

## ION AGÂRBICEANU'S BEGINNINGS AS JOURNALIST

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**ABSTRACT.** Witness of the most important key-events in Romania's history, the Romanian writer Ion Agârbiceanu couldn't be anything else but one of the most important journalists of Transylvania, a region with a tumultuous history and a lot of unsettled periods. During almost 60 years, Agârbiceanu published more than 2.000 articles, in about 80 newspapers, like *Patria*, *Tribuna*, *Transilvania*,  *Glasul Ardealului*, *Unirea* or *Luceafărul*. This paper aims to analyze the articles that Agârbiceanu wrote in his first years as a journalist, in order to understand the way he reflected the social reality and the historical facts. Also, another point of interest was to see if he tried to educate through his articles and to help people adapt to the changing society, considering that he was a writer, so he had the skills to make himself understood and to capture interest. As a further research, this study can help to understand the way his ideas changed during the years and also for a better interpretation of his literature.

**Keywords:** Ion Agârbiceanu, Transylvania, Ardeal, newspapers, Unirea, press, press history.

### Ion Agârbiceanu – a brief biography

Ion Agârbiceanu (September 12, 1882 – May 28, 1963) was a Romanian writer, priest, politician and academic. As the majority of the writers in that era, he was also a journalist. Even if the collaboration with newspapers began when he graduated high school, his most intense press activity took place when he was director of *Patria* (1919-1927) and *Tribuna*

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(1938-1940), two newspapers from Cluj. Developing a career as journalists was, for the Romanian writers, an opportunity to get in touch with more readers, to speak up even more and to earn some extra money as well. In the same time, they were the most educated people of the society, genuine opinion trendsetters, who had the cultural level for addressing to masses. Writer's journalistic activity is an interesting material to be studied, because it indicates which were the ideas that they thought that the population needs and this, indirectly, describes the society at that moment.

Agârbiceanu was born in Cenade, a village from Alba County, in a family with eight children. In 1889, he started primary school and then he went to Blaj, for gymnasium and high school. After graduation, he joined the Theological Seminary of the University of Budapest and graduated in 1904. Between 1906 and 1910, Agârbiceanu lived in Bucium-Șasa, a commune from Alba County, where he was a priest. For his literature, this was one of the most productive periods; he wrote his most appreciated short-stories, inspired by peasant's life style and their stories. During this time, his journalistic activity was considerably reduced. He maintained his collaboration with newspapers, for publishing his opera<sup>2</sup>.

In 1910, Agârbiceanu moved in Orlat, Sibiu County, where he was priest as well. He stayed there until 1916, when the events during the war forced him to flee with the Romanian army, in Râmnicu-Vâlcea. Then he ended up in Russia, in Elisabetgrad, until 1918. This was an extremely difficult time for him and his family, because they were extremely poor and with children to raise and feed. In 1918, he returned to Romania, back to his parish, in Orlat. In 1919 he moved to Cluj, where he became director of an important newspaper: *Patria*<sup>3</sup>. The experiences from the Carpathian villages influenced a lot his opera; the struggle during the war and the experiences as a refugee only taught him to be even more patriotic and to fight for his dream – the unitary state: “The study of his wanderings

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<sup>2</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu. *Works. I. Short stories and stories*. Edition made by Ilie Rad. Chronological table, edition note, bibliography, notes and comments, critical references by Ilie Rad. Introductory study by Eugen Simion, Romanian Academy, National Foundation for Science and Art, Bucharest, 2014, p. LXXV-LXXVI (originally in Romanian).

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Zăciu, *Ion Agârbiceanu*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, p. 127-128.

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”<sup>4</sup>. As Al. Ciura, a Romanian literary critic, said, “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 a unbelievably true and painful revelation: «don’t 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! »”<sup>5</sup>. The rural themes also impressed Mihai Beniuc, a Romanian poet, who wrote, in 1941: “The local coloring is rendered with so much artistry, that the ones from county side can’t help to startle and the ones in the cities are stunned by its abundance”<sup>6</sup>.

February 1919 was the moment when Agârbiceanu’s journalistic activity gets new dimensions. He became director of *Patria* (until 1927), one of the most important newspapers in Transylvania. As the writer himself said, during this years, he focused so the press, that he neglected his opera.

After leaving *Patria*, he resumed his literary activity and wrote well-known novels: *Legea minții*, *Povestea altei vieți*, *Biruința*, *Răbojul lui Sfântu Petru*, *Licean...odinioară*, *Sectarii* etc. Also, between 1938-1940, he was the director of *Tribuna*, a cultural magazine in Cluj.

In 1940, Agârbiceanu departed to Sibiu, when the Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary. There was even an expulsion decision on his name, as we find out from a letter<sup>7</sup>. During the next five years, spent in solitude, he wrote some of the most appreciated novels: *Jandar-mul*, *Domnișoara Ana*, *În pragul vieții*, *Vremuri și oameni*, *Lumea nouă*.

