

Spectacular Dilemmas in Caragiale's Works and Their Reflections on Stage and in Translation

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Abstract: This paper aims at paying homage to Romania's great classic by bringing into play the spectacular dilemmas in international translations (into English and French, our languages of work) and of his prominent characters in theatre, in general (the tipsy citizen, the cuckold at carnival, a matter of betrayal). From a theatrical point of view, we will discuss some of the performances and their dilemmas, focusing on the most recent staging of *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings* at the National Theatre of Iași. From the perspective of Translation Studies as discipline, we are interested in the relationship between the author, his work and translation, literally and in all senses as the great translator and theorist Irina Mavrodin put it; this is because specialty literature on I.L. Caragiale spoke of the invention of another language in order to render his works appropriately in different languages for other cultures.

Keywords: Romanian drama, Translation Studies, Caragiale, versatility

Introduction

For the Translation Studies scholar and the amateur interested in the phenomenon, Caragiale's spectacular dilemmas are of interest. Let us simply recall the immortal tipsy citizen who is puzzled and inquires whom to vote for, his lines just as Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' in Shakespeare's tragedy, now belong to everyday speech everywhere, an ultimate proof of the immortality of the reception of a text. Since the translator has always been considered a traitor labelled as *traduttore-traditore*¹, the betrayal in love (Ro: traducerea în amor) in *D'ale carnavalului*

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¹ In Romanian Translation Studies, the reference to the spectacular dilemma of the great classic is presented in the foreword of a seminal work: "A cliché that is several centuries old and, like any cliché, also contains a dose of truth (at least until Caragiale, our language has preserved the meaning of translation = betrayal – remember Mișea Baston's line from *D'ale carnavalului*: "Nae mă traduce" – that is, he is betraying me or, better said, deceiving me)" See Magda Jeanrenaud, *Universaliile traducerii*, Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 7.

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Carnival Doings and the staging that visually doubles the act², allow us to emerge into Caragiale's world in its transposition from text to performance. Therefore, from a linguistic viewpoint, Romanian language is considered to be a lucky and privileged one, thanks to Caragiale's characters who bring together translation and betrayal in one word³. Another merit of his characters is that, in three decades in the 19th century, they separated themselves from Alecsandri's Chirița and variants who indulged themselves into what we nowadays call 'the delights of hybrid interlingual transcodings'⁴, namely to adopt rewording as an explanation given in the same language close to professional to lay communication or intralingual translation in Jakobson's acception; in Caragiale's works, Chirița's idiolect that had expanded to become an idiom, would be rendered through a jargon used in everyday speech in which the mistreated and degraded borrowings from French would be deprived of the prestigious brand that consecrated them⁵. Regarding Caragiale, there is talk of the third language concerning the translation into French, so untranslatable his plays are; this is because the intricacies of the lost letter permeated by both an ancient and contemporary Romanian psychology are irrelevant to the foreign reader⁶ or audience without a proper adaptation. Thus, the translation manages to make the original immortal, giving new life to it or endurance in time by undoing the bonds that anchor even the most exalted poetic creation from its inception. Translation may be seen as a gift of existence beyond space and time similar to a pre-Babel state⁷.

² In literature, it was argued that "Drama, as an art form, is a constant process of translation: from original concept to script (when there is one), to producer/ director's interpretation, to contribution by designer and actor/ actress, to visual and/ or aural images to audience response... these are only the most obvious stages (no pun intended) in the process. At every stage there may be a number of subsidiary processes of translation at work". See Reba Gostand, "Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication: Drama as Translation", *The Languages of Theatre. Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama*, edited by Ortrun Zuber, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 1.

³ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁴ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁵ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

⁶ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 93. An opinion shared by Irina Mavrodin, as well, with respect to the adaptations from *O noapte furtunoasă* and *Comu Leonida față cu reacțiunea* by Monica Lovinescu and Eugen Ionesco for the French audience. See Irina Mavrodin, *Despre traducere: Literal și în toate sensurile*, Ed. Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 2006, pp. 126-127.

⁷ Cf. George Steiner, "On an Exact Art (Again)", *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), p. 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4335266>. Retrieved on April 6, 2026.

