

**FICTIONS AND FACTS ON THE MYSTICISM OF LAND LABOR
AROUND WORLD WAR I: THE PEASANTS' ECONOMY
IN THE ROMANIAN LITERATURE
(A CASE STUDY: ION AGÂRBICEANU'S RURAL PROSE)**

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***Abstract.** A “quasi-mystical” understanding of our rural economy (which has always favored propagandist uses) is disseminated through a great number of literary works and political texts, which, before World War I, depict the Romanian village as a place of poverty, misery, abuse and crime. The peasants’ habits of labor and leisure get through to the readers as an architecture of infernal circles, while “rural” psychologies are the epitome of unconscious pulsations, of extreme, self-consuming and undetermined passions. In a nutshell, this literature enhances the view that the Romanian peasant can never be reasonable. A bulk of passions and a brutal body (so, a perfect subject of physical and spiritual toils), this type of man is quite unable to cooperate, to rationalize his labor efforts, thus to integrate his household economy within a higher and more complex economical mechanism, as the doctrinarians of the National Peasants’ Party claim. Invariably, we are introduced to an incessant and wearisome process of labor, whose aims – highly predetermined by an Orthodox mindset – are not to be found or expressed here on Earth, but in the afterlife. Yet, in the context of war dynamics, which brings about demographic mobility, technical input and mentality changes, the Romanian rural economy is substantially changed by the new distribution of land ownership. Observing pernicious phenomena such as property fragmentation and overcrowding of rural areas, economist Virgil Madgearu warns about issues such as labor efficiency and intensive exploitation of agricultural fields. Extremely sensitive to the labor’s ethic (which organizes both his biography and his characters’ fictional biographies) and to the small household’s economy, Ion Agârbiceanu is a writer who records, in a behaviorist fashion, the changes occurring in Transylvanian rural society after the great Union of 1918. His literature is extremely valuable for the way it catches the traits of Romania’s rural areas, especially in Transylvanian villages that are now permeated not only by new habits developed after the war (leisure activities, new types of speculations), but also by a way of conceiving and practicing politics that is coming from the new capital, Bucharest. As Ion Agârbiceanu attests, peasants have to understand not only the social function of land but also the importance of the new owners’ mentality in an emerging rural market.*

Keywords: labor, spare time, cooperation, National Peasants’ Party, rural economy.

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Land as a social function

Published in 1863 just before Mihail Kogălniceanu and Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza's agrarian reform, Ion Ghica's first *economic colloquy* (opening a tome entitled *Convorbiri economice/Economic Colloquies*) is devoted to *labor*. He notices that, apparently, there are only two classes represented in the Romanian society of his times, separated not only by their material conditions, but also by their degree of literacy: the illiterate mass formed by peasants and workers engaged in various industries (mainly domestic), respectively, the literates that are organized in a class of bureaucrats. Choosing their children's careers draws poor parents from the countryside and city peripheries into this fatality of bureaucracy, which is increasing the social divides and prejudices concerning the honorability of jobs.

*Erorile și prejudițiile, cari adesea rătăcesc opiniunea, ne fac să credem că funcționarii statului sunt mai sus decât bancherii, pe aceștia îi punem mai sus decât pe arendași și pe comercianți, pe cari, la rândul lor, îi considerăm mai sus decât pe meșteri și muncitorii de pământ.*¹

Before Werner Sombart's unifying theory on *modern capitalism*,² Ion Ghica has a good intuition on how capitalism evolves, from early commercial capitalism (prone to buy luxury goods and to their "de-moralization"³ or, better said, "a-moralization"), to industrial capitalism (prone to producing goods over the limits of endogenous demand), and then to late financial capitalism (prone to capital accretion). In this evolutionist logic, encouraging education for practical jobs, that is, ensuring the basis for developing careers that imply a certain technological literacy, is proposed by Ghica as the best solution for a young country on the verge of industrialization, but still defining itself through its high exogenous demand of products from other capitalist markets. It is not by chance that "Dumitru," one of Ghica's partners in this colloquy is introduced as a young man who, though perfectly aware that he is going to disappoint his parents and to put at risk their "investment" in his education-for-becoming-a-bureaucrat, had quit the study of law. Instead of abstract juridical principles, he would rather carry out a more profound research of agricultural sciences in order to make his land's exploitation more "intensive."

*Dorința mea este să pui banii ce mi-a lăsat unchi-meu Costache într-o arendă de moșie; cunosc munca pământului; cu o metodă de cultură mai perfecționată și o contabilitate regulată, pot în câțiva ani să-mi dau mijloacele unui traiu îndestulat de toate.*⁴

"Labor," the Romanian statesman comments further, "is indeed the very condition of freedom."⁵ Moreover, technology (agricultural tools and machines), while easing hard labor, is presented as an instrument of enlightenment, of a good work-leisure balance.

¹ Ion Ghica, *Scrieri*, vol. I, *Partea I din Convorbiri economice*, prefaced and indexed by P.V. Haneș, Bucharest, Minerva, 1914, p. 14.

² Frederich L. Nussbaum, *A History of the Economic Institutions of Modern Europe: an Introduction to Der Moderne Kapitalismus of Werner Sombart*, New York, Crofts, 1933.

³ Cody Franchetti, *A Reconsideration of Werner Sombart's Luxury and Capitalism*, in "International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities," Vol. 5, No. 2 (2013), pp. 135-139.

⁴ Ion Ghica, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

Cu cât spiritul omenesc înaintează, cu atât scade proporțiunea osteneții ce un om trebuie să puie pentru dobândirea și mulțumirea unei trebuințe a vieții și cu atât, din contra, munca puterilor naturii se mărește [...] Lucrarea pământului era una dintre cele mai ostenoare, atunci când nu se cunoștea plugul și locomobila, atunci când se ara cu sapa și se bătea grâul cu beldia. Statisticile arată că mașinile au făcut ceva și mai mult; au moralizat și au luminat pe lucrători, ridicându-se sarcinile cele ostenoare, au înlăturat cauzele de voală și de mizerie, le-a lungit viața cu zece ani aproape. Le-a dat mijloace de-a se lumina, de a aspira la o viață mai înaltă; au desființat o mulțime de prejudețe și vișturi, căci lucrătorii nu mai ies seara din sălile de lucru zdrobiți de osteneală, posomorâți și cuprinși de trebuința de-a amorți trupul prin băuturi tari, ci ies odihniți și veseli.⁶

In 1864, Ghica considered that Romania's chance in implementing the new democratic values highly depended on its capacity of *re-defining labor and leisure* within the existing rural economy. After all, the keywords of the '48 Romanian liberals, "justice" and "brotherhood," are broadly inspired by the French Revolution's "liberté, égalité, fraternité," which are branded by the same Sombart as merely "economic" principles. "Liberty" is the liberty to get rich as Guizot would say, "equality" is the force of leveling costs, while "fraternity" ("brotherhood," "frăție") is the ability to organize and cooperate within associations aimed at raising the welfare of people and targeting their interest in the efficiency of labor.

