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**BONDING THROUGH IRONY:
TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES IN I.L. CARAGIALE AND
RADU COSAȘU**

Reading Romanian 19th century literature may help us understand communities in literature in a threefold way. Firstly, the 1848 generation of writers manifests itself as a fairly solidary group of young men participating to a relatively homogeneous textual practice, with a common pool of themes and images and a stable rhetorical repertoire circulating among them; it is therefore a writerly community¹. Secondly, their main literary theme is also one of the main concerns of the early modern Romanian society, namely “national character”; their nationalist drive, which they shared with most European young intellectuals at the time, is an expression of their interest in the aggregation of a coherent social community. Thirdly, as these writers address “the nation” in their writing, they are clearly identifying the national community to a reading community².

In the following literary generation, with writers active in the last quarter of the 19th century, there no longer exists a perfect superposition of social and reading communities, as in the previous generation, and the solidity of the writerly community also becomes highly questionable. Although Eminescu, Creangă or Caragiale contribute massively to the constitution of a spiritual solidarity with themes like national history, peasant life or *joie de vivre* in their generation, they also engage in a shrewd deconstruction of the old symbols of nationalist communities. Even when they address a wide readership, they rarely claim to speak to the nation, and instead tend to seek their readership in smaller circles of elite initiates. Even if they are friends with each other, the writer’s loneliness is their master trope. But this divorce between national and reading communities calls for techniques that engage the reader on other levels than the social one. In the following pages, I concentrate on this search for a way to compensate the lost social bond by identifying a readership which might feel as a surrogate

¹ For the sociability of the 1848 generation, see Angela Jianu, *A Circle of Friends. Romanian Revolutionaries and Political Exile (1848-1859)*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2011. For the rhetorical patterns and the common poetics of this remarkably unified generation, see Mihai Zamfir, *Din secolul romantic [From the Romantic Century]*, București, Eminescu, 1989.

² I am referring here, of course, to the reading community as a metaphor, a construct of the nationalist writer’s imagination, and not an actual presence. It would be hard to do otherwise. Alex Drace-Francis talks about the phantasmatic character of the nationalist reading community at the beginning of the 19th century, as writers were addressing a society with a majority of illiterates (*The Making of Modern Romanian Culture*, London – New York, I.B. Tauris, 2012, p. 3).

community. But it is not just 19th century literature that has this dual vocation. Writers at the end of the 20th century continue the tradition of social dissidence and innovative textual bonding, even if their struggle is with entirely different types of communities, and their literary endeavor is more postmodern than modern in nature.

To verify literature's resistance to community myths and its ingeniousness in finding alternate textual connections, I will analyze works by two Romanian authors from different epochs who write about different types of community. Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912) wrote his short prose mainly in the last decade of the 19th century, often satirizing the Romanian nationalist mythology that had constituted itself in the Romantic decades starting with the 1830s. Radu Cosașu (b. 1930), a writer specializing in novellas written during the second half of the 20th century, discussed at length in his work the failure of the communist utopia, which he had enthusiastically embraced in his youth, only to become its disillusioned chronicler later in life. Both denounced a community, either nationalist or communist, with strikingly similar means, proposing instead a strictly literary alliance with their reader, an alliance that can be studied as a new form of community. And they both used irony to build this particular reading alliance, an alliance that may be discussed using Jean-Luc Nancy's vision of the deconstructive mission of literature and Kuisma Korhonen's concept of "textual community".

Textual Community

In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that communities spring from a drive toward communion, a form of being in common which seeks further reasons and alibis to rally multitudes. The French philosopher proposes a definition of community that puts at its core the trust in its own organicity and considers secondary the mobiles of this organicity: "community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence"³. By this reversion, the idea of the community's organicity becomes its own motor, it produces itself, it turns itself into work, and this allows the French philosopher to talk about community's innate essentialism or immanentism. It is this immanence that "transforms community into communion, communion into essence and essence into work"⁴.

In light of this definition of community as immanent-driven, Nancy attributes great importance to literary texts. They have the dual function to both forge

³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 9.

⁴ Btihaj Ajana, "Rethinking Community through Literature", *Journal for Cultural Research*, XI, 2007, 2, p. 102.

immanentist communities by elaborating their myths, and also to enact their dissolving, to ruin essentialist mythologies. If any kind of story-telling may amount to a creation of myth, the situation of literature as something that is written, constituted by *écriture*, permanently differs meaning-making and thus interrupts the community that aspires to be summoned through narration. For Nancy, “myth is simply the invention of literature”⁵, and there are numerous cases and instances when literary works seek to edify an emblem of the community. But literature also performs “the interruption of myth”⁶, and through its mode of existence, the writing (*écriture*), it denies transcendence, and can therefore be defined as “the inscription of a meaning whose transcendence or presence is indefinitely or constitutively deferred”⁷. It is in the nature of literature to postpone indefinitely the constitution of the immanent sense of what it transmits, and this makes it an excellent deconstructive mechanism for our illusions of immanence.

