

## The Satanic Cult of Nude - About the Cinematography in Some of the Inter-war Publications in Romania

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**Abstract:** In the years between the two world wars, the cinema already had a meaning that no one could deny. This fact was highlighted by some of the most important Romanian journalists of the era to which we are referring. However, while some journalists saw in cinema the gentlest way in which thoughts and feelings could be communicated, others talked about the negative influence it had, for example, on children. Some of the journalists who were part of the second category even believed that the cinema is the one who reveals to honest people the ways towards depravation. In order to accomplish this paper there were analysed articles published in publications such as: *Flori de crin/Lily flowers*, *Revista generală a învățământului/General Education Review*, *Revista Fundațiilor Regale/The Royal Foundation Magazine*, *Curentul familiei/The Current of Family*, *Gândirea/The thought*, *Adevărul/The truth*, etc.

**Keywords:** cinema; press history; journalism; education; school

### 1. Introduction

In a book that is known as being the first Romanian handbook *for young people eager to embrace the journalistic career*, there are shown *the benefits<sup>2</sup> of press*. According to the author of the paper, these are the following: *stimulating social, national and international solidarity; education of the masses; political and cultural information and the dissemination of scientific or technical discoveries; control of public life*. (Samoilă, p. 37) *The cinema*, which fell within at least two of the categories listed above, could not be ignored by the journalists of the era to which we refer. But they did not have a common opinion about it. While some claimed that cinema was a degrading element of Romanian society, others emphasized its

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<sup>2</sup> These benefits are known today as press functions.

importance. Most of the texts used to make up this paper have been published, as is shown in the title, in the years between the two world wars.

## 2. Cinematography and Divorce

In an article in *Flori de crin/Lily Flowers*<sup>1</sup>, in September 1932, the *cinema* is indicated as the main place where *uncleanness grows with indescribable shame*. The author of the article divides the cinema into two categories: *the good cinema and the bad cinema*. Good cinematography is the one that serves *virtue*, and bad cinema is the one that *corrupts*. The latter is the most frequented by the public because it produces *carnal pleasures*. The main duty of cinema is, as the author of the article quotes, to contribute to his education of the people through its representations. In addition to this duty, the same author shows, the cinema must *entertain in an honest manner*.

These debts were, however, the quoted source, ignored by those who profit from the cinematographic industry:

“Read the posters, look at the cinema commercials, - or better do not watch them! You will encounter only naked bodies, harsh hugs and kisses, and many other instincts that cannot be remembered by the name. On the posters and on the screen: the satanic nude cult, *the life of the addle-brain man!* [...]

*Cinema* is even more dangerous, as the way of perception is intuitive. It is enough to open your eyes! The images on the screen give you the illusion of reality. Only at the cinema there are the most skilful and creepy criminals and the most ordinary bandits. [...]

Yeah, the cinema lights up in the youth of the luxuries. There they show married people the ways that lead to divorce and other crimes. There the elders learn to lose their minds ...”<sup>2</sup>

A statistic made by the officials of the Ministry of Finance in 1932 showed that according to an article published in the *Boabe de grâu/Wheat Grains* magazine, that

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the "religious-literary" journal *Flori de crin/lili Flowers*, which was released at the Șimleul Silvaniei, can be found in Fănel Teodorașcu, *The Issue of Affirming the Feminine Personality Commented in the Newspapers of Past Eras*, in Andy Pușcă, Cristian Sandache, Fănel Teodorașcu (Coord.) (2016). *Sexism – Topical Issues. Case Studies. Perspectives*. Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, pp. 101-112.

<sup>2</sup> Vultur, Ioan (1932). *Cinematograful/The Cinema. Flori de crin/Lili flowers*, year I, no. 3, Sept., p. 7. 148

*the cinema* was highly appreciated by the public in Romania. Thus, in the 12 months of the already mentioned year, the Romanian public spent about 52 million lei on the films. This means that at a fee of 2-3 lei for a ticket, approximately 20 million viewers entered into the projection rooms:

“Every inhabitant of Romania therefore enters a paid show during this time. For those who, despite the statistics, do not come in, there are others to enter two, ten or a hundred times in their place”.<sup>1</sup>

As one's success means, in most cases, the failure of another, it is self-evident that not everyone was delighted with the appearance of the cinema. The circus, for example, was almost *crushed* by the cinema. (Bacalbasa, 1935, p. 303) Still the cinema was the cause of the decrease in the prestige of which the theatre enjoyed.

