, we also find huge caricatures featuring either obese, unctuous, grinning Jews (the

image of the ogre), or skinny Jews with big noses and lips and sporting demonic features. The aim was to circulate both the stereotype of the rich Jew and that of the proletarian Jew, the beggar, in caricatures inspired by various bugs (spiders, mostly, but also lice), ravens, and asps, sometimes with “fangs dulled by hatred.” Their bodies were themselves mocked, bellies and faces distorted in a hyperbolic fashion. Ridiculous poems with racist overtones were also published by *Porunca Vremii*, who found, at least for a while, a poetaster in the person of Radu Bardă. Two of his poems caught my attention. In one of them, a Romanian peasant decides to plow his field using “kikes” instead of oxen. In another silly poem, a pregnant Jewish woman, Rifca, is begging accompanied by her equally pregnant bitch: the Jews give alms to Rifca, while a Romanian gives a “crust” of bread to the dog. The moral of the poem is that the bitch will give birth to other dogs, while Rifca will spawn hyenas! In 1940, among various obituaries, personal ads, etc., the periodical published a short poem called *Văscul și Jidanul* (The mistletoe and the Jew). I decided to quote the whole poem, which is emblematic for the anti-Semitism of *Porunca Vremii*: “Jews are very similar to mistletoe:/They live in vain/Growing on the back of another!...// As we very well know, just like the mistletoe/Does not belong among trees,/The Jews, with their law,/do not belong among people!...” The insidious intent was not to influence Romanian readers with philosophical pieces on the doctrine of the far right (which many would not have understood), but rather to follow the path of least resistance and mentally and emotionally sway the Romanian public with the help of such productions, of slogans printed in large script, and of violently anti-Semitic titles. All of these were to operate at a subliminal level, much like contemporary advertising. The message was deliberately simple, mechanical, minimal, intended to trigger Pavlovian reactions. The Jews had to be associated with dishonest business practices, with gangster practices, with degeneration, with a subhuman condition, with an infection. Sometimes, higher authorities are emphatically mentioned, in the same attempt to legitimize anti-Semitism: I. P. Prundeni cynically taunted the “kikes” with their “unkempt sideburns” whose “stench” “was so cheerfully mocked by Schopenhauer.” Meretricious articles about, for instance, Mina Goldstein, a madam who was trafficking in “poor” Christian girls, abounded in the newspaper led by Ilie Rădulescu. What would the director of *Porunca Vremii* have done, had there been no Jews to mock? The question was asked by another magazine of that time (baffled by the anti-Semitism of *Porunca Vremii*), and the shocking answer given by Ilie Rădulescu was that, under such circumstances, he would either die (with the existential enemies gone, the exterminator would have no reason to live) or he would have never been born in the first place. In other words, the director of *Porunca Vremii* saw his anti-Semitism as an intrinsic, organic element of his being.



In what follows I shall survey the violent discursive representations found in *Porunca Vremii*, not in the actual articles, but in the titles and the slogans meretriciously printed by the editors, with an advertising agenda (capitalizing on the well-known effect of mesmerizing hypnosis, used by advertisers). Thus, we find four types of titles and slogans: 1. vehement condemnations of the alleged corruption of the Jews; 2. pleas for “de-Judaization” (full of pathos and anger); 3. cautionary advice to Romanians or attempts to stir the Romanians against the Jews; 4. threats against the Romanians suspected of sympathizing with the Jews.

