# Rewriting Caragiale: Textual Masks in the Mirror of Contemporaneity

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"Nimic mai simplu, Mițule: *biped, biceps, bicefal, bigam, bisident.* Noi românii am fost bisidenți" (Ioan Constantinescu, *Bisidentul*).

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Maybe the most dynamic aspect of the exegetic polemics concerning the work of I.L. Caragiale as a playwright, *the contemporaneity of his work*, acquires today, in the light of the recent theories concerning the origin of the literary work, new dimensions and significations. Because, if one can state that beyond any doubt William Shakespeare is the most re-written playwright in the universal literature, a similar consideration may be asserted about I.L. Caragiale; especially the recent studies demonstrate that he is the most re-written writer from and in the Romanian literature. Such a re-writing, deriving from the formalist and structuralist contributions (we refer here to the theory of hypertextuality, elaborated by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* and to the Bahtinian theory of dialogism, is also professor Ioan Constantinescu's play, offering a creative and modern interpretation of the characters and of the action from *Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea* (*Master Leonida Faces the Reactionaries*).

Published in 1998 at Junimea Publishing House from Iaşi, *Bisidentul sau O zi istorică* (The Bisident or a Historic Day) has a subtitle which serves for its exact placing in literature, written with the accuracy of the philologist who, before anything else, takes care of the correct concatenation of his work, hoping that he will contribute to the reevaluation and, why not, even to reformulate the cannon: "farsă politică în două părți și un epilog" ("a political farce in two acts and an epilogue"). Therefore, if we take into account the fact that the play *Conu Leonida față cu reacțiunea* was, in 1880, intended by Caragiale to be a „farce in one act", we understand that no paratextual area associated with the work is chosen in a chaotic manner. We are here far from the pure coincidence and far from the fate of the simple factual influences, so that, as it will be seen after the assiduous exercise of the comparative lecture of the two texts, the hypertext is reported to the hypotext not paying it a homage, nor criticizing it, nor pastiching it, nor correcting it but in a different way and that is by *actualizing it*. A fact which serves both the dialogic relation of the existence of the works, as well as the intention from the basis of a

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writing that, miming the impossibility of the detachment from the model, becomes a creative one: creating historicity at all levels, from the linguistic and anthropologic one to the social and political one. Following an observation from the exegesis which he dedicated to Caragiale, namely that the playwright from the 19th century "*historicized* (L.I.) the old comic types" that "despite their *atemporality* (I.C.) are assimilated by a social style, also maintaining their timeless value" (Constantinescu 1974: 35), the 20th century playwright contributes as well to the *historicization* of the condition of the Romanian post-revolutionary intellectual, with humor and auto-ironic detachment, therefore in a different manner from the way in which it was thematized by the recent cinematography.

Placing itself from the beginning in the area of comedy, this play is permanently cheating its own truth: for the beginning, with the apparent sympathetic mentioning of the addressee (*To my wife*, L.I.), the author, a brilliant farceur, introduces us, as his precursor, in a familiar and apparently relaxed area, in a couple's intimacy. But he only does it in order to certify its inconsistency later, even its death in a totalitarian society, like the one which, uncomfortably and ostentatively, can be read between the lines, a society where the married couple must wear masks that they suggestively change, each contributing, more or less, to the alienation of the other. Ioan Constantinescu keeps the same denomination as Caragiale in order to designate the characters: his main *characters* mirroring, for the beginning, by the simple mentioning of their age, the paradigmatic relatives. "Fane (probabil 60 de ani)" (Fane probably 60 years od) is a sort of a more vivid pensioner Conu Leonida, due to the characterologic echoes that he borrows from Ştefan Tipătescu, while "Fany (probabil 55 de ani)" (Fany probably 55 years old) is a Coana Efimița not far from John Cleland's Fanny Hill type of the 18th century. The innovations appear in the area of the secondary characters, their name amplifying and exponentially gaining a certain importance because they designate the new social pluristratification of the post revolutionary 20th century from Romania: Zoe (57 years), the boy (16 years) and three masked men. Having names which were also taken from Caragiale's work, these characters will *reveal* their identity later, serving thus the deep intentions of the text: the first intention is to attack the lack of reaction and cowardness of the Romanian post revolutionary world, which is incapable to clear up the mess from the recent history and to reform its cankered axiological structures; keeping a provincially ironic note, the second intention is to bring the discussion in the area of some truths more or less assumed by the academic world from Iaşi, anyway embarrassing for the condition of the intellectual who chose, in a difficult period, the comforting isolation in the ivory tower, judged for his passive attitude against the political regime during the play. After the university campus novel that had acquired a great success in the Occident through David Lodge's works, here is a disguised Caragiale, through juxtaposing and fine textual transpositions, into the shoes of a university professor afraid of the Securitate, scared even after some years from the Revolution, of the microphones that he searches in every angle of the house, scared of the maid, who is an experienced informant, who steals his journals to read them in one gulp, scared of the boy that sells newspapers because he symbolizes a certain political structure, of the phone, of the far away