Starting from Nancy’s analysis of the deconstructive vocation of literature, and also using Maurice Blanchot’s insights on the “unavowable community” and Jacques Derrida’s idea of self-deconstructing notions, Kuisma Korhonen theorized “textual community”, an alternative⁸, virtual society of readers, each isolated in front of the printed page (or the digital screen) and summoned by the author and by the world in the text to an awareness of their being together through reading. As Korhonen warns us, this community does not turn into an organization, does not achieve its institutionalization, as it is interrupted by “our awareness of a larger textual community”⁹. The very fact that the reading community is open prohibits it from ever being firmly established, claims the Finnish scholar. There are several ways in which textual communities can be described as permanently or indefinitely open. They are virtual, heterogeneous, asymmetrical, and temporary: virtual, because they are not established contractually in a given space; heterogeneous, because they include readers of all calibers and producers of texts and commentaries of all qualities; asymmetrical, because their two main poles, author and reader, participate unequally to it; and temporary, because they only last as long as reading lasts or, more pragmatically, as long as the text still finds its readers. Their fragility is a guarantee that this community is not on the verge of growing into a full-fledged, essentialist community, that it remains “unavowed”.

Korhonen prefers the concept of “textual community” to the “interpretive community” defended by Stanley Fish, which he considers too restrictively

⁵ Jean Luc-Nancy, *The Inoperative*, p. 72.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁸ “A textual counter-community”, Korhonen once calls it.

⁹ Kuisma Korhonen, “Textual Communities: Nancy, Blanchot, Derrida”, *Cultural Machine*, VIII, 2006, unpaginated, <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/rt/printerFriendly/35/43>, accessed on May 3rd, 2016.

centered on reception at the expense of textuality, and at the same time utopian in its ideal of unity (“is any interpretive community really *one*?”¹⁰). He chooses to see literature as something other than an institution, and in this he is more close to the theories of reading inspired by phenomenology, such as Wolfgang Iser’s. He is fascinated by the idea of floating communities that are spontaneously aggregated and successively dissolved by readers opening or closing their books. But he seems to neglect the possible agency of the literary text that purposefully opens a dialogue with the reader. I am not referring to didactic and/or ideological texts that seek to influence their reader’s opinions, but to works that play on a shrewd complicity, based on an appreciation of wit and irony. In them, the rallying call can only come at the expense of a fraudulent, abusive or illegitimate community that the author seeks to deconstruct. By directing their irony at communitary myths, these texts maintain their lucidity and their openness, inviting others to the fragile communication one can establish through reading.

I.L. Caragiale and Radu Cosașu are both combative writers, active in periods that were suffocated by propaganda. Caragiale addressed the gregarious nationalism of his time, in which he saw demagogy, semantic vacuity, and utter stupidity. Cosașu, on the other hand, confronted the specter of the communist togetherness that he initially embraced, but soon discovered the falsity of its attraction. For each of them, the separation from the dreamed-of community comes after an unsuccessful interpellation, when contact with the other fails to be established. For each, the need to appeal to the other is a starting point, as the need for being in common does not elude critical spirit. Their texts verify the “principle of incompleteness” that, after Maurice Blanchot, drives each being to “put itself into question” with the help of the other¹¹. The communitary instinct starts from the individual’s desire to put him – or herself in the game, to be validated by the other’s participation to his or her way of being. But, in Caragiale’s and Cosașu’s texts, this desire is frustrated, the other refuses the interpellation, and the dream of community fails to materialize. This prompts the author to transfer his appeal to another, at a distance, and this other is the reader of the text. The failed dialogue with the other in proximity is converted into a new dialogical relationship that intersects perpendicularly the plane of the printed page (or of the digital screen). The text orients itself toward the reader, to which it addresses allegorically and metatextually, i.e. using the language of literature. Having failed to congregate a community of feeling and moral solidarity, the text seeks for an intellectual complicity with the reader, based on irony. Markers of irony may be phrases with defective grammar or an intertextual signal, but they function as established bonds

¹⁰ Kuisma Korhonen, “Textual”.

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, New York, Station Hill Press, 1988, p. 5.

between the author and the reader. It is through textual techniques that this new community, textual community, comes into being.

