

CAMIL PETRESCU – PUBLICIST

Ariana Bălașa
Assist. Prof., PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract: In the interwar period, Romanian press has undergone a remarkable development, absolutely amazing, by increasing the number of publications, by multiplying centers of interest, and also by the circulation of newspapers and magazines of the time. In this scene, along with other personalities of Romanian culture, Camil Petrescu has also been active as a journalist, which influenced him positively, due to the spiritual emulation he created, given that the writer was not limited in his articles to one area.

Satirizing, in the affective manner of the „pamphlet of ideas” and in the rigorous demonstration of „polemic”, ironic and skeptical in some articles, tolerant and understanding in others, Camil Petrescu was the fiercest opponent of injustices in the social, cultural and political life in the period, perhaps more than any other writer of that time.

Keywords: interwar period, Camil Petrescu, journalist, publishing, analytical mind

„The voice of the journalist” can be heard in the entire creation of Camil Petrescu, given the fact that he was a tireless combatant for justice and truth. Although in poetry, stories, novels and plays he „spoke his mind”, later on, he preferred to concentrate more on journalism, as literature seemed to be a „kind exceeded”, „the first love, dominating by far the taste for literature”, being the only constant concern of the writer.

When facing time, Camil Petrescu and his articles will show an undeniable value, because they had a lot to offer to Romanian society and culture.

In the interwar period, Romanian press has experienced an impressive expansion, becoming a major factor of economic and social development of the country. The 554 magazines were literary, religious, industrial, professional, law and administration, education,

medicine, scientific, military, music and art, humor, sociology, sports-fashioned cinema, cultural, children and official bulletins – most of them being city magazines¹.

In this period, we can see, in the Romanian media a large number of journals of literature and culture, with a different periodicity, such as: „Viața Românească”, „Însemnări ieșene”, „Revista Fundațiilor Regale” and these magazines gathered around them most of the later cultural figures of Romania: N. Iorga, T. Vianu, M. Sadoveanu, G. Ibrăileanu, V. Pârvan, T. Arghezi, Gala Galaction, Camil Petrescu, Paul Zarifopol, G. Călinescu, Al. Rosetti, C. I. Parhon, Gr. Antipa ș.a. – with the help of which have perpetuated the traditions and ideals of national culture, promoted inter-war literary values, popularized science achievements and championed the ideals of democracy.²

Also, during this period, there were many journalists who began to write, some of whom have chosen to express themselves only in newspapers, while others have chosen to make a name for themselves in literature.

On this scene of the interwar Romanian press has manifested Camil Petrescu himself, both as a writer and as a journalist.

But, for Camil Petrescu journalism is a constant concern: he entered the world of letters with an article, and retired from it after he completed a polemic. Often he said he wouldn't write literature anymore, but he never gave up on journalism, although there were some years – during the first world war – when, horrified by the disaster, and concerned about his philosophical work he only wrote sporadically.

Personally, he was an old and passionate reader of newspapers. In the anniversary issue (50 years from its appearance) of „Universul”, he wrote: „The oldest memories of those who have known me are apparently marked by this fact, strange for them, that I was a very precocious reader of newspapers. They describe me, amused by this image, as very tiny, at the age of 7, when this passion started to manifest itself, saying that the unfolded newspaper was bigger than me. [...] The column I was searching for passionately was named *Lucruri (sau știri) din toată lumea* [...]. Assiduous reader, I pased on to other columns, other pages, I have evolved to books, documentation and memoirs, mut my love for newspapers is the first one, dominating by far my taste for literature. Moreover, lately, I hardly find the disposition and attention for stories and novels. The genre seems like surpassed, on the one hand, top, by the theory of

1. Revista de istorie, Tomul 34 (1981), Nr. 7, Evoluția statistică a presei în România interbelică ; Nicolae Dascălu, *La prese des minorités nationales dans la Roumanie de deux-guerres (1919-1939)*, p. 1260.
2. Presa periodică politică, socială, literară, economică românească, Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1987, p. 35.

knowledge, and down, indifferent to the tumult and complexity of life recorded by newspaper.”

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As a journalist eternally tormented by contemporary issues, the writer, careful not to miss anything, regardless of the approach, initiating discussions, participating in memorable debates for clarifying certain situations, found between the pages of the newspaper the place and the suitable means of asserting his personality. Here, he could have a direct and permanent contact with the reality of those times, regardless of how many confusions would sneak into his demonstrations, as a result of his philosophical concepts.