In 1945, Agârbiceanu returned to Cluj, where he continued his journalistic activity and the literary one too.

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<sup>4</sup> Dimitrie Vatmaniuc, *Ion Agârbiceanu*, Albatros, Bucharest, 1970, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ion Brad, *Ion Agârbiceanu. Holy father of Romanian literature*. The Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 48 (original in Romanian).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Mircea Zaciuc, *Ion Agârbiceanu*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, p. 182.

## The Romanian society, at the beginning of the 20th century

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by several important events for Romania, which were to change its destiny. After the Balkan wars (1913), the Cadrilater returned to Romania; the First World War started and, after two years of neutrality, Romania takes Entente's side, after which it succeeds to become a unitary national state<sup>8</sup>. But before that, the Romanian society was facing a dark period, because of the economic crisis. Like Florin Constantiniu observed, "around 1900, Romania appeared – and the situation will continue over the next four decades – as a country of contrasts: refined luxury, elites living in western style, middle eastern standard of living and poverty for the middle class"<sup>9</sup>.

While Europe was filled with *la belle époque* euphoria, the Romanian peasants and workers were protesting against their difficult conditions. In 1904, over 5.000 peasants protested and the intervention of authorities ended with 33 deaths<sup>10</sup>. The climax was in 1907, when the revolt lasted for three months.

Considering the situation of rural society, the modernization was way behind at that time, comparing to the rest of the Europe, given the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population lived in the villages. For the writers, this was an inexhaustible source of topics for their literary works and articles. Agârbiceanu was one of these writers.

### Research design

Ion Agârbiceanu's journalistic work has not been deepened yet. Except for *Meditation in September (Meditație în septembrie)*, which is an anthology that reunites a few articles, there were no studies on this subject.

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<sup>8</sup> Ilie Rad, *Incursions in the history of Romanian written press*, Accent, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 76 (original in Romanian).

<sup>9</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *A sincere history of the Romanian people*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, revised and added, Encyclopedic Universe, Bucharest, 2002, p. 240 (original in Romanian).

<sup>10</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu (coord.), *Romania's history in data*, Romanian Encyclopaedia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1972, p. 277 (original in Romanian).

The purpose of this research is to bring to light the first problems that have concerned the Transylvanian writer. This particular paper treats the first three years of his press activity. The period 1903-1905 could be considered the beginning of Agârbiceanu as journalist, because in 1906 he moved in Orlat, so his life changed and his press activity as well, that moment marking another level of his career.

*Research questions:*

- Which were the first topics Agârbiceanu wrote about in his first articles? Which were the problems that preoccupied him?
- Did the fact that he was a priest influence the subjects he chose for writing about?
- Was he preachy or he managed to separate the priest Agârbiceanu from the journalist Agârbiceanu?
- Considering that he was an educated man, did he try to educate his readers too, through his articles?

**Methodology**

The primary research method used for this paper is qualitative content analysis, in order to understand the topics and the speech of the articles, but also quantitative analysis, which revealed the newspapers where Agârbiceanu published most of his articles and which are the categories that he preferred.

The sample includes all the articles published by Agârbiceanu between 1903 and 1905, the period chosen for this research.

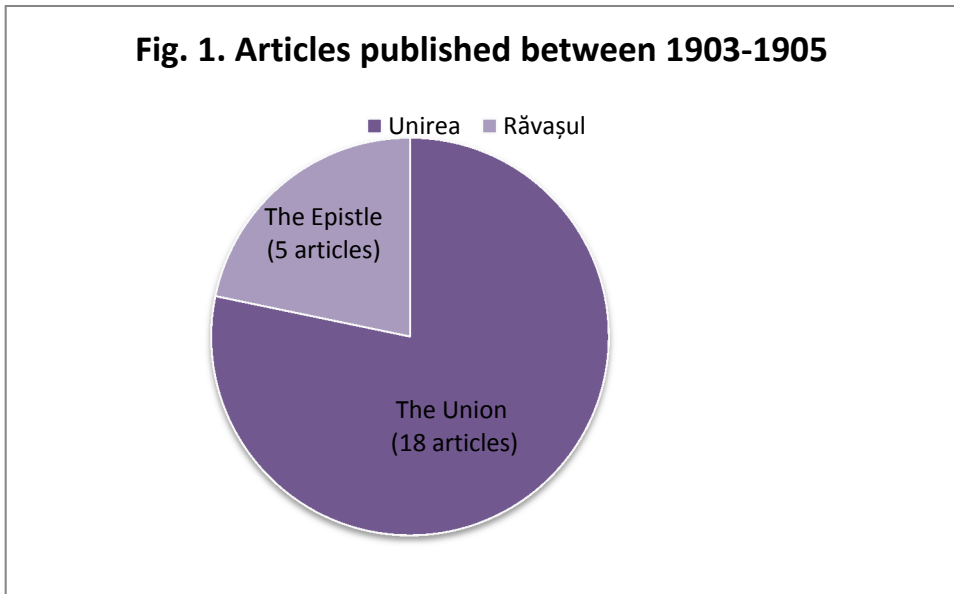
**The first years of journalistic activity (1903-1905)<sup>11</sup>**