In an agrarian and underdeveloped country such as Romania, the people's idea of labor did not coincide with Ghica's enthusiastic celebration of the local HR capital: "The wealth of a nation does not reside in its gold and silver mines, but in its inhabitants' labor."⁷ On the contrary, it relied on beliefs and images somewhere between the toils of Sisyphus and the harsh resistance of material objects (chiefly capricious agricultural fields) subjected to tiresome labor processes. As in one of Ion Agârbiceanu's most famous short stories (*Fefelega*), the peasants' labor is about an energy that is wasted without purpose, that is not needed by anyone and that nearly confounds with the physiological mechanisms. So, people did their best to escape the very condition of both agricultural workers and landowners (in case they inherited agricultural properties). Despite their apparent lack of productivity, intellectual careers and bureaucratic life appeared as the best solution for the entire society. By its weak trade and industry and by its inclination towards bureaucratic careers, this situation resembled the French labor market before the 1789 Revolution.⁸ Still, unlike France, which had a strong urban culture, Romania kept on being a rural country with a "land problem," unable to administer the long-lasting repercussions of the agrarian laws that imposed the expropriation of monasteries and state and private estates. While he claims that the land property is the most sacred because "it unites the family through shared interests and feelings and because it develops domestic virtues that are the source of all social virtues,"⁹ Ghica proves the fact that, in real terms, land does not represent an extremely

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 52-53.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁸ Werner Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism. A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Businessman*, translated by M. Epstein, London, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1915, pp. 138-142.

See also, Werner Sombart, Paris, *L'apogée du capitalisme*, Payot, 1932.

⁹ Ion Ghica, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

profitable financial speculation. Thus, smart investors should not put their money in land purchases! Besides that, the ownership of land is a right residing not within the owned object but in the person who uses the object and, most of all, in the quality of his/ her ownership.¹⁰ Briefly put, land is valuable not when an emotional attachment is involved, but when there is someone willing to work it efficiently and reasonably.

Excepting P.P. Carp's intervention on the laws of rural agreements between landowners and agricultural workers,¹¹ Ghica's rational viewpoint as well as his law projects (*The Economic Colloquies* includes the draft of such project of expropriation)¹² did not gain much influence. The political atmosphere was then suffused by a national mysticism and by the urge to formulate a national mission: to save someone, just anybody, and at any costs. Perceived as the main beneficiaries of political reforms, peasants were supposed to become free from the chains of land slavery and turn into landowners. Nevertheless, the agrarian laws of 1864 and 1921 caught the Romanian peasants rather unprepared for this status upgrade because they did not have either the technology or an effective management of labor force so as to work their new lands "intensively" and effectively. Indeed, as the fictional and historical texts between 1880 and 1914 aver, they could not boast much communal or "cooperative" spirit, as long as neighbors and relatives were ready to nurture lifelong feuds and even to kill each other not for great tracts of land but for very small scraps of gardens. Taking into consideration that the rural mentality was grounded on the material character of land property, "cooperation" and "rational labor," as Constantin Stere and Virgil Madgearu would later prove, should be encouraged as key principles of drawing profit from agriculture-based economies. Still, only after World War I would the Romanian peasants realize that *land*, as Ion Ghica proved as early as 1864, does not really have an inherent material value. Its value (and the value of related services and types of labor) must be established according to its "social function"¹³ and to the quality of its ownership.

*War and the agrarian reform. A distinction between
political and economic principles*

In 1917, when the Romanian army (mainly formed of peasant volunteers) was facing extreme difficulties in fighting the assaults of the German troops, and consequently withdrawing to the North of the country, the war government realized that only a collective emotion of positive respect paid to this category would be able to trigger the soldiers' motivation to fight further. The Bolshevik Revolution

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 143-169.

¹¹ P. P. Carp, *Legea tocmelilor agricole. Chestiunea agrară față cu teoria libertății (Ședințele Camerei din 11 februarie, 14 și 18 martie 1882)*, in Roxana Patraș (ed.), *Oratorie politică românească*, Iași, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Press, 2016, pp. 334-356.

Carp's intervention on the law of agricultural agreements is noticed by C. Stere in one of his articles, *Latifundiile și progresul economic*, in C. Stere, *Scrieri*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1979, p. 484.

¹² Ion Ghica, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-167.

¹³ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Partidului Țărănesc*, Iași, Tipografia Moldova, 2010, p. 135.

of March 1917 gave a new spur to this merely psychological stratagem. So, fearing that the misery and starvation among the Romanian soldiers would cause the same effects as in Russia, King Ferdinand of Romania issued a Proclamation (written by Nicolae Iorga in his well-known prophetic vein), which stated explicitly that, once the war would be over, the vote would become universal and the peasants would become owners of lands expropriated from private and state domains.¹⁴ In May 1917, I. I. C. Brătianu comes in the Parliament with two projects of changing the constitutional dispositions regarding land property and vote. Though many speakers step at the tribune and have their say, the debates on these proposals take less than a month (from May 24th to June 14th), and the Constitution is finally reformulated in order to prepare for the forthcoming reforms.¹⁵ As it can be easily imagined, everything happens in a quasi-mystical haste, whose aim, propagandistically formulated, is “to save and compensate the underprivileged” and not to find a solution for a systemic problem caused by a feeble understanding of our rural economy. As C. Stere noticed, the lack of economic vision had been perpetuated for over half a century (between the first reform of 1864 and the 1907 peasants’ riot) by the chain of “agricultural agreements” (*învoielile agricole*) that imposed a permanent and often unfair negotiation of labor force between freed peasants and proprietors.¹⁶

