

# JUSTICE IN CHAINS / Dreptate Ion Lanturi (1984)

DAN PIȚA

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### OVERVIEW

**Auteur** Born in 1938 in Dorohoi, Romania, Dan Pița is one of the most gifted directors of the Romanian golden age of cinematography. He is the director of an impressive number of films, such as *Paso Doble* (1985), *November, the Last Ball* (1989), *Top Hotel* (1992), *Pepe and Fifi* (1994) and *Second Hand* (2005), to name just a few. In 1986, he was awarded Honorable Mention for *Paso Doble* at The Berlin Film Festival.

**Film** The movie explores the issue of social injustice at the beginning of the twentieth century and the clash of two social classes – the *boyar* (noblemen) and the peasants. It glorifies the image of the *hajduk* (outlaws), who stole from the rich and gave to the poor, considering it was an act of returning what had been robbed from the peasants. In the communist context, the movie is a way of condemning the aristocracy, which Communism also held in disregard. The glorification of the outlaw is a way of identifying the communist hero who had fought the bourgeoisie with a popular and idealized image.

**Background** The movie is based on a true story, the life of the outlaw Pantelimon, who lived at the beginning of the twentieth century in Romania. Pantelimon was popular at the time, and his story appeared everywhere in the press. He is reputed never to have fired his gun and once wore a priest's clothes. Pantelimon Toader Adumitroaei was born in 1871 in Moldova, where he was a carpenter. He became an outlaw after he was accused of stealing cattle, which he had not done. He was popular among the peasants and the people who fought against the oppression of the aristocracy.

### SYNOPSIS

The movie chronicles the life and adventures of Pantelimon, a man who defended the poor against the upper classes at the beginning of the twentieth century in Romania. The movie begins with Pantelimon defending himself in front of an unfriendly court. He then escapes from prison, together with his friends, Năstase and Ion Radu. There are several attempts to catch them, but all fail. Coroiu, an aristocrat and magistrate, hires a criminal, named Macarie, to catch Pantelimon and his acolytes. Although he draws nearer to Pantelimon, Macarie does not succeed in catching him. The movie finishes with images of Pantelimon escaping one last time.

### CHARACTERS

**Pantelimon** – an outlaw  
**Ion Radu** – an outlaw  
**Năstase** – an outlaw  
**Coroiu** – a high official  
**Macarie** – Coroiu's employee

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

#### Toader Pantelimon

Pantelimon is a peasant become an outlaw, who fights for the rights of the peasants. He is married and has a child, but he has renounced his safe life for the sake of the peasants. He is also the lover of Coroiu's wife.

**Adventurous** Pantelimon is an adventurous man, he does not shy from danger and he takes all the risks for a good cause. With every heist he makes, he puts his life in danger, but he believes in the cause he is fighting for and so the danger does not affect him. He also has an affair with Coroiu's wife, which earned him the anger and envy of a powerful man.

**Generous** Pantelimon is also a very generous man. All the money he makes from stealing from the rich, he shares equally among the peasants. He does not fight for his own gain, but for the good of the poor. While he is generous with the poor, he is ruthless with the corrupt, as he is with Macarie whom he reveals as a cheater at cards.

**Loyal** Pantelimon is loyal to his band; he never betrays them or offends them in any way. In the small altercation between Ion Radu and Năstase, he simply tells Ion Radu to leave Năstase alone. He is respectful of the poor and also with the rich, as he explains to them, calmly, why he has to steal from them.

**Determined** Because he is animated by such a good cause, Pantelimon is determined in his enterprise. This is why he escapes every time from the claws of the police. He manages to outsmart the police's plans every time. Because of his determination, Pantelimon is never captured, even at the very end.

### **Coroiu**

**Coroiu** is a nobleman, who is corrupt, shrewd and powerful. Because of his position of authority, he is confident he will manage to kill Pantelimon, who stole his wife from him.

**Confident** Coroiu is an immensely powerful man, who has connections with politicians and the police. He has a strong position of authority which gives him great confidence that he will manage to kill Pantelimon eventually. His attitude towards other people is always assertive and he is respected by his subordinates as well as by high officials.

