Shakespeare's Audience in 19-th Century Romania

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Trying to prove that "Shakespeare is the center of the embryo of a world canon, not Western or Eastern and less and less Eurocentric", Harold Bloom noticed that "there is a substance in Shakespeare's work that prevails and that has proved multicultural, so universally apprehended in all languages as to have established a pragmatic multiculturalism around the globe, one that already far surpasses our politicized fumblings toward such an ideal."[1] So, the British dramatist had invented the attitude long before our theorists coined the concept.

That is probably why, after a considerable revival of Shakespeare's plays round about the middle of the eighteenth century, the beginning of the nineteenth century finds the English dramatist in the consolidated position of an ultimate landmark of literature at a pan-European level. Many times the density of his dramatic works was opposed to the highly schematic neoclassic plays to indicate that the literary movement inaugurated by Boileau's *Art Poétique* (1674) was in decline. European literature was moving on to major changes in cultural doctrines. In 1827, writing his *Preface* to *Cromwell* (a real manifesto of French Romantic theatre), Victor Hugo commented upon the surpassing literary excellence of the Shakespearian drama as opposed to the classic plays, following the rules of Aristotle. Later on, the musician Richard Wagner was also talking about the technical superiority of the Shakespearian tragedy, which eliminated the chorus from the Greek theatre and operated instead with well defined secondary characters and plots (*Opera and Drama*, 1852). But romantics were not the only ones to admire the dramatist; realist writers were equally enthusiastic with his works. In 1825, Stendhal discovered Shakespearian works to be the perfect mirror of nature. The complexity of his theatre, mirroring the complexity of life itself, seems to be the key of the nineteenth-century apology of Shakespeare in the entire Europe, including Romania, where the most important writers of the age expressed their huge appreciation for Shakespeare.

The Shakespearian audience in nineteenth-century Romania is impressive. The first translations known were made in late eighteenth-century. After 1840's, the translations became more numerous and each play used to have successive variants. For instance, St. Bâgescu translated *Macbeth* in Bucharest, in 1850, using a French intermediary, and so did M. A. Canini and I. G. Valentineanu in 1858. Then, in 1864, P.P. Carp translated it again in Iassy, using the English original text, and this translation was read at the first gathering of *Junimea* literary society (founded in 1863-1864, by Titu Maiorescu, Iacob Negruzzi, Theodor Rosetti, Vasile Pogor and Petre Carp), a fact that places the Shakespearian obsession at the origins of the most

[1] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon. The books and school of the ages* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995) 59.

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important cultural group of the time. Carp's version of *Macbeth* was immediately published and four years later he translated *Othello*, which was also published by *Junimea* Publishing House, in 1868.

All these translations and many others contributed to the process of shaping literary Romanian language, but what seems to be even more important is their role to the crystallization of a formal theatrical system and its technical terminology. The understanding of the dramatic species is still vague in the second half of the Romanian nineteenth century. When it came to the typological classification of theatrical texts, not only the public hesitated, but also the translators of Shakespeare's works. To take some examples: *Hamlet* is for its first translator - Ioan Barac (*Amlet. Prinţul de la Dania,* 1840) - "a tragedy in 5 curtains;" for Economu - (*Hamlet, principele Danimarcei*, 1855) - "a drama in 5 acts and 8 parts;" and for Stern - (*Hamlet prinţul Danemarcei*, 1877) - "a tragedy in 5 acts". The same vacillation between "tragedy" and "drama" is also present in the translations of *Julius Caesar*: a "tragedy" (*Iulie Cesar*. *Tragedy* in 5 acts. Translated by Captain S. Stoica, 1844; *Iuliu Caesar,* tragedy. Metric translation after the original text by Adolph Stern, 1879); or a "drama" (*Iulius Caesar*. *Drama* in 5 acts, translated by Barbu Lazureanu,1892; *Julius Caesar*. *Drama*, translated by Scarlat Ion Ghica, 1896). As for *Macbeth,* Bâgescu named it "drama in quinqui acte" (1850), Canini and Valentineanu saw it as "melodrama in four acts" (1858), and Carp as "tragedy".

Not only the theatrical language benefited enormously from the Shakespearian translations, but also the stage directing methods, the art of performing, the technical apparatus of theatrical productions, and last but not least the theatrical education of the Romanian public. Whereas in the 40's people went to the theatre considering it more like a patriotic duty to encourage the newly built National Theatres in Iassy and Bucharest, a few decades later the next generations of public were looking to the stage for aesthetic gratification. They came to refute the generalized plagiary and localizations on Romanian stages and strongly encourage the original playwrights such as Alecsandri, Caragiale, Delavrancea, and others. This was also the result of the Shakespearian productions, among other factors.

