

"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu  
The Doctoral School **Theatre and Performing Arts**  
Doctoral field: **Arts**

# **SATIRICUS – A THEATER OF RESISTANCE**

**- Summary –**

Scientific advisor:  
University professor Dr. Constantin Chiriac

PhD student  
Alexandru Grecu

Sibiu, 2022

## Summary

**Keywords:** theater " Satiricus I. L. Caragiale", resistance theatre, show, documentary show, publicistic show, satire, comedy, political farce, national dramaturgy, contemporary dramaturgy, reevaluation, interpretation, staging, director, "Satiricus" Awards Gala, "Satiricus" collection, festival.

PhD thesis *Satiricus – a theater of resistance* it aims to highlight the phenomenon of the theater "Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale" and to argue the idea of theater as a form of resistance in an uncertain world. In a period of great social-economic and political transformations, when the crisis of cultural values is felt more and more, a special place belongs to the cultural institutions, especially the theater. It is the theater that will maintain spiritual balance, provoke discussions, form opinions, sustain the national spirit and encourage the struggle for freedom and truth.

The choice of the theme is a subjective one, based on the fact that the "Satiricus" Theatre is in the true word the personal invention and creation, towards which I went for many years and to which I tried to give it a specific direction, starting from comedy to satire, from satire to satire and political farce, complementing its approach with documentary, publicistic performances, etc., but also from the objective perspective, that so far in our space there is no work that would analyze the phenomenon of "Satiricus" theatre as a theater of resistance. The work will cover the entire period of activity of the theater from its establishment in 1990 to the present. During this time, about 65 performances were mounted, most of which are focused to a greater or lesser extent on the theme of contemporary society. We conceived the repertory policy of the theatre, based, first of all, on the immediate reality, on the burning problems of the Moldovan society, which we addressed almost in all the performances mounted during the three decades, starting from the first performance *What is human life ?* by Arcadi Arkanov and until the staging of the plays of Anton P. Chekhov and William Shakespeare.

Analyzing the repertoire of the theater, which I try to keep up to date, resuming old performances in a new cast and artistic vision, we could classify them from the perspective of the dramatic text into the following groups:

- 1) The songs of Ion Luca Caragiale;
- 2) National contemporary dramaturgy;

- 3) Personal dramatizations of the world literature ("The Master and Margareta "by Mikhail Bulgakov," Metamorphoses "by Ovidiu, Caligula by Josef Toman," Carmen "by Prosperé Mérimée , " Ciuleandra " by Liviu Rebreanu and others).
- 4) Re-interpretation or re-updating of classical pieces (*Marriage proposal* and *Wedding* by Anton P. Chekhov, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, *Reviewer* by Nikolai Gogol);
- 5) Light comedies (of situations).

Emphasis will be placed on the main projects of the theatre: "Integrala Caragiale" (2002-2005) and "promoting the national drama in the context of the general evolution of the theatre in the Republic of Moldova" (2005-2008).

The research has as *object* the plays that I mounted at the "Satiricus" Theatre and through which I tended to educate an audience in the spirit of national values, a combative electorate. Or, staged performances have always been in step with life, with the problems of society.

Respectively, *novelty and originality of the theme* research emerges from this endeavor. The phenomenon of "Satiricus" theatre as a form of resistance has not been treated so far in our space, this being a first theoretical attempt to question the proposed aspect. Being a theater of a new format, the specialist critics hesitated to say firmly on the artistic-stylistic concept of the performances. I have made every effort to challenge writers, playwrights to direct their creation in the bed of the current problems of society and to bring into the stage not only the universal and national classics, but also the contemporary one. As Dinu Kivu said:"...the Romanian dramaturgy is called upon to build a theatre of reality: a theatre whose duty is the stage recomposition of the truth, without blunders and without trumpets."<sup>1</sup>. For the viewer is waiting for creations in which to reflect the problems that worry him.

Our approach is based on the following *objectives*:

- Argumentation of the place and role of the "Satiricus" Theatre in the cultural life of the Republic of Moldova;
- Tracking the evolution of the theater "Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale" in the context of Bessarabian realities;
- Highlighting the performances mounted on the basis of contemporary national dramaturgy, addressing a current theme;

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<sup>1</sup> Dinu Kivu. *Resistance through theatre*. Second edition, curated by Ionut Kivu and Luminita Vartolomei. Vol I. Bucharest: Music Publishing House, 2015, p. 22.

