I.L. Caragiale. Stage Reinterpretations

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The Director as co-author

Emerging in the realm of creation only towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, and being fully acknowledged as stage director, with everything that the term implies, only after the Second World War, the director has become in the last decades the most important creative presence in the scenic hierarchy. The success or failure of a production depends to a great extent on her inspiration and her capacity to melt into a unifying vision the text, the performance of the actors, the scenography, the music, the stage lighting etc. the coming to the foreground of the director, as the main of the theatrical art, also brought about other transformations. The art of the dramatic entertainment individualized itself from the theatre as literature (the dramaturgy), the former being a live art form, a show performed in front of the audience, while the latter has to do with the written word, meant to be read by those who are interested in it. In the stage practice of the last decades, from the "Kilometre Zero" of the theatre, the play has become a foundation on which the director builds her own work of art, developing in a beneficent way or betraying the written text. The text as pretext perfectly illustrates the present situation, in which textocentrism handed over the main role to directing, as an engine of reinterpretation. Contemporary directors have become, alongside the playwrights, co-authors of the shows, cultural products which are anchored in the dramatic work but also acquire their independence as individual works of art. Textocentrism, which dominated the theatre for centuries, evolved towards the preeminence of the director, who uses the text as a starting point for her own creation. The status of author that the director adopts has its origins in different actions typical to the act of creation: the reinterpretation of the play, the revelation of new semantic aspects, highlighted by the show; the updating of the story and of the characters, underlining the universal quality of the work, a work that agrees with resemantisation; the re/writing of the play by adding, compressing, combining fragments from different plays in one's own script etc. The techniques listed here are specific to the art of the stage, and they stand as a proof of the semantic elasticity of the primary, written work, its quality as an open work. What matters the most is the

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interpretative relevance of the directorial vision, the degree to which and the way it has an aesthetic contribution to the revitalizing of a work. From this perspective, we will analyze the productions of some of the most successful Romanian directors of the last theatrical seasons.

Even I.L. Caragiale was aware of the importance of the director in the staging of a show of quality. He was a gifted director himself, as every author is also the first director of his or her own plays. Sică Alexandrescu mentioned Garagiale's directorial qualities, quoting a letter that the playwright had sent to the management of the National Theater in Bucharest, at a time when theater was re-staging some of his older plays with new casts, without the contribution of a director. The playwright would clearly underline that the plays "…would require radically new stagings, and not some semi-improvised, careless ones, without any artistic qualities" (Alexandrescu 1962: 8).

The intellectualised humour – Mihai Măniuțiu

O noapte furtunoasă (*A Stormy Night*)[1], staged by Mihai Mănuțiu at the Odeon theater in Bucharest foyer, with low-key period music and a photography exhibition with period photos in sepia, that help you to get familiarized with the atmosphere of Caragiale's world. The curtain rises and we see Jupân Dumitrache (Marin Morariu) and Nae Ipingescu (Gheorghe Dinică), sitting and talking. What comes next is focused, in Măniuțiu's artistic vision, on the characters. The characters are even more important than the words they utter. The script is observed religiously, as well as the situations that make them exist as stage biographies. That is why the director used star actors, actors whose status is a guarantee that they would have the spotlight in the show. The dialogue at the start of the play, between Nae Ipingescu and Jupân Dumitrache, observes the rule of the snowball; the verbal avalanche is triggered by Dumitrache's concern for his "honor as a family man," and the flow is amplified by "tell me about it," Ipingescu's verbal tic. The directorial emphasis falls on the triangle in the foreground, Veta-Zița-Chiriac, that the director interpreted by making use of the *contre-emploi*. Veta (Oana Pellea) is a neurasthenic, irritated by her sister's verbal onslaughts to such an extent that she ends up filling her ears with cotton. When pleading her innocence, Veta has in her arms a live hen, which she will pluck in one of the following scenes, throwing around her feathers – the gentle creature is an ironic self-portrait. Zița (Dorina Lazăr) is middle-aged, slightly overweight, dressed in pink, having the postures and the manner of speaking of a diva, tortured by her high-heel shoes, wearing make-up in excess and fainting whenever there is a situation that could jeopardize her future with Rică Venturiano. Chiriac (Marcel Iureș) is addicted to his relationship with Veta, who makes him walk and neigh like a stallion. The affective relations with Veta are imagined in a parodic, melodramatic key, the love-making scenes taking place in a barn with nude statues and Cupids. Spiridon (Marius Stănescu) is in love with Zița, and Rică Venturiano (Marian Râlea) is a weak person, morally more than

