

Sasha Comaneshteanu – the Portrait of a Romanian Lady

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Résumé: *Ce papier a comme sujet la brève présentation de Sacha Comanéchtëanou, un personnage clef de la littérature roumaine et une de ses premières héroïnes romanesques. Bien aimée par son entourage tout comme par le lecteurs du roman, elle est une des figures proéminentes du roman La vie a la campagne, écrit par Duiliu Zamfirescu, une des personnalités remarquables du commencement du vingtième siècle roumain. Docteur es loi, avocat, procureur, et puis engagé dans le service de la diplomatie roumaine, Zamfirescu a contribué à la culture roumaine pas seulement avec ses œuvres originaux (nouvelles et romans, volumes des poèmes et même une pièce de théâtre aussi que des discours politiques) mais aussi avec des traductions de la littérature italienne en roumain. Des tous ses mérites on y mentionne celui d'avoir été le seul auteur roumain qui a synchronise son œuvre littéraire avec les tendances européennes de son époque.*

Mots-clés: *roman fleuve, chronique, féminité, fresque sociale*

A preamble

Among the Romanian writers, Duiliu Zamfirescu is remarkable above all for being the first author to have synchronized the cycle of the Comaneshteanu family, his major literary creation, with the trends in the European literature. His merits in literature have still remained a matter of debate, since some critics (Vianu 1941, Ibrăileanu 1928, Săndulescu 1969, Manolescu, 1980) appreciate his production while some others indicate to its drawbacks. Although his fame is closely connected with his novels, he also authored poems, short stories and even a play, which was acted on the stage of the National Theatre in Bucharest.

The saga of the Comaneshteanu family is “the first materialized project of an ample Romanian perspective on the national society and spirituality”¹ (Goci 1993: ix). This is a convincing enough reason for the following presentation which foregrounds Sasha, who has come to be acknowledged as an icon² of the Romanian lady. She is a positive and practical woman who takes care of her siblings and who looks after the estate (Ibrăileanu 1928, apud Zamfirescu 2009: 413). “She is our variant of the type of ideal woman, that is of the woman wherein due to heredity and the environment features of a mother, a wife and a lady of the house have combined harmoniously, features which natural selection has developed into a woman along the evolution of the species, but which can be so rarely found in that state of purity and dosed in that particular proportion capable to produce a Sasha Comaneshteanu” (Ibrăileanu 1928, apud Zamfirescu 2009: 414)³.

Equally, this literary chronicle backgrounds a wide and comprehensive image of the Romanian rural universe which is populated with people as the author saw them to be: “good and bad; boyards, lessees and peasants” (Gafița 1970: 15), and which is here and there spotted with glimpses of the urban society. “Zamfirescu’s peasants, those who live on Dinu Murguleț’s estate are not people who live on the boyard’s estate, they are not servants or serfs but owners themselves of their lands and neighbours to Dinu Murguleț’s estate; by way of consequence, they settle back in his own rights a person who had been dispossessed and cheated by the same usurper – Scatiu”⁴ (as they had also been) (Gafița 1969: 505).

An accurate observer, an in-depth analyst of the human nature and social existence and, to some extent, a controversial writer, I do hold Zamfirescu to be actually unique among the Romanian writers. His uniqueness arises from his style which reveals “a certain perception of precise forms, without digressions and intended picturesqueness, an elegance which comes from simplicity and discretion, an obvious self-imposed temperance, a judicious mixture of the current language of an educated person, without excesses of specialization, with neologisms and archaisms which come from their own place and melt together into a soluble mass, a tone of respectful detachment from the object, of self-respect and respect towards the

reader, a combination of apparent coldness and contained passion, a fluidity which hardly confounds easily with frivolity and turn this style into a work of art”⁵ (Lovinescu 1936, quoted in Omăt 1998: 291). His uniqueness equally arises from his attitude as a theorist of the novel which he overtly expressed in all favourable occasions.

Călinescu (2001: 192) admits that “Zamfirescu deserves praises for the fineness of some analyses, for the creation of the mundane atmosphere and finally for the stylistic temperance and his intuitions related to the novel writing technique,” in spite of his not being “a great novelist”. He equally emphasizes Zamfirescu’s opinions as a theorist concerned with the narrative techniques, and who is willing to observe “the significant authentic both in deeds and in words” Călinescu (2001: 191).