Truth is that literary people, aware or unaware of this ideological maneuvering, incensed this mysticism haloing the peasants’ labor. A whole score of writers enhanced and disseminated through their traditionalist literature populist ideas borrowed from the Narodniks’ movement (chiefly Nikolai Frantsevich Danielson and Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky). Guided by trendsetters such as Constantin Stere, N. Iorga, and, in Transylvania, Iuliu Maniu, the contributors to cultural journals such as *Sămănătorul*, *Viața Românească*, *Luceafărul*, *Tribuna*, *Viața nouă*, *Viața socială*, etc. tried to change the urban and bourgeois literary focus and, as a precondition of originality, address rural national themes.¹⁷

It goes without saying that this new source of inspiration also delivers a series of prejudices (and ideologemes) concerning the Romanian peasant, his environment and his labor-leisure balance, concerning “popular realism” as the most appropriate aesthetic,¹⁸ and concerning “rural democracy” as the most appropriate political solution.¹⁹ So, poverty, misery, abuse and crime prevail in this early 20th century prose, the peasants’ habits of labor and leisure being presented as an architecture of infernal circles, while their psychologies being referred as the epitome of unconscious pulsations, of extreme, self-consuming and undetermined passions. What all writers enhance – from Duiliu Zamfirescu, Ioan Slavici, Barbu Ștefănescu

¹⁴ Mihai Bărbulescu, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins, Șerban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor, *Istoria României*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, pp. 417-419.

¹⁵ Ion Bulei, *Constituția din 1866*, in Gheorghe Sbârna (coord.), *Constituțiile României*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2012, pp. 26-29.

¹⁶ C. Stere, *Pentru ce s-au răscolat țărani*, in *Scrieri, qtd. ed.*, p. 497.

¹⁷ Dumitru Micu, *Început de secol*, Bucharest, Minerva, 1970, pp. 9-179.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 100-101.

¹⁹ C. Stere, *Social-Democratism sau poporanism*, edited by Mihai Ungheanu, Galați, Porto Franco, 1996, pp. 185-188.

Delavrancea, Mihail Sadoveanu, C. Sandu-Aldea, Spiridon Popescu, Ion Agârbiceanu, Liviu Rebreanu, and so on – is that the Romanian peasant can never be reasonable. A bulk of passions and a brutal body (so, a perfect subject of physical and spiritual toils), this type of man is quite unable to cooperate with his fellows/relatives/neighbors and to rationalize his labor efforts. His spare time is represented as a chaos of vicious and immoral habits that are resistant to a higher aesthetic organization. In a nutshell, we are introduced to an incessant and wearisome process of labor, whose aims – highly predetermined by an Orthodox mindset – are not to be found or expressed here on Earth, but in the afterlife. To work and, generally, to spend energy does not end up in producing valuable goods but... salvation. Leisure means losing control, thus to escape the circle of agricultural toils means to erase oneself through vicious forgetting. Repose, relaxing, and idleness are practically impossible to conceive, while pause from (agricultural) labor is frequently associated with eternal rest.

Around 1908, an article concerning “the two national cultures,” published in *Luceafărul* by Octavian C. Tăslăuanu, raises a wave of protests among the Romanian intellectuals. On the tracks of 1907 peasants’ riot, the author considers that the rich should be eliminated and their goods should be democratized. During this period, “democratization” is understood as both fair access to resources and as expropriation. Branded as “socialist” and “anarchist,” the author defends himself by drawing attention to the fact that the psychic and ethical powers lying within the peasants’ mass cannot be awakened without “an economic organization of our peasants,” “popular banks” and “all sort of brotherhoods.”²⁰ While the main issues of this polemic do not concern our case here, maybe we should notice that, as soon as the quasi-mystical “salvation” discoursing is set apart, this journalist becomes quite able to disengage from political biases and identify pragmatic solutions for our agrarian economy: cooperation, credits through mutual funds, and reorganization of production habits.

Considering the post-war political unsettlement, the National Peasants’ Party and its doctrine comes thus not only as a third political alternative, formed between liberalism, on the one hand, and socialism (and its Bolshevik form), on the other,²¹ but also as a very articulate and socially required economic doctrine. In fact, its emphasis on evolutionary economic theories is very important, as Virgil Madgearu’s *Agrarianism, Capitalism, Imperialism* testifies.²² Here is an illustration of how the new doctrine is transferred in that time’s literary texts:

Azi trăim [...] începuturile unei epoci în care mulțimile, masele mari sunt chemate de istorie la conducere! Ele au deschis, prin participarea oamenilor la război [emphasis added], vremile de astăzi”; “Nu suntem extremiști, nu înțelegem și nu admitem lupta de clasă, în numele căreia au pornit la drum țărăniștii. Noi suntem un partid mai moderat, de mijloc, însă un partid național. și pe drumul acesta trebuie să mergă și Partidul Național Țărănesc. Fruntașii noștri nu vor îngădui alunecări spre stânga, nici exagerările de până acum ale Partidului Țărănesc. Doctrina democrației, așa cum o înțelege presa

²⁰ Dumitru Micu, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

²¹ Alin Sesslerman, *Țărănișmul și creștin-democrația românească*, Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2016, pp. 65-93.

²² Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism, capitalism, imperialism*, Iași, Editura Moldova, 1999.

evreiască de la noi – și din toată lumea de altfel – e una străină de sufletul și de mentalitatea poporului românesc [...]. Democrația judaică e socialism, e Marxism și, curând ori mai târziu, duce la lupta sângeroasă de clasă, la război civil, la dictatura proletariatului, ca în Rusia. Dar noi nu avem nevoie de așa ceva în România. Pentru noi ar fi moartea, destrămarea.²³

So, this new economic perspective aims to detach our rural society from former aesthetic and political prejudices: a. the peasant is driven by unconscious pulsations (the peasants' work/life rhythms are comparable to the beasts'); b. taking into consideration the peasants' massive illiteracy, the electoral maneuvering of the peasants' *national cause* is always legitimate (the peasants are always the recipients and not the agents of reforms); c. since society changes only through class clashes, democratization means expropriation of the rich and not cooperation of those that are "equal."