[1] Odeon Theater and SMART, 1998; director–Alexandru Dabija; scenery – Octavian Neculai; costumes – Janine; the cast: Jupân Dumitrache – Marin Moraru, Nae Ipingescu – Gh Dinică, Veta – Oana Pellea, Chiriac – Marcel Iureș, Rică Venturiano – Marian Râlea, Zița – Dorina Lazăr, Spiridon – Marius Stănescu.

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physically, running away when discerning, through his very thick glasses, the chaos he brings about, and anticipates a denouement that could be painful for him. Another element that bears Măniuțiu's artistic print is the rhythm. Everything is much calmer, the characters/actors ar not so frantic anymore, the humor is more cerebral. It is not just a coincidence that another show he staged in 1992 for the National Theater in Cluj was entitled… *Am râs destul!* (*Enough with the Laughter!*), synthesizing the director's approach to the work of our classic playwright. The scenographers imagined a scenery that evoked a world that comes into existence, a house with scaffolds all over the place. The carpet of dried leaves suggests the decline of a world, and the construction in the background is also the beginning of a new one, especially so after a locomotive, the whistles of which can be heard from time to time, along the way, enters the foreground at the end bringing down the „dump", to everybody's amazement. *Grande finale*!

Between the trivial and the sublime – Alexandru Dabija

The expectations of literary critic Dan C. Mihăilescu, who would like to see one of our theater critics stage all of Caragiale's plays does not seem realistic to me. In the theater, things are different from literary criticism, where one shows the full potential of her or his capabilities by analyzing the entire creation of a writer. Directing a play is also a type of hermeneutics, but of a special kind, different from the literary one, as it first and foremost creation, and only then interpretation. In the theater, creating means finding a personal key to the stage interpretation of a certain text, and using the same mechanisms in the staging of different plays could be considered redundant, if not a proof of one's lack of inspiration. For instance, how could someone stage in the same way *Năpasta* (*The Affliction*) and *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*).

However, the closest to the critic's ideal was Alexandru Dabija's project. He staged in 2011 and 2012 two plays, with a common theme. My attention was caught by *O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Stormy Night*) (the "Vasile Alecsandri" National Theater, Iaşi) and *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*) (the Theater for Comedy, Bucharest). As all the directors have been doing, in the last half of the century, Dabija is also reinterpreting creatively a dramatic text, becoming the co-author, with the playwright, in rendering the dramatic work to the public. Theater as literature is now of interest only for specialists, who read plays professionally. In his two stagings, Alexandru Dabija follows two complementary exegetic directions. In his version from the Iaşi National Theater, he accentuates the triviality of the world he presents, until it becomes vulgar. In his version from Bucharest, as it is explained in a brochure handed to the spectators, the play is performed "in the *underground*, it is an open, violent performance. It is exact, simple and very direct. It implies many psychological meanders, a great deal of psychological richness, the type of comic which is closer to Cehov's style, rather than to the amusement park".

