

**Origins of the *Fait Divers*<sup>1</sup> in the Romanian Press**

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**Abstract**

The *faits divers* are events assimilated to the unpredictable, the extraordinary, or the violation of one or several norms, which rapidly become subjects of discussion and sources for rumour. Their being included into newspapers has brought major changes in journalism practices – the passage from office journalism, dominated by opinions, to field journalism, which presupposes the contact with social reality, the community, political or administrative institutions, etc. In other words, the passage to information journalism. On the other hand, the *fait divers*, together with serial novels and illustrations, has made journalism more attractive, has accelerated public debates, and, last but not least, has had, though indirectly, a considerable impact on popular literacy. Although the *fait divers* has been blamed at all times for bringing violence in front of the people, which has led to the accusation that the press has become a school of crime, it has still accelerated the professionalization of journalism. This article presents a historical overview of the appearance and evolution of the *fait divers* in the press, especially in the *Trompeta Carpaților*, as representative of the titles of that pioneering period, but also in other newspapers. Romanian journalism owes much to French journalism, which served in the first years as a model and a source of information. There is much evidence to this, the most obvious being the great amount of *fait divers* from France in the pages of Romanian journals and newspapers. The cyclical nature of journalism practice is also interesting from this perspective – after the fall of the communist regime in Romania (1989), expressive journalism with a strong political bias came back in force and acted as a form of symbolic revenge

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<sup>1</sup> A term taken over from French into Romanian (“*fapt divers*”). The expression does not have an accepted translation in English, hence I will use the French expression all throughout the article. The term refers to “trivial events”, “human interest stories”, “stories on the news” – that is, stories of minor/local importance as opposed to political or economic issues. (Translator’s note, Emese G. Czintos).

(purifying anti-communism), but exhausted its resources in a short time, giving way again to information journalism, to which the *fait divers* also pertains.

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Rarely does an event become a subject of discussion, and a source for rumour alike, as it happens with the *fait divers* – that is, the events assimilated to the unpredictable, the extraordinary, or the violation of one or several norms.

Their being included into newspapers has brought upon major changes in journalism practices – the passage from office journalism, dominated by opinions, to field journalism, presupposing the contact with social reality, the community, political or administrative institutions, etc. In other words, the passage to information journalism. On the other hand, the *fait divers*, together with serial novels and illustrations, has made journalism more attractive, has accelerated public debates, and, last but not least, has had, though indirectly, a considerable impact on popular literacy.

This article presents a historical overview of the appearance and evolution of the *fait divers* in the press, especially in the *Trompeta Carpaților*, as representative of the titles of that pioneering period, but also in other newspapers.

### **The proto-*fait divers***

In the year 1837, a “society of the learned” published a newspaper which lacked the texts imposed by administrative, military, or religious authorities, political reports, or official announcements. It was the *Foaia Duminecii* (The Sunday Newspaper),<sup>1</sup> published in Braşov, printed in an acceptable quality for that age, a newspaper which contained texts and illustrations (engravings). More precisely, it contained texts about exotic territories and populations unknown to the readers (Eskimos, the Druze, black slaves, etc.), and customs which aroused their curiosity. The first issue (January 2) contained texts about the escape of two travellers from their detention in Alger, about the fight

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<sup>1</sup> The complete title was: *Foaia Duminecii spre înmulțirea cei de obște folositoare cunoștințe* (The Sunday newspaper for acquiring knowledge useful for the community, 1837)

of an Indian with a boa snake, both undated, but relatively recent, and so on. Another thematic field was the remembrance of historical events or personalities, or impressive constructions (the Great Wall of China, the marble palace of Sankt Petersburg, the Graben in Vienna, etc.) The field of these “novelties” also included articles on the use of skates and skis, the processing of cotton, the production of indigo, as well as culinary recipes.

As apparent from those said above, the newspaper contained narratives of a descriptive nature, never autochthonous,<sup>1</sup> and extremely heterogeneous. This situation may be explained by the fact that the major objective of such a magazine was to attract a less exigent audience (proven also by the size of the texts and the insertion of images), a fact which allows it to be perceived as the first “popular magazine” in Romania.<sup>2</sup>

With the appearance of newspapers (*Curierul românesc* [Romanian courier], Bucharest, 1829 and *Albina românească* [Romanian bee], Iași, 1829), shorter texts began to be published, lacking any titles or signatures, about events both at home and abroad, comprised in columns entitled “novitale din lăuntru” (‘novelties from inside’ – news from home) and “novitale din afară” (‘novelties from outside’ – news from abroad). Most often, these were isolated and rare events, lacking any major relevance. Some examples follow.

The 19 October 1936 issue of the *Curierul românesc* recounted the attempted escape of some prisoners: “Thursday night, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the current month, at about 11 o’clock (Turkish hours), the prisoners from the salt mine Telega, having plotted among themselves three days earlier, have escaped in a number of 22 people; 10 of them were taken out to work and make food that day, and 12 of them were taken out by these secretly on the trolleys and furiously rushed on the soldiers and two policemen who were guarding the entrance of the mine, hit one of the guards on the head with a lever and knocked him down, stole the

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<sup>1</sup> The texts published were most often translated by I. Barac from German periodicals, such as the *Sonntag Magazin*, *Pfennig Magazin*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The magazine failed to be an editorial success, as it started with a number of 800 subscribers according to the most optimistic estimations, in the first trimester, and only remained with 150 subscribers in the second trimester. It stopped being published in the autumn of 1837, the editors started to publish the *Foaia literară* (Literary review) instead.

weapons of the guard, and ran out... ”<sup>1</sup> The result was that the police intervened, and a fight began, which ended with the capturing of the fugitives, and many others were wounded.