**Ruthless** Coroiu does not understand the needs of the peasants and he has no problems stealing from them shamelessly. He does not tolerate any rebellion or riot and quickly punishes such actions with imprisonment or death. He is a ruthless man, the type old boyar who oppresses and kills.

### **Năstase**

Năstase is one of Pantelimon's acolytes, being part of the outlaw band. He is a bit crazy and peculiar, yet he is loyal and true.

**Playful** Năstase is very playful and carefree. He is a bit crazy as we can see in the scene where he plays with the knife until he gives himself several scratches on the chest. He is also playful in the painting frame scene, where he hangs frames on his and Ion Radu's necks. Yet this game has a subtler meaning as he tells Ion Radu 'do not sell', referring to his future betrayal of Pantelimon.

**Loyal** Năstase is loyal; he never betrays Pantelimon and he risks his life just as much as the others do. He is there by Pantelimon's side when he is in prison and helps him escape. He is a true friend to Pantelimon, despite the fact that he might appear as lacking seriousness.

### **Ion Radu**

Ion Radu is the other acolyte of Pantelimon. He is a serious man, who is not very bright, but who is animated, apparently, by the same ideals as Pantelimon. However, he betrays Pantelimon for money and for a better life.

**Serious** Ion Radu is serious all the time, even on the occasion when he mock-kisses one of the women present at a gathering of aristocrats. He never smiles or laughs and he has a grim outlook about himself all the time. He is not very smart, as we can tell from his confession in court.

**Disloyal** Ion Radu betrays Pantelimon for money, freedom and a better life. The movie portrays him as a sort of Judas as he carries the frame from a painting around his neck all this time. He is sorry for betraying Pantelimon and feels miserable about it.

### **Macarie**

Macarie is a criminal who is hired by Coroiu to catch Pantelimon. He is corrupt to the bone, shrewd and insensitive.

**Insensitive** Macarie is the type of completely insensitive criminal, who cares only for his own good. Pantelimon exposes him when he cheats on the people during his game of cards. Although he has been acquainted with Pantelimon, he has no problem pursuing him and wanting to kill him.

*Organized* Macarie is organized; he starts searching for Pantelimon, checking every possible place and corrupting whoever he can in order to catch him. He follows Pantelimon with determination and is very close to catching him on every occasion.

## THEMES

### SOCIETY

**Class** The film explores the clash between two social classes: the aristocracy and the peasants, who are poor and oppressed. In between, there is a class of leaseholders, who act as intermediaries between the noblemen and the peasants, taking away enormous sums of money and land from the peasants. The aristocracy is portrayed as arrogant, ruthless and corrupt. The peasants are represented in the movie by the band of outlaws formed of Pantelimon, Ion Radu and Năstase. They take from the noblemen the money they stole from the peasants. The peasants live in misery, have barely anything to eat and work in very harsh conditions. Coroiu, who is representative of the aristocracy, considers these acts of rebellion a mere annoyance and acts to suppress them. The aristocracy have the political class on their side as well as the police. Thus, the peasants have no choice but to rebel against the aristocratic class.

### POLITICS

**Power** The issue of power appears in the movie through the character of Coroiu. He is an aristocrat whose wife left him to go live with Pantelimon. Therefore, Coroiu has a personal reason for wanting Pantelimon dead. He veils this motivation under the pretence that he is pursuing the injustice and crime of robbers and thieves. Coroiu is connected to all the magistrates and politicians and he knows how to pull all the strings to get what he wants. He summons Macarie to capture Pantelimon and kill him. Coroiu is shrewd and, although he promises Macarie to destroy his criminal file, he keeps several copies so that, when Macarie wants out, but Coroiu persuades him to continue his pursuit of Pantelimon. The power Coroiu exerts in the movie is great; he even tries to exert it over his former wife, who laughs in his face. In spite of Coroiu's great power, he never manages to catch Pantelimon, who is shrewder and smarter than all the police who are pursuing him. Coroiu represents the type of powerful, corrupt, ruthless boyar, who has no scruples stealing from the peasants and letting them live in the darkest misery.