The aspect of the stimulation of original creativity is the most important one, as it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a Romanian dramatist who was not influenced by Shakespeare's plays. (Kierkegaard was the first to notice that it was impossible not to be post-Shakespearian.) In the Romanian nineteenth-century, Shakespeare was considered the champion of excellence, which qualified him first as a leading figure of the 1848 generation, willing to adopt any prestigious model that could contribute to the foundation of a national literature, then as a model for the *Junimea,* well-known for its utmost elitism. The writers who gathered at the *Junimea*, especially Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, I.L. Caragiale, Ioan Slavici, and Titu Maiorescu were to become the great classics of Romanian literature, and they all admired Shakespeare's works, so the spirit of the age was constructively placed under the high patronage of "the great Will".

The case study that I propose here is the research of the possible Shakespearian influences over the most prominent Romanian dramatist of all times: Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), the best key for understanding the way in which Shakespeare's authority imbued the entire Romanian cultural environment. Caragiale was a great enemy of plagiarism of any kind and of localizations, which he condemned in some of his texts.

Thus he is very careful not to imitate the playwrights that he admires, always creating new plots and characters, even if Shakespeare's works are undoubtedly of his school of theatrical construction. In his theatre, Caragiale learns from Shakespeare, in the same way in which he learns form Poe in his prose writings. Yet, he remains extremely creative and profoundly original in both cases; he always re-writes the dramatic scenes that impressed him, gives them a new functionality, transforms them in such a way as to make them depict his own Romanian world, agitated by its specific local convulsions, and by the perils of his historical moment. That is probably why Caragiale's theatre was often considered the most malicious mirror of his age. His plays presented strong characters, unforgettable insignias of human nature in general, like the heroes of his model.

In his famous meditation upon the art of writing, entitled "Câteva păreri" ("Some opinions", 1896)[2] Caragiale makes multiple references to Shakespeare, always quoted as an example of perfectly designed art. Commenting upon the most spectacular polemic of the age in Romanian criticism, between the critic of *Junimea*, Titu Maiorescu, who was convinced that art should be pure gratuity, "art for art's sake," and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who was the adept of an art indoctrinated with ideology, Caragiale quotes Shakespeare as the ultimate witness in this trial: "Do Shakespeare's plays have any tendency? – Of course, they do not." (*Opere 4*, 31) But he makes it clear that it is not the presence or the absence of tendency that gives the value of a work of art, but the aesthetic value, and the perfect example is again Shakespeare's character:

> that villain Falstaff, whom you cannot name with a better adjective, that scoundrel is an imperishable monument of human mind not only because he is not professing any tendency, but because he is Shakespeare's child, who was an excellent father. (*Opere 4*, 32)

Harold Bloom was equally enthusiastic about the same character: "Sir John Falstaff is so original and so overwhelming that with him Shakespeare changes the entire meaning of what it is to have created a man made out of words."[3]

Caragiale's unconditioned admiration for the Shakespearian character, which left visible traces in his own dramatic creations, is also expressed in a literary review published in "Constituționalul". (*Opere 4*, 548) After quoting the French critic Philarète Charles (which proves that he was also interested in the contemporary European criticism devoted to Shakespeare), Caragiale makes his own remarks regarding the so much admired character, counting Falstaff into a literary typology:

> Shakespeare's *Falstaff* is the same type of character as Cervantes' *Sancho Pança,* Rabelais' *Panurge*, Molière's *Sganarelle*, the Orientals' folk hero *Nastratin,* or the Romanians' *Păcală.*
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> The specific nuances of these literary types are different, indeed, but their essence remains the same. It is the same seed transplanted in different soils, under different heavens: it is the eternal type of the man corrupted by the

[2] I.L. Caragiale, "Câteva păreri". *Opere* 4 (Bucharest: ESPLA Publishing House, 1965) 31. All further references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

[3] Bloom 45.

> pleasures of good life, but still a man with healthy mind, at the same time grotesque and delicate, mocker and mocked, cynical and moral, naïve and mordant, trickster and tricked, but always a man of thoughtful common sense, never a nitwit, never agape, never reading cheap dictionaries. (*Opere 4*, 185)

Therefore, the literary type is universal and it found specific incarnations in each culture: in Western literatures it was incorporated into some masterpieces of classical value and in the East, were written literatures emerged later, the type crystallized in oral forms. Caragiale's comments on Falstaff help us to understand the attitude of the Romanian author towards all his literary models: they cannot be imitated or localized, they are seeds which must be planted into the specific soil of Romanian culture, so that the seedling should splice itself, becoming impregnated with the values of that land, and should grow out of the saps of that soil, inhaling the air of that place. That is why Caragiale's own characters, some of them tailored after Shakespearian patterns, became independent from their models. They organically grew out of the Romanian environment and gained their universality especially by being highly local.

