

CARAGIALE AND GUSTI: SOCIOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS

Adriana GHIȚOI*

Rezumat

Ideea lucrării de față s-a născut dintr-o constatare a lui Dimitrie Gusti: „1907 este și astăzi de actualitate. Este singura lucrare de «sociologie» a lui Caragiale, ce stă cu onoare alături de marile analize ale societății românești, săvârșite în piesele și nuvelele sale”. Pornind de la spusele gustiene, m-am întors la text, singurul care putea infirma suspiciunea că afirmația lui Gusti ar fi putut fi doar o dovadă a prieteniei ce-l lega de Caragiale. 1907 relevă un Caragiale cu un profund și ingenios spirit socio-analitic, deși autorul nu era sociolog *en titre*, competența – în acest caz particular – fiindu-i recunoscută de însuși Gusti: „Eram convins că studiul lui Caragiale va însemna una din cele mai strălucite cercetări asupra spinoasei și complexe «chestii agrare»”. Prin poziția pe care o are față de răscoala din 1907, dincolo de o profundă implicare afectivă și morală, prin analiza lucidă și pertinentă a motivelor care au declanșat revolta țărănească și, mai ales prin soluțiile pe care le propune, Ion Luca Caragiale își dovedește afinitatea pentru principiile școlii sociologice gustiene. 1907 relevă o altă dimensiune a personalității proteice a lui Caragiale, cred, insuficient exploatată încă, dar demnă de noi abordări.

Cuvinte cheie: istoria gândirii sociologice românești; Dimitrie Gusti; I.L. Caragiale; răscoala țărănească din 1907.

Abstract

This paper was initiated by a statement I found in D. Gusti's work: “1907 continues to be valid even today. It is the only ‘sociological’ writing produced by Caragiale and with honor it stands beside the great analyses of Romanian society, realized in his plays and short stories.” 1907 reveals a Caragiale endowed with a profound and ingenious socio-analytical spirit, although the author was not at all an *en titre* sociologist. His competency, however, is recognized by Gusti himself: “I was sure that Caragiale's study will be one of the most brilliant pieces of research on the difficult and complex ‘agrarian issue.’” Through his standing vis-à-vis the 1907 revolt, through his lucid and articulated analysis of the reasons that lead to this peasant rising, and especially through the solutions that he offers, Caragiale demonstrates an affinity for the principles of the Bucharest Sociological School. Therefore, 1907 shows another facet of Caragiale's protean personality – one that has not been sufficiently explored, but which is, I believe, worthy of further analyses.

Keywords: history of Romanian sociological thought; Dimitrie Gusti; I.L. Caragiale; Romanian peasant 1907 uprising.

Résumé

L'idée de cet exposé est née d'une réflexion de Dimitrie Gusti: „1907 reste toujours actuel. C'est la seule oeuvre de «sociologie» de Caragiale, qui puisse être rangée parmi les

* Ph.D., Lecturer at Hyperion University of Bucharest, Department of Journalism,
email: ady22ghittoi@yahoo.com

grandes analyses de la société roumaine, réalisées dans ses récits ou dans ses pièces de théâtre.”

Prenant comme point de départ l'affirmation de Gusti, nous avons pris en considération le texte, le seul capable d'infirmier la supposition qu'il pourrait s'agir, au fond, d'une preuve de l'amitié pour Caragiale.

1907 nous révèle un Caragiale doué d'un esprit socio-analytique profond et ingénieux, malgré que l'auteur ne soit pas sociologue en titre, bien au contraire, sa compétence étant reconnue par Gusti lui-même: „J'étais persuadé que l'étude de Caragiale serait une des recherches les plus brillantes sur «la question agraire», tellement ardue et complexe.” Ce qui sera d'ailleurs confirmé plus tard.

Par ses convictions au sujet de la révolte de 1907, au-delà d'une profonde implication affective et morale, par l'analyse lucide et pertinente des causes qui ont déclenché la révolte paysanne et, surtout, par les solutions qu'il propose, Ion Luca Caragiale prouve son affinité pour les principes de l'École sociologique de Gusti.

1907 met en valeur une autre dimension de la personnalité de Caragiale, qui est, à notre avis, pas encore exploitée, mais qui attend de nouvelles recherches.

Mots-clés: Dimitrie Gusti, Ion Luca Caragiale, révolte paysanne de 1907, l'histoire de la pensée sociologique roumaine.