### JUSTICE

**Crime** The movie is a portrayal of the lives of outlaws. They were vigilantes from 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania who stole from the rich to give back to the poor what was rightfully theirs. It is a sort of just crime that is pictured in the movie. In the beginning, Pantelimon and Ion Radu are in front of a tribunal who accuses them of several crimes. They admit to some of these crimes and explain that they took what had been robbed from the peasants; they are also accused of other crimes that Pantelimon says are a set-up and which they did not commit. The movie problematizes the question of the 'crime', suggesting that in the case of the outlaws, they were actual heroes for committing those crimes. They are harshly reprimanded and pursued relentlessly for these crimes. They manage to escape every time because they are smarter than the authorities and the peasants help them out. Thus, the director glorified the outlaws in his movie, turning them into national heroes and role models.

**Injustice** This oppression is portrayed as injustice. It is the injustice of taking away from the peasants the results of their hard labor, their rights and properties. The peasants are literally left with nothing while the aristocrats live in great luxury. The outlaws are there to correct this injustice. Pantelimon and his acolytes steal from the rich so that they can give to the poor and somehow correct this injustice. Pantelimon explains, on several occasions, that the imbalance of power and money is so great and the robbery of goods from the peasants so preposterous, that he feels entitled to take away from the rich what is rightfully the peasants'. Pantelimon acts as a vigilante who fights and risks his life for the good of the peasants. He is the Robin Hood hero of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania. Thus, the film's title alludes to the injustice present on the social scene in 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania.

### RELATIONSHIPS

**Friendship** The movie is a beautiful homage to friendship: especially, the friendship between Pantelimon, Năstase and Ion Radu. The three are animated by the same ideals – correcting the injustice brought on the peasants – even though they are different from one another. They work well together, understand one another by a mere gesture and take care of one another. Pantelimon is the

leader of their small band and they obey him. Although Năstase seems the more rebellious, it is not he who betrays, but Ion Radu. In the beginning of the movie, Năstase pretends to betray Pantelimon, only to get him and Ion Radu out of prison. When the time comes, they manage to get rid of the policemen accompanying them and Năstase mocks them. The three of them go through many adventures together and they manage to gather enough money which they then give to the peasants.

**Betrayal** However, this friendship is tainted by betrayal. Towards the end of the movie, Ion Radu turns himself in to Macarie and says he will tell him where Pantelimon is hiding if he is compensated and promised freedom and secrecy. He asks for papers from the Ministry to assure him that all is in order. Ion Radu carries with him the frame of a painting around his neck which he got while he was with Pantelimon and Năstase. When he put it around his neck, Năstase told him not to sell it and then repeated, several times, 'Do not sell'. However, Ion Radu sells and betrays, even though he is miserable doing this. As he takes the cup of wine that Macarie offered him, he pours it on the floor, an act reminding one of Judas and his betrayal of Christ. Ion Radu leads the police and Coroiu to the house where Pantelimon is hiding. At the end he is shown inside the picture frame that Năstase had given him, like a Judas who is forever depicted in the act of betrayal.

## SCENES

*PANTELIMON LIES DOWN IN HIS CELL* Pantelimon, an outlaw, has been caught by the police and put in jail. He is lying in his bed in a cell. Through these images, the movie alludes to Christ's lying in his tomb before the Resurrection.

*PANTELIMON IS GIVEN AN INJECTION* Pantelimon is taken away from his cell by some police officers. They take him to another room. There, he is given an injection.



**PANTELIMON RESPONDS TO THE ACCUSATIONS** Pantelimon is accused of several robberies and attacks. He confesses to some and denies others, saying the court is trying to set him up for crimes he did not commit so that he will have the antipathy of the people. He explains that the crimes he did commit are justifiable by the fact that all the money had been robbed from the peasants and he simply returned it.