In his synthesis entitled *The Evolution of Romanian Economy after the World War* (1940), Virgil Madgearu formulates a criticism of the Narodniks' theories, by noticing that it is not the disappearance of the peasants' domestic industry (rivalled by cheaper factory products) which is the reason for the rural market's regression. In spite of what Nikolai Frantsevich Danielson argues on the peasants' excess of spare time, which had been brought out by the loss of domestic industrial occupations such as weaving, carving, smith's work and by the inherent seasonal nature of agriculture, the Romanian theorist considers that this spare time comes mainly from an unreasonable distribution of labor force, from an incomplete use of human resources, and from the peasants' lack of cooperation. If, by taking as a measure unit a man's day of labor, the entire rural population of Romania (which raises, around 1924, to an estimate of 7,900,000 agricultural workers) can carry out around 1,865,000 work hours, its actual consume does not raise to more than 814,000 work hours, which is approximately 43.66% of their labor force.²⁴ While the peasants do not work enough but still purchase factory goods, regression of the rural markets, Madgearu says, does not look like the natural trend as the Narodniks claim. On the contrary, he argues further, the rural market is a non-capitalist market with a great potential. If micro-systemic household-based activities ("mica gospodărie") and small labor associations ("comuna" or "cooperația") were encouraged, then the Romanian economy would certainly act as an inner "exogenous demand," that is, as "a non-capitalist inner market."²⁵ Scattered through all his writings, these arguments enable Madgearu to theorize that "the peasants' economy" is an economical category that is specific only to our nation, "a national-economic category" that, placing itself between capitalism and imperialism, should draw the economists' attention.²⁶

²³ Ion Agârbiceanu, *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă*, in *Opere VII*, edited by Ilie Rad, with a chronology, prefatory note, bibliography, notes and comments, and critical references by Ilie Rad, Bucharest, Academia Română-FNSA, 2017, pp. 1474-1475.

²⁴ Virgil Madgearu, *Evoluția economiei românești după Războiul Mondial*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1995, pp. 38-48.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

²⁶ Virgil Madgearu, *Agrarianism...*, *qtd. ed.*, pp. 85-106.

Leaving the theoretical and statistical considerations aside, I would like to reflect on an apparent paradox delineated from the considerations above. While the writers, politicians, newspapermen and the entire public opinion claim that the Romanian peasants are hard workers who should be “saved” from their toils and misery, Madgearu proves that their labor is inefficient, and that they are prone to spend more than they earn. Is 60% of this unconsumed labor force just wasted? Is it consumed, as the literary people remark, with the infernal toils of an abyssal soul?

World War I as a source of inspiration: Ion Agârbiceanu's case in the context of local and national literature

Madgearu and Stere opine that the reform of agriculture, with a stress on the small farms' importance and on cooperation, cannot be put into practice unless property fragmentation and the pressure of rural density (“overcrowding of agricultural surfaces”) are fought back.²⁷ Frequent sales and debatable successions, which eventually led to the rural properties' dramatic fragmentation, is a trend that defines chiefly the lands recently attributed to poor peasants, after the 1921 expropriation law. The wealthy peasants (those who, before this, had already acquired a mentality of landowners) resisted the parceling trend and tried to keep property within their families. Statistically speaking, in post-war Romania, the most predominant type of land property was one with an area between 1 and 5 ha,²⁸ which was not enough for a family's subsistence. Reinforcing a more scientific evaluation of the Romanian rural environment constitutes the doctrinarian core of the National Peasants' Party not only in the first decade of its existence (from 1918 to the party's fusion with The Romanian National Party, in 1926), but also between 1926 and 1947, when the Communists arrest the party leaders and ban all its political activities.²⁹

It is generally accepted that wars bring forth a great number of technical discoveries, which, in their turn, change the face of economy.³⁰ But they also trigger a slow change of mentalities and life habits. For instance, World War I was a context when sedentary classes (such as the peasants) are set in motion and experience, from a distance, nostalgia for their homeland. Being far away, peasants cannot engage into a direct relationship with land anymore, so they are forced to represent this referent in a more abstract way. People from neighboring countries and provinces get to know each other. For instance, during World War I, Transylvanian volunteers are introduced to Moldavian, Jewish, and Russian

²⁷ Virgil Madgearu, *Evoluția economiei...*, qtd. ed., pp. 25-29.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

Figures are also commented in Virgil Madgearu and Grigore Mladenatz, *Reforma Cooperăției*, Bucovina, 1995.

²⁹ Alin Sesslerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-94; 94-140.

³⁰ Werner Sombart, *Krieg und Kapitalismus/ War and Capitalism*, Ayer Co Pub, 1975.

See also, Fabio Degli Esposti, *War as social regeneration: Sombart from The Quintessence of Capitalism to Merchants and Heroes*, in DADA, no. 5, 2015, pp. 41-54, <http://www.dadarivista.com/Singoli-articoli/Dada-Speciale-2015/4.pdf>.

racial traits and ways of life.³¹ They are also introduced to new technologies (trains, cars) and urban leisure.³² Turned back to their places, these peasant-soldiers bring with them stories of other regions and stories of self-esteemed heroism that prove to be, along with their recently acquired habits of life, disruptive for the rhythms of the traditional Romanian village. Men become universal voters, landowners, heroes of war, generally, all people are freed of any social bonds (marriage included), which alters the prewar social architecture. The changes underwent by the Romanian society are described and theorized by cultural critics such as G. Ibrăileanu,³³ H. Sanielevici,³⁴ E. Lovinescu,³⁵ D. Caracostea,³⁶ C. Rădulescu-Motru³⁷ etc.

Beside general emancipation, demographic boost, and technological/ industrial development, war should also be considered a catalyst for what Virgil Madgearu, under the influence of Swiss professor Hans Müller, labels as “the cooperativization of the entire economic order,”³⁸ by this implying an evolution from the “capitalist bourgeois state” to “the rural democracy.” Departing from the various regional cultures of cooperation (Transylvania, Moldova, Bukowina, Wallachia, Banat, etc.), the Romanian theorist defines cooperatives exclusively from a labor-focused viewpoint, as a fair distribution of labor among members (“a new order of labor,” “a form of economic association dominated by the labor interests”).³⁹ The autonomy of rural cooperatives, which is not granted by any state subventions, is highly dependent on the State’s authoritarian tendency, on its will to introduce protectionist measures. Nevertheless, the real “cooperative spirit” emerges from the people’s will to work, and not from State politics. This is why Romania’s cooperative laws should take the example of the Habsburg commercial code that, grounding on a federalist philosophy (whose champion is also Aurel C. Popovici)⁴⁰, ensured a quasi-complete autonomy for cooperatives.

