Romanian Post-Caragialian Literature

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While the overused collocation "Caragiale's topicality" may have negative connotations, because it rather implies the idea of fatalism characteristic of our nation, the term "vitality" is much more suitable to render the ability of Caragiale's work to maintain itself alive in our conscience, due to the fact that it has been resuscitated not only by extra literary reiterations of its language and of the social and political behavior it reflects, but also by numerous writers' willingness to refresh its basic constituents within the flux of Post-Caragialian Romanian literature. It is almost impossible for anyone who studies, for instance, Eugen Simion's vast analysis *Scriitori români de azi* ['Romanian Writers of Today'], to overlook the frequency of the term "Caragialian" as an atribute used to describe contemporary prose writers, playwrights and even poets. Once we noticed this, we could formulate the hypothesis related to the massive influence that I.L. Caragiale has exerted on our literature, to his great power of fascination, to the reverberations that his texts have had on a very large variety of writers, including the contemporary ones. This actually proves the fact that the work of our great playwright is still alive, being the very canvas on which an entire type of literature has already been created, a type of literature which, in fact, cannot be understood without having the landmark of Caragiale's work in mind. The aim of this paper is to define and delimit Post-Caragialian literature, as the needed premise that could allow us to surpass the speculative area within the limits of which any discussion about the perrenial nature of Caragiale's work would otherwise take place.

The term "Post-Caragialian" is an attribute which implies not only a temporal determination, but also a structural one, as it defines the writers who were chronologically Caragiale's followers, at the same time pertaining to his aesthetic matrix, whether they had "the acute awareness of being the successors" (Spiridon 2000: 39) or not. The core of the term "Post-Caragialism" is that of "Caragialism", on the understanding of which the correct and relevant affiliation of the writers to this Romanian literary current depends. Although the majority of interpreters of Caragiale's work have tried to capture the essence of "Caragialism" by emphasizing only one or a few of its distinctive marks, we consider that we should take into account two meanings of the term (Ilie 2012: 24–28). First, rather than reducing

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Caragialism to a certain style, an attitude or, as G. Călinescu put it, "an individualized manner of talking" (Călinescu 1998: 447), we define it as "a group of defining features of Caragiale's work, namely those features that can be found at the intersection of the typological axes with the thematic one and with that of the style" (Ilie 2012: 24). Mitică, the demagogue politician, the characters that form the conjugal triangle, "the trifle", "the great gibberish"[1], "the carnival", the gastronomical euphoria, the slum, the comic, "the ironic realism"(Fanache 1997: 8), the absurd, "the moment", "the theme with variations" technique etc. are among these emblems. Nevertheless, we have specified that:

> Caragialism is more than a museum-like string of coats of arms, it is rather a pervasive spirit that is suddenly revealed by means of Proust-like flashlights provided by an intertextual type of reading of Romanian literature understood in Borge's terms as "the great text". A certain collocation, a situation, a gesture of the literary character, a certain mark of the style etc. spontaneously activate that cultural memory which immeditely relates the text being read with the Caragialian "hypotext" which is thus refreshed (Ilie 2012: 17–18).

More exactly, the direct allusions to marks related to the language of Caragiale's "heroes", the act of remodelling in different fictional context certain types that were exemplary created in his sketches and comedies, such as the the one of Mitică, of the demagogue, of the pseudo-scientist etc. or those variations that can be reduced to themes from Caragiale's patrimony, such as that of the urban family and of the political scene, and finally, the surprising reevaluation of certain textual techniques that were inaugurated in his prose, for instance "the theme with variations", "the list", "selfreferentiality" and so on, certify the fact that his model is viable and, at the same time, definitely refutes the thesis about the perishable nature of his work.

It is a well established fact that Anghel Demetriescu (in some studies published in 1896 and 1903), Pompiliu Eliade, characterised by Dorina Grăsoiu as „the most perfidious of all adversaries"(Grăsoiu 2002: 18), Eugen Lovinescu and many other interpreters of Caragiale's work shared the opinion that "Caragiale's playwrighting, so deeply rooted in the social and political realities of the day, is doomed to die quickly" (Grăsoiu 2002: 24). We have mentioned in the chapter *Semnul lui Caragiale* ['Caragiale's Sign'] from our book *Un veac de caragialism* ['One Century of Caragialism'] that in spite of these dark forecasts,

> the reception of Caragiale's work was not imposed on the public by means of explanatory footnotes, as E. Lovinescu prophesied[2], but by its vivid presence in the substance of the literature that was written after Caragiale's death. Out of the Caragialian "games with more strategies" (Fl. Manolescu 1983: 262), the one played with his posterity was won not because he assured himself a place in our great classical writers' Pantheon, but due to the fact that he opened more lodes that could be later on explored in turn by many writers that followed his intuition (Ilie 2012: 25–26).