Ion Agârbiceanu's journalistic debut took place later than the literary one, even if the last one was in the newspapers too. In 1899, Agârbiceanu published his first poem, *Memories (Amintiri)* in *Unirea (The Union)* newspaper. His first press article was also published in *Unirea*, four years later,

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<sup>11</sup> Note: Ion Agârbiceanu signed his articles with different names: I. Agârbiceanu, Alfius, I.A., A., I. Agarbi., I. Agârbicean or they were unsigned. This paper respects his option. Therefore, in the footnotes, the name of author is the name he wrote at the end of his articles.

and it had an ecclesiastical profile. In that time, he was still a student of the Theological Seminary of the University of Budapest (until 1904). During 1903-1905, Agârbiceanu published 23 articles, almost all of them in *Unirea* and only a few in *Răvașul* (*The Epistle*):



*The church (Biserica)*<sup>12</sup> was published in the February 14, 1903 edition of the *Unirea* newspaper and it describes the sanctity that this institutions has in peasant's lives and the central place that it occupies in society and in every day activity. The church, over which the passage of years has left its mark, is situated outside the village, away from the passions and worries of the people, but watches over the whole village, from the hill on which it is situated. Written in a literary note, the article perfectly surprises the atmosphere of the traditional Romanian village, where the society is formed around the church, marked by the inherited teachings of ancestors: everything begins with "God help us!" and ends with thanking to the divinity; on Sundays, the whole village is wearing holiday clothes and taking part in the service, after the bells of the church tower

<sup>12</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu, *The church*, in *The Union*, year XIII, nr. 6, February 14, 1903, p. 56-57 (original in Romanian)

call for prayer, and the church rejuvenates; the peasants kneel humiliated and “their cracked hands make the cross sign, wide, complete, as only the peasants know how to do it!”; life begins and ends with God’s blessing and “no matter how sad and old the church on the hill is, it is the ideal of life, because the life lives in it!”. The end of the article has symmetry with the beginning, highlighting the role of the church to watch over the village: “On the hill with a rare, almost dry, poor grass, stands the church of the village, surrounded by graves, like a sentinel, tired because of the long-standing watching over the living and over the dead”.

The second article that Ion Agârbiceanu published is also an ecclesiastical one. Written three months later, this time he refers to faith, in a style that will become characteristic for him and it will consecrate him later: the struggle for faith in God, severely sanctioning moral and ethical deviations, always trying to educate, but without being a moralist. *The faith (Credința)*<sup>13</sup> is a three-part article, published within three weeks. The first article is published in the second part of the newspaper, called *Scientific-Literary Part*, and it is, in fact, a demonstration of the fact that faithlessness is always defeated, even if sometimes just in the end. Ion Agârbiceanu considered that faith can be seen from three points of view: theologically, in its relations with revelation, where the questions about the nature, freedom, necessity and merit of faith arise; from a hermit’s point of view, when it faces its enemies; faithlessness, the third one, is considered by Ion Agârbiceanu to be a subject that has never been more present, which is noisy and affects the peace of the believing souls.

### **The first political articles – the problem of socialism**

Although dedicated to theology and ecclesiastical activities, Ion Agârbiceanu wrote about plenty of subjects from the social-political sphere, starting shortly from the journalistic debut. Concerned, as in his literary work, about the good progress of society, based primarily on widespread morality, the avoidance of political opinion was impossible. The first political subject is socialism, a current that he always rejected, by exposing counterarguments and malfunctions. *The Socialists and the*

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<sup>13</sup> *The Faith*, in *The Union*, year XIII, nr. 18, May 9, 1903, p. 188 (original in Romanian).

*Romanians (Socialiștii și românii)*<sup>14</sup> is an article published in *Răvașul*, written in three parts, which starts from a clear idea: equality, justice and fraternity are concepts that arose before the 18th century, when this movement began in France. Fundamental ideas, repeated now, come from the moment of the emergence of Christianity and are values that have been promoted with the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, Agârbiceanu considers.

