

Attracting Caragiale in Totalitarianism. How the Criticism of the Epoch Influenced the Perception upon the Author

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Résumé: *Le travail de Caragiale a été porté au totalitarisme par les écrivains qui l'ont suivi et ont vu Caragiale comme un auteur intemporel, selon tous les âges et les habitudes. L'auteur a été promu plus par la lumière de moments et de croquis, qui comprenait tout à fait un peu d'informations politiques, mais des questions plus essentiellement moralisatrices. Des écrivains comme George Călinescu ou Mihail Sadoveanu ont organisé des comités et de conférences pour célébrer la mémoire de qui était le "mode de réalisation majestueuse du mode de vie bourgeois-propriétaire avant l'instauration du communisme" et dont le travail reflète les souffrances du peuple exploité par un parti politique et la promiscuité à long blâmé classe. Le travail de Caragiale a été perçue comme une critique du capitalisme au début, c'est pourquoi a été discuté que la cause de toutes les souffrances de l'auteur était originaire de la critique de ces aspects dans son travail. Le papier vient de montrer que l'auteur pouvait être censuré, mais pas annulée par le totalitarisme et sa valeur est entré et a duré dans le temps.*

Mots-clés: *Caragiale, le totalitarisme, politique, l'âge, la moralisation*

Totalitarianism is a trend that has appeared in the history with the First World War. The role of totalitarianism was to control all the aspects of the political life making use of modern techniques and a very strong authority. The state leaders did not only limited their control but to the political level, but the totalitarian intrusion was felt also in the other aspects of life: economic, social, intellectual and cultural. Totalitarianism was born as a retort to liberalism, which advocated the limiting of the state institutions powers and granting greater freedom of individual action. The literature published in totalitarianism was the one accepted by the leaders of the country, written not harmful to their interests or to their ideological spirit. The writers were censored, determined to accept compromise, to diminish their dignity not to be removed from publication and not to suffer the system's oppression. About those who were not alive, but whose works were still having echoes, they were held also to censor them. So what happened to Caragiale, prohibited on theaters' stages, schools or libraries with those works that could have damaged the totalitarian political system.

In Alex Ștefănescu's article on the Symposium "The Romanian Literature under communism" was mentioned: "in the circumstances of vacillation between cultural freezing and thawing, caused by the vacillations of the Communist Party's political line, the writers speculated in their favor the ideological moments of relaxation. The signs of thaw, when they came, they came from above, it is true, but also from the psychological pressure exerted by the writers mass, by the literary and artistic circles that have always aspired to liberalization. Any favorable circumstance was used as it was to create a literature and to the imposition of some values that, in my opinion, refute the communist cultural vacuum." [1] During the totalitarianism the censorship was present, but it was not the same form on the duration of this ideology. Before 1977 it was very hard to publish and the selection of the writings to be published was rigorously made by the politic. After 1977, Ceausescu abolished the censorship, at least theoretically, since the intrusion of politics continued to exist through new and more elaborate ways, and the period saw various changes: "As in all totalitarian regimes, nothing could be natural in Communist Romania and, much less in an area like that of literature, which could serve and had to serve to the party's propaganda. Thus, after a long period, on the indications of the Soviet advisers, was authorized to appear and to be known only one type of propaganda literature (socialist-realist), and the literature of the bourgeois-landlord past was purged of all contrary to communist ideals, the controlled opening of the years 1964-1971 favored a recuperative jump, based on restoring the well expected ties with the literature between the two World Wars," as Eugen Negrici said at the symposium. [2]

It is worth mentioning that the totalitarian literature represents a third of the Romanian literature. The bourgeois-landlord literature was republished in order not to be forgotten. Forgetting happens if works are not remembered, discussed again, republished, even if when they appeared,

they were considered by the critics to be works of art. Related to this, Stephen Cazimir recalled: "forecasts that were made about the work of Caragiale, not by low-class critics - and they were - but a critic by the size of Lovinescu, who said: "After enjoying the prestige ... will retain more value in future documentary" and continued launching another topic of debate: "Lovinescu said that over time, the work of Caragiale would need as many glosses as ancient classics. Did not happen. If a work of the communist years will need glosses, it will not actually live. Would live the ones that would not need such comments. " [3]

In totalitarianism, Caragiale was blacklisted, contesting not only his work, but also his free spirit, who had no connection that what the system demanded: obedience, dictatorship, individualities annihilation: "His sociability had no connection with the body spirit and nor his type of intelligence with the humanism, more or less popular, but certainly of the crowds organized." [4] Caragiale claimed his right to an opinion, to the freedom of expression, to the voluntary association and the restrictive measures of the totalitarian regime was suppressing them, abolishing the environment in which the playwright has created and imagined his characters.