[1] The intended title of Mircea Iorgulescu's famous paper published as *Eseu despre lumea lui Caragiale* (*Essay on Caragiale's World*) (Iorgulescu 1988).

[2] *Caragiale. 1. Considerațiuni asupra Momentelor lui. 2. Considerațiuni asupra actualității literaturii lui* (Lovinescu 1979: 175).

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In this way, Caragialism has always remained present in our literature, though only some of its components were emphasized in different literary periods. Generally, we have noticed that for the period corresponding to the end of the 19th century, some authors, such as G. Ranetti, Gh. Brăescu, Anton Bacalbaşa can be easily recognized as Caragiale's followers especially as a result of contaminations at the level of expression, most of their famous characters talking "in the style and with the syntax"[3] of Caragiale's heroes. During the interwar period, the most striking resemblances occur in the domains of typology and themes, since one can discover descendents of the Caragialian Mitică, of the "trifler" of the politician, of the seducer etc. in the novels of Mateiu Caragiale, Mircea Eliade, Tudor Arghezi, even Hortensia Papadat- Bengescu and G. Călinescu or in certain plays of Camil Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian, Liviu Rebreanu. Although typological and thematic recurrences still exist in the prose of the writers affiliated to the so called "School of Târgovişte" (Mircea Horia Simionescu, Costache Olăreanu) and then in that of some poets and prose writers from the 80's (Mircea Nedelciu, Gh. Crăciun, Sorin Preda, Ioan Lăcustă etc.), in their case the main stress is put on the revaluation of those elements of a certain Caragialian "textual engineering". Finally, nowadays Caragiale's mark is visible especially in the rather annoying and excessive use of irony and gibe in the media. That is why we need a global definition of Caragialism, since its essence is thus revealed by an endless fluctuation of some of its different constituents preferred, as shown, at some points by certain categories of writers (Ilie 2012: 25–26).

The second meaning of the term Caragialism results obviously out of this diachronical evolution, namely that of an "attitudinal and aesthetic parentage of Caragiale's spirit and art"(Ilie 2012: 306). The already mentioned examples imply that this lineage consists of writers of various orientations. It is worth mentioning that in order to establish the dimension of Caragialian posterity, we should not limit it to those writers who clearly admitted their literary congenerity with Caragiale. Although such declarations of adherence and acceptance of their role as successors can be found especially among the representatives of the 80's – *O nouă şcoală a lui Caragiale* ['A New School of Caragiale], signed by Ion Simuț (1989), *Modelul Caragiale* ['The Model Caragiale'] by Florin Iaru (1983), *Competiția continuă* ['The Continuous competition'] by Sorin Preda (1988), *Vocația succesorală* ['The Successor Vocation'] by Vasile Gogea (1988) –, the existence of such documents should not be the only criterion of inclusion in the Caragialian tradition, because it fails to offer a panoramic view of the true impact Caragiale's work has had on our literature. But, if we take into account the critical intertextual type of reading, which allows us to construct a larger corpus of texts on the basis of the so called "memory associations" (Riffaterre 1981: 4), then we can include in the Post-Caragialian trend writers that are either obviously indebted to the great forerunner, as could be the case of G. Ranetti and even Al.O. Teodoreanu, or remarkably original and hardly connectable with Caragiale at first sight. As a result of our inventory and analysis, we divided Caragiale's literary descendents in more categories. The first and the

[3] Paraphrase of the title of a brief text called *În stilul şi cu sintaxa Monitorului oficial* ['In the Style and with the Syntax of the Official Monitor'], in which Caragiale only selects a sample of wrongly built complex sentences, specific to uneducated people who are in charge with writing official reports.