In a few days the same newspaper published a story about the director of a French theatre company, Jean Baptist Fourreau, who “died in a pitiful way”.<sup>2</sup> He went to an estate in order to try to breed a new race of horses “of foreign breed”, and, accidentally, he hit his hunting weapon with his walking stick, which unloaded, and seriously wounded his hand. He could only see a doctor on the third day, as he came back to Bucharest – but that was already too late, Fourreau died of tetanus.<sup>3</sup>

The most varied of events could be included as *fait divers* subjects, from technical performances to remarkable gestures and rare natural phenomena. The highly functional new typographic machine which was handled by one single typographer, invented by “Thomas Frenk of Utica”,<sup>4</sup> was considered “a miracle of the century”, just as the appearance of a meteor (“a physical apparition”) in Moldavia, on the night of 29 to 30 August 1837, on account of its largeness (“12 palms”) and spherical form.<sup>5</sup>

It is obvious that events which take place during the night have a privileged journalistic value as they remain surrounded in mystery, regardless of their nature (crimes, earthquakes, or other natural phenomena). Naturally, it also depends on the context of the event, because, for instance, the 11 January 1838 earthquake from Bucharest enjoyed a much greater media attention both because of the 8 dead and 14 wounded, and because it happened while the Prince himself was

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<sup>1</sup> „Joi seara, la 1-iu a curgătorului, pe la 11 ceasuri turcești, arestații de la ocna Telega, având cu trei zile mai nainte făcut complot între dâșșii, au scăpat în număr de 22; însă 10 ce se afla scoși în ziua aceea pentru lucru și facere demâncare, iar 12 scoși de către aceștia fără veste pe crivace și năvălind cu furie asupra soldaților și a doi dorobanți ce se afla de pază la gura ocnii, au lovit pe unul din santinele în cap cu o pârghie, de l-au doborât jos, au hrăpit puștele caraulii și au ieșit afară ...” *Curierul românesc*, vol. VIII, no. 69, 19 November 1836, p. 2. (The translations of the excerpts written in old Romanian intend to suggest the sometimes difficult, laborious syntax and expressions of that language. Translator’s note).

<sup>2</sup> „a murit într-un chip vrednic de jale”

<sup>3</sup> *Curierul românesc*, vol. VIII, no. 78, 23 November 1836, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Curierul românesc*, vol. IX, no. 33, 1 September 1837

<sup>5</sup> *Albina românească*, vol. IX, no. 71, 9 September 1837.

attending a theatre performance.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that the events of the geographical area of Romania appear quite rarely in these newspapers. Events such as “the eruption of the Etna”,<sup>2</sup> or “Manhunt”, that is, the slave capturing raids in Sudan initiated by the Egyptian leader Mehmet Ali Pasha (1843),<sup>3</sup> and other similar reports seem worthier of representation, judging by the size they occupy in the newspapers.

Nevertheless, as the number of such publications began to grow, internal events tended to appear more frequently on their pages. The fires from Iași and Huși (1844) producing many victims and material losses determined the editors “to surpass the limits of our newspaper; and not being able to remain strangers to the tears of those impoverished, we dare present this event of the day and appeal to our readers’ help, each by their own possibility and endurance”,<sup>4</sup> that is, to ask for the reader’s mobilization in order to alleviate the effects of the fires. The marriages of noble families with all their splendour and piquant details,<sup>5</sup> the inundations (Tecuci, 9 May 1846), fires (Bucharest, 27 March 1847), and other such things were presented with excessive dramatic details.

The series of *faits divers* also reveals, in 1845, for example, events such as this: “On September 22 a rabid wolf appeared in the villages around Giurgiu, biting many cows and people, fought with the dogs, then, entering the town, jumped on a guardian soldier’s back, bit him by the shoulder, and after a fight, running out of the town (...) dangerously bit over 25 persons, until, as the townspeople heard about it and came to help the police, a soldier shot it. In order to cure the people who were bitten and to prevent them from catching the rabies, a hospital was formed immediately, where, by the assistance of its director and the arrival of chief doctor Guși, all measures were taken, leaving in charge doctor Laiber to search them. Several dogs have caught rabies already,

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<sup>1</sup> *România*, vol. I, nr. 11, 13 January 1838. At this time, at Bucharest theatre, a French troupe played Victor Hugo’s *Angelo, tyran de Padoue* beginning at 21,00.

<sup>2</sup> *Albina românească*, vol. XV, no. 100, 19 December 1843.

<sup>3</sup> *Albina românească*, vol. XVI, no. 7, 23 January 1844.

<sup>4</sup> “să iasă chiar fără’ de voie din cadrul prescris foaiei noastre; și neputând rămânea străini la lacrimile celor sărăciți, îndrăznim a arăta această întâmplare a zilei și a chema în ajutor pre cetitorii noștri, fieștecare după cât va putea și se va îndura” *Foaie științifică și literară* (Scientific and literary review) vol. I, no. 21, 23 July 1844.

<sup>5</sup> *Curierul românesc*, no. 95, 4 December 1844, *Albina românească*, no. 73, 16 September 1845.

and many others are just wandering around.”<sup>1</sup> Or also events like that of Grigore Cojocaru’s hunting down five bears at a hunt,<sup>2</sup> or various mining catastrophes, or oil extraction accidents, conflicts between recruits, etc. It should be mentioned that these texts did not appear in columns entitled *fait divers*, and most often they bore no titles and signatures.

### Events “for the columns”

In order to follow up the evolution of the *fait divers*, I have chosen, of the many newspaper titles, the *Trompette Carpaților* (The trumpet of the Carpathians) due to its editorial qualities and the echo it had ever since the year of its foundation – 1862. While initially publishing texts about internal and external events, serial novels, and advertisements, taking over the news from official sources or Romanian or foreign publications, starting with 1866 one may notice the introduction of a new, permanent column, entitled “Varietăți” (Varieties). This column grouped notes, news, sometimes even reports taken over from the *Le Figaro*, *L'Ordre*, *Rep. Française*, *Le Pays Gauloise*, *La Turqui*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, etc. Most writings were borrowed from French press, followed by Transylvanian magazines. In the year 1870 the column “Diverse” (Miscellaneous) was introduced, and in the second part of the same year texts were published on the third page in the column “Fapte diverse” (*Faits divers*).

Until the year 1875, these columns existed in parallel with those entitled “Nuvele” (Novelties), “Știri diverse” (Various news), “Știri din urmă” (Recent news), and “Evenimentul zilei” (Event of the day, beginning with 1870), having notable differences in content. The “subjects” presented in the “Varietăți” column beginning with 1866 were murders, thefts, and accidents, of the following kind: “The Prefect of

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<sup>1</sup> “Pe la 22 septembrie, un lup turbat ivindu-se în satele din’ mpregiurul Giurgiului, a mursecat (mușcat-n.n.) mulțime de vite și oameni, s-a luptat cu câini, pe urmă, intrând în oraș, a sărit în spatele unui soldat în santinelă, l-a mușcat de umere și, după o luptă, fugind în oraș (...) și a mușcat primejdios peste 25 oameni, până când, prinzând de veste orașul și venind în dreptul poliției, l-a împușcat un soldat. Spre căutarea (vindecarea-n.n.) oamenilor musercați și întâmpinul de a nu turba, s-a format un spital într-adins, unde, prin îngrijirea d-lui cârmuitor și după sosirea protomedicului Guși, s-au luat toate măsurile, însărcinând pe d. doctor Laiber cu căutarea lor. Din câini, în oraș au turbat până acum câțiva, și mulți îmblă zănatoci” *Curierul românesc*, no. 71, 5 October 1845.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (Transylvanian gazette), no. 15 - 16, 20 - 23 February 1858.

