***Octavian Goga: Sacerdote of the Nation. Revisiting the Romanian National Idea*. By Răzvan Pârâianu. Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2018. 330 pp. Selected Bibliography. $12.30, paperback.**

One of the most celebrated Romanian-language poets of the early twentieth century, Octavian Goga, threw himself into the politics of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania during his student days and then as a budding journalist. He played a leading role in Romanian politics during the 1920s, establishing his own political party, the National Agrarian Party, in 1932. Goga’s party merged with A. C. Cuza’s National Christian Defense League in 1935 to create the National Christian Party, which was dedicated to antisemitism and a far right, ultranationalist agenda. Goga and Cuza came to power for 45 days in 1938 before King Carol II suspended democracy and established a royal dictatorship. The National Christian Party’s time in power was charaterised by constant political violence on the streets and sweeping antisemitic laws that established the legal preconditions for the Holocaust. As Răzvan Pârâianu points out in the exhuastive fifty pages he dedicates to the existing historiography, there are only two other book-length studies on Goga. Writing under state socialism in 1971, Ion Dodu Bălan praised Goga as a poet and a patriot while Mihai Fătu’s 1993 book focuses only on Goga’s politics while ignoring his literary production.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is the first substantial English-language study on Goga, and Pârâianu does an excellent job of showing how his poetry, journalism, and politics worked together to create Goga’s public persona and to introduce a new type of populist politics into Romania.

Unfortunately Pârâianu ends his study in 1912, before Goga’s career as a Romanian politician really began. Although he in no way dismisses Goga’s contributions to far-right politics, Pârâianu nonetheless ignores them, pointing out that Goga is discussed in most surveys of the far right during the 1930s and that therefore yet another study would have been unnecessary. I remain unconvinced on this point, particularly as so many of Pârâianu’s original and compelling arguments point suggestively towards the politician that Goga would later become. Helping readers explicitly make those connections through a closer study of his interwar career would have been a valuable contribution to the scholarship. Instead, Pârâianu concentrates the bulk of his analysis on the period between 1908 and 1912, which is relatively unknown even to most specialists of twentieth-century Romania. The book is meticulously researched and very detailed, which is both a blessing and a curse. The detail allows the author to demonstrate his points convincingly, but at the same time the summaries of every article published by Goga or one of his interlocuitors during these five years become repetitive and difficult to read after a while. The belaboured writing style is compounded by poor editing, with frequent spelling and grammar mistakes throughout, leaving one wishing that this had been a much shorter and more compact book.

Pârâianu argues that Goga built his political career on the back of his overnight success as a ‘national poet’. Contemporaries praised Goga for capturing the ‘national soul’ and for giving a voice to peasant culture and spirituality. By the early twentieth century the Romanian National Party in Transylvania was dominated by lawyers whose days of radical opposition to the Hungarian regime lay in the past. Goga claimed that only people who truly understood the village, as he apparently did, should represent Romanians vis-à-vis the Hungarian government. Together with colleagues such as Octavian Tăslăuanu and Ilarie Chendi, Goga claimed to represent a ‘new generation’ who would reinvigorate Romanian politics through journalism rather than the committees run by their elders, represented first and foremost by Aurel C. Popovici and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. Pârâianu demonstrates that Goga inaugurated a new type of ‘lyrical nationalism’ in Transylvanian politics through his polemics with the older generation. Focusing on stirring up popular emotions before seeking legal redress for their problems and claiming to represent ‘true’ Romanians on the basis of his literary credentials, Goga paved the way for later nationalists such as Nichifor Crainic, Nae Ionescu, and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu to make fascism a major player in interwar Romanian politics. At the same time, Pârâianu unpacks the literary origins of the frequently-heard claim that there were ‘two Romanias’ – one urban and one rural – and shows how poets of ‘peasant spirituality’ were able to claim to be more in tune with popular religiosity than the Orthodox Church was. These are all important arguments and represent a genuine contribution to the literature on early twentieth century Romanian nationalism.

*Reviewed by Roland Clark, University of Liverpool*

1. Ion Dodu Bălan, *Octavian Goga: Monografie* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1971); Mihai Fătu, *Cu pumnii strânşi: Octavian Goga în viaţa politică a României (1918-1938)* (Bucharest: Globus, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)