- Mirroring the ways of manifestation of the national drama in the context of the socio-political movement in the Republic of Moldova;
- Highlighting the actuality of Ion Luca Caragiale's dramaturgy;
- Analysis of formulas for dramatization and staging of literary works from Universal Classics;
- Evaluation of the activities of the theater "Satiricus" - FESTIS and the Awards Gala;
- The role of dialogue with the Romanian theatre community by participating in festivals and meetings, such as the Sibiu International Theatre Festival.

The thesis will put into circulation new concepts, ideas for dramatization of literary texts, innovative staging formulas, experience of cooperation with playwrights/writers and, respectively, a complex vision on the phenomenon of theater as a form of resistance.

Methodological and theoretical-scientific support was conditioned by the proposed purpose and objectives. In the attempt to highlight this theatrical phenomenon, we outlined a complex portrait of the "Satiricus" theater based on the social, political and cultural conditions of the time, we traced its evolution over three decades. In this vein, we have resorted to the temporal criterion, to the historical-analytical, comparative, deductive methods. The phenomenon has been investigated both from the diachronic perspective, in the dynamics of evolution, and from the synchronic perspective.

From the point of view *structural*, thesis (page 213 ) consists of introduction, four chapters with subchapters, each addressing a special aspect, conclusions and bibliography.

In *Introduction* the purpose, object, objectives, novelty and originality of research are titrated.

In Chapter I. *The end of the resistance Theatre. Historiographical aspects and theoretical foundations* starting from the notions of satire and comedy, an incursion is made in the evolution of theatrical art from the perspective of theories about the role and place of comedy in the education of society, in exposing the mores of society... Likewise, the notion of comedy will be debated in the view of Aristotle in "Poetics", Plato in "Republic", Horatio, Dante Alighieri and others. At the same time we will review the most significant playwrights who have established themselves in the comedy genre, starting from antiquity with Aristophanes, Plautus, Terentiu, to those of the Renaissance era through the comedies of Lodovico Ariosto and Niccolo Machiavelli, Lope De Vega and William Shakespeare. A special role was played by the influence *Comedy dell arts* on the evolution of the genus as well as its

species. Likewise, it introduced a new element of disruptive and revolutionary significance: the presence of women on stage.

In the period of classicism the one who consolidates the popularity of the comedy, without a doubt, is the great Molière. His comedies represent a culmination of the art of French classicism of the seventeenth century, and once again a bridge between the realism of the Renaissance and that of the New Times.

The XIX century is imposed realist theater, whose important representative is the Russian prose writer Nicolai V. Gogol with his comedies *Card players*, *Marriage* or *Reviewer*, considered the playwright's masterpiece, which is still played very successfully today.

In the nineteenth century - the beginning of the century. XX comes a whole host of comedians, who see in his art the opportunity to criticize the mores of society. Popular comedians include the likes of Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel and Dan Leno, who have honed their skills in musical sketches. A great artist of grotesque, comedy and tragicomedy in the twentieth century was the Italian Luigi Pirandello, laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Simultaneously with the work of great playwrights, representatives of the genre, we will expand the boundaries of knowledge from the perspective of Henry Bergson's theories about laughter<sup>2</sup>, the carnival principles at Michael Bakhtin<sup>3</sup>, by Johan Huizinga<sup>4</sup>etc.

A special development will know comedy, but also satire in the twentieth century, genre taken over and exploited by the new media, such as cinema, radio, television, which have broadened the access of comedians to the general public.

In Romanian literature, they excelled, in **comedy**, writers such as Vasile Alecsandri, during the Easter period (the "Chiritele" cycle), Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, at the end of the nineteenth century ("Trei crai de la Răsărit" ), Victor Ion Popa, George Ciprian, Tudor Musatescu, G. M. Zamfirescu, in the interwar period. The one who dominates, by far, the Romanian comedy, is the brilliant Ion Luca Caragiale, whom even now, at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, we can call "our contemporary", so convincing, viable and current are its typologies-the upstart, the demagogue, the frivolous woman, the hypocrite, the servant, the first lover – that is, the unmistakable characters from "a stormy night", "A lost letter", "D – of

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Bergson. *Laughter: essay on the meaning of the comic*. Translated By Ana-Maria Datcu. Bucharest: all Publishing House, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. *François Rabelais and popular culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. In Romanian by S. Recevschi. Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Johan Huizinga. *Homo ludens: an attempt to determine the playful element of culture*. Trad. H. R. Radian, foreword by Gabriel Liiceanu. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002.