The contact with reality was largely a source on energy for the journalist, writer and intellectual that was Cami Petrescu. His activity as a journalist, in dozens of newspapers and magazines will be cultivated with ambition and seriousness until the end of his life, as a high citizen duty. First of all, that is because, as he wrote to a French friend, „Silence is a crime when you carry on your shoulders the responsibility of a nation, and each and everyone of us is responsible for the future of his nation.”⁴, and, in the second place, because Camil Petrescu’s permanent need of reality had to have its own voice.

The vast journalistic work, impressive when we think about the writer’s strength to cope with everyday stresses, will complete his profile as a poet, a novelist, an essayist and man of theatre. This work and his literary creation perfect themselves in the same time. Ladima’ drama, as a writer and journalist, is a projection out of the experience of Camil. The dignity that the artist himself kept, with fierce denials and sacrifices has remained as an ethical norm for the journalist as well.

His debut as a journalist occurs in 1913, when he writes an article in „Rampa”⁵, in various interviews as well as in an autobiographical note, written in 1955, as he stated: „My literary activity began at the newspapers „Rampa” and „Facla”, run by N. D. Cocea in the years 1913-1914. From 1918 I became a professional journalist.”⁶

In 1914 he wrote in „Facla”, under the pseudonym Raul D, and in 1915 he published in „Cronica” run by Tudor Arghezi, under the names Radical and K. Milll.

N. D. Cocea and, later on, Arghezi, will be his menthors in journalism.

3. *Gânduri cu prilejul unui jubileu în Universul*, An 50, Nr. 150, 5 iunie 1933, apud. Florica Ichim, prefață la *Publicistică*, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. IX.

4. Camil Petrescu, *Note zilnice (1927-1940)*, Editura Cartea Românească, 1975, p. 161.

5. La 30 aprilie 1913, primul articol al lui Camil Petrescu, *Teatrul Comedia*, apare în „Rampa”, condusă de Alexandru Davila și N. D. Cocea

6. Manuscris din arhiva scriitorului, apud. Florica Ichim, în prefața la *Publicistică*, vol. I, p. XI.

N. D. Cocea will constantly monitor the work of the young man he supported at the beginning of his career as a journalist: „Maybe I’m not wrong, but I have this impression that our writers don’t do anything anymore, given the fact that, once they succeeded with one piece, they re-write themselves eternally. Sadoveanu, Damian Stănoiu, Liviu Rebreanu, Mircea Damian, Cezar Petrescu a little less, Camil Petrescu not at all.”⁷

It is understandable why the young man looked rough on the Romanian high society, which he captured from deep down, from the crowd, in all its evils and seductions (v. *Addenda la falsul tratat*⁸).

„Banatul românesc” (1919) was the first newspaper where Camil Petrescu activated as an editor-in-chief⁹ until May 1920, when he withdrew from the editorial board for political reasons.

Camil Petrescu took care of some of the issues from „Banatul Românesc”, which published several works of the writers beyond the mountains: Victor Eftimiu (*Isus pe cruce, Pace Vouă*), Ion Pillat (*Solie*), I. C. Vissarion (*Veche cunoștință*) ș.a. Following his withdrawal from the board, the newspaper never published anything of this nature again. The path established by Camil Petrescu was also followed by „Banatul”, the opponent magazine, that published several poems by Goga, Eftimiu, Vlahuță, Alecsandri etc.

„Țara” is another independent magazine from Timișoara (1920), which was also run by Camil Petrescu, with a fleeting appearance of only ten issues. This is the only political newspaper he ever run.

On the 22nd of January 1920, the first issue of the magazine called „Limba română” came out, under the supervision of Gheorghe Barițiu. The magazine had a subtitle: *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură*, and was scheduled to appear three times a week, but due to financial difficulties, it only appeared twice. The pages had three columns each: one in Romanian, one in German and one in Hungarian. The columns written in German and Hungarian were actually translations of the Romanian one. The magazine has opened a gateway to the knowledge of the language and spiritual life of the Carpathians; its pages contain Camil Petrescu’s

7. „Litere”, An II, Nr. 8, aprilie 1954, interviu semnat m.a., apud. Florica Ichim, în prefață la *Publicistica*, vol. I, p. XII.

