

Ion Luca Caragiale, the Mentor of the Romanian Theatre

Anca Iorga¹

¹I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania

anca.iorga@unatc.ro

Abstract

In the world of theatre, what we see is the result of an existing vision, which is the outcome of two willpowers that mingle into a singular understanding of two complex personalities of two strong characters, but in the same time, full of sensibility: the playwright and the actor. The most important and representative in Romanian drama is Ion Luca Caragiale, prolific not only as a playwright, novelist, pamphleteer, but also head of theatre, political commentator, and journalist.

A brilliant theoretician of theatre, he characterized his state of mind and his way to look at things, in a very special way. For him, theatre was a constructive art, with its roots in the real inter human conflicts that occur and manifest themselves through the characters and their passions, considering that people are the work elements that give life to the conflict on stage. He also regarded the human soul as a mirror capable of rendering the conscience, not only the looks.

In his plays, Caragiale uses both the close-up plan, in which the character appears exactly as he is, but also the remote plan, in which we can see only the beautiful part of the character, creating a singular image that is both accurate and beautiful. All his ideas concerning theatre and the literary drama issues, his analysis on the vision and the creating process of an actor, hold their value even today and represent a landmark in today's world of theatre.

Keywords: I.L. Caragiale, theatre, playwright, actor, director.

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Introduction

Theatre performance, as a finished product brought in front of an audience represents the very product of two personalities, with their sensibilities and imagination, assisted by the imagination of the third one, the director, that organizes and gives its structure. In this way, the collaboration between the playwright, director, and actor is born and it is revealed to us by the fact that the playwright needs at least one middleman to present his play.

What we see on stage is the result of an existing vision, which is the outcome of two willpowers intermingled into a singular understanding of two complex personalities of two strong characters, but at the same time, full of sensibility. Although the central theme is established by the playwright's vision, the nuances of the actors's own view upon the character, bring savour to the interpretation. We must not forget, not even for a second, that the dramatic representation and the dramatic text enter in a subordinated state under the director. The collaboration between the playwright, director, and actor gives life to the performance, that ends as a collective creation.

Eugenio Barba argued: "The dramatic theatre is the ground on which the show is built on" (Barba and Savarese, 1991, p. 68). Even Aristotles points out the two investigation fields: the written text and the way it is performed.

We remain aware of the fact that the first step in making a performance remains the text. The artistic particularities of the drama writing ask for special ways of presenting the content, a great force of action, concision, fast and vivid depiction of the characters, sharp conflict, specific elements in the manner of speaking, liveliness, veridicity, truth, spontaneity in their reactions to the events that happen in the play. The central idea of the play as a literary work and as a performance must be obvious from the action, from the conflict, from the way the characters are formed and developed.

A creator to whom the art of theatre had no secrets left

Looking upon the Romanian dramaturgy, we must put Caragiale on the highest rank. Playwright, novelist, pamphleteer, writer, head of theatre, political commentator, and journalist, he was a complex personality, with an extremely rare vision, one that Tudor Vianu, a well-known member of Junimea described:

Through an unexpected gift given to us by providence, while the Romanian poetry embodies its finest expression through Eminescu, the narrative text and theatre play are able to reach the same heights through Caragiale, a playwright that is related to his peer by the same perfection of artistic conscience, the same cult towards their native tongue. (Vianu, as cited in Zalis, 1995, p. 4)

Caragiale was describing his own state of mind and the way he saw things in a very peculiar way, saying, "I see hugely and I feel monstrously" (2004, p. 148). By saying this he doesn't refer to the pejorative side of the character, but to his hugely artistic endowment of his personality.

The opinions stated by him about the world of theatre, subside beautifully to this admirable line. As a mediator, Caragiale reveals to us a creator to whom the art of theatre has no secrets left. Being aware of his artistic prerogatives that he worshipped through his creation, Caragiale used to say "theatre is an independent art, which in order to exist in a dignified truth, has to put in its own service, all the other arts, without allowing any of them to mount at the same level" (Caragiale, 1897).

For Caragiale, theatre is an institution that represents a constructive art, with the base in the human conflicts that are born and get to be acted out through characters and their passions, considering the individuals as work elements that put in practice the stage conflict. Being endowed with a poetic nature, but repressing it with lucidity, he felt that the images were able to reflect the complexity of the thoughts related to this phenomenon that is called theatre.

The premises are promising. Caragiale means to reach, as he himself admits, "right to the point" (2014, p. 336), considering the human soul is a mirror that gives the possibility to also observe the conscience, not only the looks of a human being, stating that "the endless outward wonder, interests us less than the also endless inward wonder" (2014, p. 16). I didn't choose the image of the mirror by chance—it is a part of the symbolism everywhere in the world, where one wishes to uncover the occult, from the alchemy to the abyssal psychology.