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voices that get closer and closer, as absurdly threatening as in Caragiale's play, he is scared of his wife and of the incapacity to unmask himself all the way to the end.

As for the stage setting elements and their role in the space-temporal organization of the stage, we must say that they are close to Caragiale's suggestions. If in *Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea* the presence of the characters on the stage is prepared by a "odaie modestă de mahala..." (a humble room in the slum), where the spectator-reader may imagine:

> în fund, la dreapta, o uşă; la stânga, o fereastră. De-o parte şi de alta a scenei, câte un pat de culcare, în mijlocul odăii, o masă împrejurul căreia sunt aşezate scaune de paie. Pe masă, o lampă cu gaz; pe globul lămpii un abat-jour cusut pe canava. În planul întâi, la stânga, o sobă cu uşa deschisă şi cu câțiva tăciuni pâlpâind (Caragiale 2012: 79)

in Ioan Constantinescu's *Bisidentul*:

> scena înfățișează camera de dormit a lui Fane şi Fany: în stânga un pat dublu de lemn, lat, cu câte o noptieră de o parte şi de alta; în fund, un şifonier vechi, de o culoare mai închisă decât aceea a patului. Se preconstituie în elemente anticipatoare ale semnificației piesei. Între pat şi şifonier – o uşă spre o altă încăpere. În dreapta, ieşirea spre hol. Lângă uşă – un dulap pentru cărți; pe un raft – telefonul. În mijlocul camerei – o masă rotundă, două fotolii vechi şi câteva scaune (Constantinescu 1998: 9).

The explicit allusions to the model text represent the anticipatory elements of the signification of the "second degree" play, as Gérard Genette would call it. This time we are in a provincial apartment, without great elegance and refinement, where the signs of the social modernization ("the telephone") coexist, antithetically, with the owners' passion for the archaic, for the vetust; a place where the space is organized in a simple way, even in a minimal way, in order to put the character in the spotlight, whose condition is discretely suggested through a notation that had obviously to miss from Caragiale's text: "lângă uşă – un dulap pentru cărți" (a bookcase near the door). This is a first sign of the substantial innovation which can be operated through a successful relation of simultaneity once with the preservation of the respected model: the main character, the nucleic character that concentrates and guarantees the essence of the authenticity of the writing, does not respect any more the model of the funny old man, of the character that Ioan Constantinescu explained in *Caragiale şi începuturile teatrului european modern*, (Caragiale and the Beginnings of the Modern European Theatre) as a special type of synthesis among "*Senex, il Dottore* and *Maccus*" (Constantinescu 1974: 68). The social status of the character evolved as well as his behavior developed and he bears the *symbol* (or as he wishes to surrender to self-mystification, the *stigma*) of *intellectuality*. But what kind of intellectuality? We think that it is one which continues the plastic conceptions from I.L. Caragiale's journalistic activity, being represented by that „soi prețios de cetățeni, de lipsa cărora patria noastră nu se poate plânge" (Caragiale 1959–1965: 448), from where one can detach

> omul care disprețuieşte orice ocupație de imediată utilitate şi pentru el şi pentru lume şi se dedă la nobila profesiune de gânditor: Acu, deştept ori ba, spiritual ori nerod, cu scaun la cap ori lovit cu leuca? Acestea sunt întrebări absolut indiferente: e destul că poate zice cu toată siguranța. Eu?... eu sunt un intelectual! (Caragiale 1959–1965: 400).



