CARAGIALE'S CRITICAL AND IRONICAL PUBLISHING DISCOURSE: "1907-FROM SPRING TO AUTUMN"[1]

Abstract*: A skilled practitioner of irony, which he uses to criticize the habits and deeds of his fellow citizens, Ion Luca Caragiale writes the article* "1907 – from Spring to Autumn", *a comprehensive study on the causes of peasant revolts. The critical comments are so violent and full of cruel irony that they cause an equally strong critique, especially for the fact that the writer refers to the era's political parties and their governance practices and also the difference between appearance and essence in the functioning of state institutions. This paper will show the way Caragiale demonstrates, from the self-imposed exile, by means of critical discourse and satire, that the Romania of his time is under political domination of a ruthless oligarchy, insensitive to the social and economic realities, especially the serious situation the peasants struggle in.*

Keywords*: ironic, oligarchy, peasant uprisings.*

The Romanian journalist Ion Luca Caragiale has used in the writing of his literary works, whether novels, stories, sketches or moments by the incidents that were happening in his real life. He took his literary sap from the breweries where he liked to spend time seeking for characters used in theater plays, or a source of inspiration was the meetings with the intellectuals and political groups that he had affinity for. Tired of the political and literary mascarade he was living and unable to change anything in the tormented Romania of his time, Caragiale has chosen to exile in Berlin in 1905. He chose Berlin after long searches of a city to represent him and to be folded on his personality. On March 14, 1905, after he settled in Berlin, Caragiale wrote humorously to Dr. Alceu Urechia: "Cry me! At this point, I put in my mouth the first loaf of exile. I greet you with a hunger of someone demon-possessed, would I eat you!" (Cioculescu, 1968: 20) In Berlin, he has established in Wilmersdorf district of villas, in a spacious apartment, overlooking the square with a fountain, flowers and greenery. His room for work, space being essential to the author, was oriented to the north, as the sun does not blind him. Inside was an austere, without luxury and opulence, "the furniture was simple: a bed, a desk, several chairs, bookshelves, the portraits of parents, in natural size, on the wall in front of the bed." (Cioculescu, 1967: 124)

Although he left the country with a willful decision to not come back, Caragiale could not be in peace without reading the news from the Romanian newspapers, or not regularly receiving the latest releases of the bookstores. Also, in order to maintain a live connection with his native country, Caragiale had epistolary links with old friends: Vlahuță, Delavrancea, Missir, Dr. Alceu Urechia, from who he collected all the information needed in order not to lose touch with the country. Vlahuță was the one who provided him information on "40 years anniversary celebrations of the reign of King Carol, with scandalous contrast between the splendor of festivities and the misery of the village, haunted by drought and tenants, the landlords, the fiscal and administrative stuff." (Cioculescu, 1967: 127)

The year 1907 was crucial both in Romania's political history and in defyning the political thought of Caragiale "event has the gift to shake him in the most intimate sensitivity fibers and induce him to take a bluntly attitude." (Cioculescu, 1967: 127) Riots erupted in the spring of 1907, raised people across Romania from one end to

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another, "as a conflagration favored by the hurricane." (Cioculescu, 1967: 127) Caragiale was an emotional and did not cultivated sensibility in his work. It seemed indecent to him to make your feelings public, your sentimental confession, the advertising of feeling. Cioculescu believed that the "cynical", as Caragiale liked to be called, made his mask of impassibility. He used this mask and made it a lifestyle. The fact that he was physically broken, and just physically, by his country, because only then he succeeded, was a gesture of releasing for I. L. Caragiale. The country for which he fought as he had known better, on either side of the barricade, it greatly disappointed him, hitting him in his pride and sentiment. However, the suffering caused by the injustice offered by his country was not enough to erase from his soul the love for country, the nostalgia for times past and hope to a better future. Caragiale felt bound by homeland across multiple invisible threads. The tragic events of 1907 have challenged the unconfessed sensitivity of the great satirist.

His son recalled how his father reacted to the news about the peasant uprising of 1907:

> in that man who always satirized the patriotic enthusiasms, a horrible suffering start to boil. He stayed motionless for days, with head resting in his hands ... Then the despair was quelled by riot. He shout it makes better for boyars. He wanted to go to see what was happening in his country and the despair paralyzed him again. (Cioculescu, 1967: 128)

That was the moment when the journalist lost tranquility and sleep and wanted to leave to his country to see what happens. Following these experiences, Caragiale wrote in one night, which meant the text of the article *1907 – from Spring to Autumn*, translated into German by the writer Mite Kremnitz and published in Viennese newspaper *Die Zeit* on April 3, 1907, under the pseudonym *a Romanian patriot*. Cioculescu remarked concerning this topic that "we can say, without any intention of paradox, that never the anonymity didn't revealed more deeper the true moral identity of the forever man, who could take...the motto *prodeo larvatus* (step masked)." (Zarifopol, 1942: 81-83) The uprising of 1907 resulted in 11,000 deaths and entire villages destroyed by artillery.