Like any endeavor – be it scholarly, literary, essayistic or of any other kind –, the one presently analyzed has a certain genesis and is subject to various concerns. And since the “genetic factors” had to have a name, those who stimulated my elective affinities for the sociological perspective on the Caragiale phenomenon are my professor, Zoltán Rostás, and my former student and present colleague, Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu. I owe them my sociological „amateurism”, to which I should add my constant need and preoccupation for Caragiale. However, I am not referring to an “iconic” Caragiale, permanently accepted as a cultural value, even if sometimes contested as such, but to a necessity for an always “different” Caragiale. Situating his work within the field of “perennial” cultural values amounts to accepting the idea that, beyond the settings imposed by time and the weight of various verdicts passed on by authorities in the field, Caragiale’s work has the living capacity to uncover itself in a “different” way, to speak to us of “different” things. The “living” character of this work looms over the quest for an almost suicidal act: the search for intersections between Gusti and Caragiale that are justified not only by a warm friendship and mutual appreciation, but also by a conceptual affinity.

Where and how did these intersections occur? The fulcrum of this relationship resides in Caragiale’s unique piece concerning the Great Peasant Revolt titled “1907. From Spring Till Fall.” Gusti considered it “one of the most astute pieces of research on the thorny and complex ‘agrarian question’, and as such, the only sociological text by Caragiale.” (Gusti, 1971, pp. 167-168). Gusti’s statement pushed me to embark on this research project.

The problematic was the lack of any thorough analysis of the above mentioned text, as well as an obvious paradox. For when one looks at the map of Caragiale's universe, one sees so many signs that it leaves the impression that there is no more room for another presence. Caragiale's exegetes were both numerous and authoritative. This is because I.L. Caragiale became a subject that important names in Romanian culture felt compelled to acknowledge. From Titu Maiorescu and Gherea to the latest bibliographical books and articles, Caragiale seems to overwhelm his readership. Both Călinescu and Vianu. Both Ibrăileanu and Lovinescu. Pompiliu Constantinescu, Streinu, and Șt. Cazimir. Both Marin Bucur and I. Constantinescu. Both Eugen Simion and Florin Manolescu. Mircea Iorgulescu, Cioculescu, and Nicolae Manolescu. Zarifopol, Tomuș, and S. Iosifescu. Both I.M. Sadoveanu and I. Cazaban. Both Iorgu Iordan and Bulgăr. Both Ioana Pârvulescu and Gelu Negrea. And the list could continue. Studies, books, analyses – modern or more traditional –, new documents, biographical investigations, republications – more popular or scholarly. The volume of Caragiale output grows in waves, occasioned, for instance, by various anniversaries and commemorations – such as “2012 – The Caragiale Year”. These events create impulses that subsequently decelerate, only to reveal anew their inexhaustible energies.

Within this massive interpretative output, “1907” passes almost unobserved. It is observed as being “something else”, a text in which Caragiale leaves behind his good-natured humor and playful comic from his literary works and identifies himself with a grave voice about a “burning issue.” The Great Peasant Revolt of 1907. During the upheavals unfolding in Romania, Caragiale was in Berlin, self-exiled since 1904, following the Caion trial. The news from his native country horrified him. His son remembers:

„He just sat for days on end with his head in his hands. When someone spoke to him, he would wake as if from a dream and answered the questions in a drained voice. Later, the despair would be overcome by revolt. [...] He wanted to leave, to see for himself what was going on in his country, then despair would again paralyze him... One night, feverish and irritated, he wrote the «1907» brochure [...], he sent the first part, translated by Mite Kremnitz, to *Die Zeit*, and he locked the Romanian manuscript in a drawer” (Caragiale, 1920).

Gusti's accounts from 1945 (Bădina, Neamțu, 1967, pp. 61-62) about the events of 1907 also portray Caragiale as extremely preoccupied and affected by what he learned about the revolts from the newspapers. More than once he manifested his anxiety by postponing reading the news and apprehensively addressing Gusti: “I wonder what is going on.”(Bădina, Neamțu, 1967, p. 62).

The article that he would write about the revolt was discussed in detail by Caragiale with the young Doctor of Philosophy, Dimitrie Gusti, who was also in Berlin. Gusti remembers:

“Invited for lunch, I was asked by Caragiale to express my opinion about the way he understood to write the requested article.

And I listened to him until 5 in the morning.