The writer disagrees with the new current of thought, which requires separation of the state and church, referring here to the French Revolution, which marked the moment when the state stopped being dominated by the monarch and the Church, the idea of equality becoming more important: “These people want to detach from the church and Christian faith; they write [...] that the church is the one keeping people in the dark and not allowing them to see the injustice in the world; that the priests, the ones who preach and drink wine, they fool people with their teachings [...] only to be able to live on their backs, to take advantage of them. And these people also say that they are the best friends of humanity that they want all men to know the troubles in which they live in, to enlighten them and to bring freedom, equality and fraternity to the world”.

It was inevitable that an article about socialism would not bring into discussion the vehement attitude against Marxist ideas, which Agârbiceanu has repeatedly expressed. Although he does not mention the scientific socialism founder’s name, the allusion is clear, in phrases like “they [the socialists] are enemies of Jesus Christ, enemies of any people other than the Jewish one”, given the Jewish origin of Marx. Agârbiceanu used to call the Jewish people *jidovi* or *jidani*, terms which were considered offensive. The criticism of the proletariat, another idea exploited by Karl Marx, is no less gentle. Large factories and industrialization are not considered by Agârbiceanu to be solutions to poverty alleviation, but on the contrary: the represent the submission of some social strata to the owners, who will establish the economic condition. This, Agârbiceanu says, is also a kind of serfdom.

Of course, the views are not the same regarding the followers of Christian Democracy, a doctrine formed as a defensive of the Catholic Church and which is based on the Christian values, which are meant to be applied in the social life. It is, however, the result of the loan of ideas

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<sup>14</sup> I. Agarbi., *Socialists and Romanians*, in *The Epistle*, year I, nr. 5, May 2, 1903, p.17-18 (original in Romanian).



from other current policies. Although they aim at a common goal, the general well-being of society, especially of workers, the difference between Christian Democrats and Social Democrats is, according to Agârbiceanu, in the way they treat people. The main reason for which he pleads in favor of the Christian Democrats, beyond his profession and personal beliefs, which automatically place him in this group, is the attention given to the spiritual component of human beings, whether they are workers or patrons.

In Agârbiceanu's opinion, the idea that "every man matters as much as his work values" ("fiecare om plătește cât muncește") turns workers into robots and even into animals, that do not involve themselves emotionally in what they do. This is the consequence of the fact that the sure thing that is expected from them is physical strength. But the Social Democrats are trying to educate people by virtue of creating a society based on morals and religious principles, says Agârbiceanu. Also, he claims that they know that they cannot bring heaven to earth, as the Social Democrats promise, but "they believe in a fate improvement, which is possible only if people will be better, and people become better only by learning about God. That is why Christian Democrats begin by teaching those who have forgotten Jesus", which is their noble purpose and supreme care. Agârbiceanu calls the Social Democrats pagans and he addresses to them: "Man is not valued, dear ones, according to his body, to his animal powers, but to the divine ones. The right thought, the pure heart and the diligent work on these give the price of man not only in front of the word, but also in front of God".

Even if Agârbiceanu was a supporter of Christian values, so, among other things, of the well-being state of people, Agârbiceanu does not condemn the rich ones: "They say that the wealthy people are tyrants, they are the leeches that swallow the blood of the workers, they are not worth living, have no value, because the price is counted considering the amount of work and they do not work. Here I will draw your attention: they say that the wealthy people do not work. They do not work with my arms, maybe, but they work in another way, more difficult things, many times". This opinion may be influenced by the fact that he was a priest and in those times priests were wealthy people, so he feels like he needs to give an explanation, to make sure that the readers understand that just because someone doesn't physically work, it does not mean that he does not do it at all. Moreover, Agârbiceanu considered that the social-democrat

were wrong when they said that the result of the work is not the property of the business owner, but of all those who contributed to obtaining the assets, which would lead to a division of the fortunes among those who are not right to receive those goods.

In the second part<sup>15</sup> of the article *Socialists and Romanians*, which was published a week later, Agârbiceanu continues the comparison between Christian and social-democratic socialists, emphasizing the importance of the spiritual dimension of human beings. The Social Democrats believe that the primary need is to have food, but Agârbiceanu believes that men are put together with animals, whose lives are limited to physical nourishment. In his opinion, people need more, and Christian-Democrats are the ones who best understand this need. They see in man, first of all, a soul, which needs attention. This is the key, Agârbiceanu considers, for the whole society to become better: caring for the spirit, feeding it with God's words, educating it, infusing the principles of the Bible and preparing the soul for eternity. Once these things are a priority in ordinary human life, society will gain new valences, build on solid principles, and material welfare will come from itself, for honest, laborers and conscientious men.

