

## Insights into Pamfil Şeicaru's Pamphletary Discourse

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**Abstract:** The model of the pamphlet written by Pamfil Şeicaru is unique within the Romanian publicist writing because his discursive strategy of swearing does not make use of the offensive register of gross language and does not become a means of the sub-intellect rude embodiment. Şeicaru used to carefully choose his targets, his attention being mainly focused on those whom he considered to be the roots of the greatest evil and who, just like cancer, might have affected the whole society. Most of his pamphlets were written following the model of an indictment. In order to prove his targets' guilt, Şeicaru made use of *judicial norms, documents, facts, circumstances or depositions*. Şeicaru's campaigns could last for several years, preserving the destructive force even after the target's death.

**Keywords:** Pamfil Şeicaru, pamphlet, rhetoric, history of the press, discourse.

### 1. The theoretical framework

A pamphlet is a vehement discourse meant to reveal some situations which or persons who may jeopardize the political and/ or social stability (Tiutiuca 1998: 46). Analyzing the pamphlet from a rhetorical point of view, Cornel Munteanu (1999: 76) mentions that

*(...) in order to convince the audience, the pamphlet writer has the whole argumentative arsenal and the persuasive inventory available to stir the audience's reaction and thus the pamphlet of oratorical origin combines elements belonging to all oratorical genres; a dialectics of demonstration, emotive effects, strategies and structures specific to the oratorical discourse.*

C. Munteanu (1999: 76-77) also highlights that the following elements are dominant in a pamphlet:

*(...) textual functions, affective reactions, accusations and severity from the judicial genre, and appraisal, slander and indignation from the epideictic genre.*

There are several criteria according to which rhetorical discourse may be classified but Aristotle's typology remains the classical one:

- the demonstrative or epideictic discourses which express appraisal, appreciation or on the contrary, denial, consternation, blame;
- the deliberative discourses focus on the audience's involvement in an action or on the contrary, on the impeding from performing an action, on the opportunity or inopportunity of an attitude;
- the judicial discourses belong to lawyers (*pleas*) or to prosecutors (*indictments*), all of them being focused on truth or error and on taking into account the judicial law.

Dumitru Tiutiuca (1998: 38) is of the opinion that

*(... ) these classifications are approximate and mainly theoretical because in real life they are combined, intertwined.*

## 2. Elements specific to Pamfil Şeicaru's pamphlet

### 2.1. The pamphlet writer as a prosecutor

Pamfil Şeicaru<sup>1</sup> addressed his readers using "an oral style as if he had been talking to them from a tribune" (our transl., Şerbănescu 1996: 7). He used to carefully choose his targets, his attention being mainly focused on those persons who he considered to be the roots of a great evil which might spread like cancer in the whole society. Şeicaru's campaigns might last for years, preserving the harmful bitterness even after the death of the target. Alecu Constantinescu's case<sup>2</sup> is probably the best example. Alecu Constantinescu „Porcu”/ Alecu Constantinescu “The Pig” was one of the fierceful pamphlet writer's favorite targets, being present in Şeicaru's articles, from *Hiena*<sup>3</sup> [*The*

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<sup>1</sup> Pamfil Şeicaru (1894-1980) is one of the most important Romanian journalists who wrote during the interwar period. Throughout the years he wrote a lot of publications but his period of glory had been since 1928 when he founded the newspaper *Curentul*, which he ran till 1944 when he left Romania.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandru „Alecu” Constantinescu (Porcu/ The Pig), a Romanian politician, was a well-known member of the Liberal Party after the First World War.

<sup>3</sup> The magazine *Hiena/ The Hyena* was published by Pamfil Şeicaru and Cezar Petrescu in January 1919. The publication, which was intermittently issued until February 1924, was meant to be a trumpet of the generation formed of those who returned from the First World War.

*Hyena*] to *Cuvântul*<sup>1</sup> [*The Word*]. According to Şeicaru, Alecu Constantinescu was the embodiment of evil. The politician was criticized by the pamphleteer even on the day of his funeral. In the „La catafalcul Porcului”<sup>2</sup> [“At the Pig’s Catafalque”], Şeicaru announced the politician’s death as a triumph of the good against the evil:

*Satan’s most monstrous creature died. Nothing was holy for him and he extracted diabolic pleasure out of his misdeeds just like a pig out of the bog. After his death, there remains the soul of our nation tired with disgust, distrustful of law, which he turned into a whore.* (our transl.)

