

The discourse of Power and the Power of Discourse

Assumption of the philosophical concepts of Humanity, Reason, Morality and Authority in sequences of classical literature. A case study: Caragiale's Năpasta

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Abstract

Fiction has always been interconnected with the problem of morality, whether we speak of a thematized assumption, or of a more subtle one.

The problem of the control of the perspective upon a character (whether fictional or not) always represented a preoccupation not only for the philosophical, mass-media or political discourse (especially in the context of the postmodern society), but also for the literary discourse, a privileged space, taking into account the fact that it facilitates, while at the same time, hides the manner in which the mechanisms of power function. Thus, if the discourse of power has the power to manipulate the reader's assumptions, it has, at the same time, the power to undermine these assumptions, to set under a suspicious look the whole mechanism through which fiction works.

Thus, the article I propose indulges in analyzing the discourse of Power and the power of Discourse in the case of the fictional language. The essay focuses on Caragiale's Năpasta, a text that thematizes the manner in which fiction creates some expectancies into their readers, the way in which a text tries to control the reader's answer, to force him, if he is not paying attention, to identify him with some unreliable perspectives or characters.

In this manner, notions such as Humanism, Reason, Morality, fundamental concepts for the discourse of Reason in the XVII and XVIII c., become, in Caragiale's Năpasta, ambiguous and problematic notions, both for the status of the characters as for readers of the story.

Keywords: *reading, morality, manipulation, power, reason.*

1. The beginning and the end

"[...] de-aia te-am luat, ca să te aduc în sfârșit aici. De la început te-am bănuțit. [...] Mai întâi, mă hotărâsem să te curăț – ba era să bag și alt suflet în păcat!

– pe urmă am stat să mă gândesc mai bine. [...] nu te puteam lăsa să treci dincolo așa nejudecat aicea. Te-am judecat, te-ai mărturisit, trebuie să-ți dau acum pedeapsa ce ți se cuvine c-ai răpus pe omul ce mi-era drag ca lumina ochilor, tu, care mi-ai fost urât totdeauna ...”¹ (my underlining). That is the speech that practically puts an end to Anca’s plea before she gives Dragomir away to the people, a moment that should mark the end of the conflict, the triumph of the truth and the solution of the moral dilemma in which the drama positions its reader.

This ending, as we can see from the fragment quoted above, represents nothing more than the purpose of Anca’s punitive act that bears the responsibility of restoring the moral disorder of the drama produced by the killing of Dumitru. The text thus (or my interpretation rather) builds around this powerful ending that Anca presents as the purpose of a punitive act that she assumed.

Therefore, there exists a powerful sense of the ending that the drama builds into its reader to whom it appears both as a purpose of Anca’s punitive act, and as a satisfaction of the reader’s wish for moral fulfillment, for restoration of order.

But the end of the drama is more than dilemmatic implying not only a dispute around justice / injustice, reason / madness, guiltiness / non-guiltiness, freedom / prison (binary oppositions that the text so intelligently works with), being also a dispute around positioning the reader around the moral perspective that the reading of the drama presupposes (starting from this ending).

2. *The scenario*

The drama opens up abruptly; from the first replies we find ourselves at the very climax of the story. Anca, Dragomir and Gheorghe find out that the Law – the one that functions outside and that Gheorghe’s newspaper brings inside – may make possible the deresponsibilization of a person that committed a murder, if within ten years, the murderer confesses. This possibility makes the engine of the text spin around because for Dragomir there appears an opportunity to get rid of his tormented consciousness that consumes him from the inside, and also the possibility to get rid of the punishment for his crime, while for Anca there appears both the possibility that Dragomir might get away unpunished, and also the confirmation of the suspicions that were the cause of her living along with Dragomir for eight years. But Anca does not wish only for a confirmation of her suspicions, but to imprison Dragomir, a personal vendetta that the presence of Ion makes possible.