Eugène Ionesco, a playwright who owes much to his Romanian predecessor, described Caragiale's characters as "about the meanest to be found anywhere in literature."[4] He also comments upon their special originality: "Caragiale's chief originality is that all his characters are imbeciles."[5]

Another Shakespearian character, which was much admired by Caragiale, was Othello:

> When Othello is enraged by the imagined treason and wiggles around like a mad wild beast, does he have time to deliver a harangue? Imagine the "stupid Turk" coming on the stage with a pose of dignity and starting to tirade on all the sufferings of his soul and then on all the imaginable tortures that he plans for the punishment of the poor, unfortunate Desdemona! All the possible comparisons between his state of mind and the darkest tortures of the Tartar, all the conceivable rhetorical curses, all the potential menaces of poetic luxury would make us wonder and think: „This Moor is not jealous as a true Moor should be, he is just an Oriental braggart!" And from that point on we could no longer worry for the fate of the unfortunate Venetian lady.
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> Because we have to decide: either he is really jealous and he will commit the horrible crime, in which case he has no time to deliver miles-long lectures in distilled verses, or, if he is delivering them, he appeased his soul and the crime will not fit into his actions anymore. So it has to be either a crime without a discourse, or a discourse without a crime. And Othello, in spite of being a "stupid Turk," knows this dramatic principle very well and, because it is the crime that he needs, he gives up the discourse and he is very smart to do so. Only one question he asks, but the core of this question is much more substantial than a hundred complicated verses: "How should I kill them?" All that his enraged mouth can

[4] Eugène Ionesco, "Portrait of Caragiale" *Notes and Counter Notes* (Vermont: Grove Press, Inc., 1964) 141.
[5] Ionesco 139.

> mumble is: "How?" And from this short question we can clearly see what a tragic fate expects both Desdemona and Cassio. (*Opere 4*, 40-41)

The theme of jealousy was also one of Caragiale's favorite topics, in both his comedies and in his tragedy *Năpasta* (*The Scourge*), where it becomes the motivation of a crime. Othello's question "How should I kill?" is also asked by Caragiale's main character of this tragedy, Anca. Like the Moor, she has no hesitation weather to punish her husband Dragomir or not, she is preoccupied exclusively with "how" to make the punishment as long and painful as possible. As a matter of fact, this play was compared with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* immediately after the premiere. Some theatrical reviews – which I will refer to later in this study - associated Anca with Hamlet, who was indeed another hero which Caragiale held dear and appreciated as:

> such a well configured role as the melancholic and likeable Prince of Denmark – with his hesitancy, with his disdain for human vanities, with his philosophy, and with his insatiable but yet emasculated yearning to avenge his noble and unfortunate father. (*Opere 4*, 166)

Caragiale imagined instead a woman character determined to avenge her beloved first husband, murdered by Dragomir out of jealousy. At the beginning, she has no other evidence to prove his guilt but her "prophetic soul" like young Hamlet.

In another occasion, discussing about the difference between style and manner, Caragiale finds the relation between Gloucester and his sons to be the perfect example of style, as the perfect "confirmation of life" (*Opere 4*, 42). As Shakespeare's plays were always into the repertory of the local theatres, his comedy *O scrisoare pierdută* (*One Lost Letter*, 1884) was staged simultaneously with *Hamlet.* When Caragiale became the manager of The National Theatre in Bucharest, the first production was *King Lear*, *Macbeth* followed, and a fragment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was planned, too.

But beyond any eulogies, Caragiale was certainly influenced by Shakespeare in the creation of his own works. The earliest echoes are to be found in his first original comedy: *O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Stormy Night*, 1879). Courting Zița, the journalist Rică Venturiano sends her love letters written in a ridiculous, highly conventional style, quite similar with those that Rosalind finds in the Arden forest, in *As You Like It*. Another common theme of the two plays is the confusion between the lover and the madman, both sharing not only the bizarre behavior, but also an eccentric appearance. During *the stormy night*, by means of a veritable *comedy of errors,* (in which fatality plays an important role as number 9 from the outside door is turned up-side-down by the wind, showing number 6) Rică is searching for his lover Zița (whose address is number 6 on Catilina Street) but he accidentally enters the bedroom of Zița's sister, Veta, who knew nothing about their affair, and he starts to ardently declaim the same stupid verses which he had written in his love letter. Having to do with a distorted version of love, Caragiale chose to parody the famous balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, re-written in a comic

register. While Romeo named Juliet "bright angel!"[6] Rică kneels before Veta with almost the same replica "Radiant angel!"[7] He proclaims himself as "madly in love" (*Opere 1*, 51) but the woman (who is not his Juliet, but her sister and is waiting for a different Romeo) takes him for a real madman and starts shouting for help. The comic mechanism violates the expectations of the public created by the Shakespearian precedent.

