

Words for the Country's Army: Tribute Brought by Ion Agârbiceanu to the Romanian Army, Before the Great Union

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Abstract. *In 2018, Romania celebrates the Centenary of the Great Union. The celebration of this event must also refer to the press of the time, which, over a hundred years ago, contributed to the propagation of the need for national unity, to the mobilization of the Romanian people for this purpose, but also to the consolidation of the new national order, through civic guidance, professional, moral and personal interests of the citizens. When talking about the Transylvanian press, Ion Agârbiceanu's name must be on any list of ambassadors of the Great Union. Patriot, without being an extremist, the Transylvanian writer has always militated, through his work and articles, for a prosperous and respected unitary state. This paper aims to analyze a series of articles on this subject, which were addressed by Ion Agârbiceanu to the Romanian army, during the period preceding the Great Union: "Words for the country's army".*

Keywords: *Agârbiceanu; Great Union; Press, Transylvania; Press history.*

Introduction

Ion Agârbiceanu was a Transylvanian writer and journalist, witness of the most important events in Romania's history. His literary and press activity lasted for almost 60 years, during which he published novels, stories, short stories and almost 2,000 articles, in about 80 newspapers.

This paper aims to analyze the articles that Agârbiceanu wrote before The Great Union, which took place on December 1, 1918, in order to reveal his ideas, his orientation and the way he attempted to change or influence his reader's views, regarding the need of a unitary state. Another point of interest is to see if he wrote news or opinion articles on this subject and in what manner were they written: objectively, sentimentally or manipulative. Considering that Ion Agârbiceanu was also a priest and a writer, it is important to see if he managed to separate his journalistic activity from these two vocations.

The relevance of this study is related to the fact that Ion Agârbiceanu's press activity has not been analyzed so far. Being a newspaper director for 10 years and a contributor for another 50 years, his journalistic work is an important part of the Romanian culture, especially the Transylvanian one. Although the subject is related to the press history, its relevance is given by his contribution to national culture, which is not worthwhile being forgotten in newspapers dating back to a century. At the same time, the novelty of the subject is that the journalistic activity of this writer has not been deepened so far. Last but not least, the subject of this particular study is relevant, referring to the event 100 years ago, of which centenary is celebrated in 2018: The Great Union of the Romanians.

Ion Agârbiceanu – a brief biography

Ion Agârbiceanu (September 12, 1882 – May 28, 1963) was a Romanian writer, journalist, priest, politician and academic. The climax of his press activity was between 1919-1927 (Rad 2014, p. LXXXIX), when he was the director of *Patria* newspaper and also in 1938-1940, when he led *Tribuna* (Agârbiceanu 2014, p. CV). Being a journalist was innate for the most writers in that period, considering that they were educated enough and powerful voices.

Agârbiceanu was born in Cenade, a village from Alba County, being the 8th child of his family. He attended primary school in his home village and then completed gymnasium and high school in Blaj, a town from the same county. Two years after graduating the Theological Seminary of the University of Budapest, in 1906, he became a priest in Bucium-Șasa, a commune from Alba County, where he lived until 1910. This was a very productive period for his literature, because he wrote novels and stories, inspired by peasant's lives (Rad 2014, p. LXXV-LXXVI).

During the next six years, Agârbiceanu lived in Orlat, Sibiu County, where he was also a priest. He stayed there until 1916, when his life suddenly changed, af-

ter the Romanian army entered in Transylvania. The first half of 1916 finds Agârbiceanu in a productive literary and journalistic activity. In August 1916, he lived with great enthusiasm the arrival of the Romanian army in Transylvania, which he considered the liberating force of this region. When, facing Germany's counter-offensive, the army withdrew, Ion Agârbiceanu, together with his wife and four children, fled to Râmnicu Vâlcea and then to Roman. A year later, in August 1917, he was evacuated to Russia, at Elisabetgrad, and in September he returned to Moldova. Throughout this period, Agârbiceanu had the support of Nicolae Iorga and Octavian Goga (Rad 2014, p. LXXVII-LXXVIII). This is the period in which he wrote the articles from the series *Words for the Romanian Army*, which is analyzed in this paper.

In 1918, Agârbiceanu returned to Orlat and continued his activity as priest. A year later, he moved to Cluj, where he became director of *Patria*, one of the most important newspapers in Transylvania. Until 1927, when he quit *Patria*, he neglected his opera. After that, he focused on writing the novels that consecrated him: *Legea minții*, *Povestea altei vieți*, *Biruința*, *Licean...odinioară*, *Sectarii* etc. Agârbiceanu resumed his activity in the press in 1938, when he became director of *Tribuna*, until 1940 (Zaciu 1972, pp. 127-128).