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Ioan Constantinescu noticed that, in the linguistic world which is instituted by Caragiale, most of the words (hence the term *intellectual*) receive a *deviated, compromising* meaning in relation with the basic meaning, indicating with precision the *modified* essence, namely the deeply *altered* essence of the character (cf. Constantinescu 1974: 172). Fane will prove to be an inventor of screen-plays, as well as Leonida, but these screen plays come from a sharp semantic fluctuation; a passionate newspaper reader, but also an occasional acid political interpreter, who, unlike Leonida, has the habit to write his fears on the paper, narrating his "political dreams" in "those notebooks with red covers", or better "yellow-red" covers transforming them into "literature-literature" because "dreams tell a story". Further on, the construction of a character also follows Caragiale's recipe: he himself reveals his identity and, at a certain moment, the inconsistency concerning the relationship with his wife, composing a new face of the eternal *funny couple* of characters that has become successful along so many epochs and ages of literature, so that it could not be absent from the "profetul teatrului nou"[1] (the prophet of the new theatre) that was I.L. Caragiale. In order to accentuate the belonging to Caragiale's paradigm, the characters pamper themselves by using the famous appellatives "Fănică" and "Mițule". If Caragiale's farce is built as a "scenario (pantomime and the text of the retorts) with two *evil* clowns (I.C.)" (Constantinescu 1974: 181) and it is based on the gradual application in the work of the *pure incoherence*, Ioan Constantinescu's farce results from the verbal duel of the characters that are built through gender opposition (male vs. female), but also through their different contextualization. Fany is a wife both attentive and flirt liking, she utters tender replies, but she also knows to use the language in an acid manner, she takes care that her husband receives his newspapers, eats his bread with fresh butter, drinks his hot coffee and she is ready to wait in line for meat in order to prove her devotedness. Fane is preoccupied with achieving and the transformation of contemporary politics, with the way in which "the fakes" from the underground may or may not be published in the new press and he *compares* with self-irony (otherwise how?), being helped by the political slogans of the time, Romanian privatization – "privatization with any cost" – with the Occidental model. Furthermore, the identitary construction of the characters corresponds with the species in which the play is placed. Fane, the intellectual, is also a "raced" practitioner of the bedroom politics; hence the farce could not have avoided being a *political* one. Also

> bărbatul e cel care crede că are toate răspunsurile în timp ce femeia aprobă entuziasmată şi orbită de admirație opiniile soțului ei [...], ea e şi aici o maşină de citate, completând invariabil orice frază cu expresii ale limbajului de lemn. Cei doi încearcă să facă față marii schimbări istorice, dar nu par în stare să-şi abandoneze inerțiile mentale şi lingvistice[2].

[1] With this expression Ioan Constantinescu closes the 2nd chapter, *Vechimea personajelor*, the 2nd part of his study, called *Legătura cu vechea comică* (Constantinescu 1974: 185).

[2] See subchapter *Roluri, măşti, simulacre, dubluri, clone* ['Roles, masks, simulacras, doubles, clones'] from Carmen Pascu (2006).



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However the level at which the play manages to convince the best is still the linguistic one: the comic of language finds here, as at Caragiale, brilliant illustrations, which contain the promise of a canonic assimilation. *Bisidentul sau O zi istorică* represents a clarification, at the age of the mature understanding, putting into practice the critical thesis supported with conviction by the comparativist from Iaşi in the '70s, therefore in a moment when the exegesis met important and various ramifications, some of them being constructive, other being harmful, many of them, in any case, being intimidating for a researcher that was at the beginning of his road. As the characters from Caragiale's work do, Constantinescu's characters state, according to the critic's observation

> from a phrase to another, exactly the contrary of those said before. Sometimes, one and the same phrase is an absolute nonsense. Actually, the characters do not speak, they are spoken: the defective mechanism of the language plays them as dolls (Constantinescu 1974: 160).

