MANIAS AND EXCESSES IN THE CARAGIALE DYNASTY[1]

Abstract: *The exaggerated vision of the Romanian writers Ion Luca Caragiale and Mateiu I. Caragiale, man's phobias, superstitions and complexes are sometimes transferred from the real world into the imaginary world, both in what concerns the form and the content. The obsession of fire, of feminity, of sight became constants of the dynasty. In the father`s work, the passion for love is closely linked to the passion for politics and is manifested through excessive gestures and discourses. In the son`s work, the character itself becomes a manifestation of the excess. So, I. L. Caragiale's upside down world and M. Caragiale`s technique of mystery are based on manias, excesses and obsessions.*

Key words: *obsession, manias, excess*

There is a tradition for critics to identify the common and different points, both in I. L. Caragiale's, and in M. Caragiale's literary productions, due to their blood family and their spiritual family. The purpose of this article is but to illustrate the amplifying vision, the hypertrophied vision, disturbing reality, which is essential for both the living and the creation of the father and son. In this purpose, we will consider all common aspects of Caragiale dynasty - themes, motives, symbols, characters - already presented along the time by P. Constantinescu, Perpessicius, P. Georgescu, M. Călinescu, S. Cazimir, T. Vârgolici, A. George, B. Cioculescu, I. Derşidan and others.

The taste for the enormous, the exaggerated, the excessive, for mystery and oddities has different explanations for the two writers, separated by temperament, biographical details, but also by the cultural context in which they and their artistic vision were formed. As a result, for I. L. Caragiale, the naturalistic trend definitely intermingled with some parts of the writings, especially in the prose of the short stories *(O făclie de Paşte, Păcat, În vreme de război)*. A certain appetite for excesses in comedies and sketches, can be easily see and even the correspondence offers the proofs of a hypersensitivity, caused especially by weather, going far from the sensitivity of the common person. And, as his senses are more often than not hypersensitive, as the narrator in *Grand Hôtel "Victoria Română"* confesses – "simt enorm şi văd monstruos" (I feel enormously and see monstrously – my translation) – this results on the aesthetic plan in the record of the unnatural, abnormal, or the skips from the natural. The literary history registered the fact that "omul avea o înclinație spre exces şi spre prezentarea lumii în momente paroxistice" (the man had a passion for excess and for the presentation of the world in its most paroxysmal moments – my translation) (George, 1996: 6), this passion was transferred into his literary work. His fears and superstitions (fear of fire, illnesses and bad luck) are reactions against the possible misfortunes and belong firstly to the writer, and reveal, "conformația unui anxios" (the structure of an anxious person – my translation) (Cioculescu, Ş., 1977: 301).

On the other hand, for M. Caragiale, the contact with the works of the symbolistic and decadent literary strain and the fact that he was said to belong to the spiritual family of the cursed writers, partially explains man's passion for eccentricities, the encouragement of the aesthetic aspect of the mystery in his works. V. Streinu situates him in the spiritual family of the cursed writers together with Baudelaire, Brummel, Barbey d'Aurevilly, E. A. Poe, de I'Isle Adam (1968: 151-153).

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Starting right with the lines which present portraits of a high class now declined, and continuing in his prose, M. Caragiale presents a hallucinating picture of a world guided by selective moral laws, which shocks the common sense. The organic unity of M. Caragiale's work, which really makes it exclusive, lies in its obsessive repetition of themes and literary motifes. Among the elements that can be distinguished in his personal mythology, on the aesthetic plan of his work, O. Cotruş identifies: "patima nopții, mitul semeței seminții, imaginea-arhetip a străbunului mitic, sentimentul tainei, al morții şi al singurătății, desfătarea mohorâtă, narcisismul cu evidente funcții compensatorii" (the passion for night, the myth of the proud family, the archetype-image of the mythical ancestor, the feeling of secrecy, of death of loneliness, the sad delight, the narcissism with clear functions of compensation – my translation). (1977: 15).

The obsession insinuates in I. L. Caragiale and M. Caragiale's work in different ways, from a simple man's state, to cranky, pathological manifestations. The analysis of the two biographies reveals the persistence of some archetypal images and some complexes and obsessions and their transfiguration can be seen in an artistic way in their works.