Those afternoon and night were unforgettable. I was witnessing the unfolding of a great and difficult problem, engaged with by a thinker who was not a professional, but who analyzed it with surprising depth and subtlety. I was sure that Caragiale’s study will be one of the most brilliant pieces of research on the thorny and complex «agrarian question».

I left before daybreak, after I was assured that in one or two days I will be called back to take a look at the writing.

It was only on the third day that I could see him. I was greeted by a desolate atmosphere, and by a tormented Caragiale, sleep deprived, and with desperate look. I worrisomely wondered what happened.

I felt relieved when I learnt that Caragiale could not write a single line. Because his verbal articulation – so accurate and eloquent – could not attain a correspondingly written form, Caragiale had chosen not to write anything.

After many days of hard work, the article was sent to the newsroom. It was also published in Romanian, under the telling title «1907»” (Gusti, 1971, pp. 167-168).

The text’s genesis comprises several stages. (See „Note și comentarii” [Notes and Comments] in Caragiale, 2001, p. 1048). The first part is dated “1907, March” and was published in the daily *Die Zeit* from Wien, year IV, no. 624, April 3, 1907, pp. 1-2. It was titled „Rumänien, wie es ist” (Romania as It Is) and signed by “A Romanian Patriot.” The newspaper can be found in the manuscripts fund at the Romanian Academy, I.L. Caragiale file I, prints 1.

Paul Zarifopol, in the preface to the third tome of his critical edition of Caragiale’s work, explains the provenance of the article’s translation: “The German translation of Caragiale’s text was done by a Berliner *literati*, Hermann Kienzl, who belonged to Mrs. Mite Kremnitz’s circle.” The perspectives about the text’s translation are multiple. Caragiale’s son, Luca Ion, maintains that the first part of the article was translated by Mite Kremnitz herself. Zarifopol, on the other hand, states that the translation belongs to Hermann Kienzl, while Stancu Ilin and Constantin Hârlav put together the following scenario: “Mite Kremnitz asked I.L. Caragiale, through Paul Zarifopol, to write an article on the topic of the peasant revolt for the Wiener newspaper *Die Zeit*. Caragiale accepts and writes the part dated ‘1907, March’, that he sends to Paul Zarifopol in order to give it to Mite Kremnitz. The latter takes care of the article’s translation, by requesting the services of the Berliner *literati* Hermann Kienzl. The German version returns to Paul Zarifopol, who might have brushed it up a little, sending it back to the author in Berlin. I.L. Caragiale sends the German version of the article to Wien, with an accompanying letter. One can easily see that the translation of the first part of the pamphlet is a collective work: Mite Kremnitz – Hermann Kienzl – Paul Zarifopol. This was the starting point of the contemporaries’ contradictory testimonies.” (Caragiale, 2001, pp. 1052-1053).

After its publication in *Die Zeit*, the Romanian version appeared in Craiova, only three days later, in *Monitorul*, year II, no. 114, April 6, 1907, pp. 1-2. It was also signed “A Romanian Patriot” and it indicated the article’s origin “From the Wiener newspaper *Die Zeit*.” The text was preceded by a editorial note: “How Foreigners Judge Us: ‘We republish from the newspaper *Zeit* [sic] from Wien the article below, so that our readers could see how foreigners judge us. Although the assessments about us and our nature are pessimistic, reading this article, one has to admit that, for the most part, the author is right. The truth hurts, but it can also serve to correct and that is the reason we printed it.’” (Caragiale, 2001, p. 1049).

Mihail Dragomirescu was the one who took the text from under the protection of anonymity and published it with the mention of the author’s name, in *Suplimentul politic* (Political Supplement) of the journal *Convorbiri* (Conversations). Caragiale’s text is printed here under the title “The Causes of the Peasant Revolt,” in year I, no. 19, October 1st, 1907, pp. 765-771. It was accompanied by Dragomirescu’s eulogistic words: “It is a magnificent chapter in Tacitus [...]. In Romanian, in this way, only one writer has written before: Mr. Titu Maiorescu in some of the ‘Introductions’ to his ‘Parliamentary Discourses’.” (Caragiale, 2001, p. 1050).

In addition to the first part, dated “1907, March,” the author added a second part, dated “1907, September,” as well as a third one, “1907, October.” These three parts were published together as a brochure at the beginning of November 1907. It appeared at the printing house of the newspaper *Adevărul* (The Truth). The brochure reached a record circulation: three editions, ten thousand copies. A fourth edition was therefore needed!