Thus, along the drama we witness a long process of investigation, judging

¹ I.L. Caragiale, *Teatru*, Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, p. 311.

and sentencing of the one that from the very beginning we know to be the killer of Dumitru. But the text favors Anca's drama which it situates at the centre of the story forcing thus the reader to read *Năpasta* from the point of view of her system of values (a system that the reader is tempted to assume). Let's not forget that Anca is given the larger space in the drama's length (she is present in all of its scenes) and that she is the only one to whom it was granted the privilege of the monologist discourse (a discourse attributed, traditionally, to tragic characters in dramatic texts).

But the punitive act that Anca undertakes presupposes the coexistence of a large number of roles that she has to play ranging from that of an investigator and a prosecutor to that of a judge. Yet, to assume all of these roles presupposes the existence of a system that would make them possible, a system of values to which the status of one character or another might be related.

The beginning of the drama, the one which is being conventionally determined by the newspaper that Gheorghe brings inside, practically establishes a part of the paradigms around which the drama might be read: the possibility that a man that is not crazy might go mad or the possibility that an innocent man might be locked up. Starting from here all the other perspectives of the text develop (that of freedom or that of justice, for example), perspectives that cannot be discussed outside the question of morality (a dilemma that involves the very positioning of the reader).

The possibility of assuming a moral position is facilitated when the two perspectives that the text opens up (that of madness and that of guiltiness) occupy some clear, non-problematic positions. But in *Năpasta* the two possibilities seem to function rather as masks that change from one character to another. More than that, the moral question of the drama cannot function outside a rational system that would legitimize it, that should establish, in a clear manner, which are the guilty and which are the mad ones. And when Anca assumes the responsibility of punishing the guilty ones, she becomes herself (or rather she wishes to become, legitimizes her acts through) a voice of this system, as Constantin Hârlav mentions in a afterword dedicated to the dramatic work of Caragiale: "În dimensiunea gravă, Caragiale mitizează rațiunea, parcă neliniștit de forța ei distructivă: Anca face din rațiune instrumentul răzbunării"².

Thus far we have seen that all the text's characters oscillate somehow around this position of madness: Ion – being the text's declared madman, and also the one that was imprisoned for a crime he had not committed –, Dragomir – as the

² Constantin Hârlav, "Fragmente pentru o «mitologie» caragialeană", in I.I. Caragiale, *Teatru*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1984, pp. 263-264.

character that near the end, unable to defer any longer the fatality of his sentence, goes mad –, Gheorghe – as the character mad enough to follow the steps of Dragomir because of his deep love for Anca. The one that seems to escape(?) this position is Anca, and that is because in and through her speaks an entire system of values that makes the punitive act possible. There is an entire rationalist discourse that she identifies with and that she puts to work so that the punitive act may be exercised.

But there also exists in *Năpasta* the question of guiltiness. We see Dragomir guilty for murdering Dumitru, but it is Ion that is being imprisoned for the murder in Dragomir's place. Gheorghe then is ready at any time to take the place of Dragomir (the same as the latter has done). Yet not even Dragomir is as free as he thinks because as he too feels that the house he lives in along with Anca is much more like a prison because if for Ion the dungeon is more of a prison of the body (because in his case, as Anca mentioned, "D-zeu, cine știe pentru ce păcate, l-a aruncat în prăpastie, dar a fost și bun și i-a luat mintea cu care să-și judece ticăloșia: i-a dat greutatea ... dar i-a luat cumpăna!"³), for Dragomir the house he lives in is more like a prison of the soul: "Ba zi că e o femeie nebună, care mi-a stricat mintea și mie. Eu sunt sănătos, crezi, de când am luat-o?"⁴.

Thus we can very easily see that the positions that these characters fill are far from being clear, univocal, non-problematic. Moreover, the system that stands behind them, system that should have offered clarity to the positions that they occupy in the above mentioned binary oppositions, fails. Anca, the character through whose voice this system speaks, is herself exposed to the contradictions that the text raises. We have seen that the text focuses on her dilemma – which it puts in the centre of it – she being thus presented as the oppressed one. Yet if we look over again we see that Dragomir also is one of the oppressed ones as a person whose consciousness is corrupted, who is tormented by remorse and that lives a continuous state of terror. The same holds true / may be said about Ion (though the discussion around him is much more complex and necessitates a separate discussion). In the end we see that Anca holds the position of prosecutor and judge, but the reasons for which Dragomir has been imprisoned are different from the real ones, thus she enters herself the group of the guilty ones.