Between 1940-1945, Agârbiceanu lived in Sibiu, because he was expelled after Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. He spent this time in solitude, writing novels. After 1945, he returned to Cluj (Zaciu 1972, p. 182).

The difficult events, lived in the period of refuge, can be found in the most of his writings. As Dimitrie Vatamaniuc wrote, "The study of his wanderings shows that he knew closely the vicissitude through which the country passed during the years of the First World War and, in contrast to so many of the politicians of the time, he stood by his nation in the most difficult circumstances" (Vatamaniuc 1970, p. 15). Also, the real events and people became subjects of his opera and articles, reflecting the reality as it was: "Before Agârbiceanu, the writers limited themselves at writing about the idyllic surface of village life; Agârbiceanu's quill broke this lying canvas and his writing tells us, like an unbelievably true and painful revelation: «do not dress up the poor nation's life in the sweet coat of poetry! Look at its bleeding wounds. This is the state of people in the country side. I've seen it and I've known it in its painful width!»" (Brad 2007, p. 48).

Methodology

Ion Agârbiceanu's journalistic activity has not been studied yet. There are a few volumes which reproduce some of his articles, but they were not analyzed. Also, this part of his work is just mentioned in biographic books, without being deepened.

The research method used for this article is qualitative content analysis, in order to reveal Ion Agârbiceanu's ideas and orientations, concerning the Roma-

nian unitary state. More exactly, the sample includes the articles that Agârbiceanu wrote during the time spent in refuge, after the retreat with the Romanian army. The series of articles *Words for the country's army*, which are also included in the volume *A hot tear (Words for the country's army)*, was written in November 1917, published in *Romania* newspaper at the end of December, the volume being published in 1918. The volume includes 21 articles. In this paper are analyzed 10 of them, which were published in newspapers too (Vatamaniuc 1974, pp. 140-142).

Also, there were analyzed the further reproductions of some of the articles, published in *Viața militară* newspaper (1967) and in Stelian Neagoe's volume, *The great union of Romanians, in narrative sources* (1984).

The content analysis took into account several variables, related to the style of the articles, the ideas expressed and the writer's views on the Romanian army and national unity. In order to draw conclusions on these issues, the objectivity or subjectivity of each article (on the basis of expressing his opinion or the simple narrative of the facts) was taken into account. On the other hand, the opinions about the Romanian army, as well as the image that Agârbiceanu has built for it through its articles were analyzed. In this case, the analysis grid contained variables such as "admiration to the army", "love for the country", "war-related suffering", "the army viewed as the liberating force of the country", or "worshiping the soldiers", of which presence in the articles was considered.

Research questions:

- Are the analyzed texts revealing a unionist perspective of Ion Agârbiceanu?
- Which journalistic genre was chosen for these articles?
- Considering that the articles were written when the writer was a refugee, are there feelings involved? Are the articles written objectively or sentimentally?
- Did the fact that he was a priest give a religious tone to these articles?
- Have there been further reproductions of these articles? Have they been affected by censorship?

Findings

A hot tear (O lacrimă fierbinte) was the first article from this series, published in *Neamul românesc*, in May 14, 1917. The rest of the articles were published on December, in *Romania* newspaper. In the second article of the series, *A prayer (O rugăciune)*, the writer talks to God, praying for the soldiers and thanking him for his help. He also expresses his infinite love for the Romanian army: "I live so deep in it, through it, through the country's army; it became my father and mother, brother and sister, loved and worshiping idol, so I tell it the praise of my soul" (*A prayer*, in *Romania*, year I, no. 297, December 19, 1917, p. 1).

The period spent outside the country was, for Ion Agârbiceanu, captivity in the darkness, marked by an endless longing for his homeland. In the article *In darkness*

(În întuneric), he describes this experience as a traumatic one, which will leave deep traces: *"When I woke up in the vast infinite wilderness, under a heavy sky of lead, silent and barren like the underlying earth, huge as a coffin cover, left over to everyone, the dead shuddered, began to rise, to shed bitter tears, inflaming me with unimaginable fear. [...] For the first time in my life, I felt that I had no support under myself, that I was thrown away, wandering between sky and earth, that the chasm underneath absorbed me with greed. [...] There were hours, there were days in which I could no longer distinguish between myself and the inanimate things that surrounded me"* (Romania, year I, no. 298, December 20, 1917, p. 1). The articles capture feelings of authenticity that later amazed even the writer himself, who said that he had the intention of editing them, in order to slow down the sentimentally expression, but he gave up, for ethical reasons.