Prahova county by telegram No. 12.940 announces that in the days past Mr Sterianoiu, land owner in Berta village, was attacked by nine robbers, and shot one of them. Due to the measures taken by the administration, five of these robbers were caught, and one was killed in another robbery, the other two are forcefully tracked.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes the texts were longer and more detailed: “On the night of 28 to 29 August, a band of seven muggers attacked the house of the preceptor of Cerbu Albota village in Argeș county, and took 1.048 lei fiscal money from a chest, a necklace of thirty pennies and another one of three pennies. The inhabitants of the village, hearing the noise of gunfire made by the robbers, as they were all armed, hastened to them, and in a gunfight which lasted for several hours, they hardly managed to catch two of the muggers, while the other five, turning the darkness to their advantage, escaped, taking with them the horses of those caught as well, because they were all riding horses. The second day, the mayor of Dealu Bradului village informed that he found Stoica Cocorea, one of the escaped robbers, in his house, seriously injured, being shot in the back. The robbers caught were handed over to justice, and serious measures were taken to capture those escaped.”<sup>2</sup>

The examples show that the qualifications were abundant and sanctioning – “wrong-doers”, “robbers”, or “muggers” being the most frequent of such qualifications –, and the titles of the texts were rare and uninspired; for example, “A sad, misfortunate case” was the title of a piece of news about a victim of an accident in Bucharest.

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<sup>1</sup> “D. prefect al județului Prahova prin telegrama No. 12.940, anunță că zilele trecute călcându-se de către nouă făcători de rele d. Sterianoiu, proprietar în comuna Berta, acest proprietar a împușcat unul din tâlhari. După măsurile luate de administrație, s-au prins cinci dintre acești jefuitori, iar un altul s-a omorât într-o altă călcare, ceilalți doi sunt urmăriți cu energie” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. IV, no. 451, 16 September 1866, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> “În noaptea de 28-29 August trecut, o bandă de șapte făcători de rele, au călcat casa perceptorului comunei Cerbu Albota din județul Argeș, și au luat dintr-o ladă lei 1.048, bani ai fiscoi, o salbă de treizeci sfați și alta de trei firfirici. Locuitorii satului simțind din sgomotul ce făceau tâlharii prin dări de focuri, fiind toți înarmați, au sărit, și printr-o luptă ținută mai multe ore între dânșii cu armele, abia au putut reuși a prinde doi dintre tâlhari, iar ceilalți cinci profitând de întuneric, au scăpat luând cu dânșii și caii celor prinși, fiindcă toți erau călări. A doua zi, primarul comunei Dealu Bradului a făcut cunoscut că pe Stoica Cocorea, unul din tâlharii fugiți, l-a găsit la casa sa greu rănit, fiind împușcat în spate. Tâlharii prinși s-au dat judecății, iar pentru cei scăpați s-au luat măsuri energice de prindere” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. IV, no. 454, 27 September 1866, p. 3.

Gradually, the articles comprised in the *faits divers* column started to gain a certain typological particularity – crimes, fortunate events, performances, immoral acts.

As I have shown, the *faits divers* from abroad were taken over from foreign publications or Romanian publications from Transylvania, with no differentiation in page layout from autochthonous events. As for the size, number, and subject of the events presented, the most varied of situations were displayed, ranging from a complete absence of any such stories to their covering almost an entire page of the newspaper.

Let me exemplify this by the succession of events published in the 22/3 January 1870 issue of the *Trompeta Carpaților*, on page 2: “Earthquake. On the night of 4 to 5 January the town Nadaș (Pojonu district) was struck by an earthquake so strong that the chimneys of many houses collapsed, and the church bells began to chime. The inhabitants, being terribly frightened, hastened out in the middle of the night to the fields, fearing the collapse of their houses.”<sup>1</sup> This is followed by the story of a woman who during a theatre performance (at the national theatre in Pest) gave birth to a boy on the gallery. The next issue is a note about the length of railways in Hungary and Transylvania (it reached 735 6/8 miles at the end of year 1869), then another one about the shipwreck of a tugboat (*Coroneos*) at Giurgiu. In Iași two girls who suffered of a disease of the legs were removed from the hospital and left in front of a shop, in the frost, saying that there is no cure for their disease; in Rome, during the councils the “holy fathers” were often robbed of their crosses, strings, and watches by robbers who were dressed in priests’ clothes; a chemist from Württemberg invented a printing ink of the best quality; and in New York the (world’s) greatest hotel was being built, called *Hotel Southern*, which “will have eight floors and three gothic towers” and which cost as much as 1,600,000 dollars. These cases are followed by Transylvanian news – a child from Teii village (in Biharea) discovered “a pot made of clay which contained, as they say, several thousands of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century talers”<sup>2</sup>; the number of the population in the castles of Posion, Clusiu, Arad, etc. increased, as shown by the last census. Finally, the

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<sup>1</sup> “Cutremur de pământ. În noaptea de 4 spre 5 Ianuarius, orașul Nadaș (districtul Pojonu) a fost cercat de un cutremur atât de puternic, în cât multe ogeacuri de case s’au dărâmat, și clopotele de la biserice prinseseră a suna. Locuitorii, coprinși de o spaimă desperătoare, alergară în mijlocul nopții la câmp, temându-se de cutropirea caselor”.

<sup>2</sup> “o oală de lut, care conținea, precum se zice, mai multe mii de taleri din sec. 16 și 17”



population of the planet reached a number of approx. 1,228,000,000 inhabitants, of whom “552 millions of Mongoloid race, 360 millions of Caucasoid race, 190 millions of Ethiopian race, 176 millions of Malayan race, and one millions of American Indian race.”<sup>1</sup>

Such events bore the title of *faits divers* in 1870. At that time there was no differentiation between the *faits divers* as events occurring in a private space as opposed to other kinds of events considered to be *news*. It was enough for a “troublesome” event to happen, turning over the everyday rhythm and order of things, to be validated as an interesting fact, therefore published as a *fait divers*. The titles became more emphatic in order to favour the reading of such texts: they contained “strong” words such as: death, misfortune, assassin, bandit, thief, murder, asphyxiation, maltreatment, suicide, etc.