Alex. Ștefănescu wrote in 2005 in *România Literară* about how Caragiale was seen in the the press of the totalitarian times, when he was considered a fierce critic of the class leaders who oppressed the working mass and the peasants, a bourgeois-landlord critic: "But what could exploit from Caragiale, in terms of the Communist Party? He does not sing anything. He does not glorify the working class, not welcomes in advance, as a visionary, the red dawn. He is only full of irony, only mockes, only satirizes." [5]

At the centenary of Caragiale, G. Călinescu held at a conference at Dalles Room in the memory of the writer, and the conference text was published in a booklet of 40 pages. The academician Camil Petrescu wrote in *Contemporanul* newspaper an article called *The realism of Caragiale's dramatic work*, where he reflected the way Caragiale was perceived in totalitarianism: "The working people recognize in Caragiale an invaluable companion in the struggle of the past against the exploiting class existed until yesterday. Today we realize that his work was one of the weapons of destruction against the exploitative mentality and procedures and was indeed a ruthless critical reflection of reality. In the past the workers loved Caragiale as a companion to fight, today it celebrates him with splendor as a companion of victory, which allows them to see what they did suffered yesterday and especially what prevents them to forget that suffering." [6] In a monograph published in 1964 by Ion Roman, the critic opined that the playwright brought offenses to capitalist system poorly made, so that he had to bear the material and moral suffering.

The theatre of Caragiale was considered dangerous in the totalitarian era and was not recommended for study or reading. The authorities' interest declined considerably for the fear of the effect that Caragiale's writings could have. Those who appreciated him led a constant struggle to promote his works with those who were criticizing him or wanted to cancel him due to political reasons. His theater was called into "carnavalesque", was distorted and simplified. George Alexandru mentioned a significant moment for the way of perceiving Caragiale as a writer of that time and in this respect brought into discussion the book of Mircea Iorgulescu, *Essay on Caragiale world*: "The essay about Caragiale is a simple improvisation, of a man who had not written at all about the great writer, by no means a page about vision and overall judgments; he knows that others have done it and he assumes to ignore everything that was said, giving somewhat to his trial the title (too ambitious in fund) of a personal exercise... Mircea Iorgulescu goes in excess to see everything in black and simplifying everything equally." [7] In the same work dedicated to Caragiale, Alexandru George explores how was the writing about Caragiale with the occasion of its centenary in 1952. The opinions are divided into articles of *Viața Românească*, *Contemporanul*, *Scânteia Tineretului* or *Scânteia*. The playwright is seen as an author who whips his heroes, pillory them and watches everything with frown: "Based on this error has built, however, Camil Petrescu his "character" from the dramatic clamping *Caragiale and his time*, and the same interpretation sin is felt throughout the whole series of studies in 1952, especially from one of the darkest points of our history under communism, «Caragiale - Studies at the centenary.»" [8] In the work of Caragiale, the reader is invited to participate in the action through a game of ambiguities, by creating humor, by

sacrificing the "superiority" of the author that those concerned to recognize themselves in that characters or their world.

At the centenary of Caragiale, many writers and journalists have dedicated entire articles in the newspapers of the period. Mihail Novicov wrote in *Scânteia Tineretului* on January 16, 1952 the article called "Our Caragiale" and talks about the life, the work and "the great love that the working people of our country have for the great accuser of our bourgeois-landlord society." [9] The writer considered the work of Caragiale as a priceless possession of the country, a weapon in the fight for socialism and removal of all that is old and harmful. Caragiale lived in the era when the leaders of the political parties built their wealth and power by oppressing the masses, and he identified himself with the struggle and the aspirations of the ordinary people. The attempts of those who have tried to demonstrate that the playwright had no political and social targets proved to be a failure because they could not explain the creation of characters that Tipătescu, Trahanache, Jupân Dumitrache, Costachel Gudurău or for the writing of the political article "1907 - From Spring to autumn", where Caragiale take a the strong stance against the organizers of the bloody repression that followed the peasant uprising of 1907. The compassion and the commitment of Caragiale to the sufferings and to the people is given by "the vehemence with which the great writer satirized from the positions of the many and oppressed, the bourgeoisie and the landlords alike, the liberals and the conservatives, in the head with «the big prankster- the king»." [10] Novicov comes to strengthen the allegations made earlier and draws a first conclusion: "Clearly, such a writer could not be either reactionary or foreign from the people, and his work could not be deprived of precise political and social targets. Caragiale lived in full ferment the political and social upheavals of his time and not taken away from them." [11] The playwright knew how to show through his work the true face of the demagogues, the corrupt politicians who plundered and oppressed people of goods, freedom and democracy. He wrote with sympathy and warmth about ordinary people and their daily drama and can not be overlooked as "a strong love for people, a high patriotism, have always characterized the great Caragiale... instead of the mocker sarcasm, instead of scorn and hate molded in sharp satire, we encounter a serious tone, sympathetic to the heroes he described." [12] Novicov ends his article with a high expression of a patriotic pride because the great Caragiale was a Romanian belonging from the ordinary people, worthy of full love and appreciation of the followers.