In the last part of the article<sup>16</sup> *Socialists and Romanians*, published on May 16th, 1903, Agârbiceanu analyzes the possibility that socialism will grow in Romania too. Although the Social Democratic Party of Workers was established in our country since 1893, when this trend was in full growth in Europe, and the program of socialist measures, drawn up by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, existed since 1886, the organizations that supported the current having a lot of followers, Agârbiceanu still believed that this doctrine would not succeed in Romania. According to Nicolae Jurca, in the *History of Social-Democracy in Romania*, "in 1888, The Ground Workers Guild, in Iaşi, had about 700 members and The Workers Party had 2.000 men"<sup>17</sup>, but Agârbiceanu does not even take in consideration this numbers. In order for socialism to succeed, "we should have, on the one hand, very wealthy people, and on the other hand people without a cure of wealth, we should have a

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<sup>15</sup> I. Agarbi., *The Epistle*, year I, nr. 6, May 9, 1903, p. 21-22 (original in Romanian).

<sup>16</sup> I. Agarbi., *The Epistle*, year I, nr. 7, May 16, 1903, p. 26-27 (original in Romanian).

<sup>17</sup> Nicolae Jurca, *The History of Social-Democracy in Romania*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 16 (original in Romanian).

non-clerical priesthood, richer than the Jews and more deceptive than them, we should have no churches in the villages and no schools”.

In the end of this series of articles, Agârbiceanu puts his trust in the country's leaders, who will know what is best for Romania and leave socialism aside. In a somewhat idealist style, it even urges the Romanians to wonder whether socialism has already covered Romania, if our leaders considered it beneficial. In his opinion, Romania is capable of leading alone, without needing help from strangers, even less of an *Itig* (also referring to the Jews) and invokes illustrious figures of the Revolution of 1848, who managed to lead Romania on the right path, through patriotism and love for their country: Avram Iancu and Axente Sever.

A week later, Agârbiceanu gets published again in *Răvaşul*, with another text about socialism, with the article *The Romanian socialist's sheet (Foaia socialiștilor români)*<sup>18</sup>. This time, he writes about *Voința (People's Will)*, a newspaper supporting this policy, which he criticizes. Initially, there was an intention that the article would be published in two parts, because the first one ends with *to be continued*, but the second part was never published.

At the beginning of the article, Agârbiceanu makes a confession, by which he wants to show that this newspaper has a very low importance, calling it a handbill (*fițuică*): “At first, I wanted to write only about the socio-democratic handbill, which is called *People's Will*. I thought, however, that is not worthy to waste so much paper and ink only to write about it, which is why I first wrote extensively about the socialists”. In this article, Agârbiceanu removes, with examples from the Bible, the self-proclaiming of the Social-Democrats as descendants, in ideas and ideals, of Jesus Christ.

### The recurrence of religious articles

The next article is also an ecclesiastical one, published in *Unirea*. *The Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pogorârea Sf. Spirit)*<sup>19</sup> is, as can be deduced from the title, about Whitsuntide, when, according to the *Bible*, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, who began to speak all the languages

<sup>18</sup> I. Agarbi., *The sheet of Romanian socialists*, in *The Epistle*, May 23, 1903, year I, nr. 8, p. 30-31 (original in Romanian).

<sup>19</sup> Alfius, *The descent of the Holy Spirit*, in *The Union*, year XIV, nr. 22, May 28, 1904, p. 201-202 (original in Romanian).

of the earth, in order to be able preach all over the world. It is only at the end of the article that we can understand what is to point of detailing this biblical scene: “Teaching only has a purpose if it illuminates your mind, if it makes you better. All our instruction, not only the religious, but also the pragmatic one, must have this goal; otherwise, we cannot become useful members of human society. But this goal will never be achieved if we are forced to work our mind with a language we do not understand, which is alien to our nature. Speaking our native language is a psychological necessity for people with healthy thinking, because it is planted by the Creator himself in us”. This passage occupies less than one paragraph of the article, but it is obvious that the reference is to Magyarization. In 1904, it began to take on an increasing scale, followed three years later by the Apponyi’s law, which led to closure of more than 300 Romanian schools. Agârbiceanu was vigilant about everything connected with the threats of other nations. Also, he was always against the Hungarians in those tumultuous times, through his articles and opera. In this case, the message is hidden behind this example, in which the will of God that everyone can be taught in his own language has a clear significance.

### The articles on social topics

On July 2, 1904, in *Unirea*, Agârbiceanu publishes *Marian societies (Societăți mariane)*<sup>20</sup>, referring to Vasile Lucaciu, one of the most important Transylvanian politicians. By the time he arrived at speaking about him, which happened only in the second half of the article, Agârbiceanu wrote again about foreigners who are attacking Romania’s security.

*Mother (Mama)*<sup>21</sup> is the last article that Ion Agârbiceanu published in 1904 and it is about the emancipation of women, the feminist movement in general, which has begun to grow in Romania too. Agârbiceanu looks at this new trend with skepticism. Not because he would consider that women are inferior, but on the contrary, because he sees them as the

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<sup>20</sup> Alfius, *Marian societies*, in *The Union*, an XIV, nr. 27, 2 iul. 1904, p. 252-253 (original in Romanian).