Here are two examples of fortunate events: “A lucky fall. Last Sunday, a Jewish woman with her daughter coming from Podul Iloaei to Iași with the railroad, the mother let her child look out from the carriage window, and suddenly the child fell out of the window. The conductors stopped the train as soon as they heard, but the child, not being injured from her fall, started to run back to Podul Iloaei; one of the conductors immediately ran after her, caught up with her, and took her back to the carriage, than after a short while they arrived in Iași safe and sound. Admirable fall!”<sup>2</sup>

“A revived deceased. Last Sunday a child of 11, daughter of citizen Gheorghe Puhă of Opișeni village, died. The funeral was to take place on Tuesday, but, luckily for the girl, as the preparations were not finished, the funeral was postponed for the following day; but on Wednesday morning the child suddenly revived. It seems that it was only a deep faint.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “552 milioane de rasă mongolică, 360 milioane de cea caucază, 190 milioane de cea etiopică, 176 de rasa malaică și un milion de cea americană”

<sup>2</sup> “O cădere norocoasă. Duminica trecută, o femeie jidovcă d’împreună cu copila sa venind de la Podul Iloaei spre Iassy cu drumul de ferr, maica’și pusese copila să privească pre fereastra vagonului și de o dată a scăpat-o afară. Conductorii auzind îndată despre aceasta opriră trenul; copila însă cum a căzut, neavând nici o contusiune, a început a fugi înapoi spre Podul Iloaei; unul din conductori, fugind îndată după dânsa a ajuns-o și a adus-o earăși în vagon, apoi peste puțin ajunseră în Iassy întregi și nevătămați. Admirabilă cădere!” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 836, 5/17 July 1870, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> “Mort înviat. Duminica trecută a murit o copilă ca de 11 ani a locuitorului Gheorghe Puhă din comuna Opișeni. Însmormântarea era să urmeze marți, însă din norocirea copilei, neputându-se face preparările, însmormântarea a rămas pe

### **Corpses for sell...**

This editorial formula which integrated the dead seems to have insured a significant audience as long as such kinds of events occupied an increasing amount of space in these newspapers each year. Death in all its shapes became merchandise, a constant element of the newspaper. The editors seem to have been so well convinced of its impact that they also searched the foreign press for events involving as many dead bodies as possible, statistics of death, etc. For instance, the number of suicides in France was extensively presented, with a great number of details: in the year 1869, 4,008 men and 1,003 women died: "Of these, 908 men and 407 women jumped in the water; 197 men and 335 women hanged themselves; 237 men and 3 women shot themselves with a pistol; 251 men and 2 women committed suicide with a rifle; 74 men and 44 women drank poison..."<sup>1</sup> They were followed by those who jumped from heights, those who threw themselves in front of trains, one starved to death; to conclude, "the suicides for the most part were workers".<sup>2</sup> If the event contained acts of cruelty, situation reversals, complex characters, etc., the journalists were all the more generous regarding the space dedicated to such facts:

"A murderer. Miss Fița, aged 16, being involved in an amorous affair with a young man who had seduced her with the promise to marry her, finding out that the seducer had already negotiated marriage with the parents of Miss Zoe, aged 15, having recently left boarding school, daughter of Mrs Frusina Dobreasca of Căciulătești village, Dobrești suburb, went to Miss Dobreasca and her mother, and warned them that the young man had promised himself to her, and that they should give up the marriage project or else one of the three would die. This determined declaration of Miss Popesca had no effect over the Dobreasca family, and the engagement of Miss Zoe with that young man was settled. Miss Popesca, hearing about the engagement, met the young man on the street of the village, slapped him in the face, and pulling his revolver from his

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ziua următoare; miercuri dimineța însă copila de o dată a înviat. Se vede că a fost numai un leșin adânc". *Trompeta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 840, 19/31 July 1870, p. 2 (taken over from the *Currierul de Iași*, unknown issue)

<sup>1</sup> "Dintre aceștia, 908 bărbați și 407 femei săriră în apă; 197 bărbați și 335 femei se spânzuraseră; 237 bărbați, 3 femei se împușcaseră cu pistolul; 251 b. și 2 fem. se sinucisese cu pușca; 74 b. și 44 femei băură venin..."

<sup>2</sup> "sinucigătorii mai mare parte au fost muncitori" *Trompeta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 829, 11/23 January 1870, p. 3.

pocket shot at him, but unsuccessfully, and he ran away. Then Miss Popesca went directly to the Dobreasca family, and finding Miss Zoe all alone, she strangled her with a napkin, and hitting her on the head with an iron clapper, she left her dead, cutting out her tongue as well. This murder happened on the 14<sup>th</sup> this month, at 12 o'clock at noon. The murderer was given over to justice together with her cousin Barbu and servant Păuna Ion. She confesses to everything narrated here, except for the murder attempt."<sup>1</sup>

If the story recounted was part of a succession of similar events (serial effect), then the text was concise and sometimes even moralizing: "Death because of drunkenness. Police headquarters II announces that on 12 April a fellow, Nicolae Vasiliu was found dead in a house in suburb Ziua Crucii. The medical examination found that the hasty death was caused by drunkenness. We hear such examples almost every day, and people still don't learn."<sup>2</sup>

Another set of events exploited by journalists were those which, besides corpses, also contained some paradoxical or inexplicable situations, such as this: "Suicides. Last week two suicides happened in Bucharest: one of an unfortunate father, a stranger, who ended his days

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<sup>1</sup> "Asasin. D-ra Fița în etate de 16 ani, fiind în relațiuni amoroase cu un june care sub promisiunea a o lua de consoartă o seduse, și aflând că amăgitorul tratează pentru căsătorie cu părinții d-rei Zoe, în etate de 15 ani, eșită de curând din pension, fiica d-nei Frusina Dobreasca, din comuna Căciulătești, mahalaua Dobrești, a se cununa cu numita Zoe, a mers la d-ra Dobreasca și mama ei, și a prevenit-o că acel june este promis ei, și să renunțe la proiectul menționat, căci din contră unul din trei va fi mort. Această declarațiune hotărâtoare a d-șoarei Popesca, nefăcând nici un efect familiei Dobreasca, a și săvârșit logodna d-șoarei Zoe cu acel june. D-șoara Popesca, auzind de această logodnă, întâlnește pe strada comunei pe trădătorul june, îi trage o palmă, și smulgându-i revolverul din pusunar trage într-însul, dar nereușind, acela fuge. În urmă d-șoara Popesca merge drept la familia Dobreasca, și găsim numai pe d-șoara Zoe singură, o strângulează cu o peschiră, și lovind-o cu o limbă de fier în cap o lăsă moartă, tăindu-i și limba. Acest asasinat s-a întâmplat la 14 curent ora 12 din zi. Autoarea fu dată justiției împreună cu Barbu, vărul ei și servitoarea Păuna Ion. Toate cele narate mai sus le mărturisește, neagă numai atentatul" *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. IX, no. 908, 29 April 1871, p. 3 (taken over from *Aurora Craiovei*, unknown issue).