By the time when they both realize the misunderstanding and Rică is ready to leave, Veta's excessively jealous husband, Jupân Dumitrache, a typological version of Mr. Ford from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, gets home and starts chasing for the shadow he had seen through the window. He is determined to capture and kill the man who jeopardized his "honor of a family head". Chased by Veta's husband, and also by her truelove Chiriac, both of them enraged with jealousy, Rică hides into a barrel with cement, in the same manner in which Falstaff had been hidden into "a buck-basket", "with stinking clothes that fretted in their own grease" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 62), and then thrown into the Thames. Shakespeare placed his character in a highly comic situation, with a specific moral hint. Caragiale hides guiltless Rică Venturiano into the barrel with cement and specifies that "his cloths are dirty with lime, cement and brick dust," (*Opere 1*, 67), which shows that, by surrounding the house of Jupân Dumitrache with scaffolds, he intended to stress not only the theme of immorality, but also the idea of a world in transition, feverishly reconstructing its façade. The same theatrical situation is metamorphosed to mirror Caragiale's contemporary Romanian world, together with its turmoil and obsessions.

As for Falstaff's last adventure from *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* a complex form of "theatre into theatre," in which almost all the characters are distributed, seems to have inspired Caragiale for a short theatrical monologue: *1 Aprilie* (*April Fool's Day*. *Opere 1*, 383-388). A mystification intended as *April Fool's Day*, also organized as a complex theatrical montage, with a script, disguised characters, scenery and all the usual dramatic details, is turned into a tragic accident. A guy named Mişu receives a fake love letter from a lady he used to court, which asks his to come into the Cişmigiu Park late in the night of April 1st. Cleopatra, the mistress of his best friend Mitică, comes disguised as the lady of his heart and, soon after that, Mitică appears playing the role of the jealous husband. Terrified by the situation (projected as potentially comic) Mişu gathers all his strengths and strikes Mitică with his cane so strongly that the man soon dies. Like Falstaff, Mişu is the victim of a hoax, but the same dramatic situation evolves differently towards a tragic end.

Coming back to the *Stormy Night,* we notice another Shakespearian parallelism, as for Caragiale the ultimate landmark for the theme of jealousy is the much-admired *Othello*. Like the Moor, who was permanently instigated by the diabolic Iago, Jupân Dumitrache is followed in his scurrying rush by his employee Chiriac, the truelove of his wife. The naïve trust of Othello in Iago is tragic-comical: "O brave Iago, honest and just,/That hath such noble sense of thy friend's wrong" (*Othello*, 1144-1145). Caragiale used the motif in a purely comic situation and made it even more drastic when, by the end of the first act, Jupân Dumitrache entrusts Chiriac to take careful watch on his wife:

[6] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet. The Complete Works* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1975) 1020. All further references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

[7] I.L. Caragiale, *O noapte furtunoasă. Opere* 1 (Bucharest: ESPLA Publishing House, 1959) 50. All further references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

> Jupân Dumitrache (gradually departing): Chiriac, my dear, be very careful with what we talked about, be all eyes, and watch closely as you know that I do care about my honor…
> Chiriac (strongly hugging Veta): Don't worry, my master, you know that I consent to your honor as a family head!… (*Opere 1*, 47)

Chiriac's neck scarf, found by Jupân Dumitrache in Veta's bedroom at the end of the play, after everything seemed completely clarified, has the same theatrical functionality as Desdemona's handkerchief. But everything is rearranged by virtue of the dramatic structure of comedy. Whilst the counterfeit evidence led to the murder of the innocent Desdemona, the real evidence of Veta's adultery enforces the betrayed husband's relief, who is pleased with the idea that the scarf belongs to his employee. The last verses of *All's Well That Ends Well:* "All yet seems well; and if it end so meet, / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet" (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 285) inspired Jupân Dumitrache's final attitude of celebrating his sweet life, once the bitter has passed, and shows Caragiale's conviction that: "A little bit of sorrow and distress is not doing any wrong, from time to time: it is like a little pepper powder poured into a sweet food – it stimulates the appetite for the good things of life."[8]

In his one-act farce *Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea* (*Master Leonida Faced with Reaction,* 1880) Caragiale is building theatrical effects out of the discrepancy between essences and appearances. His two characters, Leonida and his wife Efimița, are suffering from *hypochondria*, a temporary disruption of their relation with the real as a result of the alteration of the sensorial mechanisms. Efimița is the first to perceive suspect noises outdoors, which she interprets as a "revolution". Leonida treats her with sarcasm, as it had happened with the Shakespearian characters Marcellus and Bernardo, who first saw the ghost of Old Hamlet. Horatio, a rational mind like Leonida's, is not willing to accept their version of the truth: "Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy" (*Hamlet,* 1071). But, after he sees the ghost himself, he becomes a subject of their irony: "How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale:/Is not this something more than fantasy?" (*Hamlet,* 1072). Caragiale's Leonida, hearing the noises himself, is treated by Efimița with the same sarcasm: "Is it fantasy, my duckling?" (…) "Is it hypochondria, sister?" (*Opere 1*, 92). Again Caragiale gives a new function to a theatrical motif, which moves from the tragic register to the comic one, as the "revolution" proved to be just a noisy party.