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The French version signed by Monica Lovinescu and Eugen Ionesco is said to have come out late for foreign audiences; the 1994 trans-adaptations of Caragiale's comedies reveal little of the translators' intent at paratextual level⁸, we are only left with the translation options in this matter. Furthermore, we learn from one of the translator's original work how she began her task several decades earlier to 'bridge a gap' between Romanian and European letters⁹, as well as other issues about the internal mechanisms of translation work to decode the spirit and letter of the playwright: Eugen Ionesco worked at the translation when he took time off from writing his own plays as a way to relax according to Monica Lovinescu in her diary who does not remember whose idea was it, his or hers, to render one of the most untranslatable Romanian writers into French; they spent a few weeks, up to a month playing with equivalences from *Conu Leonida/ Mr. Leonida Faced with Reaction* and *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night*. They were almost convinced that part of Caragiale's humour was based on the misappropriation of neologisms. How could one reproduce them as such, in their misspelled form, in French? It is a question that the other translators must have asked themselves, too, to avoid giving the impression that they did not know what they were doing, raise suspicion on the mastery of the target language and the likely corrections of any proofreader in the printing house. For Eugen Ionesco, French was his mother tongue whereas Monica Lovinescu had learned it and spoke it at the same time as Romanian. Neither of them had any complexes about it. They did not see why they would treat it with more linguistic or grammatical respect than the Romanian language that Caragiale had distorted so gracefully. She is satisfied that they hopefully managed to produce, if not the best, at least, the least inexpressive of Caragiale's translations¹⁰. The lack of success the plays had with the French public was not only due to the translation, the 'total fiasco' of Caragiale's reception on the French stage¹¹ also showing in only one performance briefly mentioned in the national catalogue on the topic, *The Lost Letter* being introduced to

⁸ A preface would probably have specified whether the translation was made for reading or for the stage. Being an edition for the general public, the cultural elements remain undeclared for the French reader/theatre lover. It was concluded that "this indecision undermines the translators' project and suspends the translation in a no man's land: neither a scholarly translation, intended for an informed public, entitled to a faithful translation, but sprinkled with explanations and footnotes, nor a version aimed at an instant effect, in the theatre hall." cf. M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 116, translation ours.

⁹ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁰ M. Lovinescu, *La apa Vavilonului*, Humanitas, București, 1999, p. 73.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

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French audiences in the 50s. Things may have changed since Monica Lovinescu published her diary in which she accounted for the adaptations herein discussed; Caragiale's lack of literary celebrity can be attributed to a Romanian reality that is more difficult to digest for foreigners, similarly to that of two other great classics, Creangă and his stories or our national poet, Mihai Eminescu whose lyricism proved to be poorly received in foreign languages abroad.

The Ideology of Caragiale's Translations and Other Spectacular Dilemmas

Any translation has ideology embedded in itself, no matter how much the translator tries to hide it; it is necessary for the coherence of the text, which would otherwise be doomed to loss in generalities¹². In some cases, it seems that translation stands in the way of a writer's own development, as was the case with the French translations of Caragiale that we referred to above¹³. In one of his own works, *Notes et contre-notes*, E. Ionesco introduces the French reader to the Romanian playwright's universe, whose work is populated exclusively by 'imbeciles', 'social anthropoids', characters that 'lack intelligence', are 'greedy', 'vain', 'cunning' and eager to succeed in their 'irrational cretinism', followers of the revolutionaries of 1848, endowed with boundless 'intellectual chaos' in their political ideas, universal bourgeois confused in spirit and degraded in a society barely escaping a so-called 'prolonged Balkan Middle Ages'. As idiots, they read newspapers written by other idiots in an attempt to understand what is happening to them, hence the 'distortion of their daily language'. The ideology that had to be rendered in translation thus consisted of the characters' profile, their 'void of ideas', the gap between stereotype and the obscurity of verbosity, the deviation of equally elevated and obscure language, the theatre that becomes naturalistic beyond borders, but also fantastic in its absurdity¹⁴.