<sup>21</sup> Alfius, *Mother*, in *The Epistle*, year II, nr. 40, November 1, 1904, p. 167-169 (original in Romanian).

image of sensitivity, gentleness and tenderness: “[...] the health, liveliness and happiness of a family hangs from the way that the mother is that family. With her tender temper, with her praying eyes, with her actions of true love, a woman can – if she does not have boys in her family to bring along the right path – help to get up even the most fallen man”. She understands that times change and spending is higher, especially for child care, but Agârbiceanu thinks that she forgets one essential fact, that the woman’s goal in the world is to be a good mother, which is an obstacle in the way of emancipation: “When the little ones surround her and gaggle two words, she begins the planting, thread by thread, all the good and holy, in the bright and young soul. [...] If, however, the will and the pleasure of praying is not taught to a small child, later no teacher in the world will be able – even if he wishes – to teach him to pray with joy and not only on command”. Agârbiceanu believes that because of her gentleness and unmeasured love, the mother has to teach the child all these things, to allocate as much time as possible. This justifies his skeptical view of women’s empowerment. Her work within the family will influence future generations, so the society at a time.

In 1905, Ion Agârbiceanu spent half a year in Budapest, where he established relationships around the *Luceafărul* magazine, to which he would later collaborate with various articles and became a member of the “Petru Maior” Society<sup>22</sup>. He also focuses on literary and journalistic activity, especially in the second half of the year. In June 1905, the first article wrote in that year, he reviewed a study wrote by Ioan Rațiu, about Vasile Cârlova, a Romanian poet and officer, who died in 1831, when he was only 22 years old.

The June 24, 1905 edition of *Unirea* has the mention „festive number” on its first page. Almost the whole newspaper (25 pages) is dedicated to Timotei Cipariu<sup>23</sup> (except for the last page, where the advertising is placed), because in February 1905 would have been celebrated 100 years since his birth. The front page of the newspaper has a photo of the great Transylvanian

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<sup>22</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu. *Works. I. Short stories and stories*. Edition made by Ilie Rad. Chronological table, edition note, bibliography, notes and comments, critical references by Ilie Rad. Introductory study by Eugen Simion. Romanian Academy, National Foundation for Science and Art, Bucharest, 2014, p. LXXIV (original in Romanian).

<sup>23</sup> Romanian cleric and academic, founding member of the Romanian Academy.

scholar and a poem dedicated to him. A text by Agârbiceanu on this subject was expected, given the admiration for him, which he manifested on several occasions. This time he wrote about his poetic work, in the article entitled *Versifications of T. Cipariu (Versificări de-ale lui T. Cipariu)*<sup>24</sup>, although this part of his work was the least complex and exploited. However, “*The epitaph is not much inferior to the best poems of Eliade Rădulescu*<sup>25</sup> – except his *Sburătorul* – and *Dorul*, not the one translated from Schiller, is a composition in beautiful folk verses”, wrote Agârbiceanu about “The most erudite Transylvanian man we have ever had”.

Next, he analyzes the poems *Ecloga*, *Dorul* and *Bătrânul* and he appreciates them. Agârbiceanu considered that an analysis of Timothy Cipariu’s poetic activity was welcomed, although, he says, “certainly his merits would have been the same, even if wouldn’t have written any verse, because his poems does not make its aura of scholar any brighter”. But he confesses that he felt obliged to bring to the knowledge of the younger generation this part of Cipariu’s work too.

### ***Other letters – a series of social and religious articles***

In the period July-December 1905, Agârbiceanu published a series of articles, entitled *Other Letters (Alte scrisori)*, which were addressed *To a friend (Unui prietin)*. The way these letters are structured, like any other articles, indicates that they do not address a specific person, that friend being a generic term. Although they have different subjects, Agârbiceanu militates in the eight letters for the personal contribution of each citizen to the development of society, through culture, solidarity, altruism and education.

According to Dimitrie Vatamaniu<sup>26</sup>, the first letter was published in *Unirea* and it is about intellectual’s role in the village. A detailed analysis was not possible, because the newspaper could not be found.

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<sup>24</sup> I. Agârbiceanu, *Versification of T. Cipariu*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 25, June 24, 1905, p. 209-211 (original in Romanian).

<sup>25</sup> Romanian writer, philologist and political man, founding member of Romanian Academy and its first president.

<sup>26</sup> Dimitrie Varamaniuc, *Ion Agârbiceanu. Bibliography*, Romanian Encyclopaedia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, p. 87 (original in Romanian).