Their common preoccupations for the “peasant question” are traced, as far as Gusti is concerned, to his graduate studies in Leipzig, which continued his experience from the University of Berlin. At the University of Leipzig, Gusti persistently pursued the project contemplated before leaving the country:

“to study society, being convinced that it constitutes a separate research field [...] this why I decided to study closely, as a specialist and not as a dilettante, the sciences: philosophy, psychology, history, economy, legal studies, statistics, and, only afterwards, to be able to start the research of society as such. As a specialist and not as a dilettante!” (Bădina, Neamțu, 1967, pp. 48-49).

His desire for expert knowledge was the reason why Gusti opted for the most severe and exigent professor in political economy from Leipzig, Karl Bücher. At his seminar, Gusti gave a talk about the “History of the Agrarian Question in Romania.” The importance that Gusti assigned to this paper is emphasized in a letter sent to his friend, Ion Al. Rădulescu-Pogoneanu, and derives not only from the fact that it was presented before Bücher, but also from Gusti’s own preoccupation for the “agrarian question.”

“From this paper it was obvious that Gusti was not a supporter of extant property arrangements, especially that of the landed gentry, but, irrespective of how paradoxical it would seem, taking into account the time and the milieu that he grew in, he supported the elimination of serfdom. Gusti admits himself to be on the side of effective individual freedom, ensured by land availability and the possibility of promoting the necessary means for a high agricultural productivity.” (Bădina, Neamțu, 1967, pp. 49-50).

He articulated certain theses that he would later reiterate in his theoretical and practical activity, anticipating in this seminar, ever since 1900, the later atmosphere of social effervescence.

Within the 1907 generalized “critical and ruthless attitude of Romanian society”, as Henri H. Stahl considers it in the dialogues with Zoltán Rostás published in *Monografia ca utopie* (Rostás, 2000, pp. 129-131), Caragiale appears not at all unfamiliar with Gusti’s conception about the way agriculture was carried on, and the means whereby peasants’ work was exploited in an eminently agrarian country, where

“The country’s land, Caragiale maintains, is in the possession: 1. of large owners [...], 2. of middle owners, and 3. of small owners, [namely] the great peasant mass, put in possession of land in [18]64 and [18]88.

All peasants are ploughers, they cultivate their small holdings, as well as their small and middle properties. For these small owners (almost 5 million people out of a total population of 6 million people), their properties were not sufficient because, on one hand, the living needs and the taxes grew and continue to grow, and, on the other hand, their land shrank and continues to shrink, passing to their children in smaller fragments, through inheritance according to common law. Alienating one’s land was prohibited by law, only compensation exchange from peasant to peasant being permitted, [leading] to land fragmentation in such small pieces until they became so infinitesimal that they could have only served for an intensive and refined agricultural practice – a type of impossible work here because of the ancient habits, lack of special skills and patience, ignorance with respect to methods for savant husbandry, and also because of the lack of capital and credit [system].” (Caragiale, 2001, pp. 122-123).

Caragiale is not shy about confronting the land tenancy system that had obviously lead to the peasants’ misery and to the prosperity of land tenants, banks and credit institutions, to the enrichment of large land owners, not to mention the growth in state’s income. Caragiale’s analysis is extremely detailed, meticulous, and realistic.

Gusti argued that the possible causes of the 1907 revolt were to be found in “the lack of a profound knowledge and appropriate assessment of reality”(Gusti, 1919, p. 291) on the part of state authorities. Caragiale was not unfamiliar with this reality, nor was he unfamiliar with its reasons: “However, one who closely knows, like us, the organs of this state and their functioning is surprised now not by what is going on, but – if there was (as one would have good reasons not to believe it) such energy in those masses – by the fact that this enormous public scandal did not

occur much earlier.”(Caragiale, 2001, p. 122). Therefore, the main guilty party is the state, with its “intellectual politics, administration and culture.”(Caragiale, 2001, p. 126). The political parties were, in Caragiale’s acute perception, not

“founded on tradition, on old or new class interests and thus on programs and principles. The two so-called historical parties that regularly alternate in power are but in fact two factions that do not have partisans, but rather a clientele. The clientele is the plebe incapable of work [...], impoverished merchants from the slums, small and dangerous agitators in villages and around towns, truncheon-wielding electoral agents; and finally the hybrid product of schools of all levels, semi-cultured intellectuals, lawyers and shysters, professors, teachers, and small-minded institutors, free-thinking and lapsed priests, illiterate primary school teachers – all of them beer-hall theoreticians; followed by high officials and petty bureaucrats, in their greatest part immovable.” (Caragiale, 2001, p. 126).