Together with Leonida and Efimița, the buffoon couple started its career in the modern Romanian dramaturgy and their adventure perseveres in the play of the tormented '90s.

In the past, the character from Caragiale's farces "uttered with serenity the most stupefying stupidities" (Constantinescu 1974: 162–163), he wished the republic because "dacă e republică, nu mai plăteşte nimenea bir", "fieştecare cetățean ia câte o leafă bună pe lună, toți într-o egalitate" and, finally "se face şi lege de murături", "adicătele că nimeni să nu mai aibă drept să-şi plătească datoriile". On the contrary, in *Bisidentul*, for the main character "o revoluție nu vine niciodată singură", "depinde ce fel de revoluție e", "depinde dacă revoluția e făcută de reacțiune sau de... revoluționarii de profesie, domnule. Dumnealor ar vrea în fiecare zi câte o revoluție" (Constantinescu 1998: 30–31). The problem of the language is at the superior level of understanding, because Fane is not a simple newspaper reader, modestly gifted from an intellectual point of view, he is not a narcissistic pretentious person, he is a writer of "literature-literature", who says about himself, in the conditions in which "şi aşa se spune că scriitorii români nu prea au literatură de sertar", "eu nu sunt scriitor, dar literatură de sertar aş avea". Moreover, he is a writer that has pedagogical vocation, because we see him permanently concerned with revealing and clarifying the meanings, which were unclear because of a total obscurity for his consort, of all the controversial notions that he uses. And we say that these are controversial because at the time of the writing of this play, they represented the cause of polemics in Romania and they seemed impossible to come to an end once and for all. Therefore, for example, the drawer literature is, in his conception, "literatură care, din motive politice, a fost ținută sub cheie", while Fany, "*după o clipă de gândire*" (here the didascalies are invoked purely in an ironical way, as in many other situations in the play), understands that it was hidden in the drawer because it is "literatură de valoare [...], altfel spus bănoasă", because "ce ține omul în sertar, sub cheie, frate? Lucruri de valoare: bijuterii, bani" and she is sorry that she did not cherish it enough before being "subtilized" (sneaked) by the clever maid named Zoe, alias a former informant of the Securitate. The same happens in the case of the notion of dissident, that, in a triad mocking the systematized academic lexis, is epurated by any autobiographical connotation which we could



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suspect and is transformed into a sentential and sad axiom cynically comprising the mocked essence of the Romanian spirit: "Nimic mai simplu, Mițule: *biped, biceps, bicefal, bigam, bisident.* Noi românii am fost *bisidenți*". When the wife corrects him with a slight irritation in her voice ("*Disident.* Corect este *disident.* De câte ori vrei să-ți spun?"), she offers him the occasion for a loving teasing. Thus, by looking at her in a triumphant way, with the same triumph as Leonida, whose theories are never affected by anything, not even by evidence, Fane explains and explains himself as it follows: "Românul este parțial, Mițule. (*Zâmbet larg.*) Şi eu sunt parțial, şi tu eşti parțial.... Pardon: parțială. Toți suntem parțiali", and for the things to be clearer, he uses her as an example, attacking her in what she calls, with an obvious borrowed language "onoarea mea de femeie": "Tu, ca persoană... (*Gest cu brațul drept*). O parte din tine e cu mine, iar cealaltă parte...". What the male character does not state in an explicit way, the ellipses from his language are completed in the same way as at Caragiale, by the language of the *other* one, by the autonomous language which becomes, through opposition, a source for the comic: "Vreai să spui că cealaltă parte din mine, aceea care nu-i cu tine... (*Aproape violentă*) e cu un alt bărbat, aşa-i? Şi, mă rog, care parte?" (Constantinescu 1998: 43). The examples which we invoked, and many others as well, confirm another idea which the exegesis separated from a lexical universe of Caragiale: in these comic-tragic farces, the characters do not speak through a dialogue but use a monologue, their discourse suffers from serious reception deficiencies, a sign that the real intimacy of the couple may and has to be under question. Or under the full alienation, if, similar to Ioan Constantinescu, we think that Leonida and Efimița foretell, for example, Vladimir and Estragon...