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In his project from Iaşi, the staging of *O noapte furtunoasă* (*A Stormy Night*)[2], the poster of the show announced what the public was going to see: the camera zoomed on the fly opening of a man's pair of pants hold up by a rope that dangles, more than significantly, between the legs of the subject! Alexandru Dabija moved the center of Caragiale's world on this anatomical part of the character, rewriting the play for the stage in the key of the voluptuous trivial. A scabrous Caragiale is what Dabija is offering, an intentional submersion into the dejection of the human condition, by using a scenic discourse that jams the play unsuccessfully into the parodic, claiming to render contemporary behaviours. Defecation, urination, masturbation, copulation come to the foreground of this version, while everything happens in a house under construction, from a slum area. We have already encountered this idea of a world "under construction" in Mihai Măniuțiu's staging at the Odeon, in 1998, and Caragiale had already sank into the mud of the slums in Lucian Pintilie's film, *De ce trag clopotele, Mitică*? (*Why Do the Bells Toll, Mitică*?) In such an universe, the latrine is more important than the house itself, or any of its extensions. The outdoor is placed not in the backyard, but in the street, and one can hear, coming from there, the more than familiar sounds of defecation. The exaggeration of some of the gestures, of some attitudes and the frequent insistence on them is annoying and gives the impression of lack of inspiration. It is also from the toilet that the magazine *Vocea patriotului național* (*The Voice of the National Patriot*) is read, but the reading does not trigger our laughter, as Caragiale intended. The comic of the language is lost along the way, and not only in this moment of the show, but throughout the entire performance, drowning in the *cloaca maxima.* It is also in the latrine that Spiridon masturbates, a character that becomes almost grotesque, in this version: a *voyeurist* and an amateur of sexual fetishes, who is permanently patting and pinching Veta and Zița. The radical change of theatrical portrait is applied to most of the characters, in the sense of a primitive debauchery of sexuality and coupling. All seem to have the hots. When speaking about his "honor as a family man," Jupân Dumitrache is holding his genitals and is mimicking masturbation, the range of obscene gestures continuing with eloquent movements of the hips. Rică is courting Zița in his underwear, starting to get undressed as soon as he enters the yard, mentioning the flirt at the Union restaurant, by suggestively moving his hips; and when Chiriac "bangs" Veta, he actually makes the whole place rock, after which he proudly and lengthily urinates, from the first floor. The animal side of the characters is dominant and defines them: phlegm, urine, gases, feces, seminal fluids. Jupân Dumitrache is domineering, self-assured, emanating power to such an extent that one ends up by wondering why Veta has an extramarital relationship with Chiriac!? The relationships of dramatic logic among the characters are affected at different levels. The shop clerk is a virile person with a mental handicap, wearing a massive belt and a hunter's hat; Zița is a hysterical, ill-bred person who wears a dishabille and slippers; Veta is devitalised, dull, insignificant.

[2] The "Vasile Alecsandri" National Theater, Iași, 2011; director – Al. Dabija; scenography – Dragoș Buhagiar; the cast: Jupân Dumitrache – Călin Chirilă, Nae Ipingescu – Florin Mircea, Veta – Petronela Grigorescu, Chiriac – Dumitru Năstrușnicu, Rică Venturiano – Cosmin Maxim, Zița – Haruna Condurache, Spiridon – Doru Aftanasiu.

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Everybody is shouting, running about and overacting. Caragiale is reinterpreted through the use of thick humour, specific to poor TV shows.

In his Comedy Theater staging of *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*)[3], Dabija doesn't necessarily bring the action into the present. In fact, Eugène Ionesco said it brilliantly: „starting with individuals from his own period, Caragiale is a critic of people from any kind of society" (Ionesco 1992: 154). The action takes place in a period which is not specified, the costumes do not indicate a certain period, it could be any of the moments in our recent history. But what is underlined, unfortunately, validates the hurtful reality of dramatic characters and situations created one hundred years ago. The action is placed in an unwholesome interior, a basement or an attic, eaten away by humidity, a perfect environment for molds, fungi (which are turned into a party emblem) that thrive here. This stands for society, of course. Dabija does not change the text, he observes it rigorously, but he alters the characters, delicately reshaping them, with the help of the actors. He also uses an original score and brings the public into the performance, adding new sources of humour to the comical elements found in the original text, using techniques specific to the stage. The allusions to the present-day political situation is not ostentatious, it comes naturally: Cațavencu gives his speech shedding rivers of tears and one can almost hear president Băsescu's famous line, „Dear Stolo…"; Zoe is a blonde, beautiful and very elegant – take a guess and tell me what politician she could be?; Farfuridi and Brânzovenescu always carry around their ragbags, to move whenever they feel like it to whichever political party is more profitable, betrayal being a common currency; the Intoxicated citizen is obsessively repeating "And me, whom do I vote for?" as the voters in the audience, disenchanted with a primitive political class, people who do not know anymore how to cast their vote, as things never change after elections.