Carnival (D-ale carnavalului ", "Conul Leonida face with Reaction" („Conul Leonida față cu Reacțiunea”)).

The second notion that will be the basis of the scientific approach is the resistance that will contribute to the formation of the resistance theater phenomenon.

Also in this chapter will be analyzed the socio-political and cultural conditions of the time, which will directly influence the appearance of the theater "Satiricus" and, respectively, will be aimed at cementing its concept of resistance...

In Chapter II – *The evolution of the resistance Theatre* we will analyze the sources of the resistance theatre found in the first decades of the twentieth century in Brecht's epic theatre and Erwin Piscator's political theatre. A special subchapter is dedicated to the particularities specific to the political theatre, whose roots start from the end of the nineteenth century, when certain forces emerged in the spiritual life of bourgeois society that, consciously or only through the simple fact of their existence, caused the radical modification and, in part, even the collapse of this spiritual universe.

For this research interest presents one of the greatest German directors of the beginning of the last century – Erwin Piscator, who "always considered theater the most vivid and direct instrument of the education of the masses. He was a forerunner endowed with superior qualities of clairvoyance, consistency and tenacity"<sup>5</sup>. The artistic movements of the beginning of the century determine his visions, in which "...art is only a means to achieve a certain goal. A political tool. Propaganda. Educational..."<sup>6</sup>. Let's not forget, that for Piscator the theatre was also a grandstand to fight the approaching Nazi threat.

The montages he performs give him the opportunity to build his theories, in which are embedded all the elements of the theatrical performance. Not only each performance, but the theatre itself as a whole was an experience for Piscator, a foray into an unknown field; an experience of the audience, of the dramaturgy, of the directing, of the technical means.

We note that Piscator used for the first time, in a theatrical performance the film, slides, graphics and a lot of extra theatrical mechanisms and means that could help explain the true reality on which the play was based. But from the ideas set forth in *Political theatre*, it became clear that the technique was never for Piscator an end in itself. All the technical means he used

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<sup>5</sup> Erwin Piscator. *Political Theatre*. Translated from German. Foreword by Radu Beligan. Bucharest: political Publishing House, 1966, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

or intended to use were not intended to enrich the technical apparatus, but to potentiate the stage game, giving it the dimensions of history.

Almost simultaneously with *political theatre* Piscator's german is born and *epic theatre* Brecht's.

After B. Brecht theatre is the instrument capable of transforming society for the better through politics, thus emphasizing the political and social dimension of theatre. By proposing tasks different from those of his predecessors to the theatre, he completely transforms the old way of interpretation, in order to adapt it consistently to his vision of the political and social effectiveness of the performance. He detests the illusion of truth on stage, and therefore demands its unmasking in favor of an examination of society and its history with theatrical means.

Brecht's theories, which have always been an object of discussion, "start from the premise that the theater should not be a place of free entertainment, but an institution that has to fulfill a high social-educational mission."<sup>7</sup> Brecht advocated an "epic theater" in which the objective description of facts prevailed.

Another personality who, in this context, deserves special attention is the brazilian director Augusto Boal, who seeks to prove that everything is necessarily political, since policies represent all human activities and theater is one of them.

His theoretical ideas were formed on ancient aesthetic thought, beginning with Aristotle and continuing with other illustrious personalities of the most diverse historical periods, who exposed his conceptions of the role of theater in society. Especially he stops at the "coercive tragic system of Aristotle", being interested in the function of art and science – "to correct the mistakes of nature". Augusto Boal comes to offer more evidence that "theater is a weapon. A very effective weapon" to change the mentality. In this context, Boal will develop theater-forum, his main technique of theater of the oppressed, a theatrical method that involves the active participation of spectators in the performance.

Based on the revolutionary concepts of the controversial Latin American director, later the theater-Forum, the theater-Diary, The Theater-image, the Legislative Theater, The Invisible Theater, the policeman in the head or the rainbow of desires, etc., will appear, which had a considerable influence on the development of modern theater.

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<sup>7</sup> Ovidiu Dramba. History of the universal theater. Bucharest, 2005, p.256.