A priest of the volunteer soldiers from Ardeal during World War I and then one of their representatives, an active journalist and militant for Transylvania’s union with the Kingdom of Romania, then an MP for The Romanian National Party (starting with 1919), for the People’s Party (1927) and for the National Peasants’

³¹ Ion Agârbiceanu, *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă, qtd. ed.*, pp. 1135-1305.

³² Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison (eds.), *The Economics of World War I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Dennis Showalter, *War in the East and the Balkans, 1914-18*, in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 66-81.

³³ G. Ibrăileanu, *După război*, in *Scrieri alese*, edited by Antonio Patraș and Roxana Patraș, Iași, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Press, 2010, pp. 165-201.

³⁴ H. Sanielevici, *Noi probleme literare, politice, sociale*, Bucharest, Ancora, not dated; H. Sanielevici, *Poporanismul reacționar*, Bucharest, Socec, 1921.

³⁵ E. Lovinescu, *Epiloguri literare*, Bucharest, Al. Stănculescu, 1919.

³⁶ D. Caracostea, *Aspectul psihologic al războiului*, revised edition, introduction, notes and bibliography by Eugenia Bîrlea, Iași, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Press, 2015.

³⁷ C. Rădulescu-Motru, *Din psihologia revoluționarului; Țărănismul. Un suflet și o politică*, in *Scrieri politice*, selected, edited and introduced by Cristian Preda, Bucharest, Nemira, 1998, pp. 287-312; 339-392.

³⁸ Virgil Madgearu and Grigore Mladenatz, *Reforma Cooperăției*, qtd. ed., p. 36.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁴⁰ Aurel C. Popovici, *Stat și națiune. Statele Unite ale Austriei Mari*, translated by Petre Pandrea, introduced and edited by C. Schifirmet, Bucharest, Albatros, 1997.

Party (1938), a vice-president of the Senate (1939),⁴¹ Ion Agârbiceanu (1882-1963) is also a keen witness and commenter of social changes originating in war. Ionică, his alter ego from *Licean... odinioară* ends by being killed on the battlefield, thus sacrificed for the national ideal. Another novel cycle entitled *Vremuri și oameni* (composed of 3 novels) is a chronicle of how the Romanians from Transylvania perceive the uncertainties of war (being, as citizens of the Habsburg Empire and as Romanian minority, on both sides in World War I) and metabolize the social changes brought by the great Union of 1918. The same inspiration nurtures other short stories and micro-novels such as *Popa Man, Stana, Dura lex, Așa de singur, Jandarmul, Proces vechi, Pe urlați, după ceilalți, Răbojul lui Sfântu Petru, Minunea, Moștenirea lui Gheorghită, Mașina, Valurile, vânturile – Povestire din primii ani după Unire, Legea trupului, Legea minții*, etc.

All in all, the writer's entire activity can be subsumed to his social and national activism. But Agârbiceanu also has a special sensibility for the whereabouts of the rural economy: the peasants' and workers' labor ethic (cooperation), the relationship between the "usual" hard workers and the unusual ones (the "demons," the "idle," the "weird," the "crippled," the old ones)⁴², the work-leisure balance, the complex relationship between "the eternal rest" and the peasant's tiresome land labor, etc. Like his heroes', Agârbiceanu's literary activities are pushed forward by a mystique of hard work. Accordingly, a creation predicament occurred in 1930 is described as follows:

*Înainte de timp, aș avea nevoie de altceva: de dispoziția de a scrie. Dacă aș avea-o, aș face rost și de timp, cum îmi fac pentru bucăți mai mici. Dar nu am deocamdată dispoziție. La pierderea ei cred că a contribuit în mare măsură cu care s-au desfăcut cele mai multe multe volume ale mele, după război [emphasis added]. Apoi faptul că nu au mai fost încrestare de critică decât rar, și adeseori cu note rele, pe care nu le-am priceput.*⁴³

War, as the writer confesses, has changed the public and the critics' attitude toward his books. Indeed, even though after the war Ion Agârbiceanu delivers himself to a frantic rhythm of publication by transferring social observation from press articles directly to fictions, he is not the favorite of modernist critics who notice that his literature is an ethical bulk, not necessarily oriented by "the philosophical discerning of Good and Evil" and not necessarily oriented by an aesthetic direction. In 1921, he published no less than eight books, containing short stories written during World War I. His war experience proves extremely rich, as the writer will go on fictionalizing war types and themes until 1940. What really arrests Agârbiceanu's attention is, as Cornel Regman notices, *statistics and demography*⁴⁴, which shows him into the hypostasis of an *Aufklärer*, albeit not one of the Enlightenment, but one of a new economic era, when cooperation and agricultural banks flourish.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ion Agârbiceanu, *Opere I. Schițe și povestiri*, edited by Ilie Rad, with a chronology, prefatory note, bibliography, notes and comments, and critical references by Ilie Rad, Bucharest, Academia Română-FNSA, 2014, pp. LXXXVIII-CX.

⁴² Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-36.

⁴³ Ion Agârbiceanu apud Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

Known in Communist textbooks as author of short fictions such as *Fefelega* and *Darul lui Moș Miron*, Agârbiceanu was, during early 20th century, one of the most famous Transylvanian writers. Consecrated in traditionalist literary journals such as *Sămănătorul*, *Luceașărul*, *Neamul Românesc* and *Ramuri*, the prose writer was also hailed by the editors of *Viața Românească*, chiefly by G. Ibrăileanu and C. Stere, whose theories on emancipating the People (labeled as *poporanism*) fit perfectly with Agârbiceanu's rural themes. In a political climate favoring national culture, the young priest introduced himself as a man of his own times, perfectly aware of the political trends, but rather disinterested in showing off artistic excellence. In exchange, he seemed to hint at success by x-raying, in naturalistic fashion, the entire rural society of Transylvania. Resembling his Transylvanian forerunner Ioan Slavici (1848-1925) through a rough style of prose and an explicit ethical focus, Agârbiceanu proves to be endowed with a better political instinct. Setting himself against an ideological trend developed around Aurel C. Popovici's theory of Austrian "federalism,"⁴⁶ the Greek Catholic priest considered that the Romanian provinces Transylvania, Bukowina and Bessarabia should be re-integrated within The Kingdom of Romania. Confirmed by the course of events in 1918, these unionist ideals would be returned to Agârbiceanu through many public honors, from MP seats to membership in the Romanian Academy.