This is why, I consider life in Zamfirescu’s novels to be more realistic rather than idealistic; his characters speak and behave the way I witnessed it to happen half a century ago, in my childhood. People used to be more respectful towards each other, for they treated everybody as a human being not as a child, or as a person not deserving their respect; they used to show more common sense and compassion in their everyday life and they seemed to be polite, helpful and thoughtful then they do now. As time went by, I could easily discover much of my childhood world in Zamfirescu’s novelistic universe.

Duiliu Zamfirescu, a complex personality

Few are the writers in the Romanian literature to belong to one of those rare families with a century-long and lasting reputation as Zamfirescu’s, who sometimes mentioned the representatives of two generations in his family who had been schooled abroad⁶. He was born in 1858, brought up and educated in a climate favouring scholarly preoccupations. Aware of the values his (extended) family cherished, he continued the tradition and studied law in Bucharest. He reached the climax of his institutional education with the defense of his doctoral thesis in law.

After an eight-year interval of practice as a(n obscure) prosecutor, an advocate, later on as an attaché, and then, as a secretary of legation, he was sent abroad to work as a diplomat. With his diplomatic mission, he actually continued the tradition initiated by Vasile Alecsandri, an exponent of the late 19th century generation of Romanian writers, who also activated as a diplomat in Paris.

During his eighteen years abroad, he worked in Rome, Brussels, Paris and then in Budapest. In 1906 he came back to Romania and worked as a secretary general at the ministry of external affairs. In 1912, he was promoted a plenipotentiary minister and a few years later, in 1920 he was elected senator, thus becoming a member of the parliament.

That very year, the marshal or General Alexandru Averescu, who served as Prime Minister, appointed him minister of external affairs. Although after this appointment he could have dedicated much of his brains and energy to his political career, his life ups and particularly downs must have deeply affected him for they soon took their ultimate toll, with his death, in 1922, a year after his youngest son had died in a duel.

The writer

In parallel with developing his career, Zamfirescu showed and later on developed his propensity for literature. He expressed his ideas through various literary genres and species and affirmed himself as a poet, journalist, translator, prose writer and dramatist. He made his literary debut with a poem “dedicated” to Miss Niculescu Aman in “Ghimpele” (the Thorn). This was a satirical magazine which lived a short life, between 1866 and 1879 and which included articles whose authors would preferably sign with their pen names.

Beginning with 1880, he exercised his hand as an “apprentice” journalist and contributed to dailies and weeklies, and sustained the column *De las Palabras* (changed to

Palabras) in the publication entitled *România liberă*⁷ (Free Romania). For this same journal, he initiated the column *Tipuri și portrete* (Types and Portraits), and he must have been appreciated as a columnist and a journalist since, in 1882, he became the director of this journal.

He tried his hand with poems which were published in the contemporary fashionable literary journals or reviews (such as *Literatorul*, *Războiul* and *Convorbiri literare*⁸). Zamfirescu published six volumes of poems, i.e. *Fără titlu*⁹ (1883), *Alte orizonturi*¹⁰ (1894), *Imnuri păgâne*¹¹ (1894), *Poesii nouă*¹² (1899), *Pe Marea Neagră*¹³ (1919) and *Poesii alese*¹⁴ (1922).

While he was in Italy, he had two translations from Italian into Romanian published in his native country. His long stay in Italy must have inspired him to write his impressions as a traveller, under the title *Scrisori din Italia* (Letters from Italy), which were published in *Convorbiri literare*, in 1887.

His interest in short story writing is mirrored by his four volumes, *Novele*¹⁵ (1888), *Novele romane.Frica*¹⁶ (1895), *Furfanțo.Trei nuvele*¹⁷ (1911) and *O muză*¹⁸ (1922). As a playwright, he indulged himself into having his play *Prea târziu* (Too Late) staged at the national theatre in Bucharest in 1884.