Şeicaru explains his attitude showing that a man’s sins should be condemned even after his death:

*“Only good things about the dead”, this is men’s hypocritical indulgence running for ages as if the moment of last breath could change a life full of daring shamelessness, as if the ability to harm a man might fade away, as if the evil done might disappear.* (our transl.)

Şeicaru’s pamphlet is generally framed as an indictment, the arguments used being specific to a judicial discourse. The discourse pattern actually reminds of his former job as a lawyer. According to Dumitru Tiutiucă (1998: 65), in a court of law the only relevant arguments are those based on evidence and the evidential arguments should be associated with the law. In order to reveal his targets’ guilt, Pamfil Şeicaru appeals to the judicial norm, to documents, facts, circumstances or depositions. For example, the campaign directed against the Berkovitz brothers was based on this register. In October 1926, a corruption scandal brought the “L. Berkovitz” Bank to the public attention. At first sight, the case seemed quite simple. The magistrate Lascăr Davidoglu had accepted, for a large sum of money, to ignore some debts that the above-mentioned bank had to the state budget. After the closing of the transaction, the Berkovitz brothers had denounced the magistrate to the Ministry of Justice. The press insights into the “Davidoglu” case had brought the hatred of the public opinion upon the magistrate, this being the reason for which Pamfil Şeicaru became interested in the case.

<sup>1</sup> *Cuvântul/ The Word*, one of the most influential interwar Romanian newspapers, was founded in 1924 by Titus Enacovici, a prosperous business man.

<sup>2</sup> Pamfil Şeicaru, „La Catafalcul Porcului.”/ “At the Pig’s Catafalque.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 616, November 20, 1926, p. 1.

In the article „Sancțiuni bancherilor Berkovitz”<sup>1</sup>/ “Sanctions for the Berkovitz brothers”, Șeicaru explained that the legal sanctions should also be directed against “the corrupting rascal”, not only against the corrupt magistrate. The sentence solicited by the pamphlet writer was the following one:

*No doubt, there should be sanctions against the ruthless magistrates, but there should be even bitterer ones against those three awful bankers, Elly, Adolf and Max Berkovitz. (our transl.)*

Before presenting his proofs, Șeicaru wants to highlight “the meanness of the filthy Berkovitz brothers”. The pamphleteer brings to the readers’ attention some elements which depicted the dubious morality of the three accused brothers:

*In 1923, one of them, Adolf, had tasted from the bitter uncertainty of getting too far away from the bank counter. Caught red-handed on the well-trodden way of love, Adolf Berkovitz, the tomcat in love, was closed in the water closet for seven days by the offended husband. Since then Adolf, the erotic tomcat, has rarely been called by the name of Berkovitz, his nickname being Adolf from the water closet.*

Another discursive strategy of criticizing the Berkovitz family is the antithesis between this family and the whole country which, unlike the three accused men, had gone through terrible sufferings during the war:

*They used to host ostentatiously, with a provoking pleasure, the Bulgarian general Tantilov, for whom they used to throw parties and there also used to come Elly’s son, Jean or Bubi Berkovitz, a defector officer from the Romanian army, in order to raise his glass of champagne in honour of Tantilov’s victories against the Romanian army from where the banker’s wretched son had deserted.*

In the article „Însângerarea terapeutică”<sup>2</sup>/ “The therapeutic bloodiness”, Șeicaru reminded the objective of his campaign started in the newspaper *Cuvântul/ The Word*:

*Thus, we ask the Minister of Justice to open a public action against the Berkovitz bankers in order to sanction the prostitution of the public life.*

According to the pamphlet writer, a mild attitude of the State institutions against the three bankers would be contrary to the Romanian citizens’ expectations. The article

<sup>1</sup> Pamfil Șeicaru, „Sancțiuni bancherilor Berckowitz.”/ “Sanctions for the Berkovitz brothers.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 598, October 30, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, „Însângerarea terapeutică.”/ “The therapeutic bloodiness.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 599, October 31, 1926, p. 1.