The second letter is called *Our nation (Nația noastră)*<sup>27</sup> and Agârbiceanu highlights here the need for well-done work. He advises people to be more ambitious and fulfill their obligations with enlightenment. “You have heard so many times, my beloved friend, our people, even when they start doing a good job, they leave it so soon and they are no longer interested in it. [...] It is not enough, dear friend, to ignite the fire and believe that only by this the polenta boils well and, by doing nothing, it is done in about half. No. You have to put some more kindling from time to time, for the fire to be refreshed and the flames keep on constantly”, explains Agârbiceanu, with the mastery of a teacher. Such advice shows his continuing attempt to educate all people, a purpose that needs the ability to speak in a way that even the people with low educational level understand.

The insistence on enlightenment is intensified in the *Reading in villages and cities (Cetitul la sate și la orașe)*<sup>28</sup>, the third article from the *Other Letters* series. The article is, as it can be deduced from the title, about reading, as a form of knowledge enrichment, for the development of thought and for the creation of an enlightened mind and spirit. The issue of cultivating young people from the villages was caused by the obligation they had for physical work, on the infield, their source of income. Because of the low development potential, young people built their lives around their houses and farms, their main occupation being the agriculture.

In the fourth letter, entitled *The temper (Characterul)*<sup>29</sup>, published in two parts, Agârbiceanu treats the individual's ethical dimension, in relation to others. The temper is not a matter of heredity, he says, but it forms in the environment in which one lives. Above all, however, is the moral power, the principles and the laws upon which a person lives: “A high moral fund, the most sublime principles, the most sacred, the ones that lead to the target, and yet the purest. These principles must illuminate”.

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<sup>27</sup> Alfius, *Other letters. Letter II (Our Nation)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 32, August 12, 1905, p. 270-272 (original in romanian).

<sup>28</sup> Alfius, *Other letters. Letter III (Reading in villages and cities)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 33, August 19, 1905, p. 278-280 (original in Romanian).

<sup>29</sup> *Other letters. Letter IV (The Character)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 36, September 9, 1905, p. 303-304 (original in Romanian).

“Maybe no other decrease in today’s humanity is so bad, dear friend, as the lack of altruism. Those who say that the fight for food has never been so fierce are absolutely right”<sup>30</sup>. This is how Agârbiceanu begins his fifth letter, published in the *Unirea*, which has as its subject altruism. His priestly vocation and preoccupation for a higher moral standard make him observe the increasing concern of men for daily cares and selfishness in the realization of their own ideals, but altruism should be at the basis of the relationships between people, the foundation of happiness and good understanding.

The cultural uplifting of the Romanian people is a recurring theme in Ion Agârbiceanu’s press activity. *Popular missions (Misiuni populare)*<sup>31</sup> is an article that interrupts the series of *Other letters* and resumes the ideas about the duties of intellectuals towards the people. The so-called popular missions aim to solve the problems which society, especially the rural one, is facing: “you will see many good and useful things and good deeds, but you will see more that do not correspond to the present time of the century of civilization, of culture, you will see, among other things, a lot of people in bars, crowded playgrounds and parties [...] and you will feel that the air in the Lord’s house is not overwhelming, especially during the service”. A good pastor, Agârbiceanu says, can be recognized by the appearance of the village where he serves. Through these popular missions, people would be guided, educated and the increased level of culture would lead to a better society.

*The past’s liveliness and the present’s drowsiness (Însufletirea de odinioară și moleșirea de azi)*<sup>32</sup> is the sixth article of the *Other Letters* series, at the beginning of which Agârbiceanu quoted *Epigones*, Mihai Eminescu’s poetic art, in which he is nostalgic about the glorious past and the disappointing present. Agârbiceanu feels angry too when he talks about the Romania’s past decades. The liveliness with which the ancestors fought for the country – even when the invading nations were ruthless and broke any hope –

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<sup>30</sup> Alfius, *Other letters. Letter V (Altruism)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 41, October 14, 1905, p. 342-344 (original in Romanian).

<sup>31</sup> A., *People’s missions*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 39, September 30, 1905, p. 326-327 (original in Romanian).

<sup>32</sup> *Other letters. Letter VI (The past’s liveliness and the present’s drowsiness)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 46, November 18, 1905, p. 382-383 (original in Romanian).