In what concerns the first type, quite interesting is the desire to stick pins in the economic map of Romania, marking the places “infested” and “tarnished” by the profiteering Jews (who exploited the “good Romanians”), places that needed to be cleansed: “The dental profession taken over by the Jews,” “Jewish traffic in fake diplomas,” “Jewish merchants seek to get their hands on the Slaughterhouse,” “The alarming proportion of Jewish engineers,” “The secrets of the ghetto: How Jewish bakers make money on flour,” “The grain trade completely monopolized by the Jews,” “How Jews profit from the crops of Christian farmers,” “Bessarabian towns and boroughs in the hands of Jewish merchants,” “A crusade for Romanian commerce: Merchants, take trade back from the Jews!,” “Moldavian estates squeezed by Judas,” “The Jewish monopoly over the trade in precious stones and gold,” “The Jewish octopus once again threatens the Romanian pharmaceutical industry,” “The makers of perfume and cosmetics: Pirates and asps plaguing the Romanian land,” “No place for Jews in the press and in literature!,” “No Jews in the medical and pharmaceutical fields!,” “No more Jews in the export business. We demand a state monopoly!,” “A case of shameless Jewish theft: The Jewish vermin in the gambling joints of Bucharest,” “Hyenas with crocodile stomachs: Pirates and cockroaches, the public enemies of Romania,” etc. Quite striking is the childish nature of the hyperboles quoted above: from dentists to perfume makers, from engineers to bakers, from jewelers to meat packers, the Romanian commerce was seen as contaminated by the Jewish merchants who “empoisoned” the products they sold and who implicitly demeaned the professions they practiced. The accusers, self-proclaimed defenders of sound moral principles and of honest trade, were hoping that the mistrust stirred among the (Christian) Romanians would lead to a boycott of Jewish trade. The anti-Semitic journalists of *Porunca Vremii* claimed to be the warrior angels defending a nation deemed incapable of protecting itself from the wave of Jewish corruption. All that was left to do for these strong-handed purifiers was to don their protective gear and truly turn into what they had always wanted to be, the “surgeons” operating on a country corrupted by the Jews.

Second come the slogans that sought to demonize and expose the Jews as an alien element (in a “Romania for Romanians” approach, demanding the liberation of the nation from the “clutches” of the invaders—an old Romanian obsession, justified for as long as the country was not independent, but ridiculous after full sovereignty was gained). Here are a few representative examples: “No Romanians whatsoever! More Jewish brazenness than in Palestine,” “The impending end of the Jewish world? Naturalist opinions,” “The Jews can’t get enough!,” “Exposing the talmudic monstrosity,” “The racial degeneration of the Jews: Facial anomalies and the malformations of the skull are the tell-tale signs of a Jew,” “National redemption through anti-Semitism,” “The Jewish blight,” “The country reeks of Jews,” “Jewish scum on the offensive,” “Israel at the final crossroads!,” “Judaism is the greatest blight upon mankind!,” “Judas: the instigator and the jackal of wars,” “Israel, the historical parasite of mankind,” “Get the Jews out of our villages... or we shall leave!,” “You shall perish by your own hand, Israel!,” etc. Many of these slogans are inspired by the typical discourse of the European (and especially German) far right, in a manifest pattern of anti-Semitic violence. Still, some slogans are typically Romanian, such as, for instance, “The country reeks of Jews.” The German Nazis or the Italian fascists would have used, perhaps, a milder verb, but the Romanians chose the most concise form of expression, likely to have a maximum effect on the average reader. Also present in these slogans is the underlying idea of national salvation, which obsessed the representatives of the Romanian far right, who wanted to be seen as true missionaries.

Then comes the advice, printed in huge letters, given by the guardians of “good Romanianism”: “Romanians, never sit at the table beside a Jew!,” “Romanians, never become friends with a Jew!,” “Friendship with a Jew means disaster!,” “Friendship with a Jew means dishonor!,” “Romanians, do not seek employment with the Jews!,” “Your friendship with a Jew is nothing to be proud of!,” “Do not let the Jewish press poison your soul!,” “Romanians, never buy anything from a Jew!,” “You, Romanian mothers, do not buy from Jews!,” “To get rid of the Jews you must hit them in their trade!,” “Do you want to be rid of Jews? Boycott them!,” “Romanians, do not seek bargains with the Jews!,” “Romanians, beware of the merchandise and of the poisonous words of the Jews!,” “Be a true Romanian! Spend not a penny with the Jews!,” “Romanian men and women! Boycott all Jewish merchandise and press,” etc. We see that such advice varies from concrete-prophylactic to moralizing. The exhortations are addressed to a wide range of Romanian categories: to Romanians as a collectivity, to the Romanian mother, to the Romanian people as a group of distinct individuals but also as a single unit, or as consisting of couples and families. This allegedly cleansing advice also shows a certain aggressiveness, albeit

still rather vague: words like dishonor and dishonesty are strategically inserted in order to place blame on the possible “vile Romanians,” who are nevertheless given a chance to redeem themselves by the defenders of “true” Romanianism.

