

Judgments and Prejudices on the Journalistic Status of Pamfil Șeicaru

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Abstract: Pamfil Șeicaru is one of the leading Romanian journalists who worked in the era between the two world wars. He was endowed with that sense which allowed him to understand what readers wanted to find in the pages of the newspaper. The talent to transform a publication into a successful one brought to the journalist fame, money, power, but also many powerful enemies. Due to these opponents, nowadays, after 30 years since his death, Șeicaru Pamfil still has the reputation of a dubious character that had the unique credo of enrichment by any means possible. Despite his gangster of the press reputation, Pamfil Șeicaru is one of the journalists considered to be the creators of modern media in our country, and the connoisseurs of journalistic phenomenon do not hesitate to present him in laudatory terms.

Keywords: media history; blackmail; pamphlet

The recovery of the interwar press history is an act of culture and a scientific instrument at the same time, as there are missing the synthesis works so necessary in the world of journalism.

In the article *Pamfil Șeicaru - a demon of the interwar press*¹ it shows that the founder of Curentul/The Current, the interwar newspaper is perhaps the most controversial Romanian journalist of all time. The journalist's writing, so beloved by the readers of that time, noticed many of his opponents among the politicians, intellectuals and colleagues. But we must highlight the fact that the price for a successful pamphleteer to pay, could not be a small one. In this article, we intend to bring new elements that would supplement a *critical reception* of the activity of the journalist Pamfil Șeicaru.

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The fame of gangster and blackmailer of the press of Pamfil Șeicaru has been fuelled also by his social position during the period of the two world wars. The famous journalist was a rich man, and many voices claimed that the welfare of the terrible journalist could not have as source of wealth something other than blackmail. Zigu Ornea says that Pamfil Șeicaru has started his gangster activity after the end of World War, with the release of Hyena magazine. This publication has been released by Șeicaru in January 1919, in collaboration with Cezar Petrescu. The magazine had targeted his attacks on liberal *budget-eaters*. Ornea showed that the first journalistic actions taken by the two young newspaper journalists were sincere, but soon, things have changed and the publication has become a tool of blackmail: "Pretty soon, Șeicaru descends quality limit of the pamphlet: from the dispute of ideas to personal battles and blackmail, imposing to the magazine a brutal air attacks, he was always vulgar in his attacks." (Ornea, 1980, p. 105) In order to finalize the blackmail, Șeicaru did not hesitate to descend the "pamphlet in the suburbs" (Ornea, 1980, p. 191). Another author, Al. Gregorian claimed that the attacks of the terrible journalist were devastating, because, in his hands his pen was "an *apache knife*" (Gregorian, 1937, p. 3).

According to some testimonies, Șeicaru did not even try to hide his illegal habits. From the diary of director Leontin Jean Constantinescu we learn that Curentul/The Current did not hesitate to share his secrets of *the art* of blackmail to his employees. The mentioned author says that at a certain moment, Șeicaru gave the following advice: "saying that whenever you have a valuable document or not, that you want to use for blackmail, you do not ever show it." (Constantinescu, 1998, p. 71)

About *the modus operandi* of Șeicaru speaks Nichifor Crainic, a former associate and friend of the journalist. Crainic's memoirs show some unpleasant things from Curentul/The Current, "we criticized a person or an institution or activity contrary to the moral or Romanian idea, and the next day an article appears in response this time of praise, or an ad very well paid." (Crainic, 1991, p. 207) Also, in an article published in 1932 Crainic shows that the terrible journalist grabbed the perdition road in 1927. At that time, Șeicaru was making efforts to gather the necessary money to publish Curentul/The Current. Crainic made the following comments: "when I say that Pamfil Șeicaru has definitively sold himself my statement refers to an event in August 1927. (...) This I understood it later when I learned that Curentul/The Current funding had been purchased by the government itself" (Crainic, 1932, p. 1) We must mention that all publications conducted at one point

by Crainic led to violent campaign against Șeicaru. In 1937, in a series of articles in *Sfarma-Piatra/Smash Stone* magazine, Al. Gregorian speaks of the wealth achieved through Șeicaru's illegal business with oilfields. Thus, the *newspaperist*, as Șeicaru was dubbed by Crainic newspapers, trade oilfields since 1922 and he was helped in committing the offenses by his wife: "... the Șeicarus saved up in twelve years 4467 acres and 85 perches of oil, with a benefit of around 30,656,000 lei at the expense of landowners." (Gregorian, 1937, p. 3)