For theatre and performance, we are interested in stage directions which also have their own dilemmas, at least for translators who need to decide on the language register. For example, in the French translations previously mentioned, Veta from *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night* and Efimița from *Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea/ Mr. Leonida Faced with Reaction*, become *conjointe* (Madame Efimitza)

¹² M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹³ Until the end, Eugen Ionesco will see translation as a means of subsistence and an obstacle in writing his own work. This is also the period in which Eugen Ionesco and Monica Lovinescu translated from Caragiale." For more details, see M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁴ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

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and *épouse*, respectively (the latter pertains to high register, a translator's choice difficult to account for) although in Romanian both are consorts; Leonida is addressed as *M'sieu*, and Dandanache as *vétéran* which is obviously less fitting for the old fighter from '48 than *ancien combattant*. Also, the newspaper *Răcnetul Carpaților*, rendered by *Le Cri des Carpates*, loses its rhetorical and comic effect through the neutralization it undergoes in translation, a more 'marked' term like *hurlement* or *braillement*¹⁵ being more appropriate. *Maidan* as cultural reality finds itself at a disadvantage, the place of the plot populated only by stray dogs, a metaphor for vagueness, imprecision and confusion in general, being rendered in French as *terrain vague* or *coin de la rue*¹⁶. The option for *zone* perhaps denotes the desire to attract the Parisian public by associating the term with the squalid and illegally built *fabourg* that led to *c'est la zone*, a bad, discouraging situation¹⁷. The pleonastic (dirty, cunning) 'clean' is employed to capitalise on a servant's readiness to obey his master; through *saleté, c'est le mot!*, a play on words essential for the comic effect is lost due to the diluted extension incapable of grasping the laconicism of the source text¹⁸. In translating the forms of address, a wide range was chosen: 'bobocule' became *ma (petite) crotte* (a risky choice if we consider the usual reference to excrement and mud), *mon chou* or *(ma) poulette* and 'țățico' *frangine, bobonne, ma bonne*, although repetition would have favoured a variant for both the written text and its staging in shaping the characters¹⁹.

Interjections and punctuation, the latter completely absent from Molly Bloom's Joycean monologue, a hallmark of the modernist stream of consciousness, represent suprasegmental elements of a text, an intratextual factor in the German functionalist model designed by Christiane Nord drawing on *skopos* theory, alongside presuppositions, lexis, sentence structure or composition, opposing the more general extratextual factors that concern the author or sender of the text, his/ her intention, the reader or receiver, the place and moment in time when the text was received, the reason for which it was transmitted and its function or effect. Superior to lexical and syntactic elements, in Nord's vision, suprasegmental elements set the tone of the text and are visually signalled by italics/bold text, punctuation (question marks or other),

¹⁵ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹⁶ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁷ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁸ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁹ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.

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parentheses or deviant forms of writing for phonetic reasons, etc.; the purpose is to provide the reader/receiver with important additional information regarding the author's intention, the semantic core of the sentence or phrase, disambiguating the possible meanings²⁰. The translators have preserved the direct discourse of the text in which the characters with primary experiences do not raise any problems regarding their existence; the target text seems trivialized, compared to the source one which abounds in exclamation or interrogation marks, ellipsis marks by virtue of the over-bidding of the connotative function of satire in comedy²¹. Interjections are either taken as such, or translated by an equivalent, made explicit by paraphrase or omitted. Among others, 'as!' becomes *pensez-vous*, ',ei', *hé ,ei!*', quoi! or *eh bien!*, and 'aşa e bravos!', *c'est juste! Bravo, bis.*²²

A spectacular dilemma that is difficult, even impossible to solve by translators, is represented by the lexical borrowings from French in their distorted form coined by Caragiale; rendered in their correct form, they would lose their meaning and trivialize the text, according to Romanian literature on Translation Studies. But on the other hand, a literal translation, through graphic deformation or the addition of misunderstandings, would make the receiver/reader question the quality of the translation and suspect the translator of ignorance concerning the target language. Compensation would be a middle way, allowing the use of other terms with a function of discrimination or differentiation to achieve the same effect in translation, as in the original. Thus, *gratte-papier* would have been preferable to *employé* for 'ampliat' and (*t'as-)*vu? to *raison* for 'rezon', respectively. The distorted Romanian was rendered into correct French, therefore form was favoured to the detriment of function even if the latter matters more than the former; analogously, 'trei ani la pasion' becomes *trois ans pensionnaire* in French, 'eram ambetată', *je m'embêtais*, and 'sanfason', *sans façons*²³.