Cațavencu (Marcel Iureş) is completely remolded, as Dabija uses in a very efficient way the *contre-emploi*: tall, as thin as a pencil, dressed in black, he has nothing of the aggressive abjection in Caragiale's text. His immorality is hidden, and thus more dangerous. Even if he appears to be a humble person, his actions and insidious gestures are well calculated and carried out in cold blood, as if he were a predator. Iureş has a low-key, interiorized – and thus more intense – performance. The actor adds to the text a set of gestures that are more than suggestive, amplifying the comic of situation. Zaharia Trahanache (Valentin Teodosiu) has an imposing, massive stature, but a sing-song way of speaking, slowly uttering each syllable in a display of decrepitude and shuffling around in his slippers. Trahanache is remolded by reversing the proportions, he is a big baby: he snoozes, he urges people "to have just a little patience," he masters the secret mechanisms of the political game better that anyone else. Agamemnon Dandanache (George Mihăiță) is a strong person, who can whistle loudly, boozes with the voters, is slightly amnesic, mixing up the

[3] The Comedy Theater, Bucharest, 2011; director – Alexandru Dabija; scenery – Puiu Antemir; costumes – Anca Răduță; muzic – Ada Milea; the cast: Agamemnon Dandanache –George Mihăiță, Zaharia Trahanache – Valentin Teodosiu, Tache Farfuridi – Florin Dobrovici, Iordache Brânzovenescu – Eugen Racoți, Nae Cațavencu – Marcel Iureş, Ghiță Pristanda – Dragoş Huluba, Un cetățean turmentat (an Intoxicated citizen) – Dorina Chiriac, Zoe Trahanache – Mihaela Teleoacă, Ionescu – Dan Rădulescu.

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people and their identities, but knowing that blackmail is the best political weapon. The Intoxicated citizen is Dorina Chiriac, in travesty. Petite, explosive, she is the buffoon of the entire confusion of the day before the elections and, paradoxically, the sole honest person in this world filed with insanities. The public itself is transformed into a collective character, being included in the show. An actor is placed in the hall, among the spectators, reacting verbally during the speeches given at the party reunion. It is not only an element of surprise; he has a double role: he expands the sphere of the action by theatralizing the audience and he is an additional source of humour.

The pleasure of the carnival – Silviu Purcărete

For those who are familiar with Silviu Purcărete's directorial poetics, it was natural for him to stage *D'ale carnavalului* (*Scenes from a Carnival*), by I.L. Caragiale[4]. His aesthetic attraction for the farce, for the world of the fairs, the hedonism of the carnival, of the entangled stories and of the anecdotic, his capacity to move on the stage a numerous cast are distinctive traits of his artistic style. He had probably meditated for a long time, discreetly, as he usually does, waiting for the right moment and for the right theatrical company. He found them at the "Radu Stanca" National Theater in Sibiu, where he had already successfully staged other plays. A partisan of the classical text, Purcărete strictly observed Caragiale's words, down to the smallest detail, building on this foundation a performance the originality of which has as a starting point the characters' lines and dramatic situations. The *mise en scene* is perfectly spherical: a truck comes from the off-stage in reverse gear, and some figurants start revealing some scenery elements that actively furnish the stage, and in the end everything is removed from the stage in the same way. Underneath all this, there is an implicit message: "The Circus is coming!"; and this is what happens, indeed, as the people on stage display with scenic naturalness a sarabande of funny events. The play is convincingly staged, as the performance makes the most of the author's words and the comic qualities of the play, while adding to this the means that are specific to a theatrical representation. The string of amorous betrayals of the petty world of ruined inhabitants of the slums is localized in „Nae Girimia's Model Barbershop," the epicenter of the carnivalesque earthquake from which, in the end, no one has anything to loose, emotionally. Silviu Purcărete was extremely mindful with all the intentions of the play and he rigorously and accurately highlighted them. The scenic outline is very precise, no detail is missed, none is superfluously added. The entropy of the popular feast we become a part of is managed with precision, with great consideration for the details. To sum things up, it is a group portrait of a world that is defined by the difference between what it really is and what it strives to be. It is a world where Persian rugs lay directly on the earthen floor – a thick layer of clay covers the whole stage – a world where people

[4] The "Radu Stanca" National Theater, 2011; director – Silviu Purcărete; scenography – Dragoș Buhagiar; music – Vasile Șirli; the cast: Iordache – Marius Turdeanu, Iancu Pampon – Constantin Chiriac, Mița Baston – Ofelia Popii, Catindatul – Liviu Pancu, Crăcănel – Adrian Matioc, Nae Girimea – Nicu Mihoc, Didina Mazu – Cristina Ragos, Raluca Iani, Serenela Mureşan, Ipistatul (The policeman) – Cristian Stanca, A waiter – Vali Pecsei etc.

