May your young homeland, born yesterday like yourself, innocent like yourself, the youngest-born among nations, the orphan and the foundling (so she was called by one of her sons); may Romania travel through the tempests and dock into the safe haven of Providence!

Michelet, “Principautés danubiennes”

Throughout 1850, Dumitru Brătianu kept up a steady correspondence with Jules Michelet. From London, where he was based in early 1850, he thought that the moment had arrived to launch another awareness and publicity campaign. Amidst the sense of guilt which had engulfed the French left, Brătianu added his own accusations. The events of 1849 had shown that France was no longer in the vanguard of European revolutions and the former disciple had become a disillusioned, yet still faithful, equal who believed that he had earned the right to remonstrate with the Maître. “France is, one might say, the General Headquarters of Europe’s revolutionary forces”, he wrote on 10 March 1850 in the opening of a lengthy and impassioned letter, but France had forgotten her mission. He clearly relished his own angry rhetoric as he depicted the “new Byzantium”, a demoralised, police-state France under President Louis Napoléon, who sent reluctant armies into fratricidal battle:

[...] wounded Europe is moaning in pain; and you, masters, lords of the world, owners of the universal suffrage – in the aftermath of a great revolution, they are dragging you at your place of execution without trial; they are arming you with the assassin’s weapons and making you march at night against a republic whom you call your sister and love from all your heart [i.e. Italy]; they have violated your constitution and have condemned to life imprisonment representatives of the people who have protested by legal means against this violation; they are incarcerating you, and insulting your religion; like wild beasts they are chasing you, and hunting you down at street corners; they are suspending your newspapers, they are smashing your printing presses, they are sending your

---

245 Michelet, Légendes, 280.
journalists, in chains, on foot, from one corner of France to another; they are pillorying your most illustrious citizens and your friends like common highwaymen; in broad daylight, they are cutting down your holy trees of liberty, under your eyes they are taking away the wreaths that France has placed on the tombs of her martyrs, they are turning your brave gendarmes into vile spies and agents, they are violently snatching your children away from their teachers, forcing them into the arms of the Jesuits; they are depriving you with impunity of your most precious rights, of your most cherished liberties; they are ravishing your right to reunion, the municipal rights, the freedom of the press, the freedom of education; your cities and villages are moaning under the état de siège; the whole of France like the land of the Muscovites is run by the military and placed in legality; – and all these crimes of which you are both instruments and victims, appear to leave all of you cold; nobody is troubled, you are all afraid of your own shadows, you are all silent, you are all running away, hiding, closing your eyes, hiding your faces.246

Yet the French remained the “elect people”, Brătianu continued, and the undefeated spirit of France will guide European nations towards the revolutions of the future which, far from being violent acts of destruction like the old revolutions, will simply be peaceful manifestations of the people’s will, routine democratic acts, nothing more dangerous than joyful national holidays.247

As usual in his dealings with the intense and inflammatory Brătianu, Michelet preferred to respond briefly and cautiously, congratulating his former student on being a worthy “citizen” of a “young” nation such as Romania, rather than engaging more deeply with his unflattering political analysis of the current situation in France.248 Brătianu obviously needed to unburden his heart and, undiscouraged by his mentor’s brevity, followed up with at least one more letter of similar length and impetuosity. The target of his attacks was spelled out more clearly this time: the “men of the Montagne”, who had betrayed the French revolutionary ideals in June 1849. “What have you done to the soul of France?” Brătianu asked of the individuals whom he considered guilty of having abandoned not only the French people, but also the Poles and the Romanians, whose fight against the “colossus of the North” would have needed, beyond a symbolic emblem – an enduring French Republic – the support of French diplomacy. The people of “Messina, Palermo, Naples, Venice, Milan, Berlin, Prague,

---

247 Ibid., 360, 358.
248 Letter of 27 March 1850, in ibid., 380.