As a novelist, his literature was both remarkable and controversial. It was remarkable through the characters he outlined, through the interest in cultivating the national values and through his particular interest in contributing to the development of the Romanian literature. Controversial because he was not only accused of plagiarism, in the case of his first novel, *In fața vieții*¹⁹ (1894), but he was also severely criticized by Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Ollănescu-Ascanio (Goci 1993: xiv). The contemporaries must have had a full picture of the episode, but details are not described in the easily accessible literature.

Nevertheless, this situation seems to have hardly had long-term consequences as Zamfirescu is the author of nine novels. They reflect the superiority of Zamfirescu's theories as compared to those of his contemporaries and which consider the novel as a literary species, revealing him as a "genuine pioneer" in novel writing (Călinescu 1985: 538). They also show him to be an endowed analyst, a painter of personalities and landscapes rather than of things (Vianu 1941: 185).

The Romanian literary criticism avows Duiliu Zamfirescu to be the founder of the national contemporary novel in our literature (Constantinescu 1971: 255). In addition to *In fața vieții* (1894), *Lume noua, lume veche*²⁰ (1895) and *Lydda. Scrisori romane*²¹ (1911), which is considered to be the first epistolary novel of ideas, Zamfirescu authored the first series of novels in the Romanian literature, which is known as *Ciclul* or *Romanul Comaneshitenilor* (an appropriate English version would be the Saga of the Comaneshiteanu Family). This family chronicle consists of five novels, most of them first published in installments in the literary periodicals of the time.

Besides revealing himself as a successful prose-writing a practitioner, he also expressed his concerns for theoretical aspects of literature. He voiced his views in several articles, communications and speeches. One such illustration is the maiden speech delivered in front of the members of the Romanian Academy, *Poporanismul în literatură* in 1909, upon his becoming a member of this institution.

The experience he must have accumulated between 1886 and 1887, when he held a series of conferences at the Romanian athenaeum in Bucharest, probably served him considerably in the next two communications he delivered in the Romanian Academy, *Metafizica cuvintelor și estetica literară*²² in 1911 and *Bosforul și Dardanelele față de interesele românești*²³, in 1915, respectively.

The last two decades in Zamfirescu's life brought him two new personal accomplishments: he was elected president of Societatea Scriitorilor Români (Society of

Romanian Writers), in 1916 and two years later, he became vice-president elect of the Romanian Academy.

He also enjoyed the position of president of Camera deputaților, one of the two houses in the Romanian Parliament.

The novels of the Comaneshteanu Family

Acknowledged as the “the saga of the Comaneshteanu Family”, this is a “purely Zola-type novel” for the object of the scrutiny is not the individual but the family and through it, the nation” (Călinescu 2001: 191).

This series consists of the following volumes: *Viața la țară* (Life in the countryside), *Tănase Scatiu*, *În război*, *Îndreptări* and *Anna*. In the Preface to the fourth edition of *Viața la țară*, the author mentions his intention to write *Romanul Deduleștilor* (The Novel of the Dedulescus), a sixth and final volume of the family chronicle.

The opening novel of the family chronicle, *Viața la țară*, was first published in installments in *Convorbiri literare* (between 1894 and 1895). A few years later, in 1898, a publishing company in Bucharest, Editura Carol Müller took over the risks and published it. The novel was so successful that between 1899 and 1922 (the year when Duiliu Zamfirescu passed away), 50,000 volumes were sold. Morar (2009: 16) rhetorically asks “How many of his contemporaries were able to have 50,000 copies of one novel sold between 1899 and 1922, the year when to author went into the other world?” and he also provides the answer. “Few, of course. But a simple calculation indicates that out of the literate people of the time, a high percentage not only felt like reading it but to have it as a prized possession on their bookshelves”. Prefaced by Marcu Berza and translated into English by Lucy Bing, the novel was published under the title of *Sasha*, in London, in 1926.

Tănase Scatiu, also made popular through the installments published in *Convorbiri literare* in November 1895, came out in 1907 as a product of another publishing company in Bucharest, Editura Alcalay.