Caragiale, Nationalism, and Anacoluthon

Caragiale's short prose paints an image of turn-of-the-20th-century Bucharest as a city pampered by history, but morally corrupt, filled with ordinary people, merrily spending their uneventful lives at cafés and beerhouses. Since his characters often seem devoid of individual features and because their lives seem unimportant, lacking any major commotion that might ever make them suffer the kind of moral breakdown typical for the grand psychological realism of the 19th century, they gave some critics the impression that Caragiale's prose is "minor" and its sole purpose is entertainment. Only later, in the 1970s and 1980s, did investigations of modernist poetics show that there was a correlation between the author's option for short prose and his decision to describe the universe of minor sins, of venial offences, and of likeable corruption. They justified this correlation as a subversive operation to sabotage the prestigious, canonical genres, such as the novel or the national drama, and at the same time to subvert the all-too-flattering and used-up image of national community, which had transformed, after decades of rhetorical abuse, into a parody of itself. The writer sets out to consistently, almost systematically, debunk nationalist myths on several levels. Caragiale decides, for instance, to write about the city, thus shunning the idyllic peasant scenery of most 1848-generation literature. He mercilessly, cruelly mocks at the "sublime" rhetoric of liberal populism through his representation of revolutions as carnivals. He addresses the intellectual imposture of Romanian nationalism in parodies addressed at the so-called "green (diehard) Rromanians". And he censors the excesses of Latinomania through brilliant caricatures, while promoting, especially in some of his later prose, the non-Latin, Balkanic and Oriental heritage of Romanian post-medieval history in a cultural mix that angered purists.

At a textual level, Caragiale is very innovative: he writes theatrical, dialogic sketches, small anecdotes, mosaic compositions mirroring a Babylonian polyphony of perspectives, and also short experimental pieces, which innovate by using administrative or epistolary style, street talk, as well as several types of journalistic jargon¹². For the present discussion, I will refer to a particular type of short prose, made of texts where the narrator is also a character, the famous "uncle Iancu", an author figure, given that "Iancu" was a hypocorism for "Ion", Caragiale's given name. These texts have often been singled out by critics, but the relevance of the

¹² For a discussion of these short prose experiments, see Al. Călinescu, *Caragiale sau vârsta modernă a literaturii* [Caragiale, or The Modern Age of Literature], București, Albatros, 1976.

author's submersion in his own literary universe seems to me still noteworthy. "Uncle Iancu" not only "connects the episodes of this comedy, gives theatrical directions, converses with other characters, [...] leading almost the same life as them"¹³, but he is the essential character of these texts where he holds the most prominent part. He illustrates the typology of the well-meaning naïve, forced to learn the hard way how uncertain social interaction can be, a quixotic figure that, in many of his appearances, becomes an exemplary victim of others. It is true that he also participates to memorable drinking parties (*Repaosul dominical* [*Sunday Rest*]) and initiates exasperated feats of revenge (*Bibico*), but more often than that he suffers because of his excessive trust in the benevolence and openness of others. He is peaceful, amicable, and skeptical toward political commitment, but even moderation seems to be a dangerous attitude for this unadjusted, inadequate spectator of 1900 Bucharest's turbulent political scene. For instance, in *Atmosfera încărcată* [*Highly Charged Atmosphere*], "uncle Iancu" strives to avoid a clear political stance in a hot electoral moment, hoping that he will be able to communicate with the others indifferently from their allegiance. He professes no opinion in front of his inflammable friends and reads simultaneously both the government's and the opposition's gazettes to make a clear-headed estimate of the factual truth that both publications are obviously stretching in their favor. Still, he is repeatedly accused by the others and scorned for the abuses that either "your bandit government", or "your scoundrels" of the opposition are making, and has to pay the bill of his aggressive interlocutors. His only compensation is the last laugh, a victim's laugh in fact, which moves the debate, wrongly placed by his interlocutors in the field of politics, in another field, that of intelligence, civility, politeness. Of course, it is the victim who morally wins this dispute, if we follow it not in the flow of the anecdote, where "uncle Iancu" has to pay several rounds of beer and support the violent interpellations of no matter whom, but beyond the page, in the text's interaction with its reader. And while the narrator's desire to fulfill his social aspirations leads him to failure to establish a human understanding with the other, a new form of understanding with a sympathetic reader comes to vindicate his moral martyrdom.