Full brochure, completed in November, sold immediately, so that at the end of 1907 was released a new edition, which exceeded 10,000 copies. Caragiale advocate in his brochure for social justice, for the entry of the people in their rights by allowing them to decide their own fate by introducing universal suffrage, by allotting land to the peasants, as the fundamental reform: "social injustice had to fall, with Gentlefolk system, as Caragiale called it, once with the Constitution anachronistic and all the laws, which forbade people the access to vote and the rights for to land they worked." (Cioculescu, 1967: 129) The critic Mihail Dragomirescu had the courage to reproduce in his magazine *Convorbiri*, the Romanian text of the article, around which all the politicians, the government and the opposition, with its press, have ordered silence. At the appearance of the booklet, Delavrancea, former mayor of Bucharest and future Tory minister, was enthusiastic:

> I read the big picture: the cause of peasant rebellions. Wonder! Yesterday I was at Capşa with a journalist and with P.L.- I reread. Wonder! They left with gaping mouths. I looked! Wonder! Wonder! That's the truth. The cultural superficiality. Renting power. The thievery parties etc.. Reform!...until we reform ourselves?...To live. Ah! much...I never read the...to live! I know all booklets. God knows how many have been written. All at the press of the hydraulic press

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> to squeeze...squeeze them and you will not get a drop of sap of your article ... (October 17, 1907) (Cioculescu, 1967: 127)

In terms of Nicolae Iorga, Caragiale's study does not come with any new ideas and social criticism was so harsh, "as if it were not for his country." (Manolescu, 1983: 229) The booklet was divided into three parts, depending on the issues addressed, and the author's tone passed from ironic to dramatic. Part one, "the most positive of Caragiale's study, that shows a systematic understanding, a deeper one of the bourgeois-landlord society, seeks the causes of the uprisings in the socio-political composition of the country." (Iosifescu, 1952: 42) Caragiale's Romania was "a state of order par excellence", "the strongest element of civilization among the Balkan states, peace-loving and understanding, both in his social class relations, as well as in international relations." (Iosifescu, 1952: 42) In this manner, Caragiale showed us practically, the theme of the article, following a list of social and political realities of the early twentieth century. The irony of the author has been observed since the beginning of the article, when he mentioned ironically about the reputation of a "strong element of civilization among the Balkan states." (Iosifescu, 1952: 42) Caragiale abandoned the ironic tone for one of a sharp denunciation, stating the reasons why "maybe it no State, in Europe at least, there is no so extravagant contrast between reality and appearance, between being and mask." (Iosifescu, 1952: 42)

Journalist began to refer to one of the major shortcomings of the Romanian society, namely, the difference between appearance and essence of the treacherous society running the country and oppressing it. Romania was a predominantly agricultural country, land being the main source of employment and subsistence of the people. The small owners, the peasants, lived the most difficult life, because, as explained Caragiale in the text, their share of land, fragmented to reach all the relatives, was not enough to produce in direct proportion to their needs, so they had to work also the land of large land owners, including the State, the Crown, the areas of privilege, cultural and charitable foundations, large landowners. Finally, the production had to be shared with the big owner, as they had made the agreement:

> they work from spring until autumn, from daybreak till dawn of the stars, and in autumn, according to the agreement, the peasant carries first of all to the tenants their part, to the barn or at the train station and only at the end, he has the right to take what is his part.
> (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011).

Over the winter, when they did not have where to work, the peasants were forced to borrow sums that had to pay in summer through their work. This resulted in continuous debt, from which peasants could not escape. The indignation from Caragiale's tone, illustrated the sense of rebellion of the unjustly poor peasants, condemned by the system and the group of interests existing then.

In his polemical speech, Caragiale has staged his ideas and presented to the public, to the ones foreign of the Romanian realities, how the Romanian peasants lead their life, seen by the author as a struggle for survival. In the first part of the paper, the writer with duplicitous speech, based on antiphrases, seemed to admire the young Romanian monarchy. The reality proved quite different and the play of discursive ironic has reflected both on the Romanian society of the era and on paper characters, players of the tragic comedy that the author was building: the journalist himself, the peasants, big landowners, medium owners, the King, the political parties, the tenants, Greeks and

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Jews as alien elements. If by this point, Caragiale presented the "generality", starting now was coming the particularity.