The English translations from Caragiale that benefited from book-length treatment concern his sketches and stories²⁴; fragments can also be found in students'

²⁰ For a thorough description of the functionalist model and its uses in translation analysis, see Christiane Nord, *Text Analysis in Translation. Theory, Method, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis*, translated from German by Christiane Nord and Penelope Sparrow, Rodopi, Amsterdam/Atlanta GA, 1991 and *Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained*, St. Jerome Publishing Manchester, 1997.

²¹ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²² M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

²³ M. Jeanrenaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171.

²⁴ See Eric D. Tappe, *Schițe și povestiri/ Sketches and Stories by I. L. Caragiale*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2012.

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exercises²⁵, his theatre being interpreted in excerpts through monographs²⁶ or discussed in academic criticism²⁷. Thanks to a foreigner who loved Romanian literature, Eric D. Tappe, the Anglo-Saxon and international public enjoyed the translation of fragments from his dramatic works, *O noapte furtunoasă/ A Stormy Night, O scrisoare pierdută/ A Lost Letter* and *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings*, which accompanied the welcoming criticism in the monograph published more than fifty years ago. Eric D. Tappe summarized *Mr. Leonida Faced with Reaction* to an audience not at all familiar with the topic, making the plot and its intricacies crystal-clear to the foreign readers: “Leonida, a pensioner aged sixty, and his wife Efimița, are sitting in their room ready for bed. He is describing the excitement in Bucharest fourteen years before at the overthrow of Prince Cuza. The couple goes to bed, and he tells her what the benefits of a republic would be. Very soon after they have gone to sleep, shots and shouting are heard outside. Efimița wakes up and rouses Leonida. As the noise has ceased, he supposes that she has been dreaming; he calms her, and they go to bed again. Once more they are roused by the noise. Leonida says it cannot be a revolution, as the Liberals are in power; then, looking at his Liberal newspaper, he sees a warning against the forces of reaction. Scared by the danger he is in as a known republican, he and Efimița barricade the door against the supposed reactionaries. No sooner have they done so than knocking begins. As the shots and shouting fade away into the distance, they realize that the person knocking at the door is their own daily servant, Safta, come to light the fire early. When admitted, she explains that there has been an uproarious party nearby and that the noise was due to revelers going home.”

²⁸ In the play, metafiction of power have been identified by critics, political life reflecting the histrionic world of performance; the most impressive part is represented, by far, by the political spectacle of people’s anger that Leonida feared the most, in the confrontation with reaction, a war against terror at that time. However, for the

²⁵ See Bianca Oana Han, “Challenges upon Translating Culture-Carrier Literary Works. Case Study – Translating *Bubico* by I.L. Caragiale”. In Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean (eds.) *Multicultural Representations. Literature and Discourse as Forms of Dialogue*, Arhipelag XXI Press, Tg. Mureș, 2016, pp. 119-123, <https://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/V4354/pdf>. Retrieved on March 31st, 2026.

²⁶ See Eric D. Tappe, *Ion Luca Caragiale*, Twayne’s World Author Series no. 276, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1974.

²⁷ See Marina Cap-Bun, “The Metafiction of Power in I.L. Caragiale’s Theatre”, *ACTA IASSYENSIA COMPARATIONIS*, no. 4/2006, pp. 33-40, https://www.literaturacomparata.ro/Site_Acta/Old/acta4/acta4_cap-bun.pdf. Retrieved on March 30th, 2026.

²⁸ Eric D. Tappe, *Ion Luca Caragiale*, Twayne’s World Author Series no. 276, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1974, p. 15.

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character, the revolution was a big party that everyone took part in, with flags, music, drunkenness, so he put all his hopes in a revolution that he wanted to witness, preferably one carried out by his hero, Garibaldi. This would culminate in a utopian republic in which no one would pay taxes anymore, there would be only rights without obligations and privileges²⁹.