An explanation for the special situation of the cinema is found in a more recent date volume (2011). The author of this work talks about something that makes the difference between *film* and *painting*, theatre play, novel, poem, symphony or photography:

“In Kassel, in Germany, there is a collection of paintings, including 20 Rembrandt, one of them being “Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph.”

A play that would dramatically adapt Rembrandt's inspiration and his long hours of work to Jacob's “blessing” could be mounted on the stage of theatres.

A novel might describe a part of Rembrandt's inward and secret uprising.

A poem could make us see what pushed Rembrandt to paint Jacob.

A musician might write a stormy Rembrandt's symphony with the brush in his hand.

A series of colour photographs could reproduce, rudely or discreetly, Rembrandt's “Jacob”.

An actor could tell Joseph's visit to the dying father's head, of course it would start cry.

But only a film can mix all these elements in a way that places the spectator at the heart of the show, in a way to assist in creating the painting “Jacob's Blessing.” (Cărmăzan, 2011, pp. 9-10)

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<sup>1</sup> \*\*\*(1933). Teatru, muzică, radio, cinematograf/Theatre, music, radio, cinema. *Boabe de grâu/Wheat Grains*, Year IV, no. 3, March, pp. 187-188.

The way towards success of the cinema was not without obstacles. In an article in 1914, for example, there is talk of a plot to ruin it:

“Triumphantly, the cinema had to take into account the theatre’s enemy, drama writers and actors nor fit for movies, and if all these burdens will find entrepreneurs and filmmakers not united and without defensive resistance, the beautiful industry of cinema, the vulgarisation of science and art, will be ruined.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1943, Nichifor Crainic showed in an article in *Gândirea/Thought* magazine that the cinema “has gained in the contemporary life a meaning that no one can deny, no matter if we attribute it to a higher or a lower value. From the moment the technical genius succeeded in uniting the image with the sound, synchronized in the same rhythm of passion and idea action, multipliable endlessly, the mankind has acquired the most skillful means of communicating the thoughts and feelings.”<sup>2</sup> The same author drew attention that the cinema can be a *two-edged weapon*: “It can raise up as it can break down the soul of a people, according to the quality of the ideas and passions which it spreads.”<sup>3</sup> About the cinema's ability to do harm, we find references at another author. Also in 1943, but in the *Curentul familiei/The Current of family*<sup>4</sup>, the article “*Copiii și Cinematograful/Children and Cinema*” was published, in which the author talked about the negative influence that the cinema could have on children:

“Should we allow children to go to cinema?”

Here is a question many parents have not asked themselves. It is easy to tell a child to leave you quiet for a few hours: “Hold 100 lei and go to the cinema.” And it goes without saying, the child does not wait to tell him twice. It's a simple game of parents who keep all their advantages.

Parents do not realize to what point a movie can lose a child's soul. The big ones consider the cinema as a means of recreation, where they can escape for a moment

<sup>1</sup> Editorship (1914). Importanța revistei noastre/The Importance of Our Magazine. *Viața Cinematografică/ Cinematographic Life*, Year I, no. 1, March 15, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Crainic, Nichifor (1943). Filmul german/The German Movie. *Gândirea/The Thought*, year XXII, no. 5, May, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Crainic, Nichifor (1943). Filmul german/The German Movie. *Gândirea/The Thought*, year XXII, no. 5, May, p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> For more details on *Curentul familiei/The current of family* publication, see (Teodorașcu, 2014, pp. 202-204).

of other concerns; in front of a movie that would treat a topic as dangerous as it is, the adult is able to defend and resist any temptation the film offers.

For children, cinema can become a vice, like opium, a psychopathological need.”<sup>1</sup>

The issue of restricting cinema's ability to do harm was also discussed in the publications for teachers.