Some of the causes and effects of heavy life in 1907 were noted "in passing" by the publicist, sliping pleonasms allowed then by the language, archaisms and a highly critical tone. Caragiale gave precise explanations, mathematical, making a summary of the status quo:

> the cruelty of interest, common to the world, tightens here by the lack of national solidarity, by disregarding the traditions and public opinion, on one hand, by the boldness given by the corruptibility of the public administration, and on the other hand by protection of a foreign flag, or of a who knows who strongly universal alliance and through a violently spit manifesto towards the illiterate peasant, humiliated and long-suffering. What resulted from this system? Here: 1. The enrichment of so many large landowners, who have increased their expenditure as the leases increased, drowning into luxury wastage increasingly exaggerated based on hope of further progress on that income, 2. The phenomenal prosperity of the class of big tenants ... the prodigiously upsurge of the banks and credit institutions … disproportionate with an agricultural country, and 3. The misery of the poor… by squeezing the forces of the latter resulted the reckless luxury of the owners and the immeasurable enrichment of the leaseholders, and the enormous gains of the banks and the public administration tips and, yet, always the growing raising the state revenue.
> (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

Based on this economic realities was built a political class, appropriate to the times, with responsibilities in creating and enacting the peasants uprising, "the two so-called historical parties alternating in power, they are in fact, only two major factions, having each not partisan, but customers." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) Caragiale continued ironically: "naturally we do not doubt any patriotism, or their trusteeship intentions" (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) and desconsidered them using diminutives: "the hybrid product of schools of all levels, semi-cultured intellectuals, lawyers and little lawyers, professors, teachers and little teachers, free-thinker priests and inhibits, illiterate school teachers, - all theorists of beer - after they, big officials and little clerks, in their the vast majority, removable." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) The writer revolted and used writing as a tool for telling his sorrow, even thou he was in Berlin, far from the events in the his country. The Constitution and the electoral law in force, made so that the national representation was not actually having any value:

> the huge class of peasants, does not have, in proper speaking, any representative of its interests in the Rooms, even thou this huge class would have by law, the right to send (as the IIIrd electoral college), from across all country, about 20% of the members of the Chamber of Deputies. But the IIIrd college votes by the delegation and the delegates are all recruited from the plebs about who we have spoken earlier and imposed, without the possibility of resistance, to the peasants masses.
> (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

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The state administration didn't miss the comments and analysis of Caragiale. He divided it into two camps: the power and the opposition, both incapable of resisting to the popular uprising, made up by the "plebs, customers, university students and schoolchildren from schools, often led by university teachers" (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, accesat în 13.06.2011) and must be changed every three years "devoted to the good habits." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011). The political struggle was given noisy, with the support of political clients, students and high school students. The truth of Caragiale is also our truth, considering that the same thing continues to happen today, "one customer leaves, another comes; the hungry ones pass at the table, the satisfied to penance. And that it always and again, at every three years, and sometimes even more often." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) Caragiale is current and real, still exists today in the same form. Caragiale's writing postulates especially an ironical position for characters and times. Caragiale's realism could be named ironic realism. Caragiale figured a world with the sadness of contesting its imperfections, with obvious concern for language and behavior, always being an author located at equidistance between serious and hilarious. (Fanache, 1984: 186)

To present a people with a common character, he named all his countrymen "The Romanian", referring to Romania, which was "the tip and favor homeland", where no one trusted in justice, because although it had authority, it had not, however, prestige. Caragiale's criticism came also on the territory of education: "The Romanian school, instead of being a mean of education and culture of the people and of the supervision classes, it becomes a drain of first desires between citizens, of cheap arriving, of relieving duties, of enhancing rights and privileges." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, accesat în 13.06.2011) To the extent that justice was available anytime for the ruling party, so the "culture" came from the schools that have become factories of diploma for "a plethora of semi-cultered, with no characters, no humanity, true knights of intellectual industry, who need immediately honors as many without any merits and great gain without much trouble." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

Administration and oligarchy was the one ruling the Romanian country, and in order to get to rule it took "more courage, lack of any scruples, renunciation of personal dignity, of family honor, even infamy, if needed, and a little luck - and the brilliant career is ready" http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011). Caragiale justified his claim every time, by showing a good knowledge of Romanian realities. Oligarchic were considered also the political parties, associated with some "gangs" with historical claims, with "no respect for law, without compassion for humanity, without fear of God." (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) The article was divided into three chapters. Chapter I ended with the pray of the writer that the sacrifice be as less painful for people, sacrifice he admitted, because without sacrifices can not exist history and heroism, and after all, he said that had found the solution to solve people's requests, and

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that sat in King's involvement in matter of revolts, the only one entitled to bring peace, prosperity and justice. Anti-monarchical orientation of the journalist was as obvious as possible at Caragiale and its justification can transcend from the pages of the article.