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wear expensive shoes and clothes, but take their shoes off when they enter the barber's shop, because they feel more comfortable in felt shoes or rubber shoes. The bear, the smell of grilled minced meat rolls, the ingestion of edible props (sausages, onions, green cheese, radishes, slow roasted cabbage stew), all this is for good, nothing is mimicked, complementing the originary verism of the play. The performance has some memorable moments, one of them being Nae Girimia's entrance (Nicu Mihoc), suggestive of the style of the silent movies: elegantly dressed, with a small moustache, similar to Charlie Chaplin's famous character, he slowly crosses the stage, he poses to the public, with the smile of a dandy, accessorized with a white boom box, from the speakers of which comes the sound of the aria "Casta diva," from Bellini's *Norma*! Later on, he will say "Exactly like in *Norma*," when acting as a referee in the confrontation between Mița and Didina, moment in which the lid of the small boom box opens like the mouth of a soprano and high-pitched sounds blast out, suggesting the confrontation of the two mistresses.

Silviu Purcărete's well-known creativity comes to light once again, as every scene of the performance amazes you in one way or another. Parodically, in the feasting crowd, Crăcănel (Adrian Matioc) is running after a child who is dressed exactly like Pampon (Constantin Chiriac), thus seeking revenge for the physical differences and the beating he had been given, before; Mița Baston (Ofelia Popii) is a clumsy republican, who gets slammed by a door in the head, who stumbles around and falls to the ground or is thrown into the nylon pile gathered by the garbage men; her relationship with Nae is electrifying, literally: sparkles come out, when they touch; Didina Mazu is multiplied by three (Cristina Ragos, Raluca Iani, Serenela Mureșan), suggesting the barber's insatiable lust for mistresses and satisfying the director's need for multitudes; the massive Pampon regularly takes a pill, fearing to run or to get caught in a crisis situation, as he „suffers of heartbeats"; Crăcănel's clothes match Mița's – they wear identical fur coats, but in the madness of the carnival the lank man puts on the smaller coat, becoming even more hilarious. The choir, always present in Purcărete's stagings, is composed here of the people attending the popular feast and by the small orchestra, „*D-ale* band," whose short instrumental contributions have the qualities of a potential hit – although it is simple and brief, it is impossible to get it out of your head, once you hear it!

A real team effort, *D'ale carnavalului* (*Scenes from a Carnival*) has one more fundamental quality: homogeneity. The scenery, the actors, the aural elements, all the parts support each other and come together in an organic whole. Improvising proved to be a successful effort. Dragoș Buhagiar's scenography is dynamic, the scenic spaces succeed each other to the needs of the theatrical action, they are diverse, they undergo multiple metamorphoses. A plain door, a barber's chair, a barbecue, a few boxes with bottles and three or four tables are capable of delimiting and of defining distinct spaces, leaving to the audience the task of completing the setting with their imagination. Although they are shallow, the characters created by Caragiale are rather pleasant, in the show from Sibiu. This is how the author also treated them: without concessions, but affectionately, inviting us to laugh at them, or rather, with them, and to forgive them. This is also how Silviu Purcărete renders them, using the best possible approach, in the rhythm of the carnival.

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The travesty as an additional source of comic – Tompa Gabor