Starting from childhood, one of the writer's obsessions is that of feminity. P. Constantinescu finds surprising similarities between the vision of the woman in I. L. Caragiale and M. Caragiale's works, the result of the "intuiție comună a feminității, venită din subconştientul ereditar" (common intuition of the feminity, coming from a hereditary subconscious – my translation) (1977: 251). About M. Caragiale's another obsession, that with nobility, A. Paleologu reveals that it is also common in the works of Balzac, Nietzsche, Nerval, Lautreamont or Macedonski, united in a common attitude which is the result of misanthropy, solitude and eccentricity, and which is "un mod de a trăi în planul imaginarului" (a way of living in an imaginary world – my translation) (1977: 65)

Some obsessions are common in the literary creations of the dynasty, too. The most frequently illustrated is that of *fire*, a real mark of the family. The fire appears for the first time in the comedy *Îngâmfata plăpămăreasă* (1846), by the pioneer Costache Caragiale, the uncle of the famous dramatist. In *Biblioteci deschise,* Al. Călinescu debates interesting points on the fire aspects in I. L. Caragiale's comedies. As I. Derşidan sees it, the fire is "un motiv important" (an important motif – my translation) (2003: 109) in the work of the classical writer and, according to Șt. Cazimir, the fire becomes "*o viitoare mică obsesie*" (a further small obsession) (1967: 74). Focusing on the significance of the fire in M. Caragiale's work, Cotruş makes an analogy between the fire that destroys to allow reconstruction on the purified ruins and the devastating passion that destroys the heart of some characters as Paşadia in the novel *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, which suggests to the critic "imaginea unui vulcan, a unui rezervor de energii distrugătoare şi creatoare în acelaşi timp" (the image of a volcano, a reservoir of destructive and at the same time creative energies – my translation) (1977: 129). The burning appears with other functions, too, the expiation functions, in the son's work. I. Derşidan, starting from the anthropological suggestions offered by G. Bachelard, suggests a nice metaphor which characterizes and also explains the dynasty, that of the red carnival fire that breaks in blazes in the creation of the father, and that of the blue flame, sublimated, which purifies, liturgical, in the work of the son.

Another permanent obsession is the sight. The demonic, hypnotic eyes, with a *magnetic look*, in the sense given to the term by E. R. Curtis, of "lumină cu încărcătură sufletească" (light with a load of mind) (qtd by I. Vartic, 2002: 47), appear in I. L.

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Caragiale's work. For example, the demonic chassis traveler from *La conac* has eyes like this Marghioala, the innkeeper with piercing eyes in *La hanul lui Mânjoală,* the squint-eyed Acrivița, whose eyes can enslave even the devil, in *Kir Ianulea*, but also the characters in sketches and comedies. The sight, as the central motif, but also as a synthesizer and irradiant element, is analyzed by A. Călinescu (1986: 70) who notices that Caragiale's characters are defined by the intensity and the expression of their look. The fascinating eyes of the feminine characters in M. Caragiale's work are the clue of an abnormality. I. Derşidan (1997: 305) also reveals the odd demons that appears in the portrait of the Miss in the threesome pictures, admired by the narrator in *Sub pecetea tainei*, the portrait which, if looked at intensely, could give birth to the feeling that the woman turned into a feline. In another context, the mirror gets the meaning of an internal look, of self looking.

The obsession with heredity, noticed in *Pajere,* but especially in *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, also comes, as P. Constantinescu noticed, from his father's literature, where there are characters like this, with a loaded heredity, as Leiba Zibal, Stavrache or the priest and his children in the short story *Păcat*. The explanation given by G. Călinescu for this obsession that appears in M. Caragiale's work takes into consideration the mixture of origin of the characters, the mixture of the basic blood with that of the gipsies, or that strange mixture of Eastern and Western. Because of this, the members of the Măgureanu family, to which Paşadia belonged, were "incoherent in all they did, all with mischiefs and moods. One of the descendants has grounded many legacies and died in the furies of the madness", and one of the girls burned alive at her wedding.

As if looking for a sense for their own existential turmoil, M. Caragiale's characters get a constant idea, which is followed tenaciously. It can reveal their spiritual impoverishment, or lack of intelligence, but also a routine that keeps them connected to the pre-defined route. Cațavencu wants "progresul şi nimic alt decât progresul" (the progress and nothing else but the progress – my translation), both of the nation and his own, in particular. Zaharia has an obsession with "moral şi prințipuri" (morality and moral principles – my translation) which he does not find in their society. Pristanda does his job thinking about his "family" and viceversa, meaning he spends his time with his family pressed by the "mission". Not even the humble Drunken Citizen can escape the pre-established idea. It seems that the alcohol does not give him the go-by of the drunk, but it comes to revive the social conscience, waking up the elector, who must find out at once "eu pentru cine votez?" (whom do I vote for? – my translation).