Last comes the category of aggressive slogans, aimed at those Romanians whose love of Jews had allegedly driven them to commit betrayal: “If you truly are a Romanian, then why are you holding hands with the Jew?,” “Expose all Romanians who serve the Jews!,” “You will be sorry you married Rifca!,” “Accursed is the child born of a union with a Jew!,” “Your relationship with a Jew is an act of treason!,” “Make amends, end the relation with the Jew!,” etc. This last category of so-called advice may indeed be the most representative for the mentality of the period under discussion, precisely because it went beyond the usual statements against the “occult Jewish intentions” and found a new target in those Romanians who had allegedly ceased to be “good Romanians.” The approach is not dissimilar to self-mutilation, as the fierce guardian angels of the nation even come to advocate the elimination of those Romanians guilty of collaborating with the Jews. Mixed families, friendship with a Jew (in his *Journal*, Mihail Sebastian wrote about the pain he felt when his friends began to desert him), the children of mixed couples, all become crimes in the eyes of the far right Romanian purists. Also interesting is the fact that the far right radicals demanded that all Jew-loving Romanians be *exposed* (possibly leading to some sort of public lynching, albeit still only at a symbolic level). The same concept of *exposure* was to be taken up with much gusto by the equally aggressive communists who initiated the large-scale elimination of the “enemies of the people” (the violent reeducation practices employed in the Pitești prison between 1949 and 1952 involved a triple exposure: external, internal, and self-exposure). With both legionnaires and communists, this exposure led to national fratricide, yet another common feature of the two forms of extremism, of the right and of the left. After all, one of the myths deemed fundamental for the understanding of the Romanian makeup can be found in a popular ballad which, apart from the idea of resignation in front of death, also consecrates the notion of violent fratricide. The Romanian far right and later the communists began with verbal fratricide and ended up slaughtering their fellow countrymen. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the much touted Romanian tolerance was notably absent as a character trait, at least at the political level. The “good Romanians” executed and lynched the “vile Romanians,” when the latter refused to return to the “right path” and work for the salvation of the nation.

□

## Notes

1. Extremely useful in this endeavor has been the book written by Z. Ornea, *Anii treizeci: Extrema dreaptă românească* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, 1995; Bucharest: EST, 2009), also available in English as *The Romanian Extreme Right in the 1930s* (Boulder, 1999).
2. I have surveyed several far right newspapers and magazines, for different periods, as follows: *Axa* (1933, led by Mihail Polihroniade and Ioan-Victor Vojen; 1940, led by Paul Costin Deleanu, subtitled Newspaper of political struggle, legionary doctrine, information and reportage); *Buna Vestire* (1937, led by Dragoș Protopopescu and Toma Vlădescu, subtitled Free newspaper of Romanian struggle and doctrine; 1940, led by Grigore Manoilescu and, later, by Alexandru Constant); *Chemarea Vremii* (1938, led by Titus Popescu, subtitled Organ of nationalist struggle); *Cuvântul* (1938, led by Nae Ionescu; 1940–1941, led by P. P. Panaitescu, subtitled Journal of the Legionary Movement); *Porunca Vremii* (1936, 1939, 1940, led by Ilie Rădulescu, subtitled Daily tribune of national and Christian struggle); *Sfarmă-piatră* (1939, led by Nichifor Crainic; 1940, led by Ion Gregorian, subtitled Weekly newspaper of Romanian doctrine and struggle, and then Journal of information and Romanian struggle; 1941, led by A. Gregorian), and *Vestitorii* (1941, led by Alexandru Constant, subtitled Magazine of nationalist doctrine).

## Abstract

Spite: The Romanian Extreme Right

The present study analyzes the Romanian far right press of the interwar period and of the Second World War. These publications were violently anti-Semitic, turning personal attacks and crude language in an accepted journalistic norm. The violent discourse of the Romanian extreme right encompasses nine different registers, seen as characteristic for the Romanian mentality: subhuman, cleansing, criminal, beastly, religious, putrid-scatological, funereal, lubricious, xenophobic. Quite possibly, these representations touched upon every sensitive spot of the Romanian mentality, upon all of its complexes, inhibitions, and upon the need to compensate for the latter by finding a scapegoat and an ideal target in the Jews, in keeping with the general European trend (manifest during the heyday of the far right).

## Keywords

anti-Semitism, Jews, interwar Romanian press, World War II, Romanian extreme right