Perhaps the best example of how aspiration for community turns into failure is Caragiale's *Situațiunea* [*The Situation*]. The text begins with a declaration of the

¹³ Florin Manolescu, *Caragiale și Caragiale. Jocuri cu mai multe strategii* [*Caragiale and Caragiale. Games with a Plurality of Strategies*], București, Humanitas, 2002, p. 154. Unlike Manolescu, I do not think that "uncle Iancu" gives theatrical directions in Caragiale's texts. The "director" in his dialogue short proses (for instance, *C.F.R.*), need not be equated to the narrator-character in the texts I refer to shortly. In the case of the "director", there is no tension between the fictional status of the character and the civil identity of the author, which I think is the defining trait of the "uncle Iancu" texts.

need for community, expressing the desire to meet a random friend and live the banal experience of “breathing together” in the cool night after a hot day. The friend, Nae, indeed appears, and talking with him reveals a man extremely convinced of the truth of all his assertions. The much desired community of friends is shattered after the first words. Nae is an aggressive speaker, who attributes to his interlocutor a pro-government attitude that he resents, so that he can more vividly direct his polemical accusations toward him. Instead of a peaceful dialogue that might build trust and friendship, the narrator is bitterly scolded. Nae is a hardened patriot who expresses his love of country by diminishing its achievements and exaggerating its poverty and pleads for an authoritarian government. He is obviously politically confused and his nationalist stance is incoherent, mistaking independence for tyranny and claiming his patriotism on everyone else’s lack thereof. His ungrammatical jargon, shared by many of Caragiale’s characters, is crucial to his political position. It connotes superficial vitality and jovial aggressiveness, but mostly intellectual incoherence and lack of introspection. Nae makes great use of anacoluthon, and displays many parasitic syntactical structures that probably help him project an aggrandizing image of himself as rhetorician: “It’s a crisis, if you follow me, that you just as well could say no way could it ever be more horrible”¹⁴. At some point, Nae seems almost excusable for his nervousness, as it is revealed that he roams the streets at night afraid for the outcome of his wife giving birth at home to his child. But soon after, finding out that the birth went on normally, he sets out for a new alcohol-serving place and reprises his speech even more violently: “Do you know what we need? [...] A tyranny like they have in Russia”¹⁵. It is now that the narrator feels able to leave Nae, but only after he signals to him that any real or possible resistance to his words is gone. He demonstrates his giving in by borrowing Nae’s verbal mannerisms, syntactic errors and pompous rhetoric:

-Sorry, Nae: it’s so late, I really could not just as well go with you anymore...

-Come on...

-I’m so sleepy, I must just as well go to bed. Good bye...

I took a hackney and I left the happy father go just as well by himself to the pretzel place¹⁶.

¹⁴ “E o criză, mă-nțelegi, care poți pentru ca să zici că nu se poate mai oribilă” (Ion Luca Caragiale, *Momente [Moments]*, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969, p. 137). When not specified otherwise, the English translations from Romanian are mine.

¹⁵ “Știi ce-ar trebui la noi? [...] O tiranie ca-n Rusia” (*Ibidem*, p. 141).

¹⁶ “-Nae, scuză-mă: e așa de târziu, că nu pot pentru ca să mai merg...”

-Îmi pare rău...

-Mi-e așa de somn, care trebuie negreșit pentru ca să mă culc. La revedere...

M-am suit într-o birjă și l-am lăsat pe fericitul tată pentru ca să meargă singur la simigerie” (*Ibidem*, p. 141).

The Situation relates a failed attempt to construct or confirm a community that was initially supposed to be based on simple things: breathing together, enjoying the coolness of a summer night, drinking beer and leisurely talking about random things. But for Nae, community actually means a relation of power in which the other is a victim forced to endure incriminations and verbal abuse. Pushed into a submissive position, dominated through brutality, the narrator gives in not to Nae's violent political ideas, but to the sheer force of their flow. This is why his capitulation is signaled metalinguistically, by borrowing his verbal mannerisms and displaying them openly, as he would a white flag.

Still, the narrator continues to use the same jargon even after leaving Nae. I don't think this is the result of some irreversible mental colonization, but rather an ironic gesture of independence, similar to the "last laugh" in the previously mentioned prose, *Highly Charged Atmosphere*, which marked the narrator taking his distance from the situation. This newfound distance is not displayed for the benefit of Nae, who no longer participates to the scene in the last sentence, but for the reader, a silent witness to the events so far. It is for him that irony is displayed; in fact, the reader is invited to oppose, along with the narrator, the "Russia-like tyranny" that Nae anticipates. Apparently immersed in the world he talks about, the author evades from it and transforms the text into an allegory of his own dissidence, which the reader is free to verify and adopt for him- or herself. Caragiale, the author, is the first reader of the text narrating the conversation between "uncle Iancu" and his friend Nae. The second reader is anyone of us, who opens the book and goes through the text from beginning to end, borrowing the narrator's changing perspective and his "situation", alternately, inside and outside the textual world. Finally, the "interrupted community" in the text foreshadows a possible foundation of an alternative community through the collaborative act of reading.