Its entrance, beginning with 1918, in the "select" company of a national literature (that is, the Romanian literature produced in the old Kingdom of Romania), enabled Agârbiceanu's prose to be compared with Mihail Sadoveanu's, on the one hand, and with Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's, on the other. But while this "Transylvanian Sadoveanu" can stand a comparison with the former through his rurally-oriented themes, progressive ideas and though a shared publication space in the traditionalist literary journals, any analogies with the latter's urban prose could be made only with a great effort of critical imagination. Nevertheless, within a critical frame that recuperates Agârbiceanu as "a visionary modernist,"⁴⁷ the several "urban" types emphasized by Ion Negoïtescu and Cornel Regman – e.g. "the rustic *religieuse*" (*Vecina*), "the snob of the village" (Dinu Natului, Ion Roșu)⁴⁸, and "the economic dilettante" (Iosif Rodean)⁴⁹ – open a breach for reflecting on how, after the union of 1918, the intrusion of *urban economic elements* and of *Romanian political habits* (which are quite different from the prewar imperialist politics dictated from Vienna and Budapest) transforms the social landscape of the archetypal Transylvanian village. Since Șerban Cioculescu has already remarked upon Agârbiceanu's "phenomenal capacity of reception,"⁵⁰ the

⁴⁶ Federalism is shared by Slavici, who considered that Transylvania should be granted autonomy but still remain a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

⁴⁷ Mircea A. Diaconu, *Ion Agârbiceanu și I. Negoïtescu. Diagonale (I)*, in "Convorbiri literare," no. 6, June 2016, <http://convorbiri-literare.ro/?p=6281>; *Ion Agârbiceanu și I. Negoïtescu. Diagonale (II)*, in "Convorbiri literare," no. 7, July 2016, <http://convorbiri-literare.ro/?p=6435>.

⁴⁸ Ion Negoïtescu, *Valori stilistice în nuvele lui Agârbiceanu*, în *Scritori moderni*, Bucharest, EPL, 1966, pp. 201-232.

⁴⁹ Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵⁰ Șerban Cioculescu, *Marginalii la opera lui I. Agârbiceanu*, in *Varietăți critice*, Bucharest, EPL, 1966, pp. 367-379.

writer's style must have altered not only under the general "mutation of aesthetic values," but also because he could let himself be impressed by any new environmental information he received.

*Mentality shifts: property, labor,
spare time, and cooperation*

Leaving aside the discussion on Agârbiceanu's aesthetic standards, it is his "receptive" talents and his behaviorist approach to the rural environment that makes Agârbiceanu's prose extremely valuable for evaluating the slow displacements of mentalities occurring in Transylvanian rural economy. Generally, the prose writer opts for an indirect account of facts. In his war-inspired short stories published in the volumes *Trăsurica verde*, *Robirea sufletului*, *O zi însemnată*, *Chipuri de ceară*, *Florile lui Gheorghică*, *Ceasuri de seară*, *Păcatele noastre*, *Zilele din urmă ale căpitanului Pârvu*, *Dezamăgire*, *Diavolul*, etc., the author's alter egos ("Mr. Vasile," "master Vasilică" or a townsman) undertake only the mission of transcribing old peoples' war experiences: visiting new regions, knowing other people's habits, communicating with the beloved through letters (usually written by the few literates enrolled in the army), daily reading of the press (which, due to illiteracy, is a mediated reading that turns into a community practice), using new tools, embracing new beliefs, etc.

For instance, Old Andrei's memories of his co-nationals' war heroism (father Damian, soldier Grigoraș, and others) also unveil how, after the Transylvanian Saxons and the Hungarians run away from Transylvania, the Romanians yearn after their deserted properties (*Pe urlați, după ceilalți*). Another short story, *Proces vechi*, is inspired by the feud between a Romanian and a Transylvanian Saxon, a discord generated not by national hatred but by sheer personal envy on the fellow peasant who is able to perform a more efficient labor. The Romanian peasant wants to appropriate the German's house and wealth but, suddenly ashamed by his motivation, he puts an end to this trial. In a context of modernization, the Romanians' ethnic psychology is captured in essay-like fashion. The story entitled *Răbojul lui Sfântu Petru*, whose subject is announced in the sketch *Minunea* (1936), represents a racial diagnosis. Through the narrative convention of the foreign visitor (in this case, Saint Peter), Agârbiceanu warns his readers: "the Romanians are not evil people, but they are fragile in front of temptations." Saint Peter also marvels when he ascertains the Romanians' disinterest, their opaqueness to good-and-evil distinctions, their passion for "scorning" and, after the Union, for "politics." Imported from the new capital of the country (Bucharest), the new political passions also lead to an unbalanced labor rhythm. Like in Marin Preda's later novels, people are prone to waste time because of political debates. For illustration, here is what Father Andrei (main character of the novel *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă*) reproaches to his son, Cornel, a passionate reader of political newspapers. The old man accuses the infiltration of "politicianism" into the traditional ways of life:

Cred că v-ați umplut de răutate, de ură și de pizmă, fiindcă de zece ani [from 1918 Union, note added] nu faceți nimic decât vorbiți! Vorbiți și vi se pare că lucrați! Dar a nu realiza nimic, a pierde vremea în a încruși săbii de hârtie e izvorul oricărei nemulțumiri în viață. [...] Îmi pare mie că lumea asta de după război nu mai voiește să muncească, ci să trăiască și să se bucure de viață. Dar de când e lumea, bucuria vieții o dă munca, nu petrecerea. [...] datorită unui român în țara lui nu este să faci politică, ci să muncească și să ajute la bunăstarea semenilor săi [emphasis added].⁵¹

Emphatically exposed against a background of figurants that behave themselves by living and working us “usual,”⁵² a profusion of “unusual” types shows not only the writer’s Romantic preference for “demons,” but also an exponential increase of destabilizing social elements.