The unchain from the "claws of death" takes place *On the way to the country* (În drum spre țară), when happiness acquires new meanings for Agârbiceanu. The adoration for his homeland is growing even more now: *"From the edge of the night, from the threshold of light, thank you, my God, for bringing me here! Blinded by the glory of the Homeland, I fall on my knees and kiss the country's holy land. Oh! It is warm because of the blood and salted because of the tears, the ground most forgotten most by justice, of the most brave country"* (Romania, year I, no. 299, December 21, 1917, pp. 1-2). From that moment on, the promise made a few months ago became an undeniable fact: *"[...] feeling that I also have the duty to defend you, holy bride of our souls, I make this oath: all the power that I have in my life is for worshiping you. Whoever will blaspheme you, whoever will try to approach you with unclean thoughts, will become my enemy"* (A hot tear, in *Neamul românesc*, year XII, no. 129, May 14, 1917, pp. 1-2).

The country's army was, for Agârbiceanu, a superior entity, whom he treated, in its entire journalistic work, with admiration and extreme respect. His words are full of emotion, and nothing is greater than those who saved the country and whom he feels he owes everything to: *"You know that your arm stops the storm, you know that all nation's power has gathered in your heart, you know that the future is born from you. [...] Are they men or gods descended on earth, on the terribly tried land of my country? Because only the gods are source of light and power. I do not know if they are of gods or men, but souls of gods have descended into them, honoring our whole nation"* (Home, in *Romania*, year I, no. 300, December 22, 1917, p. 1).

The power of his glorified homeland does not lie in the physical force, but in the beauty of the soul of every soldier who fights with love and obstinacy to defend it. In the article *How small you look and how great you are* (Cât de mica pari, și cât de mare ești), Agârbiceanu described precisely this superior attribute of the country, to have soldiers brave and home-loving: *"The nobleness of your struggle was so great, my motherland, that, though crushed, you have stood up. [...] And I know that my people will now be rewarded for all the unrighteous sufferings of the mighty ones. The*

powerful ones will fall, by evil and injustice, and the strong ones will be exalted, by the sacrifice and the truth" (Romania, year I, no. 301, December 23, 1917, pp. 1-2). More specifically, in his opinion, Romania, a country whose brave soldiers struggled with their souls, will always win in front of the empires that have oppressed her, with their numerous armies.

In the article *Tortured, yet so brilliant* (*Chinuită, și totuși atât de strălucită*) (Romania, year I, no. 302, December 24, 1917, p. 2), Ion Agârbiceanu sums up the horrors suffered by the Romanian people, during all the years of struggle for national unity, for which the writer has militated so much in his journalistic work. The deep wounds, the broken bodies and souls are expressions of the wars that Romania did not want and sought. These are marks of the defense in front of the invading people, never a result of oppression, expansion or desire for greatness, says Agârbiceanu. The long defense wars, conquered by the defeat of the enemy, were due to the bravery, the love for the country, the noble faith and souls of the soldiers who gave everything to defend their homeland. The sacrifice of the Romanian people for the accomplishment of the national unity were immeasurable, wrote Agârbiceanu, but each battle was successful and the most wanted result would soon occur: the unitary state.

Torn and yet so complete (*Sfâșiată și totuși atât de întreagă*) is an article in which Ion Agârbiceanu continues the idea that the country was tortured and so were the people. But the brave actions of Romanian soldiers gave hope and faith. The country was never so tortured, says the Transylvanian writer, but also it was never so bright, animated by the big dream, the Romanian state: "*When the enemies taught that they broke us apart forever, we united more strongly than ever; when it seemed to them that we are dead, we revived, becoming more determined. The Romanian ideal is brighter than ever, my nation!*" (Romania, year I, no. 303, December 28, 1917, p. 1).

In *The generals* (*Ghinărarii*), Agârbiceanu pays tribute to the leaders of the Romanian army, who fought for national independence. He always admired and loved the leaders of the country and of the army and considered that they can give the impulse soldiers need and sees them as the image that the soldiers have in mind and for whom they would sacrifice anything. Also, he is sure that this feeling is mutual, which increases his esteem for the leaders. "*There were times when only your generals and you, beloved army, remained the keepers of the unwavering faith in victory [...] Here's why the small and undefeated army of my country is strong: it feels the blood and soul in its generals, and they worship the country and the nation by leading the army to the victory*", writes Agârbiceanu (Romania, year I, no. 312, January 10, 1918, p. 1).

The intellectuals were not forgotten either. In the article named *The scholars* (*Cărturarii*), the Transylvanian writer thanked to those who supported, through their work, the idea of the unitary state and tried to educate the public in this

direction, by becoming “heralds of the word” and by going “*from village to village, from hut to hut, teaching by words, by example or by guidance*” (*Romania*, year I, no. 324, January 24, 1918, p. 1).