The systemic and professional analysis that Caragiale makes of theatre, uncovers a totally unusual competence. It is the competence of the creator, used to contemplate the inward phenomena, instead of the outward, as the critics do. He used to say that when one intends something to appear exactly as it is, you have to

look at a person/phenomena from up close. If you wish to see only the beautiful part, one must look from a distance. In his theatre, Caragiale uses both plans, thus creating a beautiful and still exact image.

He is the one that also considers the conventionality of theatre to be gross, because the intention to show the object is done exactly by showing it. From there the authority of theatre is derived, in order to show the existence in a variety of forms, literally unlimited.

The theatre creative process is characterized by individuality, thus the playwright conception forms itself through rendering events or facts that are vivid, without the playwright taking in account how the production will transform in the end. Both worlds are significant, the worlds that the theatre consists of: the text and the performance. These two worlds can keep their necessary authority, but they need to cooperate in a creative way.

In his theoretical works, Caragiale accomplishes a mixture between the playwright that writes a play and an architect that designs a building. One is building a succession of actions, the other a detailed plan. The result of the playwright is the play as the main support for the performance and the result of the architect is the building. He argues:

The plan of the architect is not exactly the final accomplishment of his intentions, meaning the moment, but only the conventional notation after which there must be a gathering of the needed materials in an orderly whole, while in a similar way, the writing of the playwright is not the peak of his intention, but the conventional notation, after all these other elements will be added to present a passing of event and human acts. (1957, pp. 21-22)

Caragiale's aesthetic conception on theatre had as a starting point a vision with the following issues:

- Everything that literature comprises must represent an expression of society;
- Art must be a reflection of reality, that keeps at all time the perfect balance between what it depicts and the way it does it, practically keeping the balance between content and form;
- Art must be characterized by simplicity and honesty, both in conception and

expression;

- The playwright must find veridic typologies that exist and act in real life.
- Caragiale considers that there are bad plays and good plays, beautiful and ugly, intelligent and dumb. One can notice the ingenious pair of opposites that he uses as a master of his native tongue.

He used to say that a play that could be considered primitive in its time, can be extraordinarily beautiful, as well as a modern one can be extremely bad. As a true expert, he gives a different diagnosis and he enforces it by saying that the classic playwrights will always delight their public with their plays, while the modern ones have temporary success, but the main core of their work will be drowned into oblivion. By this statement he actually captures a reality that goes way beyond his time—the fact that the number of bad plays is always extremely high, way over the number of valuable ones.

In the art of theatre, the play is as important as the complexity of the psychological range of the characters, the diversity of human souls, as he calls it. These human types must act and create a certain dynamic, that must always remain instable. This fact only can save and give life to a weak comedy, as well as a bad interpretation can ruin the most beautiful play.

Caragiale reveals his beautiful exegetic qualities, even when he intends to depict the difference that occurs and manifests between the artistic conceptions concerning style and manner. His proof, made with attitude and depth, has its base in the story of two brothers: one kind, honest, devoted and the other one mean, two-faced, envious, scheming, from Shakespeare's and Shiller's tragedies.

Another topic that concerned Caragiale was the talent of the actor. This is not at all surprising, taking in consideration that an authentic creator doesn't exist inside the issues of the subject, that is determined by some extremely important objectives. The problem of talent was mentioned by Caragiale with much momentum by stating: "A work of art is a living being, whose life giver can't be none other than talent" (1957, p. 79).

His vision on the lack of talent is that it leads to artificial expressions, that furthers the work from what is artistic, thus establishing the place of talent in the configuration of creation: "In order to create a work of art, one needs talent, talent and again talent" (Caragiale, 1957, p. 80). This repetition shows us how important it was for Caragiale to work with talented actors.

Using analysis made over long periods of time, he uncovers unknown facts about the talent of the actors, stating that the human souls are receptive to what happens around them, but that only a few individuals are able to act out what they are actually feeling inside, in a way that others can understand them, by transmitting the state and feelings that made them be in a certain state. He argues: "We are all irritable, expressive are only a few" (1957, p. 85) ... and how deep this is! In his view, the intention is the essence of life, and the expression its material organisation. For Caragiale the actor's creation is a choice between raw elements from a shapeless chaos that he is able to melt and pour into a form that comes to life and differs itself from anything else that exists. The ability to create is a force of nature at the artist's mercy. This power, combined with expressivity—that's talent!

Conclusions

As a conclusion, it is worth mentioning that Caragiale's critical and theoretical activity, as well as his plays, are of absolute significance today as any time. Almost all his ideas about theatre and the literary drama aspects that he dealt with, as well as his analysis on the vision and the artistic process of creation are perfectly valid and consist even today a landmark in the creative activity of the artists.

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