Somehow the system that the text sets behind Anca's punitive act fails. Rationalism, as this is the ideology that marked the birth of the prison in the 17th and 18th centuries, as M. Foucault mentioned in *A supraveghea și a pedepsi*.

³ I.L. Caragiale, *Teatru*, Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, p. 287.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 277.

*Nașterea închisorii*⁵, is put to a trial and fails because the binary oppositions that the text works with are canceled, being far from clear and univocal.

The end of the text should have marked the “triumph of reason” and “the emergence of the truth”, does not put an end to the initial conflict, it only suspends it temporarily. How does the reader position himself towards this ending, how does he answer to the invitation of identifying with the triumphant character at the end of the drama, how does the reader respond to the text’s continuous challenging of his views (starting from this ending) remain some dilemmas that my reading of the text cannot overpass.

3. *Auctorial figures*

There is in the literary works of Caragiale a predilection for authorial figures, for director-like characters that, positioning themselves both outside and inside the text, determine, put into motion, while at the same time solve the conflicts that spin around them and the characters around them. *Năpasta* is no exception to that, placing at its very heart another “*deus ex machina*” figure – a woman this time – around which oscillate the destinies of three men: Dragomir, Gheorghe și Ion (four if we add Dumitru also).

Though placed at the very heart of the drama and presented as the oppressed ones, Anca is far from being cast in the role of the victim, acting more like an oppressor to the characters around her. Far from being a tormented consciousness (as is the case of Dragomir, for example) Anca represents a form of authority, a character that assumes (as the voice of a rationalist, oppressive and authoritarian, yet moral system) the responsibility of discovering and punishing the presupposed murderer of Dumitru.

As an authorial, oppressive figure she is the one that puts pressure on all the characters’ psyche, that manipulates the events in her favor (in the favor of her demonstration rather), that gives the characters around her a role in the story that she herself creates while at the same time closing the drama’s physical and psychological space. All of the drama’s characters live inside this closed space that she creates and manipulates, forcing them to become nothing more than mere tools, puppets. How does she manage to do that? By resorting to the instrument that her position of investigator, prosecutor and judge possesses – the power of language, the power of fiction, the ability to work with versions of reality. That is why all the characters of the drama seem to be prisoners of that closed space, their

⁵ Michel Foucault, *A supraveghea și a pedepsi. Nașterea închisorii*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997.

escape being forbidden.

At the other end, Dragomir is the only character that recognizes and accuses this fiction of the closed space that Anca creates; he is the only one that perceives the house as a prison and himself in the mouth of madness. He therefore is the only one thus, that (even though completely guilty, thus in a less appropriate instance) deconspires Anca's fiction: "Ba zi că e o femeie nebună, care mi-a stricat mintea și mie. Eu sunt sănătos, crezi, de când am luat-o? ...Uf! M-am săturat! De opt ani de zile, Dumitru și iar Dumitru; pe el îl auz când vorbește ea, când mă uit la ea, îl văz pe el ... Eu trăiesc în casă, mănânc la masă, dorm la un loc cu stafia lui ... Așa! Asta n-o să mai meargă mult!"⁶. The past, the one that Anca opposes so stubbornly to Dragomir's wish for escape, closes any way out, while the present becomes only a form of suspended time.

So there exists in this text a past story, organized around the killing of Dumitru and a present story that is centered on Anca's punitive act, stories that have Ion, Dragomir and Anca as connectors. Ion is the one that fills (unwillingly) Dragomir's position in the first story leading to a partial/open solving of the conflict of the past story. On the other hand, in the second story, the one set in the present, Ion determines the solving, for the second tome, of the conflict of the first story. The differences lie in the fact that if in the first story, the past one, his role was part of a scenario determined by fatality / destiny, in the second story his position is determined by the role that Anca assigns to him in her own scenario. Thus, Ion becomes nothing more than a tool through which Anca tries to control the story, to impose a meaning to the events, one (closed) interpretation.