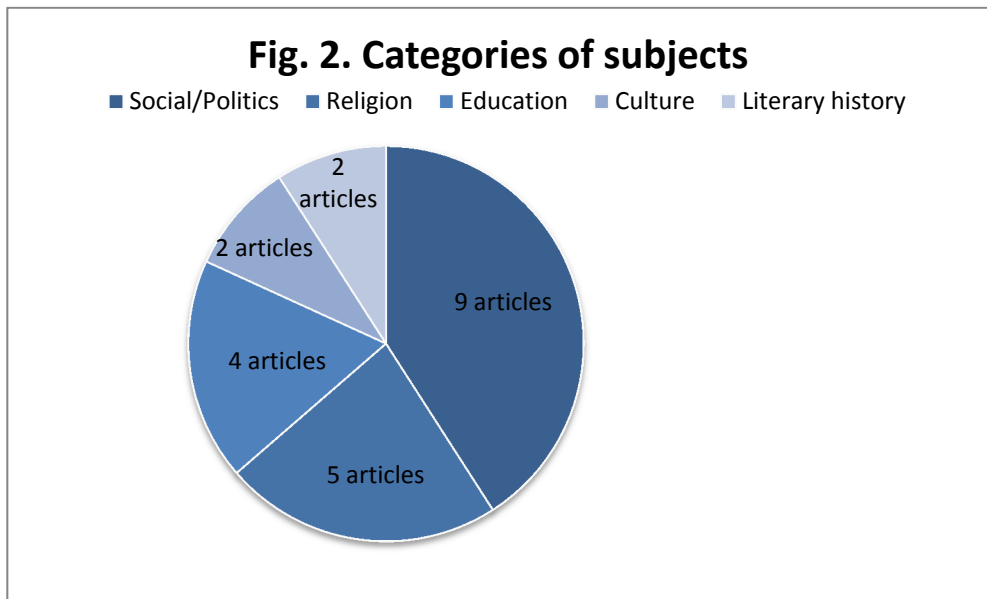


and the negligence that characterizes the people from present disappoints Agârbiceanu.

The matter of degraded present is detailed in the second part of the article, published a week later<sup>33</sup>. The worryment about the passivity of Romanians, who are now moving away from the ideal of national unity, shows Agârbiceanu's disillusion concerning the current generations.

The last letter is also the last article published in 1905. *The beauty of Christianity (Frumusețea creștinismului)*<sup>34</sup> deals with a topic commonly encountered in Agârbiceanu's press work: the beauty of the heart opened to God. "Only Christianity, a current itself, but an absolute truth, did not extinguish, when many have left or left it, when most, as in our day, are indifferent to it".

During these years, Agârbiceanu wrote 9 social-political articles, 5 with religious topic, 4 about education and 2 for each cultural and literary history domain, as it can be observed in Fig. 2.



<sup>33</sup> Alfius, *Other letters. Letter VI (The past's liveliness and the present's drowsiness)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 47, November 25, 1905, p. 390 (original in Romanian).

<sup>34</sup> Alfius, *Other letters. Letter VIII (The Beauty of Christianity)*, in *The Union*, year XV, nr. 52, December 30, 1905, p. 429-432 (original in Romanian).

## Conclusions

The first topics Ion Agârbiceanu wrote about were religious, political and later social ones. The problems that always preoccupied him were the importance of faith and church in society, the way the politicians were doing their work and about people's morality. He was also concerned about the evolution of the Romanian society and the emancipation of the citizens.

The fact that Ion Agârbiceanu was also a priest influenced the topics of his articles. The religious subjects were his second choice, the first being the political and social ones. Even if he was a priest and he preferred this kind of articles, he was never preachy. He always explained the importance of faith and tried to educate people in order to make them understand the importance of morality.

Another important aspect of Ion Agârbiceanu's press activity is that he always tried to educate his readers, the press giving him the opportunity to have a wider audience. Just like his prose, Agârbiceanu's articles always promoted moral principles. Regardless of the topic, the journalist provides an educational function to his articles. They express opinions that evoke respect for people or deeds, militate for patriotism, respect for the country and ancestors. He has tact, so he manages to educate without making any tedious preaching.

In his journalistic style, Ion Agârbiceanu does not detach himself from the literary one. In his articles, he has the same qualities of a storyteller, which are also noticeable in his prose. This makes the articles, even the political ones, written in a colloquially, accessible register, that gives the impression of an oral story. The public clearly can understand the transmitted message, but not before their interest is captured as if they would be reading a story.

The surrounding world is an inexhaustible subject source. Peasant's lives inspire him and the Transylvanian village from his literary and journalistic work is the village he lived in, during so many years. He usually wrote about political matters, religious ones, but also about education. Considering that the religious subjects are his second choice, we can affirm that the fact that he was also a priest influenced the subjects he chose to write about.

It is interesting to note that, in these newspapers (as in most of the journalistic work), Ion Agârbiceanu's writing is more stylized, comparing to his literary work. There are no cacophonies, repetitions and his writing is not negligent, as is the case in most of his novels, for example. The explanation could be that the texts written for the newspaper were verified by an editor, most likely, who corrected the small leaks. The style mistakes usually have happened as a result of the fact that the author never double checked his texts. Even Nicolae Iorga said, in 1905, that "Mr. Agârbiceanu's greatest sin is clumsiness. [...] At this point, the self-criticism of this young person must be harsher."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Evening Hours with Ion Agârbiceanu. Testimonies - Comments - Archive*. A book designed and composed by Mircea Zaciu. Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1982, p. 299.

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