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Mechanisms of the Caragialelean Theater in Inter-war drama

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Ion Luca Caragiale, the author of those especially dramatic works, characterised not only the age in which he lived, but successive generations; whether writers were touched by his genius, his mechanisms or the intimate nature of his works, all have either admitted to his hugely influential personality or have attempted to reject it with equal force.

The exponent of one of the most unreal dramatic ascensions from the perspective of the native dramaturgy, taking his first steps into the cultural continent found light-years away, being forced to “put all feet forward” in order to recover from the terrible absence of European literary values, Caragiale succeeded in creating an irreducible universe of critical concepts, both alive and current, despite our tumultuous present.

Our statement is valid whether we relate the essence of moral drama, the social criticism that echoes from his message, or his art of conjuring unforgettable characters, giving them life, placing them strategically into the harsh of apparently mundane contexts to enable them to carry out organic, natural and profoundly credible scenes that is due to his impressive craftsmanship, the art of his memorable dialogue which conveys the density and terrible complexity of life.

Caragiale's characters were not only vehicles of sovereign ideas but ministers of principles-to-be-transmitted. They were endowed by their creator so powerfully, and with so much authenticity that have become part of the Romanian collective consciousness. And this is the key to their actuality. Ideas come and go, changes and turns are simply forgotten. Authentic characters, however, although occurring and manifesting in particular historical epochs, tending to become engraved on the faces of socio-political realities, future-proof, and the most ruthless of them all. And not only that. They profoundly influence posterity, the creations that follow them, somehow escaping from the core of the works that gave birth to them, to live alongside the writings of others.

Although many volumes have been written about Caragiale, this paper finds his place in the authorial landscape, coming to restore links between contemporary characterisations and social advances beforehand and the master playwright of today, with an master dramatist, Matei Vişniec. The natural transition through literary currents, both chronological and historical, transforming, as far as Caragiale and his work are concerned, in a sarcophagus of

overlapping explanations and definitions, denying, giving their new definitions, as in the fluid mechanism of the Absurdist Theatre.

Chapter 1 of this paper aims to define the creation of the great Romanian writer in the context of literary trends in Europe, but also in the world of the native creator, outlining the phenomenon of translation of foreign works in a desolate cultural landscape and aimed at building even partially, the main elements underlying playwriting, the explanation of key concepts for further argument: the conflict as the main necessity of theatrical verisimilitude in opposition to Baroque speech and tortuous dialogue as opposed to conflict as the main action and the basic condition of dramatic creation.

An eventual debate on the literary trend in which the giant Romanian writer may be fraudulent, since I.L. Caragiale moved between the limits of the theoretical aspects of classicism and romanticism (and not only these), as noted by literary critic George Călinescu, who stated that "there is no pure, classic or romantic artistic phenomenon". Caragiale begins from classicism, with strong links to the French, but his work also travels through romanticism, containing realistic psychological elements, but also surrealism, symbolism and absurdity.

We argue in this paper that the emergence of Caragiale in a period of time when Romanian drama was at its most timid beginnings, without cultural background, roots and history, was a huge challenge, an impairment which he pretended was a huge advantage. The assertion that Romanian theater had no roots in the emergence of Caragiale is in now way an attempt to deny the importance of forms of folk theatre to which he had access, but only to point out that the influence of this kind of show on the emergence of cultured theatre is not significant.

In order to frame the birth of the Romanian cult theatre, it must be said that it is only from the second half of the eighteenth century, with the disappearance of feudalism, that we can begin to discuss the birth of a national culture and the meeting of essential conditions for the appearance of the Romanian theatre itself.

In the second chapter, we will set forth an insight into the world of Caragiale's predecessors and a review of the roles played by them on the stage of the developing Romanian theatre, as well as identifying the starting point of the national dramaturgy, not in the texts of that time but in the space for the formation of the Romanian literary art, referring here to religious texts.

The phenomenon of translation is certainly an extremely important element in the calibration of our perspective on the spirit of the age preceding the emergence of the creation of the great Romanian writer. This stage is, from the point of view of some literary criticisms, one of the most important merits of Caragiale's predecessors, because they have forced the Romanian language to develop a background, but also to allow the incorporation of new concepts that have later created in the popular consciousness, produced a cultural base, and brought the Romanian spirit to a certain extent to the doors of the European cultural scene.

The second chapter of this paper does not miss out on a brief overview of the original literature that was born during these beginnings. According to literary history, native dramaturgy begins with a written work by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu and critic Mircea Ghițulescu believes that he must integrate it into the romantic and spectacular side of "abducted authors and lost manuscripts."