Cosașu, Communism, and Intertext

Caragiale's text opens directly toward the reader, as if starting a dialogue with him or her. In his texts, the use of intertext is not very obvious, probably because at the time there wasn't too much autochthonous literary tradition for Caragiale to intertextualize. But in Radu Cosașu's literature, intertextuality is an essential feature, an integral part of his personal poetics. Cosașu published initially, in the 1950s, reportages that served the newly installed communist regime, but during the next decades he acquired a remarkable artistic prominence, especially in his cycle *Supraviețuiri* [*Survivals*] (1973-1989). An early adherent to communism, Cosașu soon became a victim of party narrowness and inflexibility, and later he came to formulate his artistic identity by analyzing, in retrospect, his moral choices. In his books, Cosașu appeals to anecdote and to literary quotation, to trivia and high-

brow cultural references, to biography and fiction, alternatively. A special mention deserves the fact that Cosașu's texts may be read as autobiographical fictions¹⁷. The author is, to some extent, present within his text and therefore his interpellation of the reader acquires a personal significance. The text is not an abstract anecdote, the pure fruit of the author's mind, but a shifting, unstable construct, opening the author's work to the text of his life. Written as an address to an unknown other, the text presents itself from the starting point as open, unfixed, mobile, and immaterial. His use of autobiographical fiction is an important part of his larger poetics. Cosașu is a writer preoccupied with "structuring diversity", as Nicolae Manolescu called it, often employing a technique of juxtaposing fragments, mosaic-like: "[E]ach sentence proceeds by putting together extremely remote things, not only at the story level, and structures the diversity. This is also a way of seeing reality not as chains of events, but concomitantly, like images on a screen"¹⁸. Indeed, Cosașu's fascination with trivial life events, newspapers, affairs and football is matched in his writing by grave ethical concerns, with topics like betrayal, cowardice, compromise, dignity and authenticity.

Cosașu wrote the novella *Arie și recitativ la Pasternak* [*Aria and Recitative for Pasternak*] in 1987, but it was rejected by censors and published only later, in 1990. In it, a critical moment in 1958 is revisited, when the young writer was going through a moral crisis. Cosașu was "unemployed for ideological reasons" and had to live with his aunt, which he called, with a Stendhalian name, Sanseverina. He tried to restructure his personal life and his career as a writer, as he was disillusioned with the "conquests of socialism" that he had praised uncritically until then. At this point, he aspired to a communion of any kind, for instance at a football match, as a refuge from loneliness and isolation. But on October 23, 1958, Boris Pasternak, the Soviet writer, is nominated to the Nobel Prize for literature, and the literary pundits in all the socialist countries start an international campaign to discredit him. In this campaign, an article by the reputed Romanian writer Zaharia Stancu¹⁹ is published in Bucharest, with the title *Pasternak? I've Never Heard of Pasternak!* Cosașu easily detects in it a moral compromise, a useful lie

¹⁷ Citing a distinction made by Philippe Gasparini and Arnaud Schmitt, Florina Pârjol pleads for Radu Cosașu's genre to be classified as "auto-narrative" rather than autofictional: "If one follows Doubrovski's definition of the species, it is obvious that Radu Cosașu does not write autofictions, but rather a species of autobiographical fiction, in the already long French tradition: his texts do not sport the narcissistic, self-descriptive, non-narrative discourse that is typical of the "violent" autofictions, neither do they have the semi-automatic, «spontaneous» flow of a psychoanalytical exposee" (Florina Pârjol, *Carte de identități. Mutații ale autobiograficului în proza românească de după 1989* [*Book of Identities. Mutations of the Autobiography in Romanian Post-1989 Prose*], București, Cartea Românească, 2014, pp. 94-95).

¹⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* [*The Critical History of Romanian Literature*], Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008, pp. 1117-1118.

¹⁹ I will henceforth refer to Cosașu's semi-fictional character "Zaharia Stancu" plainly as Stancu.

written by Stancu to gain favors from the communist regime, and feels personally affected, because his fall from grace into unemployment had come from his decision to write only “the integral truth”. Cosașu’s novella explores the world of the stadium and the literary café to debate moral isolation and false communities.