The third novel in the series, *În război* (Times of War), has a story which is different from the preceding ones: it was translated in French and first published under the title “*Temps de guerre*” by Ollendorf in Paris, in 1900. Two years later, the Romanian version of the same novel is marketed by Clementa publishing house.

Îndreptări, the novel described as “... non-conflictual and unfinished” (Goci 1993: ix), was also first published in installments, in N. Petrascu’s review *Literatură și artă română* in 1901 and as a novel in 1908 by the Alcalay publishing company in Bucharest.

The last in the series, *Anna*, which is a “social” novel in the sense of “life at the top” (Goci 1993: ix), and like many of the preceding editions of the Comaneshteanu Family novels, it was prefaced by its author. Although many editions of the Comaneshteanu saga had been published ever since their first appearance, it is only in 1970 when the only chapter of the novel of the Dedulescus is included in the volume of Zamfirescu’s complete works edited by Mihai Gafița.

Viața la țară (or *Sasha*, by its English version title)

In the preface to the first edition of *Viața la țară*, the author critically described his own views regarding the novel. Wanting to highlight members of that social stratum of property-loving Romanians, such as Dinu Comaneshteanu in this novel are, or to create portraits of lessees, such as Tănase Scatiu, or peasants embodied by Micu, wanting to personify in Miclescu and Mihai Comaneshteanu the race of several families of unaltered Romanian extraction, who “made their way through the Phanariot fog” (Călinescu 2001: 191), in other words wanting to emotionally mark the point wherefrom a new epoch in the history of our nation starts, as Zamfirescu himself had stated, his focus was on people. This accounts for a

wide gallery of people from all walks of life and of different ages, carefully placed against a well-defined background, that of Ciulniței and Comănești, two villages in the infinite southeastern fields of Bărăgan, in (present-day) Romania.

Thus, Dinu Murguleț, an epitome of the Romanian boyards, is depicted with the different sides of his personality. In the first novel he masters the moral harmony between a boyard and peasants, who not only loves his lands but he also loves the peasants either toiling for him or neighbouring his estate. In *Tănase Scatiu*, the same boyard appears "...elderly and ill", sequestered in his house by that unwanted, hated and despised person "who in the meanwhile had become his son-in-law", as Dinu himself would say it.

Lady Diamandula, the loving mother who, in her old age, is waiting for her son to come back from studies abroad, Tinca, the adolescent on her way of becoming a young lady, Sasha, the orphan in charge with her siblings, who gradually turns into the lady of the house and the protector of the poor people living on her property. Micu, the shepherd and the poetic nature, who, like the majority of the Romanian peasants, portrayed in our literature, knows everything about constellations and stars and shows his ancestral knowledge of astrology. Matei, lady Diamandula's son is an impressive person who, after spending (seven) years abroad to complete his education and professional training (which was traditional with the richest boyards' sons) comes back from France and tries to find his way, make a family and live a life his own country.

Tănase Scatiu, whose presence is stronger in the novel than his existence in his own family, is the son of a bailiff. Such a humble bailiff his father used to be that "even a gypsy" had once dared to humiliate him. *Tănase* embodies the type of the uneducated but well-determined upstart, who is particularly careful towards his mother, but mean and rude towards the rest of his family, and even brutal and inflexible towards the peasants working for him. Although he reaches his life climax with his being elected a member of the parliament, he can hardly meet sincere appreciation from the people he lives close to. His evolution ends dramatically as he is killed by his land-working peasants, whom he had repeatedly ill-treated and humiliated.

Besides these iconic representations in the foreground of the novel, the gallery of portraits exhibits in its background a few episodic presences, most frequently, officials often surrounded by 'faceless or nameless' peasants. While Buză-tăiată (Cut-lip), the priest, Ms Sharp, the English governess in charge with Sasha's siblings education, Hans, the German in charge with the threshing machine, are described in rather negative tones, other heroes are simply decorative elements of the rural countryside landscape. This would be the case of Aronovici, the mayor, or that of the subprefect and of the two magistrates whose names are not even mentioned. A colourful portrait is that of Stoica, the gypsy stoker, as well as that of Chim, a gypsy who had gradually changed his social position from that of a former horse thief into the "respected" owner of a countryside pub. The next three novels in the series mainly speak about all sorts of military (from general to the simple soldier) who are in the battlefield fighting for Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire. The novels also canvass the ladies in the lives of the military, their everyday life concerns and preoccupations as well as the younger and the new generation in Sasha's family, her brother, Mihai and her son, Alexandru, respectively. The war brought about death, sorrow, unhappiness, widowhood and sadness in Sasha's family. Nevertheless, her two sons developed their own careers and built their own families. Now and then, particularly around Christmas, they would experience several days in the presence of their lonely father who went on with his life in the countryside, at his family's estate.