Dar mituitorii Berkowitz?”<sup>1</sup>/ “What with the Berkovitz bribers?” is the starting point of his discourse focused on the proofs that he had. Facts from the three bankers’ dubious past are brought to the public’s attention:

*In 1923 it was established that the income of the “L. Berkowitz” Bank, with a capital of almost one billion lei, is ... 20 million lei and the Appeal Court found that even this evaluation (read attentively) is exaggerated and it diminished this income to more than 4 million lei. (our transl.)*

Șeicaru made recourse to the interpretation of the law, his intention being that of showing that the three bankers were guilty of breaking some legal provisions. A fragment from the same article highlights that the dreadful pamphleteer knew the judicial field terminology:

*If the legislator’s elementary concern to protect the moral order of a nation was absent, there still remains a penal infringement: THE FRUSTRATION OF THE FISCAL AUTHORITY. Article 144 of the Penal Code stipulates a sentence from 2 to 3 years and a fine double the amount of the goods received or promised for every bribery received, also adding that “the money or goods, or their value will be given to the hospices or the goodwill houses from the towns where the bribery took place.” But there is also an article for those who give bribes. Article 47 of the Penal Code stipulates that: “the provoking agents are those who through gifts, promises, threats, authority or power abuses, guilty manoeuvres shall have committed an infringement or shall be given instructions in order to commit them. THESE AGENTS SHALL BE PUNISHED EXACTLY LIKE THE PROVIDER OF BRIBERY.” The combination of Art. 47 of the Penal Code and of Art. 144 of the Penal Code provides the penalty for bribers. It is true that some law courts and some parts of the doctrine claim that the law which explicitly punishes only the witnesses’ bribers does not actually punish the bribers of the public officers. This interpretation is not possible and no law court should take it into account, and Article 47 of the Penal Code should be combined with all the texts of the penal code (theft, embezzlement, rape etc.). (our transl.)*

In order to emphasize the things highlighted up to this point, Șeicaru mentions the legislation from different European countries and the papers of those authors whose authority in the judicial field cannot be contested by anybody:

*Thus, from Romania, I can mention: Tanoviceanu (Lecture II, p. 41), M. Dumitrescu (Penal Law, p. 24), Fratoșițeanu (Case No. 44/88, p. 345). I can also mention the*

<sup>1</sup> Idem, „Dar mituitorii Berkowitz?”/ “But the Berkovitz bribers?” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 600, November 1, 1926, p. 1.

*French doctrine where we can find a special text, Article 179 of the French Penal Code and some other legislations from civilized countries: Art. 252 of the Belgian Penal Code, Art. 117 of the Dutch Penal Code, Art. 470 of the Hungarian Penal Code etc. Our former legislations also used to punish the bribers. (our transl.)*

In another article, „Privilegiații codului penal: Berkovitz”<sup>1</sup>/ “The Berkovitz: the privileged of the penal code”, besides the interpretation of the law, Șeicaru also uses his own deposition in order to demonstrate the three bankers’ lack of respect towards the law:

*Un insistent și anonim binevoitor a sfătuit la telefon pe soția mea să mă convingă să încetez campania împotriva familiei de escroci fiscali Berkovitz, pentru că primejdii grozave m-ar pândi. [An anonymous and insistent amiable person advised my wife on the phone to convince me to stop this campaign against these fiscal rascals, the Berkovitz brothers, because otherwise I might be in some dreadful dangers. (our transl.)*

Pamfil Șeicaru also brings to the public’s attention the deposition of a former employee of the National Bank, who lost his job after having refused to treat a representative of the “L. Berkovitz” Bank differently than the other clients.<sup>2</sup> After a few days the pamphleteer announced the first results<sup>3</sup> of his campaign:

*A first success was obtained against the three rascal brothers Berkovitz brothers who were the embodiments of an anonymous bank society : the revision of the impositions. (our transl.)*

## **2.2. Physical weaknesses – a means of rendering the soul of the attacked person**

Pamfil Șeicaru defines a pamphlet as “a portrait loaded with a person’s defects”<sup>4</sup>. By emphasizing some physical features, he wanted to render the reflexes of the soul of the person attacked. The following fragment is what the talented pamphlet writer used to

<sup>1</sup> Idem, „Privilegiații codului penal: Berkowitz.”/ “The Berkovitz: the privileged of the penal code.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 603, November 5, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, „Adevăratul dictator: Elly Berkovitz.”/ “The true dictator: Elly Berkovitz.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 602, November 4, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, „Un prim succes: revizuirea impunerilor.”/ “A first success: the revision of the impositions.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 607, November 10, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> \*\*\* „Pamfletul românesc - Conferința d-lui Pamfil Șeicaru.”/ “The Romanian pamphlet – Mr. Pamfil Șeicaru’s Conference.” [In:] *Curentul*, no. 344, December 29, 1928, p. 2.

write about Vintilă Brătianu<sup>1</sup>:

*He does not walk, he sneaks, he is horrified with large spaces, he is always lingering near walls and hiding in dark nooks as if his crooked figure might stir some ironical comments if it had been visible. An excessive shyness, a stifling fear of people; but exactly out of these soul weaknesses came out this force of being stuck in the absurd, of splitting himself in any petty formula which does not require any effort of imagination, any power of conceiving great things and of achieving with fierceness: a conquest of the sky not like Saint George by an heroic gesture but by the abnegation of the hermit who feeds on locusts and sacrifices himself, passively, turning into an asylum for lice.<sup>2</sup> (our transl.)*

The former minister, Alexandru Constantinescu, was provided with the same bitterness. This is the way in which the political man is presented in the article which announced his death:

*The cynical, aggressive, large grim faded away; the staring eyes terrified with the terrible presence at the last judgement have forever got stiff, and that amount of flesh, fat and bones turned to ice.<sup>3</sup> (our transl.)*

Another example can be found in the pamphlet-portrait dedicated to N.D. Cocea<sup>4</sup>:

*And the big blue eyes used to watch you smilingly, full of the most remarkable sincerity. But N.D. Cocea was a liar, his quickly uttered words actually hid a lie of a disarming sincerity.<sup>5</sup> (our transl.)*

Finally this is how Pamfil Șeicaru used to describe George Găetan<sup>6</sup>:

*The biped stud, George Găetan, used to make a living out of his job as a very sociable*

<sup>1</sup> Vintilă Brătianu (1867-1930), the youngest brother of the person considered to be the most important Romanian politician of all times - Ion I.C. Brătianu, was an economist and a representative member of the Liberal Party.

<sup>2</sup> Pamfil Șeicaru, „Politică de cârpaci.”/ “A botcher’s politics.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 957, December 15, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, „La Catafacul Porcului.”/ “At the pig’s catafalque.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 616, November 20, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> N.D. Cocea was one of the most known interwar Romanian journalists and a supporter of the Bolshevik communism.

<sup>5</sup> Pamfil Șeicaru, „Parodia lui Dorian Gray: N.D. Cocea.”/ “The parody of Dorian Gray: N.D. Cocea.” [In:] *Scrieri din exil – (I) Figuri din lumea literară*. București, Editura Saeculum I.O., 2002, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> Gheorghe (George) I. Găetan, a young man from the high society of Bucharest, shocked the Romanian public opinion when in 1928 he tried to kill one of his mistresses from whom he wanted to steal 800,000 lei.

*fellow. A caprice of nature bestowed him with a permanent virility. He could walk into parlours, with his demeanour of being always available for the hot and horny vaginas and the old desperate ladies hardly breathing. A freakish sailing monster, forgotten on the shore, a skilled sailor on the parlour floors, an agrarian owner of virility, ready to offer himself with gracious generosity, for a sum of money, a phallus in smoking, tuxedo or tailcoat.*<sup>1</sup> (our transl.)

### 2.3. Antithesis - Pamfil Şeicaru's favourite discursive attack

Pamfil Şeicaru frequently used the *antithesis* by means of which he defined some social categories, some unsuitable behaviours etc. Thus, he placed his target in opposition with the rest of the world, with common people. In an article<sup>2</sup> which was part of the campaign started by "The Găetan case", the dreadful pamphleteer highlighted his quality of a member of "high society".

*The young man belonging to this high society was a womanizer, stylized by a tailor, who used to say annoying common things. This young gentleman did not possess any trace of depth but he was good at smuggling goods, such as perfumes and silk.* (our transl.)

Pamfil Şeicaru also depicted the prototypical woman belonging to the high society. A young lady from the high society was one who used to wear dresses inappropriately short for those times and who used to have vulgar movements when she was dancing. Another feature of this prototypical young lady was to smoke in public. It was necessary for her to have intimate relations with her step-father or with her mother's lover. Finally she was a woman between two ages, who, judging by her behaviour and clothing, seemed to be a *professional of paid love*.