The theories of Bertold Brecht, Erwin Piscator, Augusto Boal led to the emergence of political theater in the most diverse countries of the world. And after the Second World War a new formula of documentary theatre would emerge. This form will be approached by independent theatres as a manifesto against large theatres operating in experimental spaces. Examples that would confirm this are independent theatres *Teatr.doc (Teamp.doc)* from Russia, *Rimini Protokoll* from Germany, *Macaz, creation and experiment Reactor* from Romania, *Laundry, theatrical Laboratory / Foosbook, Angelina Rosca theater-ART* from the Republic of Moldova, etc.

The most substantial is Chapter III - *Three decades of the "Satiricus" Theater: the fingerprints of resistance*, will debut with the formation of the concept of the new theater under the influence of Constantine Raikin's Theater "Satirikon" in Moscow, Russia. From now on from the first show mounted on the stage of the new theater *What is human life?*, a satirical tragicomedy by Arcadi Arkanov, I wanted to capitalize on the whole arsenal of modern artistic processes – spectacularity, dance, anecdotal, emotivity, etc. But what the young band achieved on stage was more than a show. The show challenged the audience to meditate on the meaning of life, the purpose of creation, the imperative to be, first of all, man among men.

The performances will be analyzed: Motoc "according to the creation of the classical writers Grigore Ureche, Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, Constantin Negruzzi and Vasile Alecsandri and "Hercule" by Friedrich Dillardrenmatt, which really marked the beginning of the affirmation of the new theater, conceived, eminently, as a theater of satire, which aims to take into account the negative realities of the society in transition.

The following subchapters highlight the two significant projects of the theater: the first is "integral Caragiale" (2002-2005), in which all the plays of I. L. were mounted. Caragiale, initiated on the occasion of Caragiale year, declared by UNESCO on the occasion of 150 years since the birth of the Romanian playwright. His dramatic creation, which proposes "a model of the theater of life", a "complex portrait of human types", became popular even from its appearance, offering unlimited possibilities and knowing over the years the most diverse directorial approaches, found in the most diverse theaters in the Romanian space.

The review of caragalian plays, staged in the theaters of the Republic of Moldova during about a century, demonstrated the necessity of our project to bring Caragiale home.



The Municipal Theatre "Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale" is the first in the Romanian space to perform the "integral Caragiale", having in its active repertoire, during several seasons, all five landmark plays of the great playwright.

Caragiale's plays were staged in accordance with the mood of the society, with the up-to-date concerns of the citizens. I mounted *A Lost Letter* during the strike-marathon period of winter-spring 2002. The message of the play was very topical when, taking advantage of the dissension among the Democrats, the communists came to power. Followed *Patriotic sacrifices* which meant the sad balance sheet of the marathon protests. The third show after Caragiale's play, *The carnival*, it seemed appropriate for the tragicomic atmosphere that was setting in our society at the time of the installation. *Trouble* it comes to define the state of deep pessimism and hopelessness that was taking shape then, on the eve of new parliamentary elections. At the "dessert" I left *A stormy night*, one of the most sparkling Caragiale's comedies, mounted in dozens of stage versions, in different countries.

The Caragialian creation was a real test of resistance for the band "Satiricus": resistance through the great classical literature.

The second project of the theatre "promoting national dramaturgy in the context of the general evolution of the theatre in the Republic of Moldova" was initiated in 2005, becoming a launching track for Bessarabian playwrights on the national and international stage. Over the course of four years (2005-2008), eight performances of eight plays by Moldovan authors on various topics of great public interest were staged on the stage of "Satiricus". Initially, in our economic and cultural mess, the realization of this theatrical project seemed a utopia. The contest announced by US was attended by 18 playwrights, more or less known, who presented about 40 works. So I opted for eight of these songs: "SRL Moldovan" by Nicolae Esinencu, "What are the savages?" by Iulian Filip, "April 7, 2009" by Irina Nechit, "Made in Moldova" by Constantin Cheianu, "Lie to me, lie to me!" by Nicolae Negru, "The sexual-United Party" by Serghei Evstratiev, "Save America" by Dumitru Crudu, "The dictator" by Andrei Strambeanu, "The temptation of Judas" by Andrei Burac, "The lost letters of I. L. Caragiale" by Val Butnaru, priority being, of course, the criterion of quality. Another criterion, no less important, was the issue addressed. Most of the plays / performances focused on current Republic issues.