At the stadium, Cosașu’s autobiographical hero assists at a football game, alongside a throng of loud and likeable common folk who love the game as much as he does. Aspiring, in his own words, to “merge” with the crowds, he obviously practices a self-prescribed therapy for depression. But politics breaks violently into this peaceful gathering as the whole stadium protests the annulment of a goal by the home team. The protest turns political and spills on the streets of Bucharest, with football fans marching together, chanting and chatting. The march thrills the young writer, as he relives the heroic times when the revolution had not yet succeeded. But it also reminds him of his childhood attachment to football, as he recalls, alongside the other fans, the teams and the players before the war, while meandering together on old streets, remembering flamboyant names of old cinemas, defying the recently-installed austerity of communist toponymy (“from Vitan to Călărași, beyond «Milano», beyond «Tomis», up to former «Gioconda»”²⁰). It is a rejuvenating trip that strengthens his trust in community and in a dense, solid moral universe, where he can feel at home together with numerous comrades. The troubled young communist regains his feeling of being in common in the presence of simple and honest strangers, but this community is politically subversive, because it shares familiar, bourgeois, intimate values, different from those of class struggle and internationalism that his ideology courses taught him.

Feeling encouraged, the hero decides to confront the author of the pamphlet on Pasternak and goes to Capșa café, where Stancu spent his evenings, to question him²¹. The older writer defends himself by claiming that Pasternak himself is not a great and tragic writer, like his friends Marina Tsvetaeva and Osip Mandelstam, but an adaptable character, and therefore similar to Stancu, who was a leftist journalist converted to postwar communism. Secondly, Stancu presents his moral compliance as a sacrifice. His compromise, he says, is actually a method to safeguard literature and help young writers publish their “intimist” and “analytical” literature. Thirdly, there is a veiled accusation that the young Cosașu is himself an accomplice to Stancu’s compromise, since instead of documenting tragic cases of his time, he writes “all-too-luminous proses” that serve the regime.

²⁰ Radu Cosașu, *Cinci ani cu Belfegor. Mătușile din Tel Aviv* [*Five Years with Belfegor. The Aunts in Tel Aviv*], Iasi, Polirom, 2009, p. 345.

²¹ There is some fiction here, but not in the essential parts. The football match did take place in Bucharest, on October 26th, 1958, with the outcome that Cosașu remembered, but Stancu’s article was published in “The Literary Gazette” only a week later, on October 30th. The writer reversed the succession in order to construct his thesis more eloquently.

The hero backs out of this trap when he sees the mystification, which he describes with a shrewd metaphor. The young man offers Stancu half of the sandwich his aunt made for him before the game; half of it had been offered and accepted by a fellow football fan, earlier, in a gesture that symbolically sealed Cosașu's "merger" with the stadium crowd. But Stancu does not simply take his half of sandwich: he basks in the aura of glorious humility projected by the meagre meal. Stancu uses the sandwich not to establish a personal, human connection, as he had been invited, but to showcase his grandiose self, his studied elegance:

He took the napkin from the sandwich and wiped, old man-like, his cheek, spilling bread crumbs on the white shirt, the black vest, the cuffs of his suit, he didn't try to shake them off, they looked good on him, as if somebody had thrown at him, for luck, charmed beads of corn²².

It is obvious that, for Stancu, there can be no community with the young reporter. Like Caragiale's Nae from *The Situation*, Stancu sees community as an unequal power relationship, which he uses to gain prestige. He is too immersed in himself to be truly empathic to a young writer's moral plight, and he turns the discussion on its head to talk about himself, about his "heroic" sacrifices. This egoistic posture does not leave room for any sharing of values and compromises community, for it actually proposes complicity, rather than participation. The young reporter backs out, shyly, "like a good child", he says, from the symbolic embrace of the older writer. His instincts nurtured by family values help him go past Stancu's verbal subtlety that cleverly disguises and moral compromise as a moral choice.

In Caragiale's *The Situation*, the text opened to the reader by alluding to the similarity between hardened nationalism and bad grammar. In Cosașu's *Aria and Recitative for Pasternak*, the reader is constantly being interpellated, notably by means of intertextual references he is called to recognize and interpret. The necessity of an aesthetic reading is signaled at first by the title and composition, which suggests the arrangement of the parts of an opera spectacle, where the "recitative" sets the tone of the text and the "aria" voices the moral debate, in the final pages²³. There are numerous quotations, mentions of writers and works of art, bookish references, seemingly random at first; very soon, they become markers of a very coherent interior debate, echoing fragments of the hero's biography or his

²² "Luă șervețelul sendvișului și se șterse bătrânește pe obraz, risipind firimiturile de pâine pe cămașa albă, pe vesta neagră, pe manșetele hainei, nu încercă să le scuture, îi veneau bine, ca și cum cineva l-ar fi «bătut» de noroc, cu boabe de grâu feeric" (Radu Cosașu, *Five*, p. 349).