Chapter II begins with the presentation of masses of revolted peasants. They are seen as confused, struggling without knowing exactly the principles of the revolt, without knowing what they want, but still resolute, "in their volcanic start" to acquire the deserved things and to defend their rights. Caragiale described the mass psychology and associated it to the movement:

> from where to come the consultation, the solidarity ... from where that vast community of a fund seemed logical for the commission of these kinds of crazy mass actions ... When something inflames and burns, it flames and burns not only for who-knows-how, but because of his way, was something that could ignite. (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

Caragiale had the precision of a man who was in the heart of events, but this can not be said about Caragiale, established in Berlin a few years earlier. Caragiale's irony to the "affectionate theatrical scenes" was associated to the behaviour of the political parties, that have suddenly turned from enemies into friends. The uprisings of 1907 showed how the class of exploiters coalition worked. The liberals, who at first had seemed to encourage the movement, hoping that it would take only anti-semitic and xenophobic forms, that will help them overthrow the conservative government, did not hesitate to unite with their political opponents in order to fight jointly against the peasantry. We can see how Caragiale painted in his study about 1907, this cynical appeasement of both political parties, the speeches and fake tears that accompanied it. (Iosifescu, 1952: 94)

The government that came to power was a fake one, hypocritical, with primiscue intentions and attitude, wanting only to master and be in power at any cost:

> victor in war, the government surrenders in peace... One can say it's absurd. No, on the contrary, it makes sense and is consequent with the principle of the State... It get inverted the sacred system! ... Anything! only to save for the moment the oligarchy from the imminent danger.
> (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

Caragiale used short sentences for his article, creating suspense for the reader, technique often used in press, designed to capture the reader's interest. Caragiale accused his contemporaries of lacking patriotism, opportunism, hypocrisy and debauchery. In Romania, things were different than normal and civilized:

> here are jobs for servants, not servants for jobs, churches for priests and sextons, not sextons and priests for churches, geese for kosher cooks, not kosher cooks for geese, chairs for teachers, not teachers for chairs ... Here it is, finally, a homeland for the patriots, not patriots for a homeland ... (http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011)

Chapter II ends in the same tone as the first, keeping the same burden. The nation wanted land, and the King was not the king that the same nation wanted.

Chapter III begins with a vehement denunciation of the oligarchy, which the journalist considered as being "unlimited ranks, without historical reason, without tradition and without the ability to create them even in time."

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(http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/1907_din_prim%C4%83var%C4%83_p%C3%A2n%C4%83'n_toamn%C4%83, 13.06.2011) The country had to clean of oligarchs and to grow, to develop as it deserves, and this could be done, primarily by changing its leaders, those which determined its future. This had to be done even at the cost of sacrifice and suffering, and people should remember of what he suffered and learn from mistakes. Caragiale waited with optimism and hoped for a better future, convinced that his country would grow and prosper under the protection of a competent leader, devoted and able to bring a solution long expected to solve the country's problems.

Life in Berlin did not estrange Caragiale from his country and did not make him suffer less, or love her less. Caragiale's article was born from the movement of the present, its purpose being in fact the present. Caragiale used a critical tone, and in addition to the descriptions and reports he did, he seemed to tax the ones concerned for their actions. Frequent lists, often loaded with irony, brought into discussion facts, objectives seemed endless. The journalist made his commons an ally, the readers who had adressed to and made himself co-partner in the sufferings of his people, through the criticism adressed to the country's political leaders. Caragiale "replaced the empty curse with the deep criticism, that stroke behind the parties, in the ruling oligarchy, which he characterized in *1907*." (Iosifescu, 1952: 78)

The pamphlet *1907 – from Spring to Autumn*, was intensively discussed in Caragiale's exegesis of the last decades and aroused many controversy. Whether it was considered as a whim of old age or as an exasperation with socialist substrate. However, it can be stated that a letter such as that of *1907*, recorded the deep seriousness of the journalist in front of the events of his time, and especially in front of the exceptional event, the high degree of emotional involvement in the political sphere and in the life of the community that he left, but from which he could not move his mind and soul.

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