In the first story, the one set in the past, Anca held the position of "object of desire" (R. Girard), a passive position (that of an object) as we see, the trophy that Dragomir wanted. In the second story, she passes from a passive position (that of an object) towards an active one (that of a subject). She now becomes an authority figure that determines decisively the outcome of the conflict. Her position is thus an interested one, organized around a (premeditated) purpose. She rebuilds the pattern of the ordinary story (that of the murdering of Dumitru, in a triangle that included Dumitru-Dragomir-Ion), forcing the position of Ion to be filled by its rightful "owner", Dragomir. Because she feels the (outside) Law does not compensate for her wish for order, for moral fulfillment, and risking that the first story might remain open (unsolved), she rewrites it, assuming a demiurgic, auctorial role. She assumes thus a paternal (ordering, corrective) position,

⁶ I.L. Caragiale, *Teatru*, Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1971, pp. 277-278.

rewriting reality (if we look backwards), manipulating the events and controlling its meanings, asking for a closed interpretation. In her fiction (the one she presents at the end of the drama to the people brought there by Gheorghe) the characters around her become nothing but tools. Gheorghe, at the beginning, and then Ion too create opportunities into the fiction of the closed space that Anca controls.

Dragomir is the guilty one for the failure to solve the conflictual situation of the past story. He is the elliptic character of the “triangular desire” that he is a part of along with Anca and Dumitru, because his position was filled in by Ion. That is why, in the story set in the present, Anca will reopen the triangle, forcing the exchange Ion – Dragomir, by bringing back Dragomir to the position once (accidentally) occupied by Ion. Her purpose thus is oriented towards repairing the errors, towards reestablishing the moral equilibrium and towards closure.

In the second story, Dragomir is a tormented character, consumed by remorse, wishing to get away (first of all from the fiction of the closed space into which Anca holds him prisoner). Otherness, in the case of Ion – madness –, that characterizes him in the second story, takes shape only in contrast with Ion (because Dragomir recognizes many times that he is in the mouth of madness).

Regarding the story from this perspective, that of Anca’s punitive act, the closure of the initial triangle (by bringing back Dragomir to fill in Ion’s position) would seem compensatory. Anca becomes thus an authority figure that wishes the closure, the control of meaning, the control of the reader’s answer – one may say –, as long as she expects that her act of punishment will be a credible one (hence the need for witnesses at the end).

4. *From a detective story pattern to a judiciary one*

As we have seen from the preceding chapters of the essay the text gives birth to some dilemmas that ask the reader to assume a certain position, especially in what concerns the question of morality. In the next chapters we shall see how the reader is constructed, forced to assume a responsibility towards the text.

It has been said about this text that it uses a detective story pattern, but one may observe easily that the patterns of this type of fiction, as they have been described by Tzvetan Todorov in “The typology of detective fiction”⁷, suffer some changes, important to the determination of the position into which the text situates its reader, because, somehow, this text undergoes an evolution from the detective story pattern towards a judiciary one, according to the roles that Anca assumes

⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, “The typology of detective fiction”, in David Lodge, *Modern Literary Theory and Criticism*, London and New York, Longman, 1988, pp. 157-165.

along the drama.

Thus there exists a detective – easy to recognize in the figure of Anca – and a murderer – a position occupied by Dragomir. There also exist two stories: an absent story, that of the murder (that is organized around Dumitru, the absent character of the text) and a present story, a story of investigation that functions inside the triangle Anca – Dragomir – Dumitru. Yet the murderer is known from the very beginning, because of Anca’s suspicions, and thus there is nothing that might have remained hidden to the reader. That is why Anca wishes for a reconstruction of the story of the murder, not through a process centered on a discovery, but through a confirmation (in other words a confession). Thus the story is not in so much one of reconstruction, but rather one of punishment. The importance of the process of deduction – so decisive in the detective story pattern – disappears because Anca’s position shifts from that of a detective, towards that of a judge, as her purpose is not that of revealing, of uncovering, but that of accusing and sentencing.