²³ The borrowing of musical terms in Cosașu's prose may be read as another hidden homage to his master, Caragiale. For instance, the pairing of "aria and recitative" as pseudonyms for narrative styles echoes Caragiale's choice of musical terms such as "theme and variations" for one famous short prose that relates the outlandish interpretations ("variations") political journals come to give to a banal incident (the "theme").

moral choices, his nostalgia and regrets, his aspirations and models: Stendhal, Gogol, Eminescu, Isaac Babel, Alexandre Dumas-père, Marina Țvetaeva, Camil Petrescu, Anatole France, and Mihail Sebastian. Each of them symbolizes either the writer's complicated attachment to the family that he reluctantly abandoned, or his troubled loyalty to the communist cause, that seems to him more and more compromised. Writers are symbols of the hero's attachments and abandonments: he wishes he were balanced like Gogol, warm like Dumas-père, sensitive like Sebastian and morally compelling like Isaac Babel. The massive presence of the intertext signals the need for a competent reader to follow on all of these references and allusions.

In this sketch of European literature, there is one name missing which is central to Cosașu's text: Caragiale. The author of *The Situation* is not mentioned, but only alluded to in small quotations that go unattributed, almost unremarked. During the "aria" part, in the course of a long reply by the Stancu character, a single word recalls Caragiale:

Don't you need a magazine for your all-too-luminous proses? Who do you give them to? Me or Pasternak? Who prints them for you? Me or Pasternak? I've never heard of Pasternak, so that others can hear of you, of Camil, of Sebastian, of all ironists... of all intimists... of all those crane operators of *yours*... [emphasis added]²⁴.

"Dumitale" (a more familiar, down-to-earth version of "yours") is a very typical word for Caragiale. "Dumitale" is used to accuse somebody of guiltily associating himself with dubious people and upholding their ill-famed moral values. "Macaragiii dumitale" ("Your crane operators") alludes to the young Cosașu's "luminous" reportages about the working class, while at the same time echoing a famous interpellation in Caragiale's *A Letter Lost*, "moftangiii dumitale" ("your scoundrels"²⁵). Before the Stancu character, aunt Sanseverina had also accused the young writer of sharing the views of the top ideologues of the communist party that resented Pasternak: "I understand *you people* do not like they gave him [Pasternak] the Nobel Prize [emphasis added]". Cosașu's hero is accused both from left and right, like the narrator in *Highly Charged Atmosphere*, of siding with the enemy when all he wants to do is to preserve his independence, his lack of political partisanship, and his incertitude. By quoting Caragiale, Cosașu adheres to the classic writer's dilemmatic manifesto of improbable independence before the political passions of everybody. This is why the signification of Cosașu "silently"

²⁴ "N-ai nevoie de o revistă pentru schițele acelea prea luminoase? Cui le duci? Mie sau lui Pasternak? Cine ți le publică? Eu sau Pasternak? N-am auzit de Pasternak, ca să se audă de dumneata, de Camil, de Sebastian, de toți ironiștii... de toți analiștii... de toți macaragiii *dumitale*..." (Radu Cosașu, *Five*, p. 349, s.n.).

²⁵ Also, in *Highly-Charged Atmosphere*, the narrator was repeatedly accused of endorsing either "your bandit government", or "your scoundrels of the opposition".

quoting Caragiale is central to this text. It suggests a deeper solidarity with the author of *The Situation* than with Pasternak and Gogol. This solidarity may be observed in the stylistic features of Cossașu's text, in his preference for irony and word play, in flaunting his lack of seriousness and assuming a "minor" status, for instance by talking about stadiums like Caragiale talked about beerhouses. But solidarity is even clearer in keeping this quotation "hidden", and it is also where the text turns decisively towards the reader. Caragiale's name is intentionally avoided, probably to stimulate the reader to recognize the unmarked snippet. By recognizing the quote, the reader enters a secret pact with the text, proving that his "encyclopedia"²⁶ is open at the same page as the writer's.