Neither is it possible to save M. Caragiale's characters from having fixed ideas, which may have different implications; starting with Pantazi's love for flowers, manifested in a foolish waste of roses and tuberoses, from the exclusive take of one single color, of the stones that were predestined at birth, by the three sisters Smaranda, Zamfira, and Bălaşa, to the narrator's weakness towards humans that with some things, not knowing exactly what, smarts a pure curiosity and which might have cost him a lot in the incident with sir Aubrey de Vere.

Caragiale's world is in a continuous move, which can lead to violence. The misusages, the threats with beating, the fights become gestures of a tumultuous changeable, impatient world. The southern spirit, known as very talkative, influenced Caragiale's heroes. When the heat does not alter the verbal expression of these characters (mainly political figures and women), they cannot be stopped from their flows of laments, insults, threats, praises, homages and useless talk, for the sake of self listening. M. Iorgulescu warns about the false excess of words in I. L. Caragiale's work.

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He considers that this stands for an absence, a lack, being in fact, "o tăcere camuflată" (a hidden silence – my translation) (1988: 92). For Lefter Popescu, who is in front of the office where he is told that his tickets are not the winning ones, the overtalk is a mechanism to protect psychologically from the catastrophe. Pirgu, a mean character from M. Caragiale's work has, a similar, short access of hysteria, when he loses all his inheritance at cards, after which he becomes calm again.

The verbal violence is sometimes associated to the violence of the gestures. As we have already mentioned, I. L. Caragiale reflects, in fact, the tendency of the society much presented in the press of the time. The extremely violent fact - with crimes, suicides and very bad accidents - seems to be well known to the author and present in his journalistic career. From the columns of the newspaper to the literary text, the brutality is diluted, to miming or caricature. Especially in comedies, the threats with killing come from love stories or political stories. Tipătescu shouts at Cațavencu: "Te ucid ca pe un câine" (I'll kill you like a dog – my translation). Not even the women react better. Mița's ambition is: "Am să-i omor!" (I'll kill them! – my translation). Words in the semantic field of death also appear in *Conul Leonida față cu Reacțiunea* and *O noapte furtunoasă.* When Efimița is scared by the noise of the possible revolution, she says: "Nu-mi spune, soro, că mor!" (Don't tell me, girl, I'm dying! – my translation). In a contest with the criminal gestures, beatings are educational strategies, as for Jupân Dumitrache, who educates Spiridon: "Mă Spiridoane, fii băiat de treabă, mă, că iau pe sfântul Niculae din cui" (You, Spiridon, be a good boy, or I'll take the stick. – my translation) Very often, the violent temperament is reflected in his discourse, as in boss Dumitrache's case. While listening to Ipingescu, who is reading the newspaper, he has commentaries like: "ştii că şi aici loveşte bine!" (you know, he hits well there, too! – my translation) or "acu înțeleg eu unde bate vorba lui" (now I get what he hints at – my translation).

Going to the identification of the causes that create a behavior far from the normal, we can see the fear of the characters that is accumulating gradually and takes extreme forms. The characters are afraid one of the other, of scandals or of betrayal. Fear is accompanied by sufferings which trigger fears of electricity, even sickness. Mişu, for example, from the monologue, *1 Aprilie,* "fiind exagerat de fricos, s-a îmbolnăvit de gălbinare" (being too frightened, got hepatitis – my translation) and commits a crime out of fear. Another character for whom fear has pathological effects is Leiba Zibal in *O făclie de Paşte*, who, threatened with beating, "pică leşinat de spaimă" (faints of fear – my translation) and lies in bed for some months. G. Călinescu thinks about Anghelache's suicide, the hero from *Inspecțiune,* that it is committed out of fear. "Fobia lui e maladivă, împotriva bunului-simț elementar şi acuză un anxios intrat în faza paroxistică la întâia zguduire" (His fobia is a sick one, against elementary common sense and reveals an anxious person in its peak phase at the first shake – my translation) (1982: 439). Vartic warns us that we have to take into consideration Freud's remark, according to which fear has a determined object, and this is for Anghelache, the inspection. But this is missing, as the cashier has never been inspected. The critic concludes that Anghelache suffers from a complex of fear frustration (2002: 130), with the same devastating effects on the psychological plan.