In spite of its shortcomings, such as the lack of narrative inventiveness, indicated by the author himself, the novel still is accepted as a "classical work of the Romanian epic prose", where "Duiliu Zamfirescu holds the position of founder of the contemporary national novel

through all his endeavours of theorization, through the suggestions and his vivid passion for aspects of the modern novel, as profoundly as he could understand and bestow them by means of his critical brilliance” (Constantinescu 1971: 255).

Sasha, an icon of the Romanian lady

Although so many characters animate Duiliu Zamfirescu’s family chronicle, very few of them had indeed meant to their creator as much as Sasha had, and even fewer “have enthused the critics” (Săndulescu 1969: 78). In one of his letters addressed to Titu Maiorescu, in January 1893, Zamfirescu confesses “For one and a half years have I lived in my imaginary world, in such a close friendship, that I now feel sorry to part with her. Sasha, a person of this world, will be introduced to you. My feelings for her were good, so good that I had already fallen in love with her” (Zamfirescu apud Gafița 1974: 279).

Literally present in three of the five novels, Sasha embodies an ideal type of femininity. In Zamfirescu’s own words, Sasha is the most graceful of all women, but paradoxically, she is at the same time, a “lady of property who is full of practical spirit” (Manolescu 1980: 127) and conversant with accounting, contract making and estate administration “whose private life eventually accomplishes itself in the homely happiness she had long awaited for” (idem).

Sasha, a young lady whose parents lived in a countryside mansion, was born and brought up in the close vicinity of her father and of his deeply-rooted ideas of love for her grandfather’s lands. As an orphan, “Sasha becomes the mother of her siblings and the guardian of the name and fortune she has inherited from her parents” (Zamfirescu 2009: 53). She lives a happy and quiet life in the countryside, looking after the crops, the family income and the peasants working her lands. She not only knows the ways of life and is happy with what she has, but she is also willing to share her knowledge with Matei whom she is ready to teach how to manage his properties so successfully as not only to make them prosperous but also to bestow his generosity upon the needy and the poor living close to their estate.

She is a traditionalist who chooses to live her life in the countryside (Romania being basically a rural civilization), even if she preserves her parents’ house in Bucharest the way it used to be during their life, and where she rarely goes in winter. In addition to her major concern in the wellbeing of her property, she is permanently supervising her siblings, Victoria and Mary, the two girls as well as Mihai, her only brother. In this endeavour, she also relies on the help coming from Miss Sharp, the children’s governess. Sasha is well aware of the people around her and although she seems to know a lot about peasants, their character and behaviour, she tells Matei, her would-be fiancé, what to expect from them. She advises him to expect a peasant to drink the wine he is given, to dance the dance he has it paid for, not to pay back his debt to his borrower and not to come to work for him when he is asked to” (Zamfirescu 2009: 66).

Nonetheless, she is friendly and supportive with the peasants working her lands, she approaches them differently; she accepts to forgive a man whose animal had caused some damage he was supposed to pay for. On the other hand, she wants to be a good Christian who goes to church on a regular basis and when the service is over she usually has brief conversations with the women there, asking them about their family members, the chores they are busy with, etc. The same feeling of religiousness lies behind her taking part in a special service organized to invoke the falling of the rain, when she asks Matei to kneel by her side “to give good examples” ((Zamfirescu 2009: 109), while she “seemed deep in humility” (idem).

Sasha’s femininity is noticeable in her interest in fashion; when she comes back from Paris she brings Matei a few gifts which are “the latest fashion ... for an engaged couple”. (Zamfirescu 2009: 176).