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most uncontroversial one refers to writers, such as Damian Stănoiu, Tudor Muşatescu, Al. Kiriţescu, Ion Băieşu, Teodor Mazilu etc. who are inevitably related to Caragiale due to the fact that they approached the comic and could not or did not even want to step out of his shadow. A second group unites authors such as Mircea Eliade, Camil Petrescu, Hortensia Papadat Bengescu, Liviu Rebreanu, Tudor Arghezi, I. Peltz, Gib. I. Mihăescu, Mihail Sadoveanu who are major representatives of other literary currents and for whom the connection with Caragiale seems rather surprising. Yet, this type of intertextual reading reveals traces of Caragiale in certain novels such as *Romanul adolescentului miop* ['The Novel of the Short-sighted Adolescent'], *Gaudeamus*, *Dubla existenţă a lui Spiridon Vădastra* ['The Double Existence of Spiridon Vădastra'], *Huliganii* ['The Hooligans'], *Întoarcerea din Rai* ['The Return from Heaven'], in short-stories such as *Şarpele* ['The Snake'] written by Mircea Eliade, in Camil Petrescu's play *Mitică Popescu*, in Hortensia Papadat Bengescu's novel *Logodnicul* ['The Fiancé'], in Liviu Rebreanu's plays *Apostolii* ['The Apostles'], *Plicul* ['The Envelope'], in Tudor Arghezi's plays *Dodi and Podi*, *Neguţătorul de ochelari* ['The Glasses Seller'], *Patriotul* ['The Patriot'], *Interpretări la cleptomanie* ['Comments on Kleptomania'], in his novel *Cimitirul Buna Vestire* ['"The Annunciation" Cemetery'], and in his satirical prose *Tablete din Ţara de Kuty* ['Tablets from The Kuty Land'], in I. Peltz' novel *Actele vorbeşte* ['Actions Talks'], in Gib. I. Mihăescu's novels, especially in *Zilele şi nopţile unui student întârziat* ['The Days and Nights of a Delayed Student'], in short-stories such as *La "Grandiflora"* ['At "Grandiflora"'], *Păcăleala* ['The Trick'], in Mihail Sadoveanu's play *Zile vesele, după război* ['Happy Days after the War']. We called the third group, in which we included Mihail Sebastian and George-Mihail Zamfirescu, the category of "Promethean offspring" (Ilie 2012: 27), because we consider that, in their lyrical and respectively, dark comedies or melodramas, they attempted to distinguish themselves from the Caragialian tradition without managing to avoid being compared to and, consequently, associated with Caragiale.

A special category is formed by the creators for whom Caragiale's work represents not only a non-avoidable valuable landmark, but also a treasure of intuitions and notable anticipations. In other words, these writers may be considered Post-Caragialian if we turn the intertextual spyglasses the other way round, namely from Caragiale's texts towards theirs. Thus, as regards the dimension of the absurd, I.L. Caragiale's posterity is enriched with Urmuz' *Pagini bizare* ['Bizarre Pages'], in the palimpsest of which an attentive reading discovers Caragiale's sign in the bewildering re/deconstruction of the type of the politician or scientist "trifler", of the conjugal triangle and of "the mecanomorfous man" (Balotă 2000: 471) as well as in the ironic, grotesque, allusive, allegorical style. At the same time, the inchoate techniques related to the anti-literature as well as the comic of the absurd constitute decisive reasons for integrating Urmuz in the gallery of Post-Caragialian writers. The Post-Caragialian route of this type offers surprising stopovers, for instance Tudor Arghezi's essays in playwright and his novels. For example, his play *Neguţătorul de ochelari* ['The Glasses Seller'], published in 1968, but already written in 1928, relates intertextually both to Caragiale's sketch *Petiţiune* ['The Petition'], and to Eugen Ionescu's sketch *Salonul auto* (*The Auto Salon*) and to his play *Englezeşte fără professor* ['English without Teachers']. This entitles us to

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consider Arghezi's play "the missing link" between Caragiale and the author of *Cântăreața chealâ* ['The Bald Prima Donna'], rather than between Urmuz and Eugen Ionescu, as Nicolae Manolescu considered (N. Manolescu 2008: 635).

This kind of progressive/prospective affiliation to Caragialism, which actually means that Caragiale's texts experimented scriptural techniques that would be claimed by ulterior currents of wide scope, is crucial also for the prose writers Mircea Horia Simionescu and Costache Olăreanu, as well as for the writers known as "the generation of the 80's", who reverentially place themselves "at Mr. Caragiale's door", as Ioan Lacustă says memorably in one of his short-stories. Unlike Paul Zarifopol, who considered that "the interruptions and the theoretical annexes" (Zarifopol 1930a: XLII) in Caragiale's *Poveste* ['Story'], *Două loturi* ['Two Lottery Tickets'] and some other short-stories, are annoying and "uselessly integrated in the texts" (Zarifopol 1930b: 18), the representatives of "The Târgovişte School" and those of the 80's seem to appreciate these inchoate forms of Caragialian "referentiality" and "selfreferentiality" above all the aspects of Caragialism (Ilie 2012: 182). Together with "the collage", "the list", "the theme with variation", these actually became frequent techniques practised afterwards by the "Romanian Postmodernists" (Cărtărescu 1999: 142–402) and their "precursors"[4]. The absurd and "the texistence" (Mircea Cărtărescu) are, therefore, among the components from the Caragialian paradigm which were augmented, on the one hand in Urmuz' bizarre prose and on the other hand, in Mircea Horia Simionescu's and Costache Olăreanu's disconcerting prose. Since Urmuz is widely accepted as Eugen Ionescu's forerunner and the Târgovişte writers are proved to have anticipated Romanian Postmodernism, Caragiale should be recognized as both Eugen Ionescu's and the Romanian Postmodern writers' "precursors' precursor" (Ilie 2012: 233).