The political world seen as a huge toilet – but one that shines with cleanliness – becomes the scenographic ambient of Tompa Gabor's staging of *O scrisoare pierdutã* (*A Lost Letter)*, at the Hungarian Theater in Cluj-Napoca (2005)[5]. The director had a brilliant idea: all the actors are in travesty! Some directors change the role of the travesty, from an acting technique to a means of underscoring new semantic qualities in some classical texts, reevaluating, through this radical transformation of the characters, the very meaning of the dramatic work. Tompa Gabor imagined a "revolutionar" *O scrisoare pierdutã* (*A Lost Letter*), making the line "Zoe, be a man" its starting point. All the characters are interpreted by women costumed as men, except Zoe, who is a man and is dressed as such, but who insists on his feminine side. At a quick evaluation, when watching the show, one would think that the use of the travesty is useful to the director's search for novel sources of humour, that would be added to the comic of situation, the text and the characters. The idea that structures Gabor's version is the use of actresses for the male characters and of the actors – or rather, of one actor – for the only feminine part. Cațavencu, Tipătescu (both of them, significantly, blondes!), Farfuridi, Dandanache and the entire entourage of political friends and enemies are incarnated by women, and only Zoe is interpreted by Miklos Bacs. When it comes to the use of the disguise, one should not look too far for a justification; it can be found in the line "Zoe, be a man," literally transposed and transformed into a pivotal axis. We can also identify in the director's idea a theme for a cultural debate: the power relationships, genuine or only apparent, between the masculine and the feminine, the powerful women who are behind successful men, the feminine side of every man, who deals the cards in politics etc. analyzing this version more carefully, sometime after watching the show, the travesty proves to be more than a simple trick used to force a smile on the spectators' faces. Tompa Gabor is actually working together with Caragiale, becoming the co-author of the play through his directorial perspective that structurally reverses the perspective on the male and female characters of the play. The travesty becomes a technique of dramatic composition. The density of the semantic texture of the staging is increased, and the re-interpretation of the meanings of the source text by using the travesty is one of the director's contributions. For Tompa Gabor, the troublesome letter gets lost in a community that is undermined by the virus of poverty, of the absurd, a community that has to be sanitized, disinfected. The upside down world in Caragiale's work is enhanced in the performance from Cluj by the radical gender reversal. The idea is not for the cast to hide their true chromosomal affiliation, the characters are not effeminate or emasculated. The travesty is "in the open"; it is reflected in some make-up or in the costumes. The controlled thickening of the voice comes as another

[5] The Hungarian State Theater in Cluj Napoca, 2005; director – Gábor Tompa; text adaptation – András Visky; scenery – T.Th. Ciupe; costumes – Carmencita Brojboiu; choreography – Vava Ștefănescu; the cast: Ștefan Tipătescu – Tünde Skovrán, Agamiță Dandanache – Melinda Kántor, Zaharia Trahanache – Andrea Kali, Tache Farfuridi – Kati Panek, Brînzovenescu – Csilla Albert, Nae Cațavencu – Imola Kézdi/Hilda Péter, Ionescu – Andrea Vindis, Popescu – Réka Csutak, Ghiță Pristanda – Júlia Laczó, Elderly woman – Júlia Albert, Zoe Trahanache – Miklós Bács, an Intoxicated citizen – Emőke Boldizsár, Coriphaeus – Enikő Györgyjakab.

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element. The most striking effect is in the case of Miklós Bács, with his explosive histrionism, a histrionism, however, that does not overwhelm the other actors on stage. His Zoe is an image of virility, dressed in a period costume, a man's suit plus a derby hat, both white. Zoe is epitomized in the masculine expression of her personality, she is the hybrid that makes you laugh, but she I also the ferment of this obsessed community that is on the threshold of the elections, of getting access to a "bone" to chew on. It is an upside down world with no logic, self-sufficient, in its mad entropy. The actors are remarkable, in travesty. What is the key to their success? First of all a special capacity to undergo such a metamorphosis. It is a complete metamorphosis, as it implies a generic transformation and it targets the exteriority of the theatrical interpretation. From this perspective, they find a support for their interpretation in the costumes, the make-up, the hair-dressing. From the point of view of the instruments that the actor can use, the travesty uses corporeality, gestures, voice. The travesty stands for what is complementary, for what you are not, structurally, but you build yourself into, for the duration of the performance. The intentional, studied tampering with the differences between the two fundamental principles that structure the world implies a perfect control of the corporal and vocal imagination, straining to the maximum the technical dexterity of the actors. The masculinisation of feminity and te feminisation of masculinity, this is how the travesty could be defined. The absolute mask. A mask which is useful both in comedies, and in tragedies. The travesty with comical qualities is, so to speak, a negative travesty, a travesty that banks on the burlesque and the caricature. Used in dramatic contexts, the travesty becomes serious, positive, it amplifies the gravity, the tragic. Having to do most of all with the physical expression of the actors/actresses, the travesty becomes the equivalent of the actor's chameleonic qualities of her or his mimetic capabilities. It has more than one theatrical use; from the technique of constructing a character to that of the performance's composition, it is a source for augmenting the comical elements or of enhancing the tragic ones. The travesty – leaving behind one's own gender and the complementary transformation – is, in the end, a proof of mastery for the actors.