8 *Addenda la falsul tratat*, în *Teatru*, vol. III, E.S.P.L.A., 1947, p. 487, apud. Elvin B., *Camil Petrescu studiu critic*, Editura pentru literatură, București, 1962, p. XII.

9. C. N. Mihalache nota: „Se cuvine, deci, să facem o precizare, Camil Petrescu a fost colaborator, redactor-șef al ziarului „Banatul românesc” și nu al ziarului „Banatul”, cum afirmă B. Elvin în monografia citată pagina 17 – C. N. Mihalache, *Camil Petrescu, profesor și ziarist la Timișoara*, extras din culegerea *Limba și literatură*, vol. VIII, editată de Societatea de Științe Istorice și Filologice din RPR.

enthusiastic efforts to contribute to the spiritual unification of all Romanian people and to a harmonic coexistence of all minorities, in an important historical moment such as that one.

The twelve issues of the magazine („Limba română”), were more instructive than any grammar, due to their trilinguist character and their interesting organisation of the material.

The publications led by Camil Petrescu in Timișoara are the first published under Romanian administration. When the media history of Banat will be released, or when the monography of Timișoara will be composed, Camil Petrescu’s name will find its rightful place.

In those two interwar decades, Camil Petrescu will speak his mind about the whole political, social, economic and cultural situation of the country, with more and more discouragement. Indeed, as he had guessed, it is very difficult to find all publications that maintained his collaboration.

At about three years after leaving Timișoara, he coordinated and edited "Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice", which he structured around two main plans: a political one, and a cultural one. Politically, almost all items converge around the issue of noocracy, that it will be debated later on in Teze și antiteze. One page was reserved exclusively for professional staff collaborators. Four pages are devoted to cultural and artistic movements, with articles signed by the cultural and artistic figures of the time. From this point of view, the magazine continues the path established by the previous one, „Țara”, and in the same time it created a substantial precedent for another one, „Universului literar”, in which the idea of personality becomes the main issue. On the cultural side, as a reflection of a cult for intellectual values, whose arguments can be depicted in the political articles, it praises cultural and artistic personalities.

From his political experiences in Timișoara and Bucharest, Camil Petrescu observed the real situation of the Romanian intellectual in the interwar period, who remained behind the drift caused by political fluctuations, unable to integrate in a certain political party. Camil Petrescu was one of the percussive voices that carried this hope, but he had to whithdraw in bitterness, as he was completely misunderstood by his contemporaries.

„Cetatea literară” (December 19th, 1925 – May 1926), with its ten issues, had a longer existence than „Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice”. More developed on the literary side than on the general, political and cultural terms, this was a supplement to the journal „Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice”.

The journalist's aggressiveness reaches its peak between 1931 and 1934, when the writer concludes that the rule of bourgeois society is to protect and proliferate mischief.

In that meeting of names and books, of diverse and often nebulous ideas, of strange literary experiences, in that climate of facility and provisory, the writer refuses to be a part of the intellectual games played by this society, because he knows them to be false, and he also refuses to believe in its artistic formulas, as he knows how fragile they really are. His standing position is that of a rebel, shutting himself from the bourgeois society.

„Journalism means sincerely and independently writing”¹⁰, wrote Camil Petrescu in 1930. In defining professional journalism – unlike a dilettante – enters „the soul consumed in the fight for an idea, a cause” as well as enrolling at a newspaper capable of being a free university, an institution that „maintains a ruthless contact with life”. Such newspapers seemed to be, for Camil Petrescu, at a certain moment, „Adevărul” and „Dimineața”, even if he didn't always agree with their political position or with their campaigns. For him, more importantly seemed to be the fact that, in these newspapers, a great deal of freedom was given to their collaborators, by encouraging personal initiatives, as well as the fact that, given the large number of columns, young writers had the possibility of writing and expressing themselves, and the fact that journalists and democratic writers were in touch with the social life, but in the same time, they were receiving others to write in their pages etc.

Dumitru Micu characterized him as a writer „deeply absorbed by the idea that writing is an engaging activity, pronouncing in all sort of matters with the seriousness with which a statement is made before a court of eternity”¹¹. Moreover, his last two articles (March 1957), from „Contemporanul”, had such programmatic titles: *Scrisul nostru ne angajează* and *Scrisul nu-l angajează*. In fact, these were his last debates, his favourite genre.