<sup>2</sup> "Moarte de beție. Comis (ariatul) II ne relatează că la 12 Aprilie s-a găsit individul Nicolae Vasiliu mort într-o casă din suburbia Ziua Crucii. După cercetarea medicală, s-a constatat, că grabnica moarte a prevenit din beție. Mai în toate zilele aflăm astfel de exemple, și oamenii tot nu învață." *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 818, 26/5 April 1870, p. 2.

because of misery and despair in the struggle for subsistence. He left behind a regular letter, and the sad event was committed with a pistol. At the first shot the man did not fall down; a friend ran to see what happened, heard the gunshot, the man who could still talk told him to run and fetch a doctor; but as soon as he remained alone, he fired another shot in his mouth and died instantly. Another suicide was committed by a Jew not because of misery, because some 10 thousand gold pieces were found in his house, but because of the loss of a sum of money. This unfortunate man had shown signs of alienation for several days, and finally he was found hanged in the house with the money.<sup>1</sup>

Let us follow up some of the titles of the events presented in the newspaper *Adevărul* (The truth) this time for the period of January – March 1906, in the *Faits divers* column: Sudden death, A thief caught, A secretive merchant, Gambling rooms of the Capital, Arrests, Attempted rape, Accident at the railway station, Died of rabies?, Died of misery, Suicide in the Labirint street, Woman's horrible suicide, Crime or sudden death?, Murder at Sf. Elefterie bridge, A thief shot, Suicide at Papadopol Hotel, Run over by a train, A moving suicide.

Around 90% of the events were stories about dead bodies... However, in order to find information about them, the journalist had to leave the editorial office, check the information, confront the sources, etc. – that is, he practiced information journalism:

“Woman's horrible suicide. Buștenari, 5 February. Several inhabitants of Telega village, coming this morning to mill their corn at the mill on Doftana river, noticed the body of a woman floating between the wheels of the mill. Being dragged out, although terribly mutilated, the body way recognized as belonging to Catinca Vlad Stoian of Telega village. As I was informed, I transported myself to the place of the sinister event, where, with all my investigations, I could not find out the

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<sup>1</sup> “Sinucideri. Săptămâna trecută au avut loc în București două sinucideri: unul din partea unui nenorocit părinte de familie, străin, care și-a curmat zilele din cauza mizeriei și a descurajării în lupta cu viața. El a lăsat o scrisoare în regulă, și tristul fapt s-a comis prin pistol. La prima lovitură sinucisul n-a căzut; alergând un amic ca să vadă ce este, a auzit detunătura, sinucisul, care încă vorbea, a zis acestuia să alerge la doctor; dară îndată ce fu singur dete un alt foc în gură și muri pe dată. Un alt sinucis s-a comis de un Israelit nu din cauza mizeriei, căci s-a găsit în casă vreo 10 mii galbeni, ci din cauza pierderii unei sume de bani. Acest nenorocit de mai multe zile da semne de alienare și în cele din urmă s-a găsit spânzurat de casa cu bani”. *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XI, no. 1082, 2 September 1873, p. 3.

causes which might have determined the unfortunate woman to end her life in such a horrible way. For the sake of truth I mention the version widespread in the village, that certain relatives of the woman who had frequently argued with her over a house and some acres of land, may not be quite uninvolved with her death. The Prosecution was informed about the case, and I will keep you posted about the results of the investigation. Victor M."<sup>1</sup>

### **The diversity of the *faits divers***

Anecdotic events also enjoyed the attention of the editors: "A pot. On the Craiova street in Bucharest a peasant went to a potter to buy a pot. – How big should it be? – asked the potter. As big as my head, answered the peasant. The potter chose one priced 3 lei, and put it on the peasant's head, who could not take it off any more; the cunning potter, noticing it, changed at once, and said that he was mistaken, that the pot was more expensive, it cost 5 lei. The poor peasant was forced to pay this price for the pot in order to escape from the trap he got himself into, breaking the pot on his head."<sup>2</sup>, as did also events with foreign citizens involved. The topic of the foreigner became almost obsessive in the stories of the *Trompetta Carpaților*:

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<sup>1</sup> "Oribila sinucidere a unei femei. Buștenari, 5 Februarie. Mai mulți locuitori din comuna Telega, venind azi dimineață spre a măcina porumb la moara de pe gârla Doftana, au observat între roțile moarei plutind, cadavrul unei femei. Fiind scos afară, cu toate că oribil mutilat, cadavrul a fost recunoscut drept al femeii Catinca Vlad Stoian din comuna Telega. Fiind avizat m'am transportat imediat la locul sinistrului unde cu toate investigațiile făcute n'am putut afla cauzele care ar fi hotărât pe nenorocita femeie să-și curme firul vieței într'un mod atât de oribil. În interesul adevărului menționez versiunea răspândită în localitate cum că oareșcari neamuri ale presupusei sinucigașe cu cari în ultimul timp avea dese certuri din cauza unei case și a câtorva pogoane de pământ n'ar fi străine de această moarte. Parchetul fiind sesizat, vă voiu ține la curent cu rezultatul anchetei. Victor M." *Adevărul*, vol. XVIII, no. 5917, 6 February 1906, p. 3. Emphasis in text mine, M. P.

<sup>2</sup> "O oală. Pe strada Craiovei din București, un țăran merse la un olar să cumpere o oală. – Cât de mare să fie, îl întreabă olarul? Cât capul meu, răspunse țăranul. Olarul îi alege una cu prețul de trei lei, pe care băgându-o țăranului în cap nu o mai putea scoate, ceea ce observând istețul olar din-dată se schimbă și zice că a greșit, că oala e mai scumpă, de 5 lei. Bietul țăran fu silit a plăti și cu acest preț oala, spre a scăpa din cursa din care a ajuns, stricând oala din cap." *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 808, 15/27 March 1870, p. 2.

“Bandits. On the night of 2 to 3 this month, two bandits murdered the innkeeper and his wife on the Golia estate in Tutova county; during the same night, passing over to Fălciu county, they tortured two boys from a sheepfold on Bossie property. One of the bandits, called Vasilie Hanciuva, a soldier escaped from the Russian army, was caught by the notary of Bossie village; the other, called Vasilie or Nicolae Pahovici disappeared. It is terrible how many robberies happen in this poor country!”<sup>1</sup>

The *faits divers* were rare between the years 1874 and 1875, as the editors favoured internal and international affairs, the military situation in various countries, etc. It was not until 1876 that one can speak again of a constant frequency of the *fait divers*, even in the columns dedicated to internal affairs (like the “Cronica săptămânii” [Weekly chronicle]) for remarkable gestures – Maria Rosetti Rosnovanu “distributed a large quantity of wood for poor people”<sup>2</sup> – as well as blameable ones – a convict was buried in Iași without his clothes and without a priest, at a depth of only two palms, which meant the sanctioning of the penitentiary’s management, that is, the intervention of the judge –, for fortunate events, such as the New Year’s Eve party of the students of Iași (at the Hotel de Rusia, where 34 students enjoyed themselves with “amusing entertainments”), or the capturing of the person who stole the golden objects known as the “Thesaurus of Pietroasa”. On other occasions, such stories also yielded the possibility of warning the authorities about certain malfunctions, their symbolic sanctioning, or moralizing sentences.