Project completion *National dramaturgy on the stage of the National Theatre "Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale"* it was an opening for new collaborations with local playwrights. Of course, I couldn't help but put on a show that would reflect the war in Transnistria. A document-show

to portray the entire drama and tragedies that followed that war, was *This country has forgotten about us* (2011), based on the play by Constantin Cheianu.

The most current and poignant political, militant, understandable performances could only be those created by contemporary local authors, on subjects from the immediate reality of the country. And since the Republic of Moldova can not boast of too many modern playwrights, it was important to find them ourselves, to mobilize them to write, to suggest topics that would be of vivid interest to our audience. In such cases, we sought the attention of authors who approached the most acute problems of society, obviously from a pro-democracy and deeply national position.

In honor of the centennial year, the band "Satiricus" came before the audience with an unprecedented premiere: "**100 minutes of freedom**", in the stage direction of the Romanian director Bogdan Saratean. It was the first sui-generis project of theatrical collaboration between Romania and the Republic of Moldova – a co-production of the National Theatre "Radu Stanca" from Sibiu and the National Theatre "Satiricus I. L. Caragiale " from Chisinau. A daredevil project, a remarkable achievement... The show was mounted on an improvised text by the actors themselves and, of course, with the contest of the director, who knew how to channel the memories, thoughts and feelings of the actors, to coagulate them, to outline vivid and deeply emotive images.

In the context of national dramaturgy, we could not overlook the problems of contemporary dramaturgy, the playwriting contest, the activity of the Center for Contemporary dramaturgy, and, respectively, the staging of plays signed by our playwrights on the stage of theaters in the Republic of Moldova.

In order to meet the challenges, to resist on all levels, "Satiricus" has continuously adapted its repertory policy, but the principles always remain the same: to be a militant theater that lives with the problems and pains of the viewer. The theatre always remains connected to the socio-political realities of the country and offers consistent artistic works with a major impact on modern society.

In the last section of Chapter III: *From national classics to Universal*, we refer to the peculiarities of dramatization of the novels "Maestro and Margareta" by Mihail Bulgakov, "Metamorphoses" by Ovidiu, "Carmen" by Prosper Merimee, "Ciuleandra" by Liviu Rebreanu through an individual vision. Of particular interest to the public, but also to the critics presented the re-interpretation and re-updating of the classical dramaturgy: the plays of Matei Vishniec –

*Clown hiring* (2015) and *Migrations ...* (2017), Anton P. Chekhov – *Marriage proposal* (2009) and *Wedding* (2015), *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (2018) and *Reviewer* (2020) by Nicolai V. Gogol, the last pieces I brought to the realities of today. The formulas and artistic means of staging the works of great playwrights are analyzed.

The last chapter of the work *Other resistance activities of the theater " Satiricus"*, refers to the collection of the theater " Satiricus I. L. Caragiale", carrying out a review of the volumes edited during the years 2000-2020; at the International Theatre Festival " Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale "(FESTIS), which reached the fifth edition and the National Theatre Awards Gala " Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale " (2000-2012), which was a unique project in the cultural life of the Republic, aiming to promote and support, first of all, the political class.

Also, the theater tours are highlighted, as well as the participation in international theater festivals in Europe. A special role in the activity of the theater was played by the dialogue with the Romanian theaters: both the participation in the festivals in the country and the realization of joint projects (for example, the staging in collaboration with the National Theater "Radu Stanca" from Sibiu of the performance *100 minutes of freedom*, directed by Bogdan Saratean). In this context, significant are the participation of the "Satiricus" Theatre for six consecutive years at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, which had a beneficial influence on the evolution of the theatre.

In conclusion, the present thesis highlights the phenomenon of the theater" Satiricus Ion Luca Caragiale " from Chisinau, which during the three decades of its existence has fully manifested itself as a theater of resistance, staging performances in which life pulsed, reflected events as in a mirror, contributing largely to the formation of public opinion, to the formation of a combatant electorate. Through its actions and artistic manifestations, the theater has always been in step with life, with the social and political problems of the Republic.

The bibliography of the work was compiled in several compartments: the theoretical sources (125) consulted during the research; the bibliography related to the "Satiricus" Theatre (57); the editions edited by the theatre in the "Satiricus" Collection (20) and the list of works published by the author of the thesis (33).