A pioneer of the Romanian theater is Iordache Golescu, considered the first truly professional writer. In the absence of actors to perform his plays, Golescu reserved this role in the puppet theater. Golescu's most successful literary work was "Barbu Văcărescul, the seller of the country", which, according to literary critic Mircea Ghițulescu, has an "inexplicable sound brechtian".

Chapter Two does not forget Gheorghe Asachi. His most important achievement was the staging of the first show played by Romanians in Romanian, an event that took place in Iasi in 1816. As shown in the press of the time and even later, the moment was realized at high professional rates. Asachi paid great attention to traditional costumes and decoration, moving Arcadia to Moldova and taking great care of the allegorical background with Apollo and Moldova. Closely connected with Asachi is Matei Millo, actor and dramatic writer who was formed at his school. Matei Millo was the first Romanian actor to cast transvestites, Chirița and Mama Anghelușa being among the roles that made him popular. Millo was a great defender of the Romanian village, a staunch traditionalist, despite appearances.

The role played by Costache Caragiale in the history of Romanian theatre is certainly an extremely important one, as he became the first director of the Bucharest National Theatre and, according to the critic, being the precursor of Vasile Alecsandri in terms of Chirița topology.

The most important predecessor of the great Caragiale is undoubtedly Vasile Alecsandri, a perfect playwright, a deeply cultured man, whom possessed a fabulous talent.

Thanks to Vasile Alecsandri and his vast dramatic work, writing of and for the theatre, moving from dilettantism to professionalism. His attitude is related to a very well-conceived conception of life as an artistic existence, existence as an art, conception deduced from the romantic literature of genius. Alecsandri's most important dramatic performances appear between 1840 and 1875 and include, among other things, the works: "Iorgu de la Sadagura (1844), Iașii în carnaval (1845), Chirița în Iași (1850) Chirița în Provinție "(1852).

Chapter 3 of this thesis is devoted to the works of I.L. Caragiale, symbol of an era, the most performed Romanian playwright of all time, a philosopher of the sound of laughter for the whole world, "who has given the society nothing but a perfidious mirror, for its face of failure", as critic Șerban Cioculescu said. Caragiale's reception in this epoch, which is obviously positioned between challenge and acceptance, is the first subchapter and focuses on Caragiale's relationship with the world, the writer's character, his influences, friendships and even his phobias and superstitions. We find out that the master was afraid of fire and plague, he believed in the "witching hour", but his most important hatred was to be alone, hence his sociable spirit, and his joy at being surrounded by people who were there to listen to his stories. Paul Zarifopol includes his considerations about Caragiale and his audience in the "Book of Thoughtful Ideas" as a real cultural obligation to give up masks and hypocrisy. Zarifopol says of Caragiale that he was "a lazy meridian, endowed with a decidedly supernormal intelligence and fantasy."

We believe that this sociable nature, Caragiale's uncanny ability to talk with people from all walks of life, were certainly elements that enriched his ability to express himself, and to strengthen an already refined sense of dialogue, situation, offering total credibility to his scenic thinking, and, by extension, to the characters he created in his work. His co-operation did not mean a perfect deal between himself and the times in which he lived, quite the contrary. Caragiale has always been in conflict with the world around him, hence his creative power.

Chapter 3 also includes considerations on the concept of the "perfidious mirror" as coined by Șerban Cioculescu, which we will consider to be an lens or structure of interpretation. The principle of mirrors, from a psychological perspective, is a theory of eternal return: relationships that people establish among themselves are, in fact, a reflection of what they really are. The dynamics of the relationships between the characters that animate the key sequences of the plays is enabled by the clarity of their typologies, and the dramatism

(the term is understood here in the sense of the conflicted finality) in these types of motions along with the narrative charge, with documentary value of reality outside the performance space.

As far as Caragiale's characters are concerned, there seems to be critical unanimity, with few who deny that the predominant typology is "mythism". We are basically dealing with the reproduction of Mitica, a synthesized character which is at the same time a collective character invested with all the characteristics of society, transforming into a generalizing attribute of it, a complete and complex attribute that embraces the entire community significance in Gogol's "mantle".

One characteristic of Caragiale's characters that we are addressing in this paper is the lack of biography, an element that reveals them to have psychological depth, puts them into the void of the present, giving them only the prospect of triumph, or the terrible desire to accede to something. Each of the characters that make up "a world within a world," a dilapidated area of humanity, from which, at one point, the world's society would have to have their own ... world. But Caragiale denies them the right to be able to hold them perpetually in the consecrated space of "a world, a world".