Și totuși, unde sunt obișnuții? La o întrebare atât de stăruitoare, răspunsul nu mai poate întârzia: ei sunt cuprinși cu lucrul [emphasis added]. Cuprinși atât de mult cu lucrul, încât chiar atunci când prezența lor se face simțită de-a dreptul, nu numai prin reprezentare, apariția lor e meteorică și marginală [...] Notând asemenea reacții ale obișnuților, scriitorul e conștient că înregistrează însăși mentalitatea dominantă a satului, în care virtutea vredniciei este preponderentă. Tocmai în raport cu această mentalitate, iar uneori în violentă opoziție cu ea se înalță povestirile, care aduc cu ele fie spectacolul fragilității (bătrânii, copiii), cu personaje ieșind merituos din arenă sau deprinzând abia, în totală ingenuitate, greaua lecție a vredniciei, fie pe acela al nevrednicilor, dintr-o carență biologică [...], fie – mai ales – în zeci de arătări, diorama invalidității și a malformațiilor morale.⁵³

Once with the growing rates of unusual types, the traditional world is permeated by an economy of exceptions, based on unexpected demands and on new habits of labor and leisure. For instance, the main characters of *Jandarmul* and *Stana* are vectors of sexual emancipation, which, for well-known reasons, can be explored only after the war. *Stana*, for example, is a peasant woman who, finding out that her husband died on the battlefield, is progressively discovering physical pleasure, thus the fact that her body is not only the agent of agricultural and domestic labor, but also the subject of various sensations. When her husband returns from war with a wooden leg, they make a strange deal: *Stana* is left to her sensual pleasures, while *Andrei* the crippled is not denounced as a bad laborer to the entire community.

In the same fashion, the main characters from the micro-novel *Valurile, vânturile... – Povestire din primii ani după Unire* (Ion Roșu) and from the novel *Arhanghelii* (Iosif Rodean) reflect the passage from transactions measured in “gold” or defined by the materiality of traded objects (e.g. land) to transactions of volatile values (e.g. credits, shares). The protagonists of this shift are “dilettante” peasants, half-literates, who migrate from village to towns and cities, and experience the alienating effects of an existence outside the logic of land labor. Ion Roșu, who has not completed his college but dreams to compensate this default through his children’s education, moves to town in order to change career. After the great Union of 1918, the first step is to get oneself involved in politics and to

⁵¹ Ion Agârbiceanu, *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă, qtd. edition*, p. 1484.

⁵² Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

deal with legal stuff as an employee of the court. Ridiculous in the eyes of all his family members, Ion Roșu returns to his village with the air of a capitalist self-made man who has learnt “reason” and has forsaken (peasant) passions such as stupid pride. Step by step, he becomes the associate of a timber-processing factory. His wife is encouraged to drop out the traditional clothes and dress as a town lady. But, one day, this business is closed and, bankrupted, this family of former peasants has to move, from one house to another, and live a suburban style of life. While Veronica and Niculiță, Ion Roșu’s elder children, adapt to this new way of living, the younger son, Dumitru, and the father become active communists. Eventually, they are sent to prison and Ana, Ion Roșu’s wife, returns to her home village. The fatalist echoes from Slavici’s *Moara cu noroc* are more than transparent. But more than this intertext, one has to stay focused on G. Călinescu’s remark on the characters’ absorption into the higher logic of economy. Indeed, Ion Roșu is anticipated by Iosif Rodean, the lead figure of *Arhanghelii*, a novel about the gold rush in the mines of the Western Carpathians. A self-made man with a bulletproof giant personality that might resemble Faulkner’s Sutpen, Rodean is a character that, rather unable to part with his archaic understanding of material resources and goods, is finally baffled by the volatile dynamics of capital.

The stories about how crippled bodies get reintegrated in the peasants’ economy, Agârbiceanu’s focus on the aging of rural population (the so called “poetry of old age”) and his fascination for cheaters (people who do not work honestly and elude effort) are, in fact, concurrent. All of them prove an obsessive interest in labor and, albeit oblique, expose the idea that compensation for this effort should be found neither in produced goods nor in circumstantial breaks of rhythm (drinking, adultery, theft, greed, etc.), but in eternal rest. Conditioned by the postwar overcrowding of rural areas and by property fragmentation, the old people of traditional villages “strive to make themselves useful, though their territory of action is obviously narrowing.”⁵⁴ The most pathetic posture is that of the old peasant who performs “a useless movement” and works without any outputs in order to indicate his/ her existence in this overcrowded society.⁵⁵ In a short story entitled *Parastas*, the main character Paraschiva cannot expire in peace. A real workaholic, she feels sorry for the fact that she cannot deliver herself to daily labors anymore:

*Ce crezi, dumneata, bădiță Vasile, ce va fi hodina aceea de dincolo? Le-o tot dorim morților și nu știm ce este. Ne dăm cu gândul, dar apriat nu știm. [...] Hodina de-acolo nu-i hodină de la lucru și de la greutățile vieții. O astfel de hodină cine ar putea răbda în veci? și mai ales cum ar putea-o suferi Paraschiva? Ca ea e ca o flacăra la lucru. Eu socot [...] că hodina sufletului e când nu te mai muștră nimic, când te-a împăcat Dumnezeu, când te-a iertat.*⁵⁶

In this picture of dramatic shifts, “the land issue” develops new social, psychological, and economic connotations. It is not its inherent material property

⁵⁴ Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Ion Agârbiceanu apud Cornel Regman, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

but the quality of land possession that forms the organizing principle of the entire rural economy. Landowners, as one of Agârbiceanu's characters notices, "can say they have finished their work, while the other workers can never say they have finished with work."⁵⁷ Apparently, the emerging culture of ownership and its ensuing developments (rural communes, cooperatives) are the answer to wearisome, pointless and irrational labor. For example, in *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă (1919-1940)*, the novelist depicts how the new owners of land from the village Curmătura (granted this status after the agrarian law of 1921) disrupt the old social hierarchies. Also, this seems to be a far-reaching effect of what Ioan Scurtu calls "the psychosis of the war trenches."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the psychology of the Romanian peasant is always inclined towards finding balance and common-sense solutions. Going through a war veterans' riot, which is actually a mock version of the Bolshevik revolution, the peasants of Curmătura prove themselves able to establish a hierarchy based on both the efficacy of labor (Gheorghe Crețu) and capital speculation (Dumitru Pop). Previous land feuds are sorted out. The families Opriș and Surdu, who before war have been disputed property over a grass field, are finally conciliated through their children's marriage and, subsequently, through a perspective of a more intensive exploitation of a greater area of land.