**COROIU PLOTS TO KILL PANTELIMON** A high official, Coroiu, plots to kill Pantelimon with his subordinates. He suggests helping Pantelimon escape prison. While Pantelimon is out, the police could take away his life in secret.



**COROIU KEEPS ON PLOTTING** In this home, Coroiu tells his subordinates he wants to have Pantelimon killed. Coroiu appears obsessed with catching and killing Pantelimon. He carefully plans the murder and makes sure everything will go as planned.



**THE OUTLAW FLEE** Coroiu has arranged for Pantelimon's escape from prison because he wants to shoot him dead outside of prison. Pantelimon and his friends get out of jail, accompanied by two policemen who are supposed to kill Pantelimon.



*PANTELIMON SPEAKS* Out of prison, Pantelimon is free to speak his mind with his friends. He speaks about the poverty of the peasants, about the injustice of the police and law, and about the reasons why he has become an outlaw.



*THE POLICE OFFICERS PLAN TO KILL PANTELIMON* As Coroiu had indicated, two police officers follow Pantelimon and his friends after they escape from prison under the pretence that they are there to help them. However, they are faithful to Coroiu and plan to murder Pantelimon.



*THE PIPER* The outlaws and the police officers take refuge in a shelter. There, they find all sorts of people, one of whom is an old piper. He plays a sad song (*doina*) and Pantelimon listens to him intently. The piper and the other folk in the shelter are the kinds of people Pantelimon is fighting for.



*THE OUTLAW ESCAPE THE POLICE OFFICERS* Realizing that the police officers are there to kill them, the outlaws wake up at dawn and run away. The police officers wake up and try to shoot them, but the outlaws are very far.





**THE POLICE START SEARCHING FOR THE OUTLAWS** Seeing that the outlaws have escaped yet again, Coroiu sends more police force to search for them. The police reach a deserted church where the outlaws were indeed hiding. The old priest tells the police he has not seen any outlaws and that he is simply minding his business.



**PANTELIMON AND FLOAREA MEET AGAIN** During one of his heists, Pantelimon meets again Floarea, his former mistress. She is a singer in a restaurant now. The two stare at each other for a long time and we can tell Floarea still has feelings for Pantelimon.



*PANTELIMON EXPOSES MACARIE* The three outlaws go to a tavern where they find an old acquaintance, Macarie, who is playing a game of cards, cheating and taking money from naïve customers. Ion Radu starts playing and loses the money Pantelimon gave him. Pantelimon, who knows about Macarie's tricks, decides to join in the game and exposes Macarie by showing the card hidden in his sleeve.



*PANTELIMON VISITS A LAWYER* Pantelimon goes to see a lawyer he and his wife owe money to. The lawyer says Pantelimon should pay more because he was late with his payment. Pantelimon gives him the money and chides him for his unfairness.



*COROIU CONSULTS HIGH OFFICIALS* Frustrated that he cannot catch Pantelimon in any way, Coroiu calls in the country's high officials in order to discuss ways to catch him. Coroiu offers the solution of hiring Macarie, a former criminal, to catch Pantelimon. The high officials agree.



*COROIU RECRUITS MACARIE TO CATCH PANTELIMON* Seeing that the police are ineffective in catching Pantelimon, Coroiu recruits Macarie to catch him. Macarie agrees on the condition that they wipe out his previous criminal record. Coroiu agrees (lying) and Macarie is presented to the officials who have gathered to address the 'Pantelimon' problem.



**PANTELIMON VISITS HIS WIFE** Pantelimon is married and has a child. One night, he decides to visit his wife. The meeting is emotional. She says that she felt he was going to pay a visit. She asks him if anyone has seen him. At that moment, they hear the police yelling that the house is encircled and that they are trapped. Pantelimon asks his wife to take the child and get out of the house, while he hides underneath the stairs.



**PANTELIMON ESCAPES AGAIN** With a torch he takes from one of the policemen, Pantelimon sets fire to the house filled with policemen and flees. The police catch his wife and child and take them away. Macarie is frustrated and asks the policemen to search the place, but Pantelimon is nowhere to be found.