Sasha is also a daydreamer who imagines how happy they will be after getting married (Zamfirescu 2009: 177). Sometimes Matei joins her in prospecting their future: “They both looked in the distance, in the white horizon searching for a personal meaning to that grandiose human nature. ... Sasha, red with cold, a lace twisted above her cap, would smile her eyes of a happy woman... everything seemed settled down for a long, calm and clear life to which their a bit expensive natures would lend a slight shade of ideal” (Zamfirescu 2009: 179).

Although in the novel *Viața la țară* Sasha’s name is rarely mentioned, the whole novel is imbued with her personality. Little does the author say about her. “He shows her living her life” (Ibrăileanu 19).

Now and then, she lives her moments of loneliness, playing the piano, and she gradually gets the courage to admit she would need a change in her monotonous life when she admits her love for Matei. At the end of the first novel, the two get married, to their friends’ and family’s content. They share their life’s ups and downs with their friends, and they all witness radical transformations in the world around them.

In *Tănase Scatiu*, the second novel in the series, Sasha’s presence is extremely scarce: she appears only three times, two of which happen under inauspicious and very sad circumstances when she comes to attend Tincuța’s funeral (Zamfirescu 2009: 219 and 255).

The third episode of the family chronicle, *În război* (Times of War) happens during times of war, when the novel canvasses the 1877 war for Romania’s independence. Sasha’s presence is more frequent here, for she not only comes into her brother’s mind (Zamfirescu 2009: 304), but she also lives bits of her life admiring him for real (Zamfirescu 2009: 217), spending some time in an empty room (Zamfirescu 2009: 292), discussing with her brother (Zamfirescu 2009: 294), smiling with content (Zamfirescu 2009: 347), or sitting by her brother’s hospital bed (Zamfirescu 2009: 403), and finally accompanying her son to the military school in Iași (Zamfirescu 2009: 406).

Therefore, the tribute Sasha has to pay is huge: Mary, her sister, becomes a widow with her husband dead at war, and Mihai, her brother, is wounded in battle at Grivița and finds his death on a hospital bed.

Noticeably, Sasha’s presence grows rarer and rarer as the chronicle keeps unfolding. There is only one reference to Sasha in each of the last two chronicle novels. Thus, the second chapter of the fourth novel reveals Sasha’s days as an elderly lady who was shuddered by her brother’s untimely death and who “lived few more years like a story image, heading for the whispers of an unseen world as good and kind as she had always been until she discreetly faded away into disappearance (Zamfirescu 2009: 432). Her husband outlived her in admiration for their son, Alexandru. Although gone from this world, Sasha still lives in her relatives’ and friends’ souls. Thus, in *Anna*, Alexandru is asked by Natalia Canta, a former of Sasha’s acquaintances, who had been in love with Mihai, whether he is Sasha’s son. And when Natalia leaves the room she takes Sasha away with her, never to be brought back among her descendants.

The chronicle novels bring forward the Comăneșteanu family second generation. Alexandru is now a mature person who enjoys life to its full.

Sasha’s whole evolution unfolds her through the first three novels, in different roles: “a mother-woman, a sister-woman, a lover-woman joining together the freshness and warmth of a feeling with maturity, equilibrium and thoughtfulness” (Al. Săndulescu 1969: 78). Literary criticism has praised her virtues for almost a century. Out of the rich literature discussing both Duiliu Zamfirescu and his literary productions, we only mention a few monographic studies (Gafița 1969, Nicolescu 1980, Oprișan 2008), which examine both the writer and his representative heroes and characters.

Ibrăileanu must have felt about Sasha the same as Zamfirescu had, when following the trend, he drew a parallel between Tolstoy and Zamfirescu. Admitting the possibility of the

Russian influence, he states overtly that “there is nothing Russian in Sasha.” I should modestly add that the very name is quite frequent in Russian but it is used for men and not for women. She is *our* (Romanian, my emphasis) variant of the ideal type of woman, that is of the woman wherein, due to heredity and the environment, there have harmoniously combined the features of mother, wife, and housekeeper: features which selection has developed in women all along the evolution of species, but which can be so rarely found in this degree of purity and quantified in such a proportion as to result in a Sasha Comaneshteanu. She is so *ours* (Romanian, my emphasis), that we can easily distinguish her social class and age.” (Ibrăileanu quoted in Zamfirescu 2009: 414). Ibrăileanu assimilates Sasha to the same typology of women as those of the literature signed by Brătescu-Voinești, who love like ‘sisters’, for their love is purely human, that is with much soul involvement. And hence, in this kind of love, psychology is superior to physiology. And such a kind of love is not only possible but it is deep and touching as well.