The Source of Pamfil Șeicaru's wealth caused heated discussions also in 1945, when the Communists launched the so-called trial of fascists' journalists. In the article *Sketched portraits under indictment* published in *Scanteia/The Spark*, on 1 June 1945, without signature, there was an attempt to justify the presence of Curentul/The Current's founder on the list of the judged ones "Pamfil Șeicaru, one of the main agents of Nazi-fascist propaganda in Romania, he sustained it in writing - with no holding back – the aggression policy of the Nazi criminal imperialist. While being toxic as public opinion, he was a real gangster of the media, managed by its blackmails to acquire a fabulous fortune." (Spark, 1945, p. 1) The public prosecutor C. Vicol states that, for the installation of the printer from the Curentul/The Current Palace, Saicaru was indebted to a German consortium of 60 million lei and on behalf of that debt the journalist wrote articles of German propaganda: "In 1939, September 15, Pamfil Șeicaru meets German Legation Attorney General Schnichel and it receives *the necessary means* to improve the fascist propaganda in the Romanian country." (Scanteia/The Spark, 1945, p. 4) The indictment also says that the *fabulous fortune* left behind by Șeicaru who chose the exile in August 1944, consisted of land, buildings and shares in Radio Broadcasting Company and the Current Company. According to the same source, the journalist owned many oil fields as well.

Details of the talks held between Hitler and Șeicaru are described by Marin Preda in a *private diary*. Thus, in 1938, the terrible journalist, that the novelist used him as a model for achieving Grigore Patriciu character, in the novel *The Delirium* met with the Fuhrer to put in place the achievement of the pro-Nazi campaign on Curentul/The Current page. According to Marin Preda, after the parley of the two, in particular through Baron von Killinger, Șeicaru "will receive money to erect a building, it will be sent from Germany a modern print-art seized from a Jew in Berlin and a huge amount in foreign currency for the owner in a Swiss bank." (Preda, 2007, p. 304)

But there were many people who did not hesitate to bring him to the spotlight the journalist's journalistic achievements and pass his sins in the background. In a banquet held to mark the number 5000 reached by Curentul/The Current newspaper, several personalities of the Romanian culture wanted to highlight the important role played by Pamfil Șeicaru in developing our country's media. The academician Ion Al. Bratescu-Voinesti addressed him as follows: "No man is immaculate; everyone's life is a problem with pluses and minuses. It is important that the result would not be a minus - but a plus, and counting your whole activity leads to a very important plus, only those blinded by enmity may not recognize it." (Curentul/The Current, 1942, p. 5)

The writer D. Iob pointed out that Pamfil Șeicaru was noted in the world of the gazette ever since he was a high school student and he tales something that happened in the editorial office of Lumina Literara/Literary Light magazine: "I received an article that made a great stir and then everyone began to wonder: who is the author? either they will make him an assistant professor of Iasi, some would say even that he is a professor of Iasi and when he learned he was a mere student in 7th grade in high school, you can realize how surprised we were. A high school student had the courage to challenge the authority." (Curentul/The Current, 1942, p. 5)

About Șeicaru's courage also talked the poet George Tutoveanu, who, in order to highlight the human and professional qualities of The Current's Director, uses a story that had the central role Ion Nadejde, who was the director of Contemporanul/The Contemporary magazine: "This scene: Ion Nadejde, the well-loved animator of the youth back then, and a famous scholar of that time, an unsurpassed journalist, standing with his hat up before the mayor of Bucharest, I was distressed beyond measure watching myself, until today. And in the years that followed, whenever I saw not only future and former mayors of the capital, but also former and future ministers, climbing the stairs of the Editorial building of Curentul/The Current to talk still with a journalist, I think what is great distance between ... Ion Nadejde 's hat and ... Pamfil Șeicaru's hat." (Curentul/The Current, 1942, p. 5) The poet also said that the most important legacy of the Romanian Journalism left by Șeicaru is "the bright conscience of the journalist, he is called to fight with words, with writing, and also with the deed, in order to lift his nation" (Curentul/The Current, 1942, p. 5)

The reputation of the famous journalist as dubious character who has as unique creed the enrichment by any means possible was promoted, in particular, by the

communists, and the results of the journalist's discrediting campaign are still visible. Victor Frunza explains this situation by showing that a journalist who mastered the art of writing was able to give the word a bomb force "it was impossible not wake adversity." (Frunza, 2001, p. 345) How was Pamfil Șeicaru's fortune explained? We find the answer at Mircea Coloșenco, which indicates that the journalist's maternal and paternal grandparents were well-off people, leaving, after their death, substantial family inheritance: "In Tăbărăști-Buzău, Haralambie - Pamfil Șeicaru's father - owned the land Constantin Șeicaru priest. In Buzău, Ana - Pamfil Șeicaru's mother - by the endowment sheet, she had a house surrounded by a large courtyard, which is now the City Hall building, and, in Ploiești, shops and in its environs, oil-bearing earth. (...) After the war, the oilfield gave Pamfil Șeicaru the financial base to start the Anonymous Society Curentul/The Current, whose sole shareholder, initially, was just him." (Coloșenco, 2002, p. XI)

Despite the allegations against him, it must be said that Pamfil Șeicaru is among the journalists that are considered to be the creators of modern media in our country. The researchers of the journalistic phenomenon in our country did not hesitate to say about Pamfil Șeicaru that he is "the greatest journalist of Greater Romania, the founder of modern media under the stylistic and technological aspects. (Popa, 2009, p. 698)

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