The reference to the troublesome letter of love that has been lost and the apparent naivety of Trahanache who kept reading it, pretending to be an imitation, is rendered in English translation with almost the same effect that the original had on the source audience. Thus, “Am citit-o de zece ori poate: o știu pe din-afară! ascultă: „Scumpa mea Zoe, venerabilul (adică eu) merge deseară la întrunire (întrunirea de alaltăieri seara). — Eu (adică tu) trebuie să stau acasă, pentru că aștept depeși de la București, la care trebuie să răspunz pe dată; poate chiar să mă cheme ministrul la telegraf. Nu mă aștepta, prin urmare, și vino tu (adică nevastă-mea, Joițica), la cocoșelul tău (adică tu) care te adoră, ca totdeauna, și te sărută de o mie de ori, Fănică...(…) Bine frate, înțeleg plastografie, până unde se poate, dar până aci nu înțeleg... Ei, Fănică, să vezi imitație de scrisoare! să zici și tu că e a ta, dar să juri, nu altceva, să juri!”³⁰ becomes “I have read it perhaps ten times: I know it by heart! listen: ‘I’ve read it ten times, maybe; I know it by heart! Just listen ‘My dear Zoe, The Honorable (that’s me) is going to the meeting this evening (that’s the meeting the night before last). I (that’s you) must stay at home, because I’m expecting dispatches from Bucharest, to which I must reply by return. Perhaps the Minister may even call me to the telegraph. So don’t expect me; *you* must come (that’s my wife, Zoe) to your ducky (that’s you), who adores you as always, and sends you a thousand kisses. Fănică’ (...) I understand forgery up to a point, but to such a point as this...it’s beyond me. Look, Fănică, you should see the imitation of your handwriting! You’d say it was your own; you’d swear it, you would indeed!”³¹

We also find a spectacular dilemma in *A Lost Letter*, through the change intended by Farfuridi; the character who proposed the modification of essential parts without changing nothing is a classic example of tautology, semantically speaking,

²⁹ Marina Cap-Bun, “The Metafiction of Power in I.L. Caragiale’s Theatre”, *ACTA IASSYENSIA COMPARATIONIS*, no. 4/2006, p. 34, https://www.literaturacomparata.ro/Site_Acta/Old/acta4/acta4_cap-bun.pdf. Retrieved on March 30th, 2026.

³⁰ I. L. Caragiale, *Teatru*, <https://ro.wikisource.org/w/index.php?oldid=77829>. Retrieved on March 30th, 2026.

³¹ Eric D. Tappe, *Ion Luca Caragiale*, Twayne’s World Author Series no. 276, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1974, p. 21.

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hence the loss in incoherence, a mark of the humorous language. This adds to the admirable and sublime industry mentioned by Cațavencu which is completely absent, leaving the performance lover/reader, as ‘intoxicated’ nowadays as in Caragiale’s time. If the tipsy citizen continues to be puzzled in his dilemma, not knowing whom to vote for, the candidate who seems honest shows his anger, and his peculiar language, another source of humour in Caragiale, is rendered in neutral English; consequently, the effect of the source text is lost for the foreign English speaking audience, „Cum îți spui, să nu m-aleg, puicursorule, nu merdzea... Eu, familia mea, de la patuzsopt... luptă, luptă si dă-i, si dă-i si luptă... si eu mă-nțeledzi tocmai acuma să remâi pe dinafară... fără coledzi!... si cât p-ați, neicursorule, să nu m-aleg...”³² being rendered as: “it wouldn’t have done for me not to be elected. I and my family, since ’48... fight and fight... all the time... and to think that I should be left out in the cold just at present... without a constituency... very nearly not elected, old man.”³³

It was concluded that rendering Caragiale in a foreign language was a utopian task since only a trans-adaptation could be achieved, somewhat intelligible for the target audience. In the English translations brought into play so far, at the lexical level, compromise solutions were made, some of which preserve the sonority of the original, with the same effect for the readers of the translation, at least in the case of the author’s prose. Thus, in *Două loturi/ Two Lottery Tickets*, *Lefter Popescu* becomes *Penniless Smith*, ‘cocoană’, *ma’lady*, ‘boierule’, *boyar/mizter* in keeping with the orality of the original. The slum which is also problematic, just like *maidan* for the French translators who dealt with ‘mahalaua Farfurigiilor’ became *slum of the Platers*, the direct option being preferred to *shanty town* that would have described the unpleasant way the place, the outskirts of Bucharest, looked to Caragiale³⁴. Overall, the Romanian atmosphere and spirit in Caragiale’s work were transposed into English³⁵

³² I. L. Caragiale, *Teatru*, <https://ro.wikisource.org/w/index.php?oldid=77829>. Retrieved on March 30th, 2026.