Caragiale's other farce in one act *O soacră* (*A Mother-in-law,* 1883) uses a character and a theatrical situation of Shakespearian inspiration. Malvolio, the servant from *Twelfth Night* who absurdly thought that he is loved by his mistress Olivia is redesigned as the waiter Victor, who falls passionately in love with the young mother-in-law Fifina, a tourist in the hotel where he works, and both men are subject to derision. The association becomes even more interesting as Fifina, like Shakespeare's Olivia, pretends that she will give up her love life, an idea which both of them abandon by the end of the plays, on finding their "Mr. Right". However, both Caragiale's short plays have subjects which are deeply rooted into Romanian realities so that the possible Shakespearian influences are carefully filtered and only the technical frame remains

[8] I.L. Caragiale, *Opere*, VII (Bucharest: Royal Foundation for Art and Literature, 1942) 19.

active. *Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea* is a pointed satire of political and social ideas highly fashionable in the 1880's, and, at the same time, a parody of Plato's utopia of the ideal metropolis.

O scrisoare pierdută (*One Lost Letter*, 1884) is the most popular of Caragiale's comedies and the most deeply rooted into the local political realities of the age. Played on some stages abroad, it brought the Romanian author worldwide success. The action takes play during the elections in a small provincial town. Like Poe's *Purloined Letter*, Caragiale's *Lost Letter* works as a highly efficient political weapon, overtaken only by another love letter, lost and found in the capital of the country, by an even more powerful candidate without scruples. Here, the Shakespearian links are less visible, although the fortitude of the characters involved in getting and keeping the power by any means reminds us somehow of the Shakespearian historic tragedies. Also, the obsession of a double treason (political and erotic) transformed in such a manner to become a very efficient comic device still seems a remote parody of the hatred which mobilized the diabolic Iago, twice frustrated: professionally because Cassio is preferred for the promotion, and erotically because he thinks that both Othello and Cassio made a cuckold of himself. In both plays, the theme of the horns is a core subject and the different forms of treason are mixed in a hallucinating manner.

The relations between the characters are also very inciting. The brave and honest Othello is by contrast very inexperienced and credulous, so the sophisticated Iago takes advantage of his lack of experience in social relation. Caragiale uses similar associations of characters in his comedy. The young and naïve Tipătescu, the prefect of the county and the truelove of Mrs. Trahanache, knows nothing of the deep meaning of human relations, therefore he constantly precipitates the crisis, while the old and complicated Trahanache always has and demands "a little patience" for everything. The experienced political leader, cuckolded by his wife with the prefect, a situation which we do not know for sure if he ignores or he tolerates,[9] assumes that things will be solved out happily if he will wait long enough. When his political opponent Cațavencu shows him Tipătescu's love letter for his wife, the husband declares the document to be fake, although he recognizes the handwriting of his friend and ally. Like Jupân Dumitrache, he takes the real evidence for a fake one, giving the public huge grounds for amusement. He does not accept to be blackmailed by Cațavencu and, in the end, he will discover a compromising document, which was really forged by his counter-candidate, who is thus convinced to give up political combat. All the provincial political fuss proves to be pointless, as the candidate is finally imposed from Bucharest officials, where another love letter determined the fate of the election. Caragiale ingeniously reduplicates the comical mechanisms, to illuminate the fallacy and corruption of politics. The final line of Caragiale's comedy: "Music! Music!" (*Opere 1*, 221) seems to be a replica of the final lines of *Much Ado About Nothing*: "play, music" (…) "Strike up, pipers." (*Much Ado About Nothing,* 151) Music and dance are the temporary solutions for the entire machinery of treasons and entanglements, which goes on but still needs a happy ending, proper for comedy.

[9] Paul Zarifopol, one of the close friends of the dramatist remembers that Caragiale used to tease them by loudly wondering weather Trahanache knew or ignored the fact that Zoe was Tipătescu's mistress. See: "Introducere" at *Opere II* (Bucharest: National Culture Publishing House, 1931).

D-ale carnavalului (*Into the Carnival*, 1885), Caragiale's last comedy, seems to be more closely connected with its Shakespearian models. The idea of a carnival-like existence, of the feast, which makes social conventions blur and melt, was also present in *Twelfth Night.* The boozing, the masquerade, the carnival are equally explored by the two playwrights, who are using the unlimited theatrical potential of such events, and their power to generate a pleasure of futile conversation. With Shakespeare, such a situation in which talking becomes more prominent than action is rather rare, but Caragiale used it a lot. The masquerade and the disguise imply a kind festive joy and the both dramatists made them the explicit credo of some of their characters. Caragiale's Catindatul[10] is a fan of boozing and distraction, and so is Sir Andrew: "I delight in masques and revels sometimes altogether" (*Twelfth Night*, 75).