Now, as Anca is set in the centre of the drama, as the text follows her investigatory act, the reader is set into a position not only of “revealing” along with her the motives of the crime, but also of identifying with her position. Thus the position that the reader is situated in is no longer that of an apprentice (a position traditionally assigned to the reader in the detective story pattern), as it is not his apprenticeship that is being intended, but, since the purpose of the investigating act is no longer one of discovery, but that of accusation and sentencing, the position to be filled in by the reader would be that of a “witness”, of an assistant / spectator in a court of law. Because what Anca does in this text is to build an accusation that aims at the punishment of Dragomir.

Thus far, we have seen that we know from the very beginning the names, the motives and the participants in the act of the crime, thanks to her suspicions and to her insinuating game. That Dragomir already lives in a (psychologically) closed space, is indicated by his very words. Before Anca delivers Dragomir through the ending she herself imagined: “de-aia te-am luat, ca să te aduc în sfârșit aici. De la început te-am bănuțit”⁸, she wills put him to a real interrogation (“Stăi drept ... adună-ți mințile câte le mai ai și răspunde la ce te-oї întreba ... Pentru ce l-ai omorât? [...] Cum l-ai ucis? spune. [...] Cum ai făcut? [...] El ce-a făcut?”⁹), with the help of which she might get a confession – that, as M. Foucault noticed, “constituie o probă atât de zdrobitoare, încât face inutile căutarea altor probe și

⁸ I.L. Caragiale, *op. cit.*, 1971, p. 311.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 309-311.

recurgerea la anevoiosul și îndoielnicul procedeu combinatoriu al indiciilor.”¹⁰ And the obtaining of this confession, which must lead to the truth, will bring about a change in Anca’s behavior because now, not only does she know the story (the truth), but she controls it also. By controlling the story, Anca will change its elements so that at the end she will deliver to the “witnesses” – the ones that Gheorghe brings to her house – a story that (ironically) repeats the first one (that of the murder of Dumitru), yet hides its contradictions, its differences.

Thus, the ending of *Năpasta* seems to be ironic on two accounts: first of all because it reactivates the old scenario of the crime (according to a pattern of repetition), of the judiciary process that made possible the locking up of Ion (and here we must read a subtle critique of the system that made this scenario possible) and second because the story is constructed around a detective story and a judiciary pattern, patterns that in themselves involve “a disturbance of order in the wake of an originary event [...], followed by a re-establishment of order by the discovery of the criminal”¹¹, and also because “the genre [...] depends on an outcome in which society’s and the reader’s desire for moral restitution is fulfilled.”¹²

In the chapter “Ideology” from *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory. Key critical concepts*, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, discussing the patterns of the detective fiction, consider that “classic detective fiction must distance itself from an ideological critique of society which, however, can never be finally erased”¹³. Thus, even though it is not thematized explicitly in the text, a critique of the society (understood as a critique of the system that made possible the appearance of the prison) is present. The locking up of Ion is twice as inhuman because it also represents a “judiciary absurdity” because, as Foucault would say, inside the rationalist system, which made possible the appearance of the prison system, it is “imposibil deci să declari pe cineva în același timp vinovat și nebun.”¹⁴

Anca herself, as a voice of this system of exclusion, of penitence, even though she recognizes the absurdity of Ion’s existential condition: “Dar e nebun... Mai are nebunul bunăvoie?... Lumina soarelui fără lumina minții...”¹⁵, does not

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹¹ Andrew Bennett, Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory. Key critical concepts*, Prentice Hall, 1995, p. 134.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 134.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁵ I. L. Caragiale, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

have any remorse in using him as a tool in the accusation, judging and sentencing of Dragomir: “Nebunul ăsta tot e osândit o dată... Pentru un păcat, două ori zece, un om tot cu o viață plătește... Și fără altă vină nouă, nebunul tot are să fie prins până la urmă și întors de acolo de unde a fugit. [...] Așa-așa... locul lui e la ocnă...”¹⁶