Another way of identifying Post-Caragialian literature is to consider it a "second degree kind of literature"[5], which would include, apart from the easily recognizable network of "intertexts", a number of "hypertexts" based on perceivable Caragialian "hypotexts", together with an ever growing amount of "metatexts". While the intertextual relations, in the various forms of allusions, quotations or simply any type of microscopically small traces of Caragiale's mark are innumerable and actually unmatched by any other Romanian writer, examples of "hypertexts" are not so numerous. We could mention Al.O. Teodoreanu' sketches *Manevre* ['Maneouvres'], *S-au supărat profesorii* ['The Teachers Became Upset'], Tudor Muşatescu's *Post-restant* ['Post-Restant'], Camil Petrescu's play *Mitică Popescu*, Mircea Horia Simionescu's short-story *Acceleratul complimentelor* ['The Fast Train of Compliments'], Ioan Lăcustă's series of sketches *La uşa domnului Caragiale* ['At Mr. Caragiale's Door'] from his volume *Cu ochi blânzi* ['With Kind Eyes']. All of them have in common the attempt to crystallize the "geometric place" of Caragialism in symbiotic texts that can be called homage-like pastiches and parodies (Ilie 2012; 308). These examples actually confirm that in each important period of our literature, I.L. Caragiale's texts remained a model and a challenge at

[4] Mircea Horia Simionescu, Radu Petrescu, Costache Olăreanu are considered by Ion Bogdan Lefter the first Romanian Postmodernists, therefore Romanian Postmodernists' forerunners (Lefter 2003).

[5] If we were allowed to use one of G. Genette's famous collocations and to paraphrase his distinctions between "transtextual" relations: "hypertexts", "hypotexts", "metatexts" (Genette 1982).

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the same time, a decisive test for the "apprentices" who have assimilated his "lessons" and can continue his work on their own.

If we sum up the results of combining various criteria of identifying I.L. Caragiale's traces in the subsequent literature, we conclude that writers such as Al.O. Teodoreanu, Tudor Muşatescu, Al. Kirițescu, Ion Băieşu, Mircea Eliade, Camil Petrescu, Liviu Rebreanu, Tudor Arghezi, I. Peltz, Gib.I. Mihăescu, Mircea Horia Simionescu, Urmuz, Eugen Ionescu etc. can be affiliated with Post-Caragialism, understood as a distinct Romanian literary direction. However, one should not consider that, because of this categorization, these authors lose anything from their own literary integrity. On the contrary, their literary identity is enriched through this original manner of exerting their vocation of being our greatest playwright's worthy successors. Thus demonstrated, the amazing fertility of the Caragialian textual seeds, explored in this immense literary posterity, categorically disproves E. Lovinescu's thesis according to which I.L. Caragiale's work is ephemeral and proves, on the contrary, its long-lasting vitality. That is why, instead of focusing on the commemoration of one hundred years since I.L. Caragiale's death, we should rather see it as an opportunity to mark the anniversary of one century of Caragialism in Romanian literature.

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Abstract

The paper outlines the dimension and the configuration of the vast literary Caragialian lineage. This everlasting fluorescence of the Caragialian texts in the flux of our literature definitely proves I.L. Caragiale's work's undeniable vitality. In order to identify all Caragialian traces both diachronically and synchronically, i.e. to demonstrate that we could consider delimiting a distinctive Romanian literary trend, we have simultaneously applied more criteria to a large number of writers: the existence of certain *ars poetica* which can be seen as "patrilineal" documents confirming their authors' adherence to the aesthetics of Caragialism, the act of re-creation and revaluation of typological, thematic or stylistic constituents of the Caragialian paradigm, the recognition and augmentation of elements of this paradigm, which anticipated literary currents of wide scope, such as the literature of the absurd and Postmodernism and, eventually, the remarkable effort to refine the Caragialian "hypotext" into Post-Caragialian "hypertexts" as homage paid to the great forerunner. Out of the combination of these criteria, there comes the conclusion that writers such as Al.O. Teodoreanu, Tudor Muşatescu, Al. Kirițescu, Ion Băieşu, Mircea Eliade, Camil Petrescu, Liviu Rebreanu, Tudor Arghezi, I. Peltz, Gib.I. Mihăescu, Mircea Horia Simionescu, Urmuz, Eugen Ionescu can be affiliated to Post-Caragialism, not as epigones, but rather as worthy descendents with their own literary identity enriched by this original manner of assimilating our greatest playwright's lesson.

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