³³ Eric D. Tappe, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

³⁴ Bianca Oana Han, “Translating Caragiale – A Utopian Endeavour? Case Study – Translating “Două Loturi” by I. L. Caragiale”, *Multilingualism and Plurilingualism in Europe*, Scientia Kiadó, Tg. Mureș, 2017, pp. 163-164, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/chapter-detail?id=828725>. Retrieved on March 31st, 2026.

³⁵ Bianca Oana Han, “Challenges upon Translating Culture-Carrier Literary Works. Case Study – Translating *Bubico* by I.L. Caragiale”. In Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean (eds.) *Multicultural Representations. Literature and Discourse as Forms of Dialogue*, Arhipelag XXI Press, Tg. Mureș, 2016, p. 119, <https://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/V4354/pdf>. Retrieved on March 31st, 2026.

D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings – Between Dilemma and Betrayal

Before the disloyalty in the play *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings*, in old criticism there is mention of the betrayal of the great classics, of Caragiale and Eminescu, who had risen against liberalism, the former in literature and the latter, politically. They had detractors ready to defame them and accuse them of slander³⁶. Despite being compared to Moliere, Caragiale was accused of plagiarism on two occasions: first, there was suspicion that *Năpasta/ The Disaster* was extensively inspired from a Hungarian play translated into Romanian, then *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings*, ostensibly modelled after a French play³⁷. As for the staging at the National Theatre in Iași in 2025, it marked over 170 years since the playwright's birth, 140 years since the first premiere and its publication in the periodical *Convorbiri literare*³⁸, respectively. At the National Opera in Iasi, *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings* was performed as an 'epic theater-dance show' signed by director and choreographer Ioan Tugearu, who confessed he was nervous when giving voice to the ballerinas just Pygmalion creating life or Geppetto turning Pinocchio into a real boy: "I've been staging ballet shows for 25 years, but what's happening now is a first for me, too: I'm under extraordinary pressure, because the dancers have to speak on stage. Everything that could be transformed from the text, I transformed into movement. What couldn't, I kept as text. The musical collage will remind us of the time when there was no man without a hat on his head in the slums of Bucharest, when Maria Tănase's songs were listened to, yet there will also be fragments of contemporary music."³⁹ Here the betrayal took place among carefully orchestrated pirouettes, the comedy coming in counterpoint, recalling Romanian spectators, Shakespeare's Hamletian betrayals, a tragedy diluted into drama and performed on the same stage.

Caragiale's comedy was also turned into a 'teleplay' at the inauguration of the public television channel TVR Cultural in 2002, its postmodernity being illustrated

³⁶ For more details, see Șerban Cioculescu, "Detractorii lui Caragiale", *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, 1 Oct. 1935, pp. 170-190.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Iulian Bârsan, "IAȘI: Premiera spectacolului „D'ale Carnavalului”, pe scena Teatrului Național”, *Radio România. Știri locale*, 7 Feb. 2025, <https://www.radioromania.ro/stiri-locale/iasi-premiera-spectacolului-d-ale-carnavalului-pe-scena-teatrului-national-id50062.html>. Retrieved on March 27th, 2026.

³⁹ <https://360.uaic.ro/blog/2013/03/27/dale-carnavalului/>, translation ours. Retrieved on March 27th, 2026.

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by a new generation of artists⁴⁰; director Dominic Dembinski created the show after the September 11, 2001 American attacks when Caragiale was staged drawing on the Russian classics, Gogol and Chekhov. It was argued that “The script mixes fragments from Năpasta into the body of the play, bringing Ion Nebunul into the carnival. He delivers lines from the famous character that, most of all, fit (...) Iordache, Nae Girimea’s employee who is also a wannabe philosopher, one who looked in the barbershop mirror with dark eyes, inert, smiling in agreement or angrily frowning upon everything. (...) The ball is also a place of darkness and mysteries following the principles of chiaroscuro. Through the corners of this labyrinth crowded with large baroque objects, the betrayal in Caragiale’s dramatic world entangles the characters who never find what they are looking for and do not seek to find anything.”⁴¹ Therefore, translation in its form of betrayal in love and other circumstances creates problems and dilemmas for everyone, unravels intrigues for the characters who stumble both literally and figuratively, hence the comic of situation and their language. If during the communist period there was radio drama (for *D’ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings*, Sică Alexandrescu’s 1951 version is the landmark), in the digital era, the great classic’s play benefits from online animated, interactive summaries that aim to make it known to the general public similarly to international projects on world wide web⁴².