Another interesting episode, in what the comic of the language is concerned, is the textual transposition of Conu' Leonida's phantasmagoria about the revolutionary Garibaldi and the Pope in the polemics concerning the gestation of the new revolutions ("Înseamnă că Walesa nu mai are nici un amestec în povestea asta. Ideea cu revoluția a fost doar a papei, nu?", p. 30). Caragiale uses as a source of comic the *false quotation from memory* of the Pope's words

> Ce-a zis Papa – iezuit, aminteri nu-i prost! – când a văzut că n-o scoate la căpătâi cu el?... "Mă, nene, ăsta nu-i glumă; cu ăsta, cum văz eu, nu merge ca de cu fitecine; ia mai bine să mă iau eu cu politică pe lângă el, să mi-l fac cumătru"... Şi de colea până colea, tura vura, c-o fi tunsă, c-o fi rasă, l-a pus pe Garibaldi de i-a botezat un copil (Constantinescu 1998: 82).

Ioan Constantinescu mocks the model with an ingenious pun, using, as Carmen Pascu observed in *Scriiturile diferenței. Intertextualitatea parodică în literatura română*, the popular etymology as a constant source of the comic especially from the desire to pay homage to the great playwriter. The ungrammatical language, deformed and unconstructed, is here too a sign of the characters' truncated understanding or even of misunderstanding of the recent history. Ioan Constantinescu's antiheroes live the present by deforming it because they have a distorted perception of the immediate past, they think that the last great revolution is the creation of the Pope, "da, el, cu *emucenismul* lui", and not of Walesa, because "la polonezi este tolerat" the small or the big robbery, the mystification of the historic truth, "cu ceilalți e mai greu". *Emucenism* is therefore a word composed



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from the word *martyr* and designates the fact that "toți mucenicii din lume, adică, să se unească într-o credință" (Constantinescu 1998: 18). There are here other memorable expressions, be they coming from the area of the comedy of name („Fidel Castor"), be they resulting from a parodist recontextualization, with reference at the period after '89, of some notions like political pluralism. Fany observes, falling amazed under the weight of her discovery, that we "suntem mai pluraliști decât cei din vest" because in the postrevolutionary Romania there are about four-five hundreds of parties.

Ioan Constaninescu substantially modifies the temporal level of the climax. We remember that in Caragiale, the room was in semi-darkness, a sign that the characters prepared for sleep and their entire conversation with pretentions of political philosophizing was actually transforming into a powerful....sleeping pill. Ioan Constantinescu throws his characters in the bright show of the morning, more exactly "before breakfast", when "Fane se întoarce în somn de pe o parte pe alta", and "Fany se ridică în capul oaselor şi se uită la el". We have here an almost classic manner of mocking the model by inversion: what at Caragiale happened only at the end of the play, the effect illuminating the understanding of the cause, here takes place in a loud kind of way, in a carnival like manner or "upside down" (with a concept launched by Bahtin and cherished by the critic from Iaşi), the final of the hypotext being strategically disguised in the incipit of the hypertext. The political nightmare which Efimița almost provokes herself is transferred here in the male character, who around seven "se răsuceşte agitat sub plapumă şi strigă înăbuşit: Nu,... nicidecum! Este, ... nu, nu!", and then "se răsuceşte violent şi dă plapuma la o parte: Împuşcături...?! A!... Rafale de mitra...". Fany undertakes the behaviour and the type of problematization which was once specific to Leonida ("îl scutură de umăr: Fane, trezeşte-te, că visezi urât!"; "N-a fost nimic, ai visat"; "Le-ai auzit în vis" etc.) implicitly valuing a specific procedure for the dramatic postmodernity, the one of *putting into abyss*, according to the *mise en abîme* model from the new French Novel. We believe that this is a personal success, thought and carefully prepared for the jeweler who, in order to value an old and broken jewelry, has to polish and build up its hidden parts, which cannot be seen by the naked eye. Mastering the ambiguity technique and detaching from the path of the interpretation, aligned to the model, the author channels his own text on new hermeneutical directions, which, probably he did not suspect to be easily accomplished.