Commenting on *Twelfth Night,* Leon Levițchi noticed that the moral design of the play is concentric-circular, organized around a vital, amoral, irresponsible and joyful group.[11] *D-ale carnavalului* is based on an equally complicated moral structure, in which the barber Nae Girimea is the amoral center of the system and around this core there are some pairs of satellite characters: his apprentice Iordache and the Catindatul, on the one hand, and his two mistresses, on the other hand, having as satellites of their own: the other lovers who financially support them, Pampon and Crăcănel. The duplicitous games and the immorality are hallucinating and they grow exponentially as we are getting closer to the exterior circles of the system. There is no one here who would like to stop the spreading out of immorality. Catindatul, for instance, although a secondary character himself, becomes the midpoint of a secondary plot, illustrating a different kind of immorality, non-erotic, but social and financial. He is a master of mystification at many levels, including his physical sensations. He is suffering of teeth pains, like Benedick, but when he enters the barber's shop, pretending that he wants his molar to be taken out, he is only trying to mystify his pain. He has no serious intention to get rid of his molar, but this is a useful device for his training into the art of mystification. All the characters of Caragiale's play indulge themselves in vulgarity and duplicity, no one is innocent, and no one wants to stay out of the immoral macro-system of dishonesty and trickery. The press of the time glossed a lot on the subject of the immorality of this play and the author was generally blamed for letting such characters step on the stage. But none of these could impinge on the playwright's belief that he had written his best comedy. Writing to his friend Missir, Caragiale explains that he had composed a better comedy, "showing an evident technical progress as compared with *The Lost Letter"* (*Opere VII*, 532-533). Should we ask where his confidence came from? Might it be, among other factors, a result of the author's feeling that he had extended the Shakespearian lesson of theatrical construction?

Carnival-like existence seems to be the ultimate form of "theatre within theatre" for both dramatists. Masquerades, disguises, farces, music, dance, costumes and masks – they all finally shed lights on the themes of "life as theatre" and "theatre as life". The plays *Twelfth Night* and *D-ale carnavalului* are about parties and are parties themselves, carnival nights in which every character wears a supplementary mask, superimposed on

[10] "Catindat" is a metathesis from "candidat", meaning "candidate" and here is defined as an eternal applicant, who never gets the job. See *D-ale carnavalului. Opere* 1, 223-321.

[11] Leon Levițchi, *Critical comments* on *Twelfth Night* in: Shakespeare, *Opere complete*, vol. 5. (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1986) 304.

the daily social mask, and no one shows his/her real face. Both playwrights are very subtle in playing with the essences and the appearances, and with letting each character discover new things about themselves and about others, things that they conveniently forget afterwards, so that the great comedy of life should go on, both on the stage and in real life. All the characters are ready for farces and frame-ups and they are always equipped for a carnival. Nae Girimea, for instance, has two different carnival costumes of his own. In the second act of *Much Ado About Nothing,* a masquerade is organized on the stage, like in Caragiale's last comedy. Both dramatists explored this form of excessive theatrical-like popular party, which becomes a hyper-frame of falsity in conventional human relations. The identity marks are hidden beyond the daily masks, but people are still allowed to wear supplementary masks, a kind of "masks of the masks".

The theatrical mechanism of *qui pro quo*-s has a huge comic potential and both dramatists used it frequently. To take only a few examples, in *Much Ado About Nothing* Margaret is taken for Hero, and in the same way Veta is taken for Zița in Caragiale's *O noapte furtunoasă.* In *The Comedy of Errors,* this mechanism becomes the main motor of the comic and so it happens in Caragiale's *D-ale carnavalului*, where everybody is taken for someone else. The errors are unfailing sources of comic effects with virtually unlimited theatrical potential. Caragiale, who constrains different people to become alike, radicalizes the theme of the physical similarity, which is reduplicated by Shakespeare in *The Comedy of Errors* as the twin brothers who have twin servants. In *D-ale Carnavalului*, the couples Pampon-Crăcănel and Mița-Didina are not physically identical, but they are impossible to distinguish when it comes to literary typology. Even Caragiale scholars are sometimes confused with their similarity. To push the game of the errors up to its ultimate limits, the two ladies swap their carnival costumes. Everyone is deeply hidden under multiple layers of masks and carnival costumes, but still their immorality is left outside the masks to be contemplated by the public.