In an existentialist key, an artistic director noted that *D’ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings* inspired various directors who appreciated Caragiale for catching the spirit of our country, incapable of development because of the memory that kept us stuck; we invoke him every time we want an explanation for an absurd situation, and he is everywhere, he follows us and we are his prisoners; the meaning ascribed to the carnival is that of a strange dream from which we cannot wake up, a total show

⁴⁰ Dominic Dembinski, “Teatru TV: „D’ale Carnavalului”, de I. L. Caragiale”, 3 June 2021, http://teatru.tvr.ro/d-ale-carnavalului-de-i-l-caragiale_32509.html. Retrieved on March 27th, 2026.

⁴¹ Doina Papp, “TEATRU. Un Caragiale postmodern la Televiziune”, *Observator cultural*, 2.07. 2002, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/teatru-un-caragiale-postmodern-la-televiziune/>, translation ours. Retrieved on March 27th, 2026.

⁴² We have in view the project of the cultural association Atelierul european de artă (<https://normalitate.ro/2023/10/06/dale-carnavalului-caragiale/>. Retrived on March 23rd, 2026) based on models that abound on the internet, one relevant for us being Literature Study Guides, <https://www.coursehero.com/lit/>. Retrieved on March 23rd, 2026.

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for actors and spectators⁴³ who, once again, find themselves in a dilemma, unable to distinguish between a reverie that approaches nightmare and reality. A total show could be even more easily organized in an absurd key, a postmodern one on the principle of dadaist nonsense or following the model of Cortazar's *Hopscotch* by randomly combining acts, scenes and their directions organized in separate downloadable files available online; these contain dramatic corpora for computational study in various languages, thus facilitating comparative and contrastive linguistic and literary interdisciplinary studies⁴⁴. A black-and-white staging was compared to Pintilie's film *De ce trag clopotele, Mitică*, the critic praising the cyclical nature of the show and the respect for Caragiale's text in the era of experiments that do not favor the original⁴⁵; on the contrary, they leave the audience in a dilemma, puzzled wondering whether they see the work of a great Romanian classic on stage or of any contemporary playwright.

Back to the most recent staging in Iași, it was considered appropriate to explain lexis from the playwright's time, today archaic and possibly confusing for a modern audience; thus, to avoid any linguistic dilemmas *ab initio*, just before the start of the performance, in a palimpsestic manner, on a sheet in front of the curtain, there were projected words like dictionary entries, ready to reveal intrigues once the world on stage was set in motion; capital letters were probably preferred to small ones for emphasis. The contemporary theater lover learns about *Grandirop* = *Garderobă/Wardrobe*, *Marsandă* = *Storekeeper*, *Patroană de magazin/Santimuri* = *Cenți/Cents*, *Mangafa* = *Om bleg/A sad and stupid man*, *Brunel* = *Lână pentru încălțăminte/Wool for shoes*, *Bizeț* = *Ornament al pantofului/Shoe ornament*, *Volintir* = *Voluntar/Volunteer*, *Răvășel* = *Bilețel/Note*, *Asenție* = *Esență/Essence*, *Pecetie* = *Ștampilă/Stamp*, *A catinda* = *A candida/To run for elections*, *Țiperig* = *Sare amoniacală/*

⁴³ Alex Bogdan on the staging at the Bacovia Municipal Theater, Bacău, played at the Summer Performing Arts Season, SEAS 2025, <https://seas.ro/en/e/dale-carnavalului-a-neglected-play-2/>. Retrieved on March 23rd, 2026.

⁴⁴ See Dracor for more details, namely the organization of the play *D'ale Carnavalului* according to text, characters and other data, <https://dracor.org/ro/caragiale-d-ale-carnavalului#downloads>. Retrieved on March 24th, 2026.