This is what the “Diverse” (Miscellaneous) column read on 8 February 1876: “Stray dogs. We read and approve of the following lines from the *Presa*: the lack of such a necessary service in our Capital to collect stray dogs makes people not being able to get about in the suburbs any more without exposing themselves to the dangers of being ripped apart or at war with these animals useless in a town, where they form

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<sup>1</sup> “Bandiți. În noaptea de 2 spre 3 curent, doi bandiți au asasinat pe cârciumarul și cârciumărița moșiei Golia din jud. Tutova; tot în aceeași noapte trecând în jud. Fălciu au torturat pe doi băieți de la o stână pe proprietatea Bossie. Unul din bandiți, cu numele Vasilie Hanciuva, soldat fugit din armata rusească, s-a prins de către notarul comunei Bossie; celălalt cu numele Vasilie sau Nicolae Pahovici s-a făcut nevăzut. Este grozav câte hoții se întâmplă prin biata țară!” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. VIII, no. 818, 26/5 April 1870, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> “a împărțit o mare cantitate de lemne pe la oamenii sărmani” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XIV, no. 1232, 11 January 1876, p. 3.

packs especially now in wintertime. Exactly this Sunday morning a poor woman was bitten in the Polish street by a pack of dogs, which pulled her down, ripped her clothes off, so that, had the neighbours not jumped to her help, she could have ended up even worse. Are we perhaps in Rusciuk, or Brussa? Or in Bucharest, where the tributaries pay so many taxes?! We want to seriously draw the attention of Mayor Manu, who has initiatives and administrates the Mayor's office, to urgently arrange the foundation of a regular service for collecting the dogs, having for each district a closed wagon – not like that wretched wagon of 20 years ago – where stray dogs could be regularly collected, together with those dogs which belong to someone, if the sergeants report that they are dangerous and unchained.”<sup>1</sup>

A good opportunity emerged to attack the foreigners on “the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month”, when in Craiova “a poor widow, having nothing left to sell to feed her children, went out in the market with a cat, skinny as poverty, and sought for somebody to buy it, so that she could buy some bread for her children. Could there be a more deplorable state than this? Our country feeds so many strangers, and her children should starve! ...”<sup>2</sup>

“The clients of the criminal book”, as criminals were called, always offered story subjects, as it happened with Petre Căldăraru,

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<sup>1</sup> “Câinii vagabonzi. Cetim și aprobăm următoarele linii din *Presa*: Lipsa unui serviciu atât de necesar în Capitala noastră pentru strângerea câinilor face ca oamenii să nu mai poată circula prin suburbiile fără a se espune a fi sfâșiați sau a ține război cu aceste animale inutile în oraș, unde se grămădesc mai ales acum în timpul iernii. Chiar Duminică de dimineață o biată femeie a fost mușcată în strada polonă de o haită de câini, care a trântit-o jos și i-a sfâșiat toate hainele, încât, dacă nu săriau vecinii, putea să sufere și mai rău. Suntem oare la Rusciuk, la Brussa ori în București, unde contribuabilii plătesc atâtea impozite?! Atragem serioasă atenție a dlui Primar Manu, care are inițiative și administrarea Primăriei, ca să ia de urgență dispozițiuni a se înființa un serviciu regulat pentru strângerea câinilor, având pentru fiecare culori (sectoare – n.n.) câte o căruță închisă – nu ca acea odoagă de căruță de acum 20 de ani,- unde să strângă regulat câinii vagabonzi, și chiar acei care ar aparține cuiva, dacă sergenții vor raporta că sunt vătămători și neînlanțuiți” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XIV, no. 1236, 8 February 1876, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> o văduvă sărmană, nemaiavănd ce să vândă ca să-și hrănească copiii, ieși în piață c-un pisoai, slab ca și sărăcia, și căuta să i-l cumpere cineva, ca să poată duce pâine copiilor. Se poate mai deplorabilă stare de cât aceasta? Țara noastră, care hrănește atâția streini, și copiii ei să moară de foame!...” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XIV, no. 1247, 2 May 1876, p. 3.

caught by the Tulcea police, having “a machine for manufacturing Romanian coins, as well as leis and halves, and some of such counterfeited coins were also found on him, made of some white metal, a skilful imitation of silver.”<sup>1</sup> Or there was that “foreign thief” who used to go to the Grand Hotel de Boulevard in Bucharest, introducing himself as American, but turned out to be a thief, Basilie Zaharov (a Greek from the island of Malta), who “as seen from a portrait sent from London, also committed various thefts there too, on several occasions, for which he is wanted ...”<sup>2</sup>

As I have previously shown, a distinct type of *faits divers* was those about tragic situations involving many dead. For example, in the 29 February 1876 issue there was a note taken over from the *Kelet* (East) magazine in Cluj, which informed that “40 Romanian men and women, as they were passing through the ice of the frozen Olt river on their way to a wedding in a village on the other side of the river, as they arrived to the middle of the river, the ice suddenly broke under their feet, and the unfortunate people were lost in the waves with carriages and horses and all...”<sup>3</sup> News about catastrophic fires in various places also came from Transylvania – in Murășiani village 80 houses were burnt down with all their outbuildings, in Iona village only three houses escaped the fire, and “we have received telegraphic news today from Cluj, which is the capital of Transylvania with 25 thousand inhabitants, that since half past 4 yesterday afternoon the fire has been burning permanently, and by 10 o’clock today morning around 260 houses have burnt down, that is, a whole suburb (...) In the Saxon town Sighișoara and the Saxon village Danesiu also several houses burnt down.”<sup>4</sup> There were rumours that the

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<sup>1</sup> “o mașină de fabricat monedă română, precum lei și jumătăți, gășind chiar asupra lui câteva asemenea monede false, fabricate d’intr-un metal alb, cu fel de imitație dibace a argintului” (29 February 1876, p. 3).