Whilst Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* a play written at Quinn Elisabeth's request, is the comical history of the triumph of virtue and decency over immorality, *D-ale Carnavalului* is, on the contrary, a triumph of generalized immorality and lechery. Although all the characters found out the unpleasant truths, they chose to continue pretending that nothing happened. Pampon and Crăcănel, the sponsor-lovers of Didina and Mița are painfully aware of the fact that both their mistresses are having an affair with Nae Girimea, whom they first chase to kill, but finally they prefer to ignore such a small detail and continue their love life by the same rules. Didina and Mița, in their turn, discover the fact that none of them is the one and only beloved mistress of the barber, but they have to share him in order to keep the balance of their lives in a perfectly carnivalesque equilibrium. And no one has a bit of remorse. They all continue the game as if nothing had happened. In the last scene of the play Nae Girimea is whispering to his mistresses the schedule of their rendezvous for the next day. The barber is thus a character somehow related with Falstaff, as there is no proof that he loves any of the women in his life; he is just using them. The betrayed sponsor-lovers not only pretend to ignore his guilt, but they finally express their gratitude for the barber for the genuine favors he had made them both. Again Caragiale radicalizes the comic situation projecting it into disturbingly uncanny forms, challenging the limits of the genre. Although they get the indisputable proof of having been betrayed by their mistresses, in the end they will be as contend as Mr. Ford and Mr. Page are. Even the

asymmetry between the gentle and thrusting Page and the angry jealous Ford is somehow kept by Caragiale's couple, in which the confident, more pacific Crăcănel is balanced by the aggressive Pampon, a former police officer.

Another thing that *Twelfth Night* and *D-ale carnavalului* have in common is their position into the complete works of the two dramatists; both represent the last serene comedies, before the tragedies or bleak and sober comedies. *Twelfth Night* stages the last of the celebration nights starting on Christmas evening. As it is well known, in the British Middle Ages a crowned Abbot or Lord of Misrule ruled these feasts. Caragiale's carnival also seems to be ruled by Girimea, as a different kind of King of the Fools, who consecrates the up-side-down order of things. After this play, the author never wrote a comedy again.

Năpasta, the only tragedy written by Caragiale, five years after *D-ale carnavalului,* has a theatrical configuration, which reminds of the Greek tragedy. The main female character Anca has been married for eight years to Dragomir, whom she suspects of murdering her first husband Dumitru, out of jealousy. She plans to avenge her beloved Dumitru, but only after the complete confirmation of her prophetic forebodings. Like Oedipus and Hamlet, Anca is searching for the truth, and this self-destructing quest gives meaning to her life. The madman Ion, who had been imprisoned for murdering Dumitru, accidentally escapes and (among all the places on earth) he comes exactly at the tavern owned by Dragomir and Anca. The woman interprets his coming as a sign from heaven to confirm her presentiments and help her decide the proper punishment for Dragomir, who had killed Dumitru and let Ion be imprisoned for a crime which he did not commit. Like Hamlet, she feels that something is very wrong, very "rotten," but would not take any action before she has strong evidence of his guilt.

Immediately after the premiere (February 3rd 1890), the theatrical reviews associated Caragiale's female character with *Hamlet.* The best-rated theatrical commentator of the age was Grigore Ventura, a less known dramatist himself and an inveterate enemy of Caragiale, as his wife, actress Fea Vermont had major conflicts with Caragiale during his directorship at the National Theatre in Bucharest, not to speak about the creative envy. In spite of his evident maliciousness, Ventura observed the Shakespearian links, when he pretended that Caragiale's Anca is "a kind of rural Hamlet in skirts" and Ion "a kind of Ofelia in slacks, meant to serve as a *pendant,* or pair for Hamlet in skirts" (*Opere 1*, 673-674). A few decades later, the association will be reformulated by an important Romanian critic, G. Călinescu, who also believes that "Anca is not a normal person" but "a monster, a female Hamlet."[12]

The fragility of the young Prince of Denmark was probably the reason for reshaping the Shakespearian role as a woman character. The power of hatred seems greater than the weakness of the arm that should punish a terrible crime.

In his famous *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, Hegel made subtle comments upon the metamorphosis of the Aristotelian tragic hero from Greeks' to Shakespeare's theater.[13] Nevertheless, Hamlet, with his "noble nature" and his "beautiful soul" seems

[12] G. Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în present* (Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, 1982) 500.

[13] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, Trans. F.P. B. Osmaston (New York: HackerArt Books, 1975).

to be still related with the typically Aristotelian tragic character, his fate illustrating, in fact, the failure of a noble man.

More radically affiliated to modernity, Caragiale's Anca is a simple peasant woman who is ready to do justice by any means, and she does not die in the end, as a genuine tragic heroine would do. Although at first she plans to let the madman Ion or Gheorghe (a young teacher who loves her) to kill her husband, Anca is also ready to slay Dragomir with her own hands, which makes her also a remote relative of the bloody lady Macbeth. It is but a way of saying that Dragomir's first crime is the beginning of a tragic series of events, which is able to generate new crimes, as it happens in Greek tragedy.