While some of the war-heroes become landowners (as in *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă*), the crippled, the demons, the cheaters, the idle, the debauched, the whores, the unruly, the gossipy, the snobs, the old ones, all in all, the "unusual" pack drives the attention of the entire community toward ways of eluding hard work and, consequently, of existing outside the logic of material property. As if following Virgil Madgearu's findings, Agârbiceanu tries to find a solution to the most difficult matter of rural economy: how to organize spare time and leisure in a more effective way, by warding off the peasants from the circles of infernal passions. All priests and teachers would consecrate their time and efforts, from now on, to the establishment of new types of *cultural cooperatives*. Presented in *Vremuri și oameni. Lume nouă*, the events animated by associations such as ASTRA and "Șoimii Carpaților" are meant not only to reinvent the national feelings (whose rates had dropped down after the Great Union of 1918), but also to give the peasants a structured cultural occupation during their spare time. Tastes in entertainment are also decided by the new technologies of information and mass communication (listening to the radio while working in a cooperative; daily reading of the press) and by the postwar leisure culture (the popularity of soccer, of genuine talents' contests). At the end of the cycle *Vremuri și oameni*, the village of Curmătura has got not only an agricultural bank aimed at supporting labor cooperatives, but also a Cultural Center ("Casă culturală") aimed at supporting cultural cooperatives such as ASTRA. The Cultural Center of Curmătura hosts now various entertainment gatherings, mainly genuine talents' contests. Thus, the Romanian peasants prove to be not only an abyss of passions that waste a

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁵⁸ Ioan Scurtu, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

considerable part of their labor time. Marching towards World War II, the new aesthetic organization of leisure activities and a profusion of genuine talents grant our entire rural economy a brand new “creative” character.

Conclusions

Starting from Ion Ghica’s remark that “Labor is indeed the very condition of freedom,” we tried to trace the way in which the balance between labor-spare times is redefined, after the postwar agrarian reforms. Drawing from a wider theoretical frame whose main purpose was to define localized conditions and specificity of the Romanian peasants’ economy, issues such as *labor efficiency*, *cooperative spirit*, *ownership culture*, and *small farms’ development* were disseminated not only through the doctrinarian texts of the National Peasants’ Party (C. Stere and V. Madgearu), but also through a rurally-oriented fiction published in traditionalist journals (*Sămănătorul*, *Viața Românească*, *Luceafărul*, *Tribuna*, *Viața nouă*, *Viața socială*, *Ramuri etc.*).

In 1917, when the Romanian army (mainly formed of volunteer peasants) was facing extreme difficulties, the war government realized that only a collective emotion of positive respect paid to this category would be able to trigger the soldiers’ motivation to fight further. So, constitutional dispositions regarding land property and vote are changed with a view to postwar expropriation and universal vote. The scenario of expropriation happens in a quasi-mystical haste, in the same way as in 1864, when Mihail Kogălniceanu decides that Romanian peasants should become landowners. The aim of this legal measure, often propagandistically formulated, is to save and compensate the underprivileged and not to find a solution for a systemic problem, that is, the perpetuation of “agricultural agreements” (*învoielile agricole*) and of incessant negotiation of labor force between freed peasants and proprietors.

A “quasi-mystical” understanding of our rural economy (which has always favored propagandist uses) is also promoted by a great number of literary people who, before World War I, depict the Romanian village as a place of poverty, misery, abuse and crime. Moreover, the peasants’ habits of labor and leisure get through to readers as an architecture of infernal circles, while their psychologies are the epitome of unconscious pulsations, of extreme, self-consuming and undetermined passions. What all writers enhance is that the Romanian peasant can never be reasonable. A bulk of passions and a brutal body (so, a perfect subject of physical and spiritual toils), this type of man is quite unable to cooperate, to rationalize labor efforts, thus to integrate his household economy within a higher and more complex economical mechanism, as the doctrinarians of the National Peasants’ Party profess. The peasant’s spare time looks like a chaos of vicious and immoral habits that are resistant to a higher aesthetic organization. In a nutshell, we are introduced to an incessant and wearisome process of labor, whose aims – highly predetermined by an Orthodox mindset – are not to be found or expressed here on Earth, but in the afterlife. To work and, generally, to spend energy does not end up in producing valuable goods but... salvation. Repose,

relaxing, idleness are practically impossible to conceive, while pause from (agricultural) labor is frequently associated with eternal rest.

Yet, in the context of war dynamics, which brings about demographic mobility, technical input and mentality changes, the Romanian rural economy is substantially changed by the new statistic of land ownership. Observing pernicious phenomena such as property fragmentation and overcrowding of rural areas, economist Virgil Madgearu warns on issues such as labor efficiency and intensive exploitation of land. Extremely sensitive to the labor's ethic (which organizes both his biography and his characters' fictional biographies) and to the small household economy, Ion Agârbiceanu is a writer who records, in a behaviorist fashion, the changes occurring in Transylvanian society after the great Union of 1918. His literature is extremely valuable for the way it depicts Romania's rural areas, especially the Transylvanian archaic villages that are now permeated not only by new habits developed after the war (leisure activities), but also by a way of conceiving and practicing politics, which is specific to Bucharest. So, while the number of "unusual people" with unusual tastes and habits rises exponentially, the "usual" people (who have been granted land properties according to the Law passed in 1921) are bound to usurp the old social hierarchies based on a mystical interpretation of agricultural labor and on a material understanding of land property. As Ion Agârbiceanu attests, the process of change is irreversible. In order to survive, peasants have to understand not only the social function of land but also the role of their mentality in an emerging and creative rural market. Finally, what all these texts say is that the war did more than implement the expropriation law. War built a sense of community and a pragmatic understanding of labor before Madgearu's theory of cooperation. By favoring a reasonable attitude toward labor, by acknowledging their needs for leisure and pleasure, by developing a more abstract idea of land property, the Romanian peasants prove their aptness to give a creative input to an economy simplistically defined as "rural."

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