The state of permanent confrontation with evil all around him, prompted Perpersicius to characterize him as „solus contra omnes”. Paradoxically, one day, feeling dissatisfied, he will write an article named *Zădărnicia scrisului* and he will even initiate a column, under the same name: „I reject the idea of being condemned to write daily – he said –, and even if sometimes I receive my fee, I would never write only for the fee. I mean I do not write as one who would be condemned to talk five hours a day in the hopper of a phone, knowing too well that, at the end of the line, there is none listening to him, and he is still obligated (and controlled)

10. *Ziarist profesionist*, în revista „Omul liber”, An I, Nr. 59, 3 februarie 1930, apud. Florica Ichim, *Publicistică*, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. VIII.

11. Dumitru Micu, *Scriitori, cărți, reviste*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1980, p. 147.

to express himself with intellectual decency. I can stop writing, but if I have written indeed, I am not so rotten with pride as to become disinterested in this important matter, which is the understanding of my writing and its intentional communication”.¹²

Camil Petrescu thought that there is a deep connection between the intellectual's and the journalist's condition. Considering the fact that the media ensures a permanent contact with reality, journalism was, for Camil Petrescu, a biographical act with a phenomenological sense, because in its contact with the world, the journalist consciousness is in a position to select facts and elucidate the knowledge incidents. As a result, „...a good journalist has the technique of a true artist”, and „... the newspaper can only start from facts, and it can only aspire to facts. Its beauty lies only in this, because facts have their nude prestige, embarrassing this way any attempt to cheat through a second hand literaturalization. That's why it is absolutely necessary to have a way (a principle) of selecting the facts, and more than that, as being essential for the idea of a newspaper, a precise execution of that function establishing a hierarchy of the fact – values. Otherwise, there is only chaos and boredom.”¹³

Regarding the controversy, which was his favourite manner in journalism, Camil Petrescu wrote: „Only the faint, parasitic spirits run from the path of contrary arguments, only the literary heroes with their ombril still attached (no figure in the text...)... abhor any personal fight. A controversy gives us the fear of a child crossing the street alone.”¹⁴

When reading some articles published by Camil Petrescu, we immediately think about their obvious connection with the articles of Eminescu: „We are dealing with one of the most crucial exams of the Romanian society, and Camil Petrescu is one of the most vigorous and gifted journalists since Eminescu, said Eugen Simion.”¹⁵

Ironic and skeptical in the article named *Exproprierea îmbogățitorilor de război*, satirizing and bitterly in *E parale, dar păcat că românii nu e deștepți*, tragical in *Cantonierul Picioarea*, or even worm and profoundly human in *Invalizii și chetele*, Camil Petrescu was probably the fiercest opponent of the social-political elements of all writers between the two world wars.

In the first years of his career as a journalist, Camil Petrescu wrote very few articles about war, about himself and the others, about sacrifice, misery and death, but as time goes by

12. V. *Cascada prejudecăților... Zădărnicia scrisului*, în “Lumea”, An I, Nr. 3, 7 octombrie 1945, apud. Florica Ichim, *Publicistică*, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. XVII

13. *Gânduri cu prilejul unui jubileu*, în „Universul”, An 50, 5 iunie 1933, apud. Aurel Petrescu, *Opera lui Camil Petrescu*, Editura didactică și pedagogică, București, 1972, p. 85.

14. Camil Petrescu, *Maxime și reflecții*, Editura Albatros, București, 1975, p. 133.

15. Eugen Simion, *Timpul trăirii, timpul mărturisirii*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1976, p. 45.

and the sacrifices prove to be useless, as starvation, poverty and mockery continue, his writing begins to show a certain pain and despair that will never truly disappear. If he gets tired hoping for the best, hoping that things will somehow straighten for good, he never stops revealing the suffering of his fellows, which is his suffering as well.

Although he was not close yet in revealing his theory of „necessary noocracy”, he strongly believed in the force of intelligence as the one true weapon against turpitude and lack of ethical behaviour. Hence, the need for solidarity among intellectuals, among those who have a sense of responsibility and who are determined to listen to that sense. He considers himself among the people doomed to constantly seek new fulfillments, and he believes they ought to realize those at any costs.