In many of his political texts, Şeicaru referred to the age of his target as a weak point. In his opinion, youth constituted the main criterion according to which the Romanian interwar political class should be organized. For example, in „Zborul tinereții”/ “The flight of youth”<sup>3</sup>, Şeicaru places two stages of a human being's life in antithesis, highlighting the superiority of *youth* in opposition with *old age*. Thus, the journalist shows that “youth has the frenzy of taking risks” whereas “the old age blocks the

<sup>1</sup> Idem, „Peşte ciocoiesc.”/ “The boyar-like pimp.” [In:] *Curentul*, no. 51, March 1, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, „Lume bună.”/ “High society.” [In:] *Curentul*, no. 53, March 3, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, „Sborul tinereții.”/ “The flight of youth.” [In:] *Curentul*, no. 1070, January 17, 1931, p. 1.



brooks of life”. The article „O țară de cocoșați”/ “A country of hunchbacks”<sup>1</sup> is an interesting article where old age is embodied by Vintilă Brătianu:

*Mister Vintilă Brătianu does not love youth because he was born old, because he didn't enjoy the exuberance of a healthy and optimistic laughter, because youth exudes the impertinence of sheer truth uttered as vigorously as if slinging stones, because youth defies and does not kneel asking for the promising look of his/ her master. Mister Vintilă Brătianu will not give his country the rhythm of youth. (our transl.)*

Pamfil Șeicaru also uses the antithesis in the article „Să-l sfințim, dar să ne lase în pace”/ “Let's hallow him, but he should leave us alone”<sup>2</sup>. The target of his pamphlets is Vintilă Brătianu. Șeicaru's intention is to prove the inability of the political man to run the country. The journalist has a particular way of attacking him by placing two Brătianus in antithesis: Vintilă Brătianu – the man eager to help a poor child versus Vintilă Brătianu – the manager of the national misery.

#### **2.4. The pamphlet register used to discredit *parliamentarism***

Pamfil Șeicaru's anti-parliamentary attitude was no surprise to the interwar press readers. The journalist did not miss any opportunity to show that the Romanian Parliament was mainly formed of people who had no solid intellectual education. When writing chronics in the newspaper *Cuvântul* about the meetings of the Chamber of MPs, Șeicaru was not interested in the thoroughness of the discourses delivered by the members of the Parliament or by the members of the Government who took part in the meetings of the legislative forum. His only intention was to depict, for the public, the ridiculous atmosphere in which the elected persons used to carry on their daily activities.

Whether he blamed or praised somebody, Pamfil Șeicaru emphasized the physical features of those he was writing about. When describing Tancred Constantinescu's speech, an important interwar politician, Șeicaru highlighted the statesman's “spattering rhetorics”: “*The words uttered by a lisping tongue were accompanied by*

<sup>1</sup> Idem, “O țară de cocoșați?”/ “A country of hunchbacks?” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 959, December 17, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, „Să-l sfințim, dar să ne lase în pace.”/ “Let's hallow him, but he should leave us alone.” [In:] *Curentul*, no. 90, April 9, 1928, p. 1.

*beads of spit at his mouth corner.*"<sup>1</sup>

The fragment below illustrates Șeicaru's speech about Georgescu Constantin, another politician of those times:

*Mr. Georgescu Constantin, a debutant politician, is speaking. His speeches have all the surface elements of success which, by a circumstantial caprice, do not seem to accompany them. He is always equal with himself: his petition-like calligraphic sentences, his utterly drone accent, his common physical appearance make you ask yourself: who is this man? Isn't he Ionescu? And you are totally baffled when you are said that he is not. He is Georgescu Constantin. When he finished, he seemed to have still been at the beginning, as he might as well be at the middle of his argument.*<sup>2</sup> (our transl.)

## Conclusions

I consider that Pamfil Șeicaru's pamphlet model is unique in the Romanian publicist writing. His way of swearing does not get down to the lame register of lewdness, an aspect also emphasized by Nicolae Florescu.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Șeicaru used to carefully select the *character* he wanted to insult. Thus he cultivated his fame of a journalist who does not enter into polemics with every human being. As shown throughout this article, Șeicaru used to shape his pamphlet as an indictment, his main targets being those persons he considered to be the saboteurs of the Romanian interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Idem, „Dezbaterile Parlamentare – Camera. Aspecte de la ședința din 4 decembrie.”/ “Parliamentary debates – the Chamber. Aspects from the 4<sup>th</sup> December meeting.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 28, December 7, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, „Dezbaterile Parlamentare – Camera. Aspecte de la ședința din 11 decembrie.”/ “Parliamentary debates – the Chamber. Aspects from the 11<sup>th</sup> December meeting.” [In:] *Cuvântul*, no. 34, December 14, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Florescu (1998) „Pamfil Șeicaru sau reperatele rememorării.”/ “Pamfil Șeicaru or the details of remembrance.” [In:] *Întoarcerea proscrisilor*. [The Return of the Outcasts] București: Editura Jurnalul Literar, 1998, p. 56.

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