Claudiu Goga also uses the travesty, in his version of *Conu´ Leonida față cu reacțiunea* (*Master Leonida Faces the Reactionaries*), 1998[6], a stage version where Efimița was interpreted by the corpulent Adrian Rățoi, while Leonida, by a frail person like Mircea Andreescu. The director exploited another element that is specific to Caragiale's plays: the fascination of the characters or what is written in the newspapers, the pleasure they take in reading and interpreting the articles. Goga uses these elements by imagining a scenography (Viorel Penișoară-Stegaru) dominated by such publications. The stage is crammed with such materials: piles of newspapers are on the floor, among suitcases; the bed is supported by stacks of papers, and when the noise coming from outside frightens them, the protagonists block the door with newspapers, trying to protect themselves from the world outside.

[6] The "Sică Alexandrescu" Theater, Brașov, 1998; director, Claudiu Goga; scenography, Vorel Penișoară Stegaru, with Mircea Andreescu – Conu Leonida, Adrian Rățoi – Efimița, Nina Zăinescu – Safta.

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Postdramatic, postmdern

Whether we talk about relocating the action of the play in the present, by bringing the scenery, the costumes and he characters' behaviour into the present, or about the insistence on the "thick paste" of his texts, about the rethinking of the characters from angles that do not clash with the written text, by using the scenic art, the travesty or the *contre-emploi*, or about underscoring the carnivalesque elements, the scenic versions of the Romanian directors that we have taken as examples are, each of them in its own way, an original reinterpretation of I.L. Caragiale's work. By re-writing the play from the director's perspective, that is, by creating the *mise en scène*. In a posthumous partnership, I.L. Caragiale the director joins forces with the present-day directors, offering them a resourceful dramatic material, that allows multiple scenic developments. The written work benefits from it, as its potential is made available to the public; the artists also benefit from it, as they have at their disposal a valuable dramatic material; finally, the spectators have only to gain from it, as the written text is offered to them through a living art.

"The greatest of the unknown playwrights", as Eugène Ionesco depicted him, regretting the fact that his plays were written "in a language without a global circulation" (Ionesco 1992: 153), should be the subject of an ample promoting program abroad. Considered "le Molière roumain", I.L. Caragiale deserves to be known all over the world. The director's merit is that through his show, he delivers it to the public in the most active and direct way. The theatrical literary theory, one's own style and the written text are brought together on stage by his artistic interpretation. With every new staging that is relevant, from an aesthetic point of view, the stage "exegesis" becomes richer.

In the end, keeping in tone with Caragiale, I suggest an exercise of imagination. How would the staging of Caragiale's plays look like, according to the postdramatic canon? It would be a project in which the re-writing of his plays would make such dramatic situations possible: the lost letter would get to a newspaper; Zoe would meet Rică Venturiano, to prevent the publication of the letter; Veta would ask for Master Leonida's help and Zița, for Agamiță Dandanache's, to solve their amorous problems; Jupân Dumitrache would find out about his wifes' indiscretion from an article written by Cațavencu a.s.o. Such a possible development unsettles the more conservative individuals, who find it disrespectful. However, such re-writings are frequent in the Western dramaturgy, and in the United States. There would be no harm in doing this. On the contrary, they would bring forward classic authors and plays, developing them playfully, uncovering their universal qualities.

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Abstract

The essay *I.L. Caragiale. Stage reinterpretations* is an analysis of the different aesthetic reinterpretations of Caragiale's plays from the last two decades, by some of the most important Romanian theater directors. All this has been done not just for the delight of the spectators and of the specialists; it is also a proof of the desire to rediscover creatively new meanings in Caragiale's plays. Some of the directors chosen as examples here are Silviu Purcărete, Tompa Gabor, Alexandru Dabija, Mihai Măniuțiu, all of them having significant contributions to the recent theatrical art, directors for whom Caragiale has constantly been a source of inspiration. Using their craft to reinterpret, for the stage, the dramatic text, these directors brought their contribution to the hermeneutics of our great classical playwright's work. This was done not through academic exegesis, but by the means of theatrical creations that reveal their great creative potential, their artistic inspiration and their innovative capacity when dealing with works that are known to almost everyone, from an early age, in school. These profoundly original creations are important contributions to the spectacology associated with Caragiale's work. In the case of dramatic works, the spectacological exegesis is at least as important as the philological one, as the contemporary director also assumes the role of co-author, when staging a play, even when it is a classical one.

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