When speaking about „attacks from the press” Camil Petrescu wasn't referring to controversy or pamphlets, he was actually talking about personal attacks and scandal. In controversy he refuses to use „vulgar stupidity”, characterized by: inability to distinguish shades – „a superior mind finds detail where the common thought only sees a large scale” – , useless generalization and „lack of emotional restraint in the face of evidence, having as an immediate corollary the lack of experience and self-control.”¹⁶ He was sure that the controversial dialectics technique was superior to the expository technique. Even from his first articles in „Țara”, his main formula remains unchanged. The writer reproduces the general aspects of the article he wants to attack, using ironic interventions in order to establish the truth (parenthetical), and then he comments on the statements. He hates the apodictic tone, characteristic of „current judgement victims”, of prejudice and dogma. Hence, the frequent use of suspension points, of formulas trying to depict a certain meaning, to explore the word, as well as a prudent measure of his admiration, in some cases. His stand is a pretty obvious one, even in his first article in „Țara”, where Camil Petrescu, at 26 years old, proves to be a mature journalist and a campaigner for the good of the country.

From his political experiences in Timișoara and Bucharest, Camil Petrescu observed the real situation of the Romanian intellectual in the interwar period, who remained behind the drift caused by political fluctuations, unable to integrate in a certain political party. Camil Petrescu was one of the percussive voices that carried this hope, but he had to withdraw in bitterness, as he was completely misunderstood by his contemporaries. The programmatic

16. „Cuvântul liber”, seria a II-a, An II, Nr. 28, 15 august 1925, apud. Florica Ichim, *Publicistică*, vol. I, Editura Minerva, București, 1984, p. XXVI.

article of the magazine named „Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice” was also named after the magazine’s title, and its aim was to show that worker’s interests were entirely different from those of intellectuals, peasants, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, their ideal being „the harmony between all these interests in the name of an ideal of culture and humanity”.

În the first issue, an article from the third page is named: În frământarea culturii europene: George Enescu. In this article, in an optimistic tone, Camil Petrescu said: „And then, after 10 or 15 issues, we would have offered to the Romanian public an entire gallery, and this public could feel something more against some personalities, shadowed by our daily newspapers, which prefer politicians”. Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice had a great resonance in public opinion, despite the lack of solidarity.

„Cetatea literară” had a longer existence than „Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice”, that had its first issue on a Saturday, 19th December 1925, closing in May 1926, with a total of ten issues. More developed on the literary side than on the general, political and cultural terms, this was a supplement to the journal „Săptămâna muncii intelectuale și artistice”. As editor-in-chief, Camil Petrescu, wrote almost the entire magazine: the editorial, personal literary creations, different columns, such as Comentarii: cărți, teatru, reviste, revista revistelor ș.a.

„Cetatea literară” placed a great importance on literary criticism, in the broadest sense of that term. Camil Petrescu devotes two and even three pages, almost half the magazine to the columns named: Comentarii: cărți, teatru, revistă și Notelor, where the writer was publishing reviews, dramatic chronicles, summaries of other magazines. In one issue, commenting on the magazine „Gândirea”, among others, Camil Petrescu claimed that ignoring the other magazines proved to be a lamentable attitude.

The most productive and the most balanced, but also the longest period in his career as a journalist is marked by the collaboration and leadership, as editor, of the magazine called „Revista Fundațiilor Regale”. This happens from the appearance of the magazine (1934), until its termination (1947). Since its first issue, the magazine appeared as a select publication. It was intended to be a cultural and artistic synthesis publication, putting out polemical scandals, so frequent in Romanian cultural and artistic world. This type of magazine required an eclectic character, and so, in the first article, Camil Petrescu said: "We sought and seek to embrace in

the strictly literary production all modes of Romanian sensitivity, even when we don't adhere completely to one or all of them"¹⁷.

Although it was often considered as a complementary aspect of his artistic creation, the publishing activity of Camil Petrescu still maintains the main characteristics of his entire work. So, in the strength of his ideas we can feel the reflective character of the writer, that cerebral strain that can be perceived through the concreteness of the images, supported by its turn through the permanent metaphorical illustration. With his temper, Camil Petrescu is present in that personal, specific note, that makes him oscillate between depression and enthusiasm, between rebellion and understanding, always waiting nostalgically for better times.

At the end of a research path that will never be closed, hopefully we managed to present arguments in order to show that there is a unity of vision in the entire work of Camil Petrescu.

Due to the correspondances between that reality and the present one, the publishing activity of Camil Petrescu has a strong resonance in the current publishing environment, and remains a model of firmness, fairness and ethical behaviour.

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