Discussions

Even if this series of articles is called *Words for the country's army*, it is not addressed to the soldiers. Every article is built like a monologue, in which Ion Agârbiceanu “talks” to his country. Half of these articles were published initially in *Romania* and *Neamul românesc* and the rest of them only in the volume called *A hot tear (Words for the country's army)*, published in 1918 and 1991, the second edition.

Considering that *Romania* was a newspaper which was distributed to the soldiers in the trenches, for encouraging them, it may be taken into consideration that the articles were written in this form in order to fulfill the purpose of the newspaper. But if we take a look at Agârbiceanu's journalism, stories and novels, we can understand the sincerity of these articles, the love for the country being a recurrent element in his work. Also, the authenticity of the expressed feelings is supported by the difficult moments the writer has been through, being a refugee when he wrote them.

Some of the articles were reproduced later, but the censorship had an important impact on them. *How small you look and how great you are* was the first article from this series, put in this situation. In 1984, the Romanian historian Stelian Neagoe published the book *The great union of Romanians, in narrative sources* and included here articles from Ion Agârbiceanu's series, *Words for the country's army*. In 1984, the politic regime in Romania was communism, so Neagoe could not reproduce the parts of the articles that were against the opinions of the time. “*I come from a big country, in which I did not find anything: I did not see neither light, nor strength or sacrifice*”, wrote Agârbiceanu. He was talking about Russia, where he was expelled. Considering that Romania was in good relations with Russia, the reproduction of reference could not pass unobserved by the censors, so it was left out. The missing phrase was marked.

The same thing happened with the article *Tortured, yet so brilliant*. Stelian Neagoe transcribed this article as well, but with the same modifications. In this case, several paragraphs were left out, because they were referring to Russia. “*I have seen people coming out of their room or from others, screaming that they are living in a new world. But no ray of this new world bought light in their eyes or kissed their foreheads. Only the satisfaction of a sick human highlighted the ugly lines of their faces. I felt that the orgies of their joy led to death. I have heard the well-fed and well-dressed mocking the hungry and naked ones*” is an example of the left out parts. The missing paragraph is marked too in this article as well.

Another idea that could not be accepted by the communist censors was the union of Romania with Moldavian Republic. Agârbiceanu embraced this ideal, so

some parts of these articles were also left out. For example, in the reproduction of Stelian Neagoe, all references to the Romanians across the Prut, from the article *Torn and yet so complete*, were removed, the lack of quotation being marked.

In an even worst situation was the article *The generals*. It was reproduced in *Military life* newspaper, in 1967. The communist censorship was in full activity and several paragraphs, referring to religion, were simply left out, without marking the lack in a certain way. For example: “*Worshiped should be The Almighty, because, in tumultuous times and heavy endeavor, the generals of the Romanian army were bone from our bone. [...] Because he has given you such hard struggles, bless God, my brave country!*” The absence of the paragraphs was not even marked, so the translation was made in an unprofessional manner.

Conclusion

Ion Agârbiceanu was a unionist and he supported the idea of a unitary Romanian state, not only in this series of article, but in his journalistic and literary work, in general. He started his journalistic activity in 1903, when he was only 21 years old, but soon enough he was mature enough to realize the need of a unitary state and to militate for it.

The articles from *Words for the country's army* series were written like monologues, in which the writer addresses to his country, expressing his feelings and gratitude. He wrote these articles after he spent time in exile, so they have a subjective and sentimentally component. There are feelings involved, in order to describe his admiration for the armed forces, for the generals and for the soldier, who fight and sacrifice their life for the country.

The articles have a religious tendency, an aspect that can be found in many other of Agârbiceanu's journalistic and literary works. An explanation for this can be the fact that he was a priest, so he could not stop expressing his beliefs when he wrote as a journalist. Despite of the fact that he sometimes referred to God in his articles, he was never preachy. He tried to educate his public, by explaining political and social problems and their solutions.

There have been some reproductions of these articles, in a volume and in a newspaper, both published during communism: *The great union of Romanians in narrative sources* and *The military life*. In these cases, the parts about religion were erased. The same thing happened with the paragraphs in which Agârbiceanu wrote about Russia in a bad way. The difference between the two works is that the first one marked the absence of the paragraph and the second one did not, so the reader is not warned that something is missing.

Unlike some of Ion Agârbiceanu's works, this articles are more stylized. There are no repetitions, cacophonies and style mistakes, which can be found in his novels. Like Nicolae Iorga once said, “*Mr. Agârbiceanu's greatest sin is clumsiness. [...] At this point, the self-criticism of this young man must be harsher.*” (Zaciu 1982, p. 299).

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