It was, of course, the common theme of the vengeance of a beloved family member which made the association possible, and also the fact that both characters are looking for the confirmation of their presentiments, using forms of "theatre within theatre." After he meets the phantom of his father, Hamlet is hiring a theatrical troupe to stage the scene of the murder in order to study the reactions of his uncle. Caragiale does not allow the specter to come on the stage, but he replaces the scene with a sinister exercise of imagination, directed by Anca, who is forcing Dragomir to visualize Dumitru's ghost coming to haunt him:

> Listen to me Dragomir… what if as we both stay here Dumitru (he makes an impulsive move) would slowly come through the door… look, that way… (she points to the backside of the stage) to see him coming, tall and vigorous as he used to be, and sitting there at the table face to face with you: *Well, good evening brother Dragomir... How are you?Do you remember me?...* (Dragomir is fretting on his chair and strongly clutches the table; she takes his head into her hands and tries to turn him forcibly towards the back) Look there… there he is… Look at him… Look at him!… Come, come Dumitru! (She tries to turn his head with all her strength) Do look at him… (*Opere 1*, 357).

While confronted with this virtual presence, which has been haunting his guilty conscience for years, Dragomir reacts strangely, showing his turmoil and anguish. But that was just the beginning of his distress, as immediately after that the madman Ion also enters the stage, although the morning newspaper declared him dead. For Dragomir, he seems just another ghost, which comes to haunt him. In terms of theatrical functionality, these two vaguely immaterial characters have the same effect upon Dragomir and upon the public as Hamlet's troupe of actors who are playing the murder on stage. They are both forms of "theatre within theatre" meant to reveal the hidden guilt and prepare the final punishment. Both Claudius and Dragomir strongly react to such stimuli and thus confirm their culpability. But while Claudius is allowed to leave the stage, Dragomir is forced to confess his crime and the woman finds the perfect punishment for him, as death would be too mild for his deeds. When Ion commits suicide, she tells the authorities that Dragomir killed the poor madman and thus he is to be punished for a crime that he did not do and he will also have to live with his real guilt. Like Macbeth, Dragomir is tormented by his guilty conscience and finally he becomes the real victim of his crime.

In terms of performing art, the characters of *Năpasta* were played by the greatest actors of the age. Aristizza Romanescu, distributed in Anca's role, described the inspiring creation of her colleague Nottara, as the madman, who was so much impressed of this role that many of his later creations were involuntarily related with that of the madman Ion (*Opere 1*, 662). Emil, a theatrical reviewer of the age, also mentioned the success of Nottara's role (*Opere 1*, 663). The attention given to the role of the madman comes from the special status gained by this type of character through the exercise of Shakespearian plays. Less impressed by Nottara's creation, another reviewer, Suchianu, claims that he was playing rather the role of an epileptic than that of a madman, which was unacceptable to him: "A madman is allowed to come on the stage, sometimes he is even funny with his up-side-down judgment (Shakespeare used three of them in *King Lear*), but never an epileptic" (*Opere 1*, 662). So it seems obvious that the Shakespearian productions had become a landmark, not only for the actors and the stage directors, but also for the public and the theatrical reviewers, who were now grading everything that was happening on the stage from the Shakespearian perspective.

To conclude this discussion on Shakespeare's audience, we have to keep in mind the profound originality of the theatrical typology created by Caragiale. Acknowledging the Shakespearian model, he was really creative in radicalizing some of the characters and plots, for which he always finds a new theatrical functionality and context, making them useful technical devices of his theatre. Like his master, he continually renewed his theatrical typology, from one play to another, and he incessantly looked for new patterns. The problem of knowledge and self-knowledge, which is always essential into the equation of comedy, functioned for both dramatists as a permanent quest for solutions. Caragiale invents his own obstacles for knowledge, especially the theme of stupidity (including self-delusion, egocentrism and vanity), the frame-ups (with the entire technical apparatus: disguise, travesty, masks etc.), and a malevolent fatality. All of them are associated with ingenious forms of "theatre within theatre".

La réception du canon shakespearien en Roumanie, au XIX e siècle

Cette étude examine la réception du canon shakespearien en Roumanie, au XIX e siècle, et passe en revue les traductions et les commentaires critiques les plus importants, ainsi que les mises en scène et leur emprise sur le milieu culturel roumain. L'étude de cas proposée, pour illustrer les profits/avantages considérables dus a la rencontre avec le théâtre de Shakespeare, est centrée sur l'influence enrichissante du dramaturge anglais sur le théâtre de Caragiale, qui s'approprie la leçon shakespearienne, tout en inventant d'autres procédées, personnages et situations scéniques. Pour Caragiale, Shakespeare représente un défi majeur et, en même temps, une impulsion d'acquérir une certaine renommée au-delà de l'espace culturel d'origine.

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