Madness and death are frequent themes in M. Caragiale's work and are exclusively treated in a sober and tragic manner. The soul of the last boyar Măgureanu in the fragment of the novel *Negru şi aur* is haunted by madness after his wife's death. Aware of his soul's problems, the man plans to move to an Eastern country, "unde nebunii sunt priviți ca sfinți" (where all the crazy people are taken as saints – my

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translation). For the demonic Mihnea, the vision of the imaginary death of his enemies becomes pleasure, as for M. Caragiale's characters, crime is cosubstantial to human mind. Paşadia has moments, from time to time, of fury, horrible madness, which isolate him, periodically from people. Talking about his exalted start to self destruction, E. Papu mentions that "totul la acest om este pasiune demonică de a se anihila" (everything at this man is a demonic passion to annihilate himself – my translation) (1977: 181-182)

About excess, Flaubert said that it is "o dovadă de idealitate: înseamnă a trece dincolo de ceea ce ai nevoie" (a proof of idealism: it means to pass beyond what you need – my translation) (qtd by Cotruş, *op. cit.*: 49). M. Caragiale's imaginary characters illustrate therefore a frenzy of living, explained by Cotruş with the fact that "frenezia, ruperea marginilor îngăduite, excesul în bine sau în rău este pentru Mateiu un netăgăduit semn de măreţie" (frenzy, the break of the well known borders, the excess in good or bad is for Mateiu an undeniable proof of greatness – my translation) (1977: 49). The devilish aspect of M. Caragiale's characters, derived from Baudelaire's aestheticism, comes from excess and implies a pleasure of self destruction, with the outbreak of unhindered passions. Both Pantazi and Paşadia - the writer's *alter-egos* - leave their lives in the hands of these passions and of dissipated life, but in opposition with the common and mean person, as Pirgu is, in the case of the two, this abandon is not the result of some weaknesses, but more of a form of eloquence, a conscious acceptance of self undermining. After a mythical and symbolic reading of M. Caragiale's novel, V. Lovinescu tries to demonstrate that "în Mateiu Caragiale au coabitat, efectiv, visceral, Pirgu, Paşadia şi Pantazi […], aceştia fiind proiecţia străfundurilor abisale sufleteşti ale creatorului lor. Primul, prin exces de abjecţie, al doilea, prin exces de împătimire, al treile, prin exces extatic" (in Mateiu Caragiale there lived together, effectively, physically, Pirgu, Paşadia and Pantazi […],who are the projections of the inner abysses of their writer's soul. The first, as an excess of meanness, the second as an excess of passion, the third, as an excess of ecstasy – my translation) (1996: 37).

Sometimes the character itself becomes the embodiment of the excess, he seems a joke of the fate, he does not find the road in life, that is why he leaves it too quickly or unnaturaly. Cănuţă, I. L. Caragiale's character, is meant to live everything in a topsy turvy manner. Right from his birth, the priest drops him while baptizing him. In his childhood, he does everything he has to do in contrary way, being a "topsy turvy" child. His reactions are either delayed when his wife cheated on him, or exaggerated, because he divorces as his wife burnt his meal. Not even his death is different, as at the religious service after seven years, the priest sees that this wasn't quite dead when they buried him.

The flawed world of the Arnoteni, where Pirgu is the guide, has the dimension of a nightmare, which makes Cotruş to exclaim: "Iată o familie exemplară în ce priveşte exerciţiul răului" (Here it is a perfect family in what bad manifestation means – my translation) (1977: 294). The head of the family, Maiorică, is a morally and socially degraded character the embodiment of the nerveless Trântor (Drone) in *Pajere.* His wife, Elvira had her own contribution to their daughters' fall. In Masinca's description, the two girls appear as "ceva nemaipomenit, ceva de spaimă" (something extraordinary, something frightening – my translation). Mina was a nymphomaniac and an exhibitionist. The fact that she did everything upside down and backwards vaguely reminded of Cănuţă the twisted. Her sister Tita, had a mental disability, which made her dangerous. For Sanda Radian, the two sisters are "două faţete ale degenerescenţei clasei din care fac parte: destrăbălarea din viciu şi cea din tembelism" (the two facets of the degeneration of the class they belong to: the degeneration of vice and that of