In the first scene of the first part, light focuses on Fane's nocturnal torments, who struggles and screams in his sleep, dreaming of gun fires, machine-guns spatters and screams, onirically invoking the under layer of the same "disease" from which Leonida and Efimița suffer. Reacting like the main character of the novel of Ismail Kadare *Slujbaşul de la Palatul viselor*, Fane's first impulse is to consider dreams as being reality. His consort, who is a little bit more practical, draws his attention that he suffers from "hysterical" readings (meaning "esoteric") and that his habit of reading obsessively all the political newspapers of that time, early in the morning, on an empty stomach, is in fact the element that causes him the self-imagined suffering, the bovarism. The action of preparing breakfast is ordinary, spiced up by the mockery of some mental cliché like "comunismul – visul de aur al omenirii", transformed into – … the golden nightmare of humankind, a parody that



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actually prepares the nightmarish area of the play, an aspect that was not lacking from Caragiale's model-farce. The protagonists gradually become very suspicious one of another, they have monomanias, but especially they present the fear of not being "attacked" by the others, by the *boys*, like they are called here, which we can understand as being the professional informants of the communist regime. The journal in which Fane wrote his dreams, the drawer literature, disappears in a mysterious way, and the potential guilty, Zoe (again a name from Caragiale used in order to introduce in the play an echo-character of the naive Safta), uses the term "borrowed" in order to excuse herself in case she could steal. Then, in another scene, the newspapers are brought by a younger *boy*, who is no longer the same newspaper vending garçon from the sketches and moments of Caragiale, but the representative of a new world of businessmen from journalism, who do and undo "the law" of the public opinion. Those episodes entitled Carmen Pascu to talk about the transformation, in the hypertext, of Conu' Leonida's imagination into "mediatic imagination", because Fane does not represent reality starting from a careful lecture of the press, but waits for the press to confirm or to infirm his own opinions, beliefs or even dreams, in an agitating and yet uniforming post-revolutionary world of consciences: "Ştii doar cum e la noi: vorbe, zvonuri şi toate celelalte. Maşina de legende funcţionează fără greş, ca înainte" (Constantinescu 1998: 14).

Actually this dark, nightmarish and grotesque area of reality behind the real, of the world of rumors scattered willingly within any kind of totalitarian regime, for the physical and psychological destabilization of the intellectual person who becomes dangerous, not wanting to cooperate, finds in *Bisidentul* forms of investigation which fall from the source play and gain autonomy both on an aesthetic plan, as well as in an ideological one. "Brain washing" is another subject that Ioan Constantinescu approaches in a scene achieved by all the means from the media. It is not about a "passing hypochondria" provoked by the sound of "două-trei detunături de puşcă şi chiote surde, apoi, altele mai multe şi strigăte mai distincte, şi încă o dată" (Caragiale 2012: 87); it is about a real fear, inculcated by the microphones that were hidden in the house and from the boys without a name. Fane develops a paranoiac behaviour: when Zoe, "zvonerul şi răspândacul" who is successful in both regimes announces that the police – "poate superpoliţia" – drafted a list with suspects because there will come a social turmoil, the things rush, Fane is convinced that he is on that list because of *his bisident past* and feels more and more threatened because of some anonymous phone calls. In order to exorcize his fears, he reads the nespapers, from *Adevărul* up to *România liberă*, but he also watches "televiziunea liberă" and listens to "ce spun la radio ceilalţi, de la München". The real invoked historic event is what, according to Caragiale, has to follow the revolution, meaning *reaction* – in this case, the news broadcast stories about "greva itinerantă, fără pretenţii politice!" of the miners who came to Bucharest. Fane and Fany watch on TV the transformation of the peaceful manifesting people into violent brutes and, in parallel, they start to hear noises, screamings and shootings louder closer: "Ha, ha, bătălie în regulă, frate!".