<sup>2</sup> “după un portret trămis, din Londra, (că) a săvârșit și acolo, în diferite rînduri, furtișaguri, pentru care este urmărit ...” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XIV, no. 1241, 14 March 1876, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> “40 de români și românce voind a trece peste gheața Oltului, spre a se duce la o nuntă într-o comună de dincolo, pe când se aflau la mijlocul râului, gheața se rupsă pe neașteptate supt dâșii, și nenorociții nuntași se perdură în undele apei cu trăsuri și cu cai cu tot...”

<sup>4</sup> “astăzi ne vin știri telegrafice din Clușiu, care este capitala Transilvaniei cu 25 mii loc., că ieri de la 4 ½ ore după am. arde neîncetat și până astăzi la 10 ore dim. s-ar fi prefăcut în cenușe vreo 260 de case, adică o suburbie întreagă (...) Au ars și-n urbea săsească Seghișoara și în comuna săsească Danesiu mai multe case”



incendiaries were Romanians who wanted to revenge themselves on the Hungarians, but these were refuted by the press – “It is true that in Murășiani the fire was started because of the cigarette of a coachman in the stables of the Catholic monks, in the middle of the day at half past 12, and in Cluj in a garden where there were barrels of kerosene. In Sekler villages the Seklers set their houses on fire because of their drunkenness”.<sup>1</sup>

Other newspapers also offer the same kinds of events in the *Miscellaneous* column. The readers of the *România liberă* (Free Romania), for example, could find, on 21 August 1877, the following *Varieties*: the meeting of the Romanian Academic Society, the exhibition of a pair of boots made of human skin (in Chicago), the marriage of the Spanish king, a rich man starved to death (in London), the publication of the *Confidențialul* (The Confidential) newspaper (in Paris), the death of general Doroshinsky (in Bulgaria).

### **The *fait divers* newspaper: *Universul* (Universe)**

The introduction of the *fait divers* in high circulation Romanian press is connected to the initiative of the Italian origin journalist Luigi Cazzavillan, who founded the “newspaper dedicated to anybody, regardless of culture, education, and social class”,<sup>2</sup> entitled *Universul*. This periodical is an important reference point in the history of the press, due to the fact that it generated a veritable revolution by determining the decrease of newspaper prices, by publicity, and also by “provoking the taste of reading”. Basically, the success formula of Cazzavillan’s newspaper was “a paper that dealt with no politics, advertised an Italian pharmacist (Bertelli – author’s note), and published no other texts than: serial novels of the lowest literary quality, *faits divers* from abroad and some from Bucharest. With such a subject matter the *Universul* was

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<sup>1</sup> “Este adevărat, că la Murășiani s-a iscat focul din țigara unui surugiu în grajdul călugărilor catolici, ziua mare pe la 12 ½ ore, iar în Clușiu într-o grădină unde erau butoaie cu petrol. Pe la satele secuiești își dau foc secuiei în urmarea beției la care sunt supuși ...” *Trompetta Carpaților*, vol. XIV, no. 1246, 18 April 1876, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria presei românești de la primele începuturi până la 1916* (The history of Romanian press from its very beginnings until 1916), Bucharest: Atelierele “Adevărul”, 1922, p. 143.

about to become the wealthiest and most widespread newspaper in Romania.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, in a period in which the newspapers were published in approx. 5000 copies, the *Universul* was to reach a circulation number of as many as 80,000 copies in Walachia. As for the *faits divers*, they were progressively becoming more concerned with home matters and occupying more and more space, for which reason many journalists of the age despised it, considering it the newspaper of coachmen and “the strata with low culture”. One of the contemporaries, Al. Nora, noted about the “success formula” of this prototype of Romanian popular press: “The newspaper ably cultivated the readers’ weaknesses, and the always sensational novels, with exciting turns which took away your breath and infused you with impatience to find out the continuation, were matched with reportages (*faits divers* – author’s note) of the same kind, gleaned from foreign newspapers, often happening in unknown islands or countries. This was for the small people, the masses, but the elite centres also had to be attracted. And a wonderful possibility turned up: Zola’s trial...”<sup>2</sup>

In the first years of its publication, the *Universul* did not have a column specialized in *faits divers*, and these were found in other columns, such as “Events from the counties”, “Judicial bulletin”, etc., but the events published in these columns were more extensively discussed than in the case of other newspapers, because the editors were equally distant towards all political parties of the time, therefore the newspaper had a wider audience.

The first issue of the *Universul* published on 20 July (correctly: August – author’s note) 1884 contained: page 1 – editorial (“What we want”) and a large engraving – “Elephant hunt in Indo-China”; page 2 – “Mietta – Venetian dramas” by Emile Richenbourg, in series, published daily till the end of the year, and “Fire in Galați”, a *fait divers*; page 3 – column “Everything from everywhere”, which comprised various events of the kind: “A revived dead” (from Naples), the column “The country”, containing other *faits divers* from the country; page 4 – the column “The leaflet of the *Universul*”, publishing Victor Tissot’s book, “Prussian secret police”.

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<sup>1</sup> Constantin Bacalbașa, “Ziaristica română din zilele noastre” (Romanian journalism nowadays), in Iorga, *Istoria presei românești*, pp. 169-192.

<sup>2</sup> Al. Nora, *Un om uitat: Const. Mille* (A forgotten man: Const. Mille), Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1945, p. 76.

The newspaper came out every morning at 7, cost 5 bani in the Capital, and 10 bani elsewhere, and had as a motto: "Truth for all / All for truth", accompanied by two medals with the faces of Mihai Viteazul and Ștefan cel Mare."<sup>1</sup> The *Universul* soon became the most extensively read newspaper in Romania, due to its structure which comprised images, many *faits divers*, serial novels, contemporary events presented in an unbiased manner, advertisements, and a programme in which the editor claimed: "... we want the *Universul* to become a popular newspaper, but popular in the true, and widest sense of the word, so that it would deserve the title of an organ of public opinion (...) our impartiality will be complete, steady, absolute".<sup>2</sup> This programme was consistently respected.

It should also be remarked that the subject matter of *fait divers* category articles did not change significantly in the period between 1884 and 1932, as shown also by the examples to follow.

1884: "Killed himself on the street. Ploiești, 31 December. A moving suicide happened this morning on Diligenței street in our town centre. A young commercial worker named Avram Veitman, aged 17, ended the chain of his days with a revolver bullet shot at his right temple. The young man, after committing this deed, fell on the ground, unconscious. Some passers-by found him and announced the officer on duty, who had him transported to Schuller hospital, where he passed away after some hours of torment. The causes of the suicide are not known; it is believed however, that it is the result of an unshared love."<sup>3</sup>

1932: "A child beaten to death. Constanța, 31 December. The citizen Gh. Verzeanu of Creia (Gura Dobrogei) village, beat the child Const.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael the Brave and Stephen the Great – two outstanding medieval princes of the Romanian principalities.