The difficulty of discussing this character appears when the question arises, if not of the reader’s identifying with him – an impossible identification, I might say –, at least of the reader’s positioning with respect to Ion. If it is easy to see the oppressed in the figure of Anca (who loses her husband and accepts to live for eight years in the company of his murderer) – as much of the critical reception around the drama did, or in the figure of Dragomir (whose consciousness is marked by remorse, a prisoner in the psychological prison that Anca had created all along those eight years), it is harder to see that figure in the person of Ion, the only one guilty without a fault, condemned by the very discourse that made his locking up possible, and also exiled into that “moral space of exclusion” (M. Foucault).

Thus Ion is excluded (removed from the centre) from a wide range of perspectives. Not only is his perspective on things ignored (see also Anca’s discourse in Act I, Scene VII), as he is not a rational character (that is why he cannot be judged nor be part of the moral order, that the end of the drama seems to re-establish), but he is the one that, without guilt, experiences the most inhuman condition (he is the one that absorbs the whole absurdity of the conflict of the drama) without being given a (credible) voice.

Through this character, reason – which made possible the appearance of the binary opposition that the text works with – exposes its limits, while the ending, which should mark the triumph of reason in its relation with madness, with immorality and the truth, manages to reposition our reading, by being unfulfilling in what concerns the reader’s wish for (moral) order.

Man, and ironically the most human position in the text is that of the madman, becomes nothing more than a tool through which the discourse of power legitimizes itself. Man thus becomes a character in a fiction that de-humanizes him, positioning him into suitable “subject positions” through which power can exercise itself. Reason, whose voice in this drama is represented by Anca, exposes its madness (for how should we interpret that wish for the ultimate / abstract truth, that fanatic belief in the idea of absolute justice, that institution of “fanatic justice” but as another form of madness, of reason taken to the extreme).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 287.

At the appearance of Ion in the 5th scene of the 1st act, when Anca recognizes in him the one imprisoned instead of the real murderer, she puts his appearance under the sign of fatality/destiny, of necessity: “Cum a ajuns omul ăsta aici? ... Tu, Maica Domnului! i-ai fost călăuză; tu l-ai purtat pe căi necunoscute și mi l-ai trimes aici ca să ridice din calea hotărârii mele îndoiala”¹⁷. Reread from the perspective of the end, this positioning of Ion’s appearance under the sign of necessity creates meaning because it creates the expectation of some sort of order (divine, therefore a moral order) that a crime would produce, as happens, for example, in a Greek tragedy. More than that, Anca disapproves of the Law (the one that Gheorghe – by means of the newspaper – brings inside), proposing (somehow at the advice of Dragomir) a new Law, a moral (therefore compensatory) one: “ANCA: Cum adică? La zece ani un ucigaș poate veni să spuie singur ce-a făcut și lumea îl lasă în pace. DRAGOMIR: Așa e legea ... ANCA: Bună lege, zău! DRAGOMIR: De ce nu te pui să faci alta mai bună?”¹⁸

Why was it that the Law that Gheorghe brought inside wasn’t good anymore? Mainly because it left outside the question of morality. It was immoral for a person that had committed a crime to be left free. That is why Anca rewrites the Law, adding to it – through a compensatory gesture – the moral dimension that had been left out, therefore heading for closure (understood as reinstallation of order, recreation of the initial equilibrium that the murder of Dragomir broke).

But the ending enters an ironic contradiction with this expectance. The iterative pattern that Anca uses (that of making Dragomir fill in the position that was once occupied by Ion, to which the presence of the girdle and the blood stains might be added) does not manage to hide the pattern’s contradictions, its differences. The rationality of Anca’s punitive act does not manage to hide its irrationality, and thus the initial conflict does not find a clear outcome and the ending remains open.