Conclusion. Bonding through Irony

From Korhonen's point of view, textual communities are a feature of all world literature and are established by the simple act of reading. But for a big part of modern literature, establishing textual communities is the task of the writer, who seeks a literary alliance with readers, and especially with readers who do not share the same "time, space or identity"²⁷ as the author. Modern literature refrains from being too culturally specific, too narrowly pinpointed to a particular time and space. To achieve an alliance with the reader, writers must refer to some place in time, without becoming the "voice" of that place. This is why, for a large part of modern literature, Caragiale and Cossașu included, their discussion of community issues is made in a universal horizon, and sometimes rests on the recognizable deconstruction of communities. And this is why irony functions as a privileged form of bonding between text and reader: not because modern life is inconsistent and lacks *gravitas*, but because it offers "disenchanted" ways of being together, social aggregations that defy essentialism, communities that refuse to "avow" themselves as communities.

Textual communities are configured in Caragiale and Cossașu by means of textual techniques like anacoluthon and intertext, which are meant to stimulate solidarity between reader and writer. Seeing the importance of irony for the construction of the modern textual community, it is understandable why both are employed in an ironic manner²⁸. Caragiale starts from the recognizable rhetoric of his age, that of demagogic and violent nationalism; he underlines not only its abuses, but most of all its ridiculousness, made obvious by incoherence and bad

²⁶ "The encyclopedia competence" of the model reader, Umberto Eco says, is also an intertextual competence (Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula*, București, Univers, 1991, pp. 112-120).

²⁷ Kuisma Korhonen, "Textual".

²⁸ Creangă's famous use of anacoluthon as an expression of affectivity in *Memories of My Boyhood* and Gabriela Adameșteanu's Homeric intertext in *The Encounter* are examples when these techniques are used without an ironic intent.

grammar. Later, Cosașu describes his escape from the lure of communism and the struggle for moral integrity using bookish passwords and oblique allusions that address the reader. Both are using irony as the overarching technique that unites the reader with the text. It is irony's transgressive nature allows it to practice a "transideological politics"²⁹ and to be variously employed to counter both the nationalist narrations of the 19th century and the communist narrations of the 20th. And it is, ultimately, irony that projects a specific and very efficient form of being in common that not only deconstructs essentialist communities, but succeeds to deconstruct itself, in order to maintain its paradoxical openness.

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²⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London – New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 9.

BONDING THROUGH IRONY: TEXTUAL COMMUNITIES
IN I.L. CARAGIALE AND RADU COSAȘU

(Abstract)

Starting from Jean-Luc Nancy's explanation of literature as both community-making and interrupter of community myths, this paper discusses Kuisma Korhonen's notion of "textual community". Textual community refers to the interaction between reader and text as a form of open, virtual cooperation that avoids the essentialism of political or religious communities. Trying to locate historically and culturally the propositions of the two scholars, this paper reads two distant, yet connected authors in Romanian literature, the 19th century classic Ion Luca Caragiale and the contemporary author Radu Cosașu in their dealings with communities and their unmaking in their respective texts. Caragiale presents how nationalist rhetoric can be divisive rather than unifying when paired with personal pride and stupidity. Cosașu analyses the moral failure of writers' solidarity in the face of communist totalitarianism. Both are using irony as the overarching technique to dissolve fraudulent communities and forge on their ruins a new, textual community.

Keywords: textual community, irony, deconstruction, modern Romanian literature, Ion Luca Caragiale, Radu Cosașu.

IRONIA CARE CONECTEAZĂ: COMUNITĂȚI TEXTUALE
LA I.L. CARAGIALE ȘI RADU COSAȘU

(Rezumat)

Pornind de la explicarea literaturii ca instrument de construcție și de dizolvare a miturilor comunității realizată de către Jean Luc Nancy, lucrarea de față discută noțiunea de „comunitate textuală” propusă de către cercetătorul finlandez Kuisma Korhonen. Comunitatea textuală desemnează interacțiunea dintre cititor și text ca o formă de cooperare deschisă și virtuală, lipsită de esențialismul comunităților politice și religioase. Pentru a situa istoric și cultural propunerile celor doi teoreticieni, lucrarea propune lecturi a doi autori români, clasicul Ion Luca Caragiale și contemporanul Radu Cosașu. La Caragiale, retorica naționalistă mai mult separă decât unește, atunci când e intersectată de orgoliu și stupiditate. Cosașu analizează eșecul moral al solidarității scriitoricești în timpul comunismului totalitar. Ambii se folosesc de ironie ca tehnică crucială pentru a dizolva comunitățile frauduloase și pentru a ridica pe ruinele lor noua comunitate textuală.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunitate textuală, ironie, deconstrucție, literatura română modernă, Ion Luca Caragiale, Radu Cosașu.