<sup>2</sup> "...voim ca *Universul* să fie un ziar popular, dar popular în adevăratul și cel mai larg sens al cuvântului, astfel ca să merite titlul de organ al opiniunii publice (...) nepărtinirea noastră, ea va fi deplină, statornică, absolută"

<sup>3</sup> "S-a sinucis pe stradă. Ploiești, 31 Decembrie. O impresionantă sinucidere s-a săvârșit azi dimineață pe str. Diligenței din centrul orașului nostru. Un tânăr funcționar comercial anume Avram Veitman, în etate de 17 ani, și-a curmat firul zilelor cu un glonț de revolver tras în tâmpla dreaptă. Numitul, după comiterea faptei, s-a prăbușit la pământ, în nesimțire. Niște trecători l-au găsit și au anunțat pe comisarul de serviciu, care a dispus transportarea lui la Spitalul Schuller, unde după câteva ore de chinuri a încetat din viață. Cauzele sinuciderii nu se cunosc; se crede, că ar fi rezultatul unei dragoste neîmpărtășite" *Universul*, vol. XLIX, no. 1, 2 January 1932, p. 16.

Stoianof, who in a few hours passed away. The criminal was sent to the Prosecutor's office with his papers drawn up"<sup>1</sup>

### **The *fait divers* censured**

The *fait divers* was repeatedly blamed for suggesting ways of stealing, murdering, etc., or, as it has sometimes been said, for being "a school of murder". On this account it was the object of several interdictions. The *Register of Central Censorship* of Bucharest, recently published by researcher Ioan Lăcustă, reveals many interdictions of the following kinds: "10 November 1937. Suicides started to multiply. It is something contagious. The Minister of Home Affairs orders: no details, no photographs, not even the mere information not showing how it was done – that they threw themselves before the train, or swallowed I don't know what, or lit charcoal, etc. I will be announced if the newspapers protest, but the order shall be executed" (note of the chief censor – author's note).<sup>2</sup> In February 1938, an ample set of instructions was issued, influenced, so it seems, by Minister Armand Călinescu, which contained orders of the type: "any report will be censored which has an overtly sensational character regarding crimes, criminal lawsuits with their clichés, or immoral acts"<sup>3</sup>; it is understood that the royal family, the high officials, etc. were spared, regardless of their actions – see another interdiction, on 20 March 1938: "The great Prince Mihai had a car accident: he hit a citizen (mortally). Nothing shall be written of it in the newspapers..."<sup>4</sup>

Although it may be stated that in times of war there is a kind of agreement in finding arguments for the limitation of the freedom of

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<sup>1</sup> "Un copil omorât în bătae. Constața, 31 Decembrie. Locuitorul Gh. Verzeanu din satul Creia, comuna Gura Dobrogei, a bătut pe copilul Const. Stoianof, care, după câteva ore, a încetat din viață. Cu actele dresate criminalul a fost înaintat parchetului" *Universul*, vol. XLIX, no. 1, 2 January 1932, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> "10 noiembrie 1937. Sinuciderile au început să se înmulțească. Este ceva contaminant. Domnul ministru de Interne ordonă: nici un detaliu, nici o fotografie, ci numai pur și simplu informația, fără a se arăta cum – că s-a aruncat înaintea trenului, că a înghițit nu știu ce, că a aprins mângal etc. Voi fi anunțat, dacă ziarele protestează, dar ordinul se execută" In Ioan Lăcustă, *Cenzura veghează. 1937-1939* (Censorship is watching. 1937-1939). Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> "se va cenzura orice reportaj cu caracter vădit senzațional despre crime, procese criminale, cu clișeele lor sau fapte impudice" In *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> "Marele Voevod Mihai a avut un accident de automobil : a călcat (mortal) un cetățean. Nu se va scrie nimic în ziare..." In *Ibid.*, p. 146.

speech – as certain news may provoke panic or demoralize the population or the troops on the battlefield –, in times of peace the sources of interdictions are most often the ideologies – ideologies and especially their promoters.

In Romania, the *faits divers*, as well as all other kinds of events, passed through the “sieves” of censorship until as late as 1989.<sup>1</sup>

It was only the *România liberă* (Free Romania) newspaper which was allowed to maintain a column of *Fait divers*, attentively selected of course, prior to 1988. Clearly, no publication appeared with this title. The communists seem to have had an almost pathological fear against all printed materials, judging by their extreme prudence in matters of the press. They promoted a mobilizing, militant journalism of great subjects, great priorities, compared to which the *fait divers* type of news were regarded as ridiculous or dissonant in relation to the defined emergencies of the Communist Party. Humour had a similar destiny – it can hardly be understood today that the entire range of communist press (450 titles) contained one single comic publication ...

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The evolution of post-communist press in Romania meant the explosion of titles which cultivated opinion in general; in addition, they brought to the fore, once again, the *fait divers*. The first moment of the rehabilitation of information journalism and news in particular – the *fait divers* – was the publication of the *Evenimentul zilei* (Event of the day) in 1991, followed in 1992 by another newspaper, the *Curierul național* (National courier), which practiced a kind of journalism closer to the professional standards of information. Unfortunately, excesses have proven unfortunate this time as well – the multiplication of the *Evenimentul zilei* formula by most other daily newspapers accelerated their end.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusions

The *fait divers* clearly worked as a subject of public debate, sometimes even to a greater degree than the more polemical political or

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see: Marian Petcu, ed., *Cenzura în spațiul cultural românesc* (Censorship in Romanian culture), Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Marian Petcu, *Tipologia presei românești* (The typology of Romanian press), Iași: Institutul European, 2000.

economic events which were less accessible for an audience of little education (and even largely illiterate).

The Romanian press owes much to French journalism, which has served, especially in the first years of publication, as a model as well as a source of information. There is much evidence to suggest this, first and foremost the abundance of *faits divers* of French origin on the pages of Romanian newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, the increasing space occupied by such kinds of events can be understood as an editorial “innovation” to attract representative readership of such a kind that would make the publishing of these periodicals profitable. Furthermore, they were published in the context of a kind of journalism dominated by a politically and literarily oriented discourse, which has produced, in its turn, the appearance of a new “format” – popular press –, and at the same time subserved the process of the professionalization of journalism, as it marked the passage from opinion journalism, edited in the office, to information journalism, involving the identification of events, and collection and processing of information.

The cyclical nature of journalism practice is also interesting from this perspective: following the fall of the communist regime in Romania, expressive journalism with a powerful political emphasis has returned and acts as a form of symbolic revenge – purification from communism – but it has also rapidly exhausted its resources to the advantage of information journalism, to which the *fait divers* equally pertains.

Translated by Emese G. Czintos