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sluggishness – my translation) (1986: 79). Heredity is loaded. The major's mother, Sultana Negoianu, who, when she was young, succeeded in to frightening with her luxury all the principalities, was now an apparition who howled like a dog in the night with fool moon. For the critic O. Cotruş, this woman seems the most terrible example from this museum of monsters. The portrait of the minister from *Sub pecetea tainei* had something of a beast "gata să se năpustească asupra vrăjmaşului să-l sfâşie şi să-l calce în picioare" (ready to pounce on the enemy to tear, to trample – my translation). His life implies forcing the physical and intellectual limits, as he was working during the nights without sleep, sometimes weeks after weeks. M. Caragiale's poems evoke strange, unsettling faces. The conqueror's portrait in *Lauda cuceritorului* is a frenzy of living, "beat de măcel" (drunken slaughter – my translation). In *Astra,* the Lady "ani are peste sută / aşa cumplit o arde năprasnica văpaie / A urii" (who is over one hundred years, / Is burnt by the so painful cruel flames/ of hate – my translation). The descendant of rulers in *Trântorul* is consumed of vice and corruption, "e putred, deşi tânăr, e veşnic beat de votcă" (he is rotten, although young, is always drunk on vodka – my translation).

If it is natural for hate to bring devastating consequences, love is not a pure and innocent feeling, too. Love excesses have tragic ends, in some of Caragiale's novels and in drama *Năpasta*. Ileana in the short story *Păcat* seems that "îi plesneşte inima de atâta chin mut, că fără omul asta înnebuneşte, omoară pe cine i-o ieşi înainte şi se strânge singură de gât cu ghearele ca o fiară nebună" (her heart breaks of so much unspoken suffering, that she gets crazy without this man, kills the first that comes in front of her and breaks her neck with her claws as a mad beast – my translation). Love goes out of the rational, especially when it is unnatural, that of incest, or is generated by witchcraft, as in *La hanul lui Mânjoală*, where Fănică runs three times from his fiancée to return in the arms of the "moo" innkeeper.

In M. Caragiale's work love as an erotic action can kill. The deviant sexuality, the monstrous one, could not escape M. Călinescu's critical analysis, who talks about a textual hell (2003: 95), in which there are inserted nymphomania, depravity, homosexuality, bisexuality, prostitution and the deviated anatomical conformations. According to Sanda Radian, M. Caragiale's novel gets therefore the structure of a maze novel, as Gustav Rene Hocke saw it: "O lume a incestului şi a perversităţii […], o lume a încrâncenării în veşnic însinguratul eu, opusă lumii armoniei între creaturi" (a world of incest and perversity […], a world of stubbornness in his always lonely ego, opposed to the world with harmonious relations among the creatures – my translation) (1977: 308).

The geography of the two writers defies sometimes normality. Especially in fantastic and naturalistic prose, I. L. Cargiale suggests the atmosphere of terror with weather conditions that make the characters get confused. Fănică in *La hanul lui Mânjoală* gets lost in the tempest for some hours, to finally arrive where he started from. Stavrache's nervous state of mind in *În vreme de război* is painfully affected by the bad weather that keeps for three days and three nights. The quaintness, that is for M. Caragiale the result of too much, prevails in the scenery in *Negru şi aur*, and its subtitle *Salon al iadului* (*The Hall of the Hell – my translation)* is significant for Mihnea's damned condition. The hall looked stately and strange, as it seemed cast in gold, in pitch and in slag, in accordance to the color of his dark clothes, for funeral. Alina Pamfil talks about a poetic melancholy in M. Caragiale's prose, where living goes hand in hand with dreaming, and also records the dark side of the dreaming, the nightmare area, where "decorul este locul unei deformări" (the scenery is the place of distortion) (1993:

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101). She refers to the Arnoteni domain, in which even the house is a monstrous building, a hybrid construction, with other parts added afterwards, chaotically.

As a result of all these, the model of the "topsy-turvy" world introduced by the work of the great Romanian classical, model so much quoted in the literary critics, is due to mainly "gustului lui Caragiale pentru situații extreme şi coincidențe ciudate" (Caragiale's taste for extreme situations and strange coincidences – my translation) (Zarifopol, 1984: 40), a common taste for the writers of the family, with which Paul Zarifopol makes a common connection between M. Caragiale and I. L. Caragiale's work. Beyond the aesthetic formulas that characterize their work, I. L. Caragiale and M. Caragiale are undoubtedly parts of a gifted family of blood to which subtle, but lasting veins of their creation go. One of these connective veins of the dynasty is the sense of enormity which prevailed in their works and which created real "hiperbole ale imaginației nestăpânite" (hyperboles of unruly imagination – my translation) (George, 1980:103), coming paradoxically from an excess of lucidity[1].

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