The newspaper *Scânteia Tineretului* presented daily the way the whole country was preparing for the I. L. Caragiale centenary. There were organizing conferences, writing journals and were publishing some works of Caragiale. It happened also to mobilize youth for reading sessions, essays, plays, sketches and discussions on the work of Caragiale. In schools and colleges were made up wall papers, including articles, photomontages and excerpts from the opera of the writer. Many cities like Bucharest, Iași, Bacău, Tg. Mureș and Suceava had unique cultural show, and also villages, where the Committee for Cultural Establishments carried out various activities to popularize through the working peasantry the work and the life the of the great classic of our literature. On the occasion of the Caragiale centenary celebration, the Bucharest film studio presented three short films: "Lessee Romanian", "The Chain of Weaknesses" and "Visit...", where the writer whipped the bourgeois' society mores.

On January 4, 1952 was published an article in the newspaper *Scânteia Tineretului*, which belonged to Sadoveanu and was originally published ten years before in the Volume VI of Sadoveanu's, published in the State Publishing House for Literature and Art. Sadoveanu presented as literary as possible the remembrance of the news that the ironic and sad Caragiale had died. In the whole country strongly rang the news of the writer's disappearance and those who cherished him wept and praised him. Sadoveanu hardly accepted the playwright's death and continued to see him in all the things around. He was reading his books and seeking for his spirit: "In these books is living the known world, his world. He lives and moves between pages where I constantly see glowing a skeptical smile and the anxious eyes of Caragiale «who is not here anymore, who had died». The skeptical smile and the eyes look like moving with forbearance to the heroic neck of Jupân Dumitrache, to Nae Ipingescu's administrative intelligence, to the young Chiriac and to the unforgettable, sentimental and romantic Madam Veta ... I look at their life of trinkets, policies, care

for the family honour and to the dramatic adventures of a real «stormy nights.» [13] Caragiale continued to live through his characters, who got grandmothers or grandfathers of the drunk citizens, policemen and politicians: "Other masks, same range . . ." [14] Whether it's novels or comedies, moments or sketches, in the work of Caragiale you could see all the history of our people. The bourgeoisie of *A stormy night*, the politicians from *The Lost Letter*, the small officials from the *Moments* have built the world of the 100 years celebrated in the memory of Caragiale.

Caragiale's spirit is always alive through his work, able to enter people's hearts to enjoy them. The writer's work keeps its soul true background by "the eternal matter, the eternal pain, the eternal desire for something better, brighter, straighter, which always characterized the great souls." [15]

In the newspaper *Viața Românească*, the second number, published in the centenary year of Caragiale, 1952, Radu Beligan wrote an article dedicated to Caragiale and called *I. L. Caragiale and his age*, in which he described the manner Caragiale was perceived and popularized. The writer was shown to the theater and literature loving public as a author that promoted the slums and province's comic. The truth and the creative intentions of Caragiale were completely misleading: "From the components of the ruling classes, the characters of Caragiale were decreed the critical bourgeois and then turned by the game on stage - in small gossips and provincials. From a critical realist painting of the bourgeois-landlord regime they tried to turn his work into a simple charge of «vener of Western civilization.» From plays with a deep social significance, they attempted to present his comedies as mere free pranks free, based on speculation of situations and on comic verbal." [16] The officials of the time wanted the transformation of Caragiale's characters from people to clowns and creating some distance from the reality they were created, from the membership of the contemporary world of Caragiale. Radu Beligan wanted the reconsideration of Caragiale's theater and the giving back to the people of the true Caragiale, and this could be done by the research of the writer's real social condition and the circumstances that influenced his human and literary personality. In this respect, the author of the article resumes the whole personal and professional life of the writer just to be presented in its development. It is carefully presented the journalistic evolution of Caragiale, considering that it is rooted in his journalistic and literary creation.