5. The power of Discourse and the discourse of Power

If we reconsider the whole discussion, we see that, evidently the text tends to cancel any form of univocity, of clearness, the status of the drama’s characters, the positions that the latter fill in being problematic. In all of the drama’s characters we encounter the difficulty of defining madness, truth or morality, and that is why the masks they wear circulate. In the second chapter of the essay we have seen that

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 284.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 276.

the two stories that we find underlying this text (the present and the past one) seem to be split, somehow, by some sort of an ontological order, by the “will” factor more exactly. If the first story is put under the sign of fatality, the murdering of Dumitru creating disorder in Anca’s life, the second story seems to be somehow forged, artificial. The fatality now bears the mask of Anca, the one that assumes the responsibility of reinstating the moral order, of closing the conflictual situation and of catching and punishing the murderer. So the second story is nothing more than Anca’s fiction in which all the characters around her become tools, puppets, in which the events unfold according to the meaning that she is willing to impose on their interpretation. Fiction in this second story is a controlled one, going towards closure.

The moral restoration that the end should have produced is an illusory one because, ironically, even though Anca wishes for difference (proposing a better Law for the one that Gheorghe’s newspaper at the beginning of the text brought in), she repeats the same ideology that so unfairly had put Ion behind bars. It is not the truth but the evidence that triumphs at the end. And thus the morality of Anca’s discourse (the one that legitimated her punitive act) has been excluded.

Thus, from a point of view that considers reading, the end of the drama becomes nothing more than a trap, manipulating the moral expectations of the reader, expectances that the end of the text seem – but fails, in fact – to accomplish.

From many perspectives the drama is a limit text. First of all because it exposes the discourse of power, a discourse that is assumed by Anca, the auctorial figure in this text. Yet it is the excluded, the marginal that bear the marks of humanity and not a central instance as Anca that legitimizes herself through a rationalist discourse. Somehow Anca tries to fool us when she asserts that she wishes a change: “ANCA: Cum adică? La zece ani un ucigaș poate veni să spuie singur ce-a făcut și lumea îl lasă în pace. DRAGOMIR: Așa e legea ... ANCA: Bună lege, zău!”¹⁹ In fact she repeats the same scenario, the same ideology that had been used to imprison Ion. This way the drama suggests a model of reading the discourse of Power: unmasking its incongruence, exposing the irrationality behind reason, thus asking its reader to take a responsible position towards the moral question of the text.

At the same time, because of the presence of some authority figures, of some real forms of control, *Năpasta* dramatizes the manner in which a text, by means of some textual instances or fictional strategies tries to control the reader’s answer, to

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 276.

impose a meaning to him, to enclose him into a pattern of meaning, into a fiction of “the closed space” (I. Constantinescu). This enclosure of the meaning, this sense of living in absurdity is a constructed one and this fact is better exposed by the second story of the drama (the one set in the present) which, in contrast to the first one, as we have seen, has a somehow forged, artificial air. The idea that there is no escape is Anca’s creation. It is thus a constructed pattern of meaning. Caught into this moral dilemma, forced (by the different instances of this text) to take a position, the reader might become himself nothing more than a “prisoner” in the house of language.

As an authority figure, Anca is anxious. She does not want her “prisoners” to escape and that is why she forges a story out of which nobody can get out. Thus, the control of fiction entails a form of control of the reader’s answer. But there are instances that deny these forms of control. Dragomir, for example, is the only one that, as we have seen, recognizes and accuses this fiction of the closed space. His wish to escape this real prison (of language), a form of rebellion that we find also in Ion, becomes a form of resistance. The two (symptomatically guilty positions in the discourse of Power) become voices that try to expose this attempt at controlling the fiction, the prison of language, the fiction of the closed space into which they are held up prisoners.

Thus we can say that in *Năpasta* Caragiale thematizes the manner in which fiction creates some expectations in their readers, the way in which the text, with the help of some fictional strategies, tries to control the reader’s answer, to force him, if he is not paying attention, to identify with some unreliable perspectives or characters (because even though Anca’s behavior seems to be justified, identifying with her perspective is a trap), the manner in which we as readers find ourselves exposed to manipulation by an auctorial instance because in *Năpasta* there is no escape outside language, fiction.

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