Ever since its publication, Zamfirescu’s literature has been welcome by the Romanian readership, and it has been steadily and continually admired. It equally exercised an impact upon literary criticism and it has had its critical moments or episodes. Thus, even if in the case of his first novel, Zamfirescu had to face the accusation of plagiarism, which has not been mentioned as to have been confirmed by the specialist literature, his prolific talent was fully revealed not only to the Romanian readership, but also to the speakers of English who benefitted from Sasha as early as 1926.

Conclusions

The Romanian criticism has but rarely, and I should say rather superficially, approached Zamfirescu’s literature, in general and his heroines, in particular. Controversial and debatable, convincing and reliable, Zamfirescu’s personality has been the object of not only consistent monographic studies (Gafița 1969, Niculescu 1980, Oprișan 2008, Săndulescu 1969) but chapters in histories or at least entries in the specialist dictionaries (DCRR 2004²⁴, DGLR 2009²⁵) of the Romanian literature.

As much as Sasha is concerned, one and the same idea appears here and there, i.e., in Ibrăileanu’s studies (who actually seems to have launched it, for chronology shows it) and without any reference to this critic’s words, other more recently published studies consider one and the same aspects.

Sasha was created to be a wonderful creature: she is full of solicitude with people who live in the same village with her and work her lands. She is thoughtful and caring to her siblings, understanding with her friends, respectful and supportive with the elderly, such as lady Diamandula and polite with those whom she hardly considers (Scatiu’s mother, for one example). She knows how to manage an estate, how to keep the book and how to use the finances to a profit. She can also teach others how to do all these and to get accustomed to life in the countryside after along stay in Paris, and the examples could still continue.

She is a good orthodox who goes to church regularly, thus observing the basic ways of the church; she visits families who live on her property to see the ill children and to help them the best she can. She knows most of the people in the village and calls them by their names. She is familiar with their concerns and sufferings, their problems and their trouble, and lives part of her life to serve them. She is a practical landowner who eventually finds her happiness in her family life. But in her family life does she also carry the burdens of her sorrows and painful losses of her dearly beloved to be finally thrown into oblivion by her son, who above all, is her very image, as Sasha’s acquaintances let him know.

Notes

- [1] This is my translation of Aureliu Goci's opinion who emphasizes that "[...] saga Comăneștenilor este primul proiect concretizat al unei ample viziuni românești asupra societății și spiritualității naționale", Goci, p.ix.
- [2] in one of his letters, Zamfirescu himself points to his idea that he was extremely fond of his heroine "I lived with her on very special terms, so special that I had almost fallen in love with her", my translation for "Eu am trăit cu dânsa în foarte bune raporturi, așa de bune încât mai de nu mă înamorasem de ea".
- [3] The Romanian text reads: "E varianta noastră a tipului de femeie ideală, adică a femeii în care, datorită eredității și mediului, s-au combinat armonios însușirile de mamă, nevastă și gospodină: însușiri pe care selecția le-a dezvoltat în femeie de-a lungul evoluției speciei, dar care se găsesc atât de rar în acea stare de puritate și dozare în acea proporție, încât să rezulte o Sașa Comăneșteanu".
- [4] The original text reads: "Țăranii lui, cei care trăiesc pe moșia boierului Dinu Murguleț, nu sunt oameni de pe moșia boierească, slujitori sau iobagi, ci stăpâni ei înșiși pe pământ și vecini cu moșia lui Dinu Murguleț, prin urmare, ei restabilesc "în drepturi" un om deposedat, înșelat de aceiași uzurpator - Scatiu".
- [5] The literary critic says: "Un simț al formei precise