### 3. Cinema and Education

At the stage of collecting the information necessary for the realization of the present paper, several articles were identified, which were published in the period that we are interested in, regarding the benefits that *the cinema* could bring *to the education*. We have just stopped on some of these articles, but the others will be noted in the bibliography.

In February 1931, in the *Revista generală a învățământului/General Review of Education*, the article “*Cinema and School/ Cinematograful și școala*” was published. The author of the text, Vasile P. Nicolau, showed that if the Romanian pedagogy wants to remove the gap between theory and practice, it must begin to take into account *the discoveries of positive sciences, using them and adapting them according to their needs*. It also shows that the teacher has to periodically modernize *the means he uses to educate his students*:

“Cinematography was considered, and is still considered by many people to be involved with school as dangerous to youth because of the influence it exerts on it. Not just once, like weird, movie have stopped being presented, being labelled as dangerous, especially morality. It seems that the people who manage the school do not see but the harm.”<sup>2</sup>

In the opinion of the quoted author, the cinema, “especially the speaker and the sound”, is one of the most important gifts that science and technology have given to mankind. In the hand of an intelligent educator, he says, the gift is the strongest and

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<sup>1</sup> Dumbravu, N. (1943). Copiii și Cinematograful/Children and Cinema. *Curentul familiei/The Current of family*, year I, no 2, 2 Oct., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolau, Vasile P. (1931). Cinematograful și școala/Cinema and school. *Revista generală a învățământului/ General Review of Education*, year XIX, no. 2, Feb., p. 92.

safest *weapon*. The author of the text asked the educators *to keep up with the time and to use all the means provided by the technique of their time*.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1926, Maria Vladescu proposed to make films on the *history and geography of Romania*, and the popularization of these films was made with the help of the *itinerant cinema*.<sup>2</sup> The idea of making such films is also found in the article “*Educația și propaganda națională prin cinematograful/National Education and Propaganda through the Cinema*”. The author of this text shows that Romania should follow the model of Germany, in this country the cinema is regarded both as a means of national education and as a means of propaganda abroad:

“For eight years, since we have been living together all the Romanians together, we know very little.

Romania is one of the most beautiful and richer countries, and yet few know its beauty and wealth. [...]

The cinema could eliminate this big drawback.”<sup>3</sup>

Among the articles on the same topic published in the *Revista generală a învățământului/General Review of Education*, we list the following: “*Importanța cinematografului din punct de vedere cultural/The importance of cinema in terms of culture*” (1928), “*Cinematograful educative/Educational Cinema*” (1929), “*Cinematograful și telegrafia fără fir în școală/Cinema and wireless telegraphy in school*” (1926).

In 1943, the *Romanian film* continued to be a *problem* for both the *Propaganda Ministry's official circles* and the *cinematographers*, who claimed it was more and more difficult to pay “the high prices of films made abroad.” (Teodorașcu, 2014, p. 203)

<sup>1</sup> Nicolau, Vasile P. (1931). *Cinematograful și școala/Cinema and school*. *Revista generală a învățământului/General Review of Education*, year XIX, no. 2, Feb., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Vladescu, Maria (1926). *Cinematograful ambulant/Itinerary Cinema*. *Educația/Education*, year XI, no. 9-10, Nov.-December, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Baciu, Dim. (1926). *Educația și propaganda națională prin cinematograful/National education and propaganda through cinema*. *Revista generală a învățământului/Revista generală a învățământului/General Review of Education*, year XIV, no. 8, Oct., pp. 538-539.

#### 4. Conclusions

The cinema's power to badly influence public behaviour has been widely debated in the publications of the time. While for some journalists the cinema was a *satanic thing*, others claimed that those times when “the crimes displayed on the screen were repeated as in everyday life” could be *count on the fingers of one hand*<sup>1</sup>. The cinema, despite the many criticisms it has ever brought, has never lost public affection. This was confirmed by the proceeds of the sale of access tickets in the rooms where the films were projected. The audience's passion for movies made some publications reserve pages *to the cinematic phenomenon*.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the casting for certain films was done through newspapers or magazines.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crainic, Nichifor (1943). Filmul german/The German movie. *Gândirea/The thought*, year XXII, no. 5, May, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> See (Teodoraşcu, 2014, p. 203)

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