One of the subchapters is dedicated to the theory of Vasile Fanache, which speaks of such characters without biographies, drained of personal historical content about "a world in which illusion and conventional replace biographical truth and are in continuous social fluctuation. Without biographies, the characters have no secure public identity," says the critic. Chapter 3 also proposes a perspective on how Caragiale dealt with the comic, the ridiculous, as an aesthetic category. Through the prism of his talent, however, ridiculousness is a violent weapon of extraordinary power, stemming from the monstrous sensitivity of the author, in accordance with his own statement, "I feel enormous and I see monstrous." Caragiale himself received the most virulent caricature, coming across as more powerful and impactful as a result.

At the beginning of Chapter 4 we propose to sketch out a fresco of the situation of Romanian dramaturgy during the inter-war period, many exponents of the period considering this period between 1920 and 1940 as something of a crisis in local theatre. There are, however, opinions contrary to the those mentioned, some critics being of the opinion that this period contained one of the transformative searches, which developed the increasingly important links with the exterior European dramatic space. Among those who are

disappointed by the evolution of the native dramatic literature is Eugen Lovinescu, explaining that this hundred years of Romanian cultural development could not offer us such a "phase of maturity".

In opposition to Lovinescu and George Călinescu, there are voices stating that the period was a particularly fertile period for dramatic literature and for the Romanian theatre. These voices highlight the undeniable successes achieved by the theatrical community in Romania, in the country, but also beyond its borders. In the continuation of the work, we review the authors who manifested themselves on the stage of Romanian dramaturgy before the First World War, but also during the interwar period, in order to subsequently consider the influence that Caragiale's work had on them.

George Ciprian is one of the most famous and experienced writers in the great European scenes, becoming famous for his song "The Man with the Carrot" and his friendship with Urmuz. He wrote a total of five songs, of which only three were played. He was more successful as an actor, the critics of the time claiming he carved out some excellent roles.

The play "Gaițele" (1937) is a milestone of this period, Alexandru Kirițescu succeeding in creating a memorable universe, sealed in by what surrounds him, a community with its own mentality and its own customs. The influence of Caragiale was denounced by some critics, who accused Kiritescu of plagiarising Caragiale's verbal humor, placing it in a context defined by a lack of action. Like Caragiale, Kiritescu was accused by critics of having created a play that is nothing but a social satire, although the suicide of Margaret is the genie of this writer, in any case one of the few moments in which the tragic disappearance of a character in this manner does not occur at the end of the opera.

Victor Eftimiu could not miss our analysis, the author being one of the most prolific Romanian playwrights, with more than fifty pieces of theatre covering nearly all species of scenic art which impress through their thematic diversity. Marked by a fantastic debut, "Make a Broken Peace," Eftimiu's career ring out in the orbit of native culture, the author succeeding in drawing the laudatory attention of both audience and critics alike. Another proof of the creative force that characterized Victor Eftimiu's dramaturgy was the dramatic fantasy "The Black Cock". "Manole Craftsman," "Frog Inspector," and Eftimiu's most valuable comedy, "The man who saw death" which was another extremely important moment in his illustrious career.

Camil Petrescu has been labelled since his debut as an author in the theatre of ideas, but this perspective has always been contradicted by the great theorist of dramaturgy, who has always considered that the theatre "cannot have anything but a casual encounter with the people... Ideas pass, but people remain." Petrescu's people are truly memorable, Gelu Ruscanu, the protagonist of the play "The Play of the Ile", with certainty not only the exponent of the philosophical principle "however much lucidity, so much drama" but a key character for his creation and for the evolution of Romanian theatre in general. Pietro Gralla, former commander of the Venetian fleet and conceived with absolute love, which his unbearable wife Alta betrays in the play "Venetian Act", is another unknowable character that takes over the Romanian interwar scene and marks the dramaturgy of the period. The interpretation of Danton, the hero of the French revolution and namesake of the play signed by Camil Petrescu, considered to be the most dramatic and dramaturgical creations of the writer, marks the partition of the playwright Gelu Ruscanu and is an indirect confession of an irresistible lust for life that you could not possibly have suspected in the substrates of his early creations.

Victor Ion Popa succeeds in raising the Romanian stage to the European level through innovative performances and the manner in which he mounts them. He experiments with outdoor staging and has a pedagogical approach to the theatre. The vocal teacher, a multi-faceted professor who sees in the theatre a "means of thinning the consciousness" attributed to the director the natural meaning of his old title of "teacher".

Chapter 4 deals with the dramatic creation of the great Romanian thinker Lucian Blaga, although this dimension of huge creative force which does not demand as careful an analysis of the territory as the other writers of the period do. The theatrical universe created by Blaga contains the tools of its metaphysics. He categorically opposed the naturalist theatre, not considering that an artistic product must be judged according to its ability to reproduce fragments of reality. In Blaga's creations, the universe is internalized, passed through the filter of fantasy and artistic thinking, becoming an extension of the creative soul, "giving, not rendering," according to German artist Herwarth Walden. The universe of Lucian Blaga's dramaturgy includes themes that go beyond the mundane, the theatre plays created by him were aimed at a world other than the real world, his characters being in search of more mysterious answers than the world could offer in their configuration of timeliness.

In Chapter 5 of the thesis, we explore the structural similarities between Caragiale's dramaturgical philosophy and those which reside in the work of Eugen Ionescu. We turn to the principle of the mirror in which the posterity mirrors the "waters" proposed by Caragiale, to return to the work of the giant ironist. A mirror also offers Ionescu the spectator, one that reflects nothing but what the spectator wishes to see.

We further analyze Eugen Ionescu's views on theatre, denouncing unanimously accepted theories of dramaturgy, and saying that theatre is "the eternal need for miracle and horror". Ionescu believes that the miracle that benefits from too intense explanations of conventions leads the spectator to that particular type of expectation of miraculous production, its mechanization, which eventually destroys it. Thus, the miracle is necessary in forming and maintaining a coherent and open mind in modern man that must be thought of and created as a "product of coincidence" that would impose a specific type of expectation, an ingestion of meaning by the spectator-viewer. The theatre revealed to Ionescu, according to the chroniclers of the times and those after them, in the realm where everything and anything is possible, where the image can be first in front of the word, and the word can become totally at the expense of the image, where the equilibrium of these two entities must be perfect for the artwork to survive and where the playwright is the central pillar of this is so difficult to recognise an equilibrium.

We consider that both Caragiale and Ionescu are important mavericks of Romanian dramaturgy, the first one unquestionably marking the beginning of the classical Romanian theatre, the second of the post-dramatic theatre. We assert, however, in this thesis that although Ionescu adheres to a radical separation from the history and automatisms of the Romanian theatre as they appeared at the time of its appearance, this does not necessarily demolish what Caragiale had created, but rather used as a starting point from which to travel under his own power.

We build, during the fifth chapter of the work, a theoretical framework for the theatre of absurdity, without bypassing Nicolae Balotă, one of the most prolific Romanian theorists of the absurd, and without addressing the theme of inferno to Ionescu, which does not flow from others like Sartre, but from us. For Eugen Ionescu, the absurd theater represents the real theater, the uprooting of the past, exiting schemes and conventions for the achievement of a new world in which it can develop radically from a creative point of view. These are, in his opinion, the conditions for obtaining what he calls pure theatre. His approach to this issue is similar to the approach to philosophical solipsism, that conviction that the self that thinks is

the only certainty and that the outer universe might just be a reflection of the viewer's own spirit.

Chapter 5 also addresses Matei Vişniec's dramatic creation. We are thus trying to provide an explanation for the successful recipe of this brilliant playwright and we start from the assertion that, for his descendants, Vişniec leaves a very difficult legacy, that of the impossibility of overcoming. He is the indisputable king of absurd, surrealism, post absurd, post-dramatic, impossible to fit, like Caragiale, within a certain current.

Vişniec's work is an invitation to a reading, the message addressed to the public by the author assuming that a play can be read with as much aesthetic satisfaction as a novel, novel or poem. He has a dynamic, quick writing, loaded with a message that does not need the actual crux of the scene, to make it obvious to get to the surface of things. Critic Mircea Ghiţulescu believes that Vişniec writes a theatre of the director and not of the writer. Chapter 5 aims to explore the similarities between Vişniec's "Decomposed Theater or Waste-Man-Trash" and Caragiale's "Moments and Sketches", starting from the premise that Vişniec takes over the realism of Caragiale's creation to look at the surrealist key.

Chapter 6, the conclusions of this paper, contains the presentation of the approach behind this paper, which aims to identify and formulate some considerations about how the great playwright validated and was historically and creatively validated by interwar drama, and not only that. Caragiale's influences on his contemporaries, and especially on the writers who followed him, are indisputable and resist any criticism, any opposition at all. The native dramaturgy encompasses and contains Caragiale, the actuality of his work does not take into account the period in which he has been analyzed, and this fluid force of the creation of Nenea Iancu surpasses the purely unforgettable, generally given by the strict intrinsic value of a work. Caragiale's theatre is not only a scene of creation, but astonishingly a gateway to the understanding of any age, a borghesian mirror that is not content to multiply the real but to modify it indefinitely, constructing and deconstructing eternally to show us to ourselves.

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