**COROIU LEARNS ABOUT PANTELIMON'S ESCAPE** While having a meal in his home, Coroiu receives the news that Pantelimon has managed to escape yet again. The news enrages Coroiu, but he keeps his cool. He decides to summon Macarie to ask him about what is going on.



**COROIU AND FLOAREA** Floarea visits Coroiu after the latter has asked her to come. During their conversation, we learn that Floarea is also Coroiu's former wife and that she left Coroiu for Pantelimon. Coroiu asks Floarea to help him catch Pantelimon, but Floarea refuses.



*THE OUTLAWS BEAT A MONEY COLLECTOR* Back to the villages, the outlaws meet a tax collector, who collects money from the peasants to give it to the noblemen. They seize him and beat him.



*THE HEIST ON NOBILITY* With his friends, Pantelimon pulls off another heist, this time on noblemen and women in the palace. He tells them that if they think what he is doing is not right, they can shoot him right away or refuse to pay. Nobody dares make a move. Ion Radu mock-kisses a noblewoman.



*NĂSTASE DANCES WITH THE GOVERNESS* Năstase invites one of the ladies present there – the governess – to dance with him. She accepts and the two waltz for a while. After this, the governess joins the outlaws and leaves with them.



*THE GOVERNESS* After joining the outlaws, the governess has cut her hair short and wears a man's hat. She accompanies the outlaws in their heists and adventures.



**THE OUTLAWS FIND SOME OLD OBJECTS** While resting in a grove, the outlaws find some old objects, among them frames from paintings. Năstase takes them and plays around with them and gives one to Ion Radu, telling him not to sell it. He then repeats, several times, 'Do not sell!.'



**COROIU THREATENS MACARIE** Seeing he is unable to catch Pantelimon, Macarie tells Coroiu he wants out, counting on the fact that his previous criminal record has been erased. But Coroiu has kept several documents and blackmails Macarie with them. Macarie is forced to continue his pursuit of Pantelimon.





*PANTELIMON SPEAKS AGAIN* Pantelimon meets a friend and talks to him about the motivation behind his fight against the system. He says that it is an unjust and oppressive system and that they have to do everything they can in order to stop it. He says he does not fear for his life.



*THE OUTLAWS GIVE THE MONEY TO THE PEASANTS* The outlaws go to a village where there are many peasants living in misery and poverty. They give some of the money they have taken from the noblemen to the peasants. The peasants are grateful and thank the outlaws.



**NĂSTASE CLIMBS UP A LADDER** While they are resting in a shelter, Năstase is shown climbing up a ladder and standing on it as though he were crucified.



**PANTELIMON GOES TO SEE HIS WIFE AGAIN** After she has lost her house to fire, Pantelimon's wife lives in a shabby house in difficult conditions. She scolds Pantelimon for becoming an outlaw and ruining their lives. Pantelimon says that he could not have lived any other way.



*NĂSTASE DIES* After Ion Radu leaves the group, Năstase is haunted down by the police and killed. Pantelimon finds him hanging from a tree.



*ION RADU BETRAYS PANTELIMON* Ion Radu offers to betray Pantelimon to Macarie. He says he wants money, a clean criminal record and secrecy on who it was who turned Pantelimon in. Macarie agrees, says he will bring the papers Ion Radu requires, and wines and dines him. Ion Radu takes the glass of wine in his hand and pours it on the floor.



*THE POLICE ARE AFTER PANTELIMON* Having been informed of the whereabouts of Pantelimon, the police go after him. They hike up a mountain and arrive at a small house on top.



*ION RADU CRIES* As a reward for betraying Pantelimon, Ion Radu is offered a lavish dinner. During his meal, he begins to regret his act and starts to cry.



*ION RADU WITNESSES THE HOLD-UP SCENE* Ion Radu accompanies the police as they go up the mountain to catch Pantelimon. He is alone with a picture frame behind him.



*PANTELIMON ESCAPES* The militia circle the house where Ion Radu says Pantelimon was hiding and order him to surrender. As they are waiting, the house starts imploding and we see Pantelimon get out of the house and going far away.