⁴⁵ Much has been written about Alexandru Dabija's performance at TNB, the opinions in the text belong to Răzvan Nită, *Acta est fabula – „Iartă-mă, nene Iancule, nu mai fac!”*. Și tot așa... Nu de multe ori dar cam des.”/ “Forgive me, Iancule, I won't do it again!”. And so on... Not often, but quite often.” <https://razvananita.wordpress.com/2021/06/28/iarta-ma-nene-iancule-nu-mai-fac-si-tot-asa-nu-de-multe-dar-cam-des/>. Retrieved on March 23rd, 2026.

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Ammoniacal salt, Tist = Ofițer/ Officer, Liubem = Parfum/ Perfume, Calfă = Lucrător calificat după o ucenicie/ Skilled worker after an apprenticeship, Conține = Joc de cărți/ Card game, Bogaserie = Magazin de stofe/ Cloth store, Spițer = Farmacist/ Pharmacist, A traduce = A înșela/ To cheat, Odi colon = Apă de colonie/ Cologne water, Itindenție = Intendență/ Intendance, Mazu = = Sumă în plus peste miza la jocul de cărți/ Extra amount over and above the stake at the card game, Merchez = Secret, Ște la o vacăță = Până apare un post vacant/ Until a vacancy is advertised.

A slight simplification of the language can be observed, yet it is not exhaustive, the modern insertions going as far as today's slum music, the period costumes also welcoming (post)modern sets, transplanted as if from a vampire horror movie (a coffin that accommodates characters, depending on the circumstances). Their passions are intense, there is the lust in love, Nae cheating on stage as convincingly as in Caragiale's text; the traitors debate the issue of betrayal, planning treason against the traitors, and the ultimate cuckold complains about being cheated for the eighth time. The scam involving the ticket at the barber's shop is still in the pipeline, like the fear of the dentist/assistant surgeon, greater than the toothache; publicity in healthcare is today as in vogue as it was then, the internet (with its fake news) and artificial intelligence replacing the specialist or his apprentice, in the dilemma regarding human stupidity or credulity. The whims of card games have remained just as strong, and those who resort to fortune telling could confirm it, horoscope issues being out of place here. Jealousy, that green-eyed Shakespearean monster only causes hysteria and insomnia for those who are gripped by it and, fortunately, the resolution is one specific to comedy; therefore, in this staging in which everyone sits at the table reconciled at the end, the womanizer promises encounters to his women in the love triangle, while assuring their men of his most sincere friendship. The dilemmas are thus old and all new, Caragiale's text offering multiple interpretations with each staging, in the *opera aperta* stance if we were to refer to Italian semiotics.

Conclusions

Overviewing the translations of Caragiale's comedies into two international languages with incursions into his entire work, we conclude that the prominent figures of our culture, Eugen Ionesco and Monica Lovinescu, and the passionate admirer of Romanian letters abroad, Eric D. Tappe, have generally managed to preserve the comic effect of the original for foreign readers, in French and English, respectively. If in the case of translations into French, a third language has almost been invented, in English the translations of fragments of the play that double the author's monographic approach are insufficient for such conclusions, considering the difficulty of the dramatic genre intended for both reading and staging, as emphasized

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in the specialty literature. This may have been a reason for the lack of literary and performance celebrity, along with a more neutral language in translation and contemporary stagings than the originally published text for increased intelligibility. As we have shown, the explanation of the lexis of the time, archaic today, is also done for the modern audiences, the staging at the National Theatre in Iași being notable in this regard by the projection of the most common vocabulary and their equivalents before the curtain rises. The immortality of the great classic, likened to Moliere by his contemporaries, inspired various stagings, some darker depending on the significant events on the world map (after September 2001, a director's vision drawing on Gogol or Chekhov). The spectacular dilemmas include not only practitioners, translators, directors, but also actors amazed by the life that Caragiale was able to give to the characters and the intrigues he subjected them to, masterfully handling the strings like a puppeteer. Among them we have betrayal: a character confesses being cheated on eight times in *D'ale carnavalului/ Carnival Doings* against the background of boulevard music from the slums of our days or romance from another time. The versatility of the text has allowed its transposition into various stage-related media (performance, epic dance theatre, radio theatre), all intended to elucidate the most diverse dilemmas by facilitating access to the widest possible audience: fans of love triangles and jealousy today tabloidized through reality shows, not just consumerist literature and soap operas, will find their place here, as will believers in fortune tellers and last but not least, sick people or imaginary invalids that fall prey to fake news and other drawbacks on the digital era.

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