In this context, the immense peasant class has no representative in the Chambers, for the representatives are recruited from the illustrious political clientele already mentioned.

In “Apelul pentru Constituirea Asociației pentru Studiul și Reforma Socială” (The Appeal for the Establishment of the Association for Social Study and Reform), publicized in Iași in April 1918, Gusti – in much the same way Caragiale did eleven years earlier – articulated a trenchant critique against the governing system and asked for its dissolution. Gusti attacked “the intrusion of party political interests and of persons who neither know the needs of the groups they make up reforms for, nor the feasibility of the means used for their accomplishment; however, they seek, through the promoted reforms, personal or party interests.” (Gusti, 1919, p. 291).

It is true that the two friends diverged when it came to the method of applying these principles for social recovery and reform. Gusti, with his intellectual finesse, was confident that the use of social research data and results in the governmental acts of social reform was the solution, while the more forthright Caragiale believed that only a coup d’état could put an end to the despotic oligarchy, and could remake a new system “from the bottom, on the principle of the rational and equitable empowerment of producers and the deterrence of profiteers of all kinds.”(Caragiale, 2001, p. 132).

Neither education, nor public culture escape Caragiale’s critical stance:

“the schools are just factories that churn out functionaries, a plethora of half-ignoramuses, characterless, heartless, true knights of intellectual industry who covet as many meritless honors and as much effortless gain as possible.

These factories feed the public oligarchy that exclusively rules over the Romanian country. These factories produce an opportunistic oligarchy [...] Lots of nerve, lack of

any scruples, renunciation of personal dignity, of family honor, infamy even, but also some luck – and a great career is all but assured.

In the Romanian country, this is called, very seriously, the democratic system... And this oligarchy, semi-cultured or, at best, falsely cultured, is as incapable of useful production and thought as it is greedy for gains and honors. Moreover, it arrogates for itself the full power of the state: with a cruel and outrageous shamelessness, it denies the peasants (the immense, submissive and dutiful mass that produces the national wealth) any right of interference, be it only consultative, in the ruling of their interests, in the guiding of their destinies. This is done under the pretext of their ignorance and lack of political maturity.” (Caragiale, 2001, pp. 129-130).

I do not believe that it is a stretch to read in Caragiale’s writing Gusti’s later conceptualization of an intellectual elite who matured and became autonomous after having had contact with the School’s and the Professor’s formative thinking, had the mission to contribute to the rising of the masses. What Caragiale envisioned in the realm of ideas was later institutionalized by Gusti.

The solution and the most important point of convergence for the issues put forth by both thinkers was political reform.

“The country needs political reform. [...] The abolition of the usurpation political configuration, the eradication of the most odious boyar system, without many established boyars and petty boyars, but with uncounted fleecers and parvenus, and the entry of the entire country in its rightful sovereignty, with the ability to decide about its wealth and honor, about its fate and destiny, according to God’s will, entirely through its own will. [...]

And then what? Then the entire country, called upon to exercise its holy right! And if it doesn’t yet know well enough what to do, then... it should learn! The country should learn with sorrows and sacrifices – just as the entire civilized world did. There is enough time for this: God, praise His name!, hasn’t fenced in the future...” (Caragiale, 2001, pp. 140-141).

Finally, both Caragiale and Gusti were ruled by a warm feeling, mostly discredited today, but theorized yesterday by Gusti, i.e. patriotism. One could also consider the hypothesis that, at least to some extent, Caragiale contributed to Dimitrie Gusti’s return to Romania and, thus, to the enormous benefit brought about by the Gustian School’s social research and reform activities.

In *Autosociologia unei vieți* (A Life’s Self-Sociology), Gusti remembers the moment Caragiale roused him from his indecision to repatriate:

“What, Doctor, are you still pondering? Don’t you understand you don’t have a choice, but only to fulfill your duty to your country? For, however this country would be, it is still your country. Just like your mother would be, even full of vices, drunkard, even murderous, you can never forget she is your mother! Don’t look askance that I’m here, for I left after having fulfilled my duty, and only after I was convinced that it doesn’t

want me anymore. But you, Doctor, in the beginning of your life, you are not allowed to desert and, especially, to become a prodigal son who doesn't want to acknowledge his country, his mother." (Caragiale, 1971, p. 175).

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