Another aspect of the *mise en abîme* network which the writer creates here, results from the simultaneity of the presentation of the events: what can be heard in the present of the characters, from the vicinity of their apartment, superposes with



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the noise of the televised images, resulting an increased effect of ambiguation. Ioan Constantinescu did not think to shed a light on the obscure areas of the systematic and ideologic event from December '89; he was more interested in revealing the conspirationist side of the intellectual living in an apartment and the drama that he lives, being forced to adapt himself to a system with new rules and characters in which he cannot find himself anymore.

As all the characters, both the main ones as well as the secondary ones have a clown like side, there are here many specific elements of the clown art: *qui-pro-quo*, the abundance of confusions, the mask, the miming of the erotic passion, the tears, the good will, even the insolitation – in this case, loneliness in two. Maybe the most successful form is the *disguise* at whom Fane is thinking, forced by the surroundings to manufacture himself a new mask in order to save himself from the potential spies. And what other mask better than the one of his own wife? Fane comes up with the idea to change their clothes, one with the other, not to be recognized; then we are announced that the two were already disguised, after three decades of marital routine, "travestiul le devenise a doua natură; masca substituise identitatea originară" (Pascu 2006: 221). We think that that scene concentrates the semantic weight of the entire play showing, in equal proportions, that *Bisidentul* by Ioan Constantinescu,

> bases on the aggravation of the meanings of the hypotext, in the sense that he exaggerates certain dimensions, but also in the sense that he makes them more serious, more problematic, an intertextual operation whose success is assured by a partial sacrifice of the comic energy which constituted the force of Caragiale's text (Pascu 2006: 222).

"Cea mai sigură realitate e tot travestiul, Mițule", here is a reply that might impose in the collective memory like the famous Caragiale's witticisms, followed by a reply that betrays the Baroc art of the dissimulation which the communist regime practiced at a large scale, described by Fane, at page 67 of the quoted edition as a "joc de-a v-ați-ascunselea în care s-ar putea să rămâi mereu ascuns". As probably Caragiale's readers would expect, this politic mockery written in the '90s is also solved through a carnival like denouement, the same carnival spirit of which M. Bahtin was talking, considering it an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the dialogic works. And if here the revolution is described as a carnival, where the mask bearers fall themselves prey to their own mystifications and they do not have the power to turn back to their original identity, this happens in order to certify once more an already validated truth: at a universal scale, the historical phenomenon repeats itself daily.



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## Abstract

The author of the present study takes into account maybe the most dynamic aspect of the exegetic polemics concerning I.L. Caragiale's work as a playwright, the *contemporaneity* of his work. *Rewriting Caragiale: Textual Masks in the Mirror of Contemporaneity* shows how this theme acquires today, in the light of the recent theories concerning the origin of the literary work, new dimensions and significations. Because, if one can state that beyond any doubt William Shakespeare is the most re-written playwright in the universal literature, a similar consideration may be in the case of I.L. Caragiale, which shows that in the recent studies he is the most re-written writer from and in the Romanian literature. This kind of action of rewriting, built in the ancestry of the formalist and structuralist contributions (we make a reference here to the theory of hypertextuality, elaborated by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* and to the Bahtinian theory of dialogism) is also the case of professor Ioan Constantinescu's play, who offers a creative and modern interpretation of the characters and of the action from *Conu' Leonida față cu reacțiunea*. His play, the one that follows the paradigm of Caragiale's comical drama, shows an interesting predisposition towards a methaphorical level of understanding: Ioan Constantinescu did not think to shed a light on the truths of the dramatic ideologic change from December '89; he was interested in revealing the conspirationist side of the intellectual and the drama he lived in the '90s, being forced to adapt to a system with new rules and characters in which he could not find himself anymore. However, the present study emphasizes how a parody with an explicit model such as *Bisidentul* is not intended to be a malicious one, a demolishing one; on the contrary, it respects and even honors its model, contributing to new forms of conceiving the literary work.



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