The papers where Caragiale wrote were in general with political orientation, be it liberal or conservative. The political route, based more on affinity than on participation by 1895, was influenced by the political orientation of the newspaper. In 1895, Caragiale joined the Democratic Radical Party of G. Panu, and then, through fusion it came to be part of the Conservative party. Radu Beligan was a keen observer of the life and evolution of Caragiale while objective and carefully documented. After making a brief history of the publications that Caragiale created and worked at, giving concrete examples of the playwright's views and his political guidelines, Beligan final concludes on the feelings and beliefs of the writer: "Through his publishing activity carried out in other publications than the bodies of the two parties, Caragiale's position as an exponent of the «nearly 5 million people in a population of about 6 million,» gets complete the following ways: antimonarchic, antimilitarist, anticospopolit, antichauvinistic." [17] The bourgeois literary history presented Caragiale in the same way: "a junimist a reactionary, an opponent of liberalism." [18] Garabet Ibrăileanu considered Caragiale a junimist, a ruthless critic of liberalism, an opponent of revolutionism. Lovinescu considered that the playwright "Caragiale is the purest expression junimism" and Gherea said about him that was "regardless of social policy". [19] Radu Beligan analysed also Maiorescu's attitude towards Caragiale and wanted to annihilate the social violence criticism of his play. Titu Maiorescu said this observed violence appeared from the personal ascension personal as "an such an absolute requirement that any impression that prevents it or turns it is an enemy of art, especially of poetry and drama." [20]

Also in *Viața Românească*, Mihail Novicov said that Caragiale's work is a huge mirror of his time with strong influence on our contemporaries. Suggestive is the observation of Novicov: "the presence of many full scenes of Caragiale's work in people's consciousness is so great that often when we would say simply that in a particular sector achievements are zero, we call it

«sublime», inferring in our mind a quote from the speech of Cațavencu about the Romanian industry that «is admirable, sublime we can say, but is lacking.»" [21] In Caragiale's work, all the building elements such as characters, characterizations of the characters, dialogue, landscape, language reveal the content of ideas. Through the perseverance he defended his ideas, aspirations and desires of the people at risk to be cursed, persecuted, threatened, Caragiale gained the right to remain in the consciousness of the followers as a leading exponent of the true Romanians.

About the injustices suffered by the work of Caragiale there was throughout spoken and written, as we mentioned above. Zaharia Stancu strengthens the idea that I. L. Caragiale that was a big critic of the bourgeois-landlord regime who suffered from the public presentation of his views: "Both the first and the replays, the press of the time sought in every way to undermine the dramatic work of Caragiale, to withhold its true and deep meaning, or at least to reduce it. The way the Caragiale's plays were staged also contributes to forging his work. But even as it was represented, Caragiale's dramatic work was not seen either during the life of the author, or after by too many people." [22] Stancu saw in Caragiale the exponent of the socialism's supporters, of the fighters for peace and a life better, the despised the greedy, hideous and wicked bourgeoisie, long derided. Not the same way were treated the characters that embodied the peasants, who who always respected in his work. About Caragiale's writings, the author of the article concludes: "Caragiale's work is still present. It shows us what was there and what should not be ever with this country. It shows that we must fight for what was not to rise again." [23] Caragiale's work was present because although there was no bourgeoisie, the struggle for survival, for a better and prosperous life of the poor and exploited, continued to exist. Caragiale had "the consciousness of the high missions of literature" and the mastery "has earned through a long apprenticeship in the school of life", where "he learned to speak without mercy the essential truth of life, to speak through artistic images of a great strength of conviction, built with relentless consistency of a logician-artist." [24]

Read today, as in totalitarianism, Caragiale's work had always the value of a gun battle. For this reason it is so loved and valued by ordinary people and creators of literature, but also highly feared by those who were affected. The writer's work was censored, fragmented, tried to be annihilated, but it had the necessary resources to survive and conquer the audience and the reader.

Notes:

[1] http://www.romlit.ro/literatura_romn_n_timpul_comunismului, accesat la 21.10.2011

[2] Ibidem.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] Alexandru, George, *op. cit.*, 9. 192.

[5] http://www.romlit.ro/literatur_scriis_la_comand2, accesat la 21.10.2011

[6] Ibidem.

[7] Alexandru, George, *Caragiale*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 1996, p. 161-162.

[8] Alexandru, George, *op. cit.*, 9. 180.

[9] Novicov, Mihail, *Caragiale al nostru*, Scânteia Tineretului, seria a II-a, anul III, nr. 851, 16.01.1952, p. 2.

[10] Ibidem.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] Sadoveanu, Mihail, *Caragiale*, Scânteia Tineretului, seria a II-a, anul III, nr. 841, 04.01.1952, p. 2.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] Beligan, Radu, *I. L. Caragiale și epoca lui*, Viața Românească, nr. 2, Anul V, Februarie 1952, p. 12.

[17] Beligan, Radu, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[18] Ibidem.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] Ibidem.

[21] Novicov, Mihail, *I. L. Caragiale, maestru al realismului critic*, Viața Românească, nr. 2, Anul V, Februarie 1952, p. 39.

[22] Stancu, Zaharia, *I. L. Caragiale, critic al regimului burghezo-moșieresc*, Viața Românească, nr. 1, Anul V, Ianuarie 1952, p. 225.

[23] Stancu, Zaharia, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[24] Campus, Eugen, *Arta de a exprima adevărul vieții*, Viața Românească, nr. 1, Anul V, Ianuarie 1952, p. 275.

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