

A Thematic Approach to Pamfil Șeicaru's Conferences

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Abstract: There are many voices which claim that Pamfil Șeicaru did not benefit from the interwar public's appreciation. He was perceived as a human being eager to get rich using any kind of means. But Pamfil Șeicaru can be considered a star of the press of the period between the two world wars. His prestige is also proven by the numerous conferences which he held in the most important Romanian cities during the interwar period.

Keywords: the history of the press; the interwar period; blackmail; ethics; journalism

1. Background

Despite his journalistic achievements throughout his entire career, Pamfil Șeicaru is nowadays known to the Romanian public especially for his so-called blackmails during the interwar period. He became a famous blackmailer during the two world wars but this fame was consolidated by the propaganda means used by the communist regime which was established in Romania after the Russian invasion.

In a *journal* published in 1984, Liviu Rebreanu criticized P. Șeicaru's type of writing using downplaying words. The writer claims that in order to gain the attention of the public and consequently substantial financial benefits, Șeicaru uses the immoral behaviors of those from the *high society* from Bucharest. Liviu Rebreanu describes Șeicaru as being "the man who daily swallows a *whore* at his newspaper". (Rebreanu, 1984, p. 52) The language used by Șeicaru in his articles from the interwar period is often considered as highly violent.

The director of the newspaper *Curentul* is accused of giving words those meanings whose purpose is to make the Romanian language filthy (Florescu, 1929, pp. 53-54). For example, Radu Gyr describes Șeicaru as "a virtuoso of journalistic obscenity", who downplays the pamphlet to the level of obscenity. This is the way

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in which Gyr explains his point of view. “Thus, on the death of the liberal minister Al. Constantinescu, a truly corrupt politician, Șeicaru wrote some years ago a filthy article entitled “At the bedside of the Pig”¹, a pamphlet of a disgusting vulgarity, where there were plenty of terms, such as muzzle, sty, pig swill, turd, in a repulsive mix of dirt and reek.” (Gyr, 1996, p. 135)

His fame of a defender of national interests that Șeicaru enjoyed during the interwar period is contested by Tudor Arghezi, the person from whom the journalist did not expect to get such an attack, we might say, dastardly. In 1946 when Romania was under Russian influence, the author of the right words published *A Manual of Practical Ethics*. In this work, Pamfil Șeicaru is described as a *counter seller of ideals* ready to sell himself to whoever may offer more. The paragraph below illustrates how Tudor Arghezi illustrates the journalist activity of the person who was the head of the newspaper *Curentul*: “He pretends to love his country and publishes about this feeling in such a loud voice as if using an orchestra. [...] It is a natural and tender love for one’s country and it is part of a human being. A vivid root seems to create a bond between you and the country’s dust, womb, which seems to feed your lonely being with generosity. How could one brag about this, confiscate this holy and continuous bond and sell it in the market? He sells it daily and sometimes even in several editions. He swears that he respects the past, that he did not dig the dead from their graves in order to grab their rings and golden teeth. He considers himself to be the owner of the past and of the Romanian people love: he booked them and keeps on sucking them. He is even a believer. He reads his prayer publicly, gathering people to see him. He cares about his country and God just as sheep care about the thistles from their tails. When he is among his friends, he laughs dead drunk and makes eyes at everybody. He even read Machiaveli and at his counter of ideals he even considers himself to be the equal of Cesar, Borgia and the Prince. How good your country must be if every gipsy is allowed to analyse it and to insult it! Several years ago the gorilla male used to sit with his tribe in a room, divided by a rope where four articles of clothing were hanging to dry in the heat of a cooking stove where some onion was baking in some grease: a pair of shabby drawers, a ragged shirt, some socks which needs mending and a handkerchief: The Gipsy has had an open day since morning. He loved his country in such a pathetic and loud manner that he got richer and richer.” (Arghezi, 1946, pp. 138-139)

¹ The correct title of the article to which Radu Gyr refers is: “At the catafalque of the pig”.

One of the most virulent critics of Şeicaru is Zigu Ornea who claims, in one of his articles published in 1980, that the immediate result of the journalist's success of opening his own newspaper was to move the political article on blackmail from *Cuvântul*, a publication founded by Titus Enacovici, to *Curentul*. (Ornea, 1980, p. 123) Ornea considers that Pamfil Şeicaru started his gangster activity after the end of the First World War once the magazine *Hiena/ The Hyena* was issued by Şeicaru in 1919. Cezar Petrescu was one of his collaborators and the main goal of this magazine was to attack the liberal politicians who feed on the state budget. According to this source, the first journalistic actions of the two young journalists were sincere but soon the things had changed and the publication turned into a means of blackmail. (*Ibidem*, p. 105)

One may observe that the tone used by Zigu Ornea in depicting Şeicaru becomes milder after the fall of the communist regime. In an article published in 1999, the same author, although he persists in considering that *Curentul* was "specialized in tough campaigns against some commercial, bank and industrial strong organizations, which, in order to calm the spirits, left behind their milt" (*Idem*, 1999, p. 180), had no problem in labeling Pamfil Şeicaru as one of the best journalists which our country has had, besides Mihai Eminescu, Constantin Mille, Nae Ionescu, Tudor Arghezi etc.

According to some authors, Pamfil Şeicaru was not highly appreciated by the public from the interwar period, which perceived him as a human being eager to get rich by all means. (Florescu, 1998, p. 54) Pamfil Şeicaru is a star of the press of those times, a fact which was confirmed by N. Carandino in his memories. (Carandino, 1992, p. 193) The prestige that the journalist enjoyed was proved by many conferences held by Şeicaru throughout the interwar period in all the important cities of the country. His conferences were depicted in the newspaper *Curentul*.

The themes discussed by Şeicaru during his conferences covered different fields of interest. He used to talk about a different topic in each city where he held his conferences. Actually his speeches are continuations of his articles. At Târgu Jiu, on March 19, 1933, during an event organized by "The research center" of the accountants from Gorj, Pamfil Şeicaru held a conference on how actual Mihai Eminescu's political writings were. He highlights that the economic and financial policies issued by the politicians of those times were totally wrong. The fragment below illustrates his way of thinking:

“Politics shatters the meaning of faith in labor. The election improvisation denies the intellectual value. To believe that the society, in its actual structure, can be run by a group of people is totally wrong. It is run by the elite. That today we are run by improvisations, is something else. These improvising people produced the catastrophe that we go through today. The peasant was given land without having the obligation to work it. He allowed himself to have any fantasy with the land that he did not pay. (Pamfil Şeicaru’s Conference at Tg. Jiu”, 1933, p. 2)

This fragment embeds several problems that were of major interest for Pamfil Şeicaru: the disadvantages of having a Parliament and the lack of a serious program of reforming agriculture in our country. Pamfil Şeicaru is invited to hold conferences even by sports organizations which wanted to find out the famous journalist’s opinions about the young persons’ tendency to provide a higher attention to sports activities and to ignore the intellectual ones. In his conference of *The generation of equilibrium*, held in Buzau, on the occasion of the great festival organized by the *Buzau sports district Commission of F.R.F.A. – the South League*, Pamfil Şeicaru compares two generations – that from 1900-1915 and that belonging to the interwar period, in order to emphasize the fact that *every generation has its own physiognomy*. According to Şeicaru, the rhythm of modern life shapes a human type which is too much sportive and less intellectual:

“*The former generation was excessively spiritual, it ignored nature, sports, tourism. But today’s generation is excessively sportive, ignoring spirituality. Today’s generation is searching for a kind of equilibrium through its physical and spiritual efforts. It should be a generation which seeks to harmonize the necessity of sports with that of the intellect.*” (Pamfil Şeicaru’s Conference on: *Echilibrium Generation*, 5 April 1933, p. 2)

The role of the journalist and of the newspaper in a modern state is another theme discussed by Pamfil Şeicaru in his conferences. He was invited at the *Center of the correspondent journalists* in September, 1933, at Dorohoi. The title of his speech was *The newspaper in modern life*. His public at Dorohoi was formed by professors, doctors, lawyers, officers and students. The fragment below illustrates the role played by the journalist and the newspaper in society:

“Our newspapers have reached a quite high degree of development. Anyhow the journalist will remain anonymous. His tenacious work will have severe consequences. The newspaper creates trends. The journalist creates and raises glories. He launches political stars. There are so many patented nobodies who owe

their ascension to the humble journalist's generosity and benevolence. Nobody thinks at the work of this humble journalist, a work which keeps tormenting his health." ("Ziarul în viața modernă/The Newspaper in the modern life", 8 September 1933, p. 7)

The interwar press from our country is not flawless, and Pamfil Șeicaru highlights this fact in his conference at Dorohoi. Despite its flaws, the Romanian press could brag itself that "it is one of the most organized" (*Ibidem*). The problem of the press is discussed by Pamfil Șeicaru during an event organized by the General Federation of the Regional Press. The journalist asks Valeriu Pop, the minister of Justice, to enact the press: "*I am not interested in the freedom of the press. The more obstacles will be, the tougher the soul grace will grow. The political parties struggle for the freedom of the press, but they were the ones which decreased the standard of writing. We who do not belong to the newspapers of parties try to weigh our words. Ask for the regulation of the journalist profession. The one who makes journalistic commerce should obey to the law in order to guarantee the existence of his employees. Do you want the press to be moral? Enact it!*" ("Viitorul regim al presei/The Future regime of the press", 12 February 1936, p. 3)

Pamfil Șeicaru asks the Minister of Justice that, according to the law of the press, the selection of journalists should be made only by the state. Thus the interests of the journalists would be in harmony with those of the state. Thus Pamfil Șeicaru brings into discussion an old theme, launched in 1921, in the pages of the magazine *Hiena/Hyena* and then discussed in *Cuvântul* and *Curentul*, namely that of the low intellectual level of many Romanian journalists. The articles which include Pamfil Șeicaru's conferences reveal that the students constituted the public of the journalist.

For example, at Cernăuți, on June 8, 1933, there were present more than 300 students in order to listen to Șeicaru's *political equation of the present*. ("Ecuția politică a prezentului/ *Political equation of the present*. Pamfil Șeicaru's Conference at Cernăuți", 11 June 1933, p. 2)

They chose to stand up because there were no more available seats at the National Theater in Cernăuți. During a conference held in Constanta in April, 1934, at the invitation of the Student Center, Șeicaru talks about *The dreamed Romania and the Achieved Romania*. The journalist's speech represents an attack against *democracy and the universal vote*: "*The democracy of the universal vote brought the filth of the election agents, and we experienced the awful mobilization of mediocrities and*

pretentious vanities. The demagogues' careerism and the agitators' epilepsy canceled the old virtues of the work, honor and humanity capital. «The sovereign people » degraded once the silly teams of the vote bidders; as the country borders grew larger and larger, it seems that we had been cursed to watch the way in which our rulers' moral horizons were growing narrower. Comparing the former Small Romania with the Great Romania after the dreadful hecatomb, and being the witness of this confrontation exam between the dreamed Romania with the achieved Romania, we are stunned by this disproportion between the narrow political vision of our leading elements and the spacious territorial dimensions of our new State.» (“România visată, România realizată/Romania as dreams, Romania Accomplished”, 18 April 1934, p. 9)

Șeicaru talks about the new form of state that Romania had to embrace after giving up the *orthodox democracy*, at Braila during an event organized by *The Annals of Braila*. According to the journalist, the best form of a state for our country is the one which proves itself to win after the confrontation between the most powerful countries of the world. The fragment below illustrates Șeicaru's thoughts: “*The national-socialist Germany, the Russia of the iron discipline of Marxism, the United States had reached that state of denying the individualism and Roosevelt's etatism, the corporate Italy animated by that totalitarian spirit which integrates everything in the State – these are some labs of the social life which shape the new state forms in the future. When the conclusions of these experiences grow clearer, we will hurry to embrace them, being even zealous, since when we fling to a constitution, we chose the Belgian one, the latest modern model!*” (“În căutarea unei noi forme de stat/In the search of a new form of state”, 21 May 1936, p. 5)

Despite the irony used by Șeicaru in the end of his statement, his position regarding this issue is very serious. It is obvious that the themes which Șeicaru prefers when holding his conferences are political. In a conference held at Sibiu, in March 1934, the journalist demolishes the *myth of disarmament* and foretells the outburst of the World War II: “*Thus the technical disarmament will be just like the moral one, a wish still in the zone of the dangerous illusions: one may say to the naïve apologists of pacifism that, with or without their will, humanity will engross our destinies more deeply in a period of expiration and ecstasy of nationalism.*” (“Mitul dezarmării/The Myth of disarmament”, 25 March 1934, p. 9) The ideas mentioned by Șeicaru will prove to be correct.

The leaders of Bucharest took Pamfil Șeicaru's opinions into account. In April 1935, Al. Donescu, the Mayor of Bucharest, invites the journalist at the City Hall

in order to ask his opinion regarding the measures to be taken to embellish Bucharest. The discussions that took place at the City Hall, together with the sculptor Oscar Han, the former Mayor Dem. Drobescu, the architect Dumitru Marcu etc., are mentioned in the newspaper *Curentul*. Pamfil Şeicaru highlights *the necessity of an architecture office which should not function only on paper, but which should filter the fanciful architectural styles*. This is what the journalist claims: “*Bucharest has turned into a permanent exhibition of all kinds of styles. There should be a unique style of Bucharest, there should be shaped a personality of the capital which all great capitals have. The architecture office should correct the architectural fancies, providing an active and authoritarian form.*” (Tutoveanu, 25 April, 1935, p. 1)

The conclusions of the discussions will be presented by the Mayor Al. Donescu to the General Council of Bucharest at the meeting on April 26, 1935. Pamfil Şeicaru had a special relation with the employees of the Romanian Railway Company. This was due to the fact that the journalist’s father worked for many years as an employee at this company. The employees of this state company considered *Curentul* a partner in the union fights carried out against the governments which did not care about the employees’ difficult lives. In January 1936, the railway union organizations from the whole country gathered at Cluj in order to celebrate the winning of the pay rights, and Pamfil Şeicaru was a special guest at this event. The fragment below illustrates his speech: “*I do know your problems, I do know your sufferings. I know how you save every penny in order to send your children to study. Your problems are my father’s problems. When I come here, I feel as if being a child again. And then please believe me and I want you to be sure that as nothing can wither the memories of one’s childhood, so you are tightly bound to my soul.*” (Vornicu, 29 January 1936, p. 9)

The journalist will be present at many manifestations of the Railway Company employees. On January 22, 1939, at the General Gathering of the “Station” Association, where representatives from all the branches were present, Pamfil Şeicaru gives them the news that “*the lease payment will be according to every employee’s family difficulties*”. (Când Suveranul a chibzuit să dea ţării o nouă Constituţie a gândit-o în spiritul familiei», a spus d. Pamfil Şeicaru la Adunarea asociaţiei ceferiste/ When the Sovereign has granted the country to have a new constitution, it was designed in the spirit of a family,” said Pamfil Şeicaru at the Assembly of railroad association «Station»" 25 January, 1939, p. 5)

In our opinion, Pamfil Șeicaru is one of the most valuable Romanian journalists. The year 1928 constitutes the period of maximum glory for Pamfil Șeicaru. It was the year when the newspaper *Curentul* is issued. His direct and acid style will immediately bring him the public's sympathy. His journalistic success will be accompanied by the severe critical remarks of some colleagues who label him as a human being dominated by mercantile interests. But for the interwar public, Pamfil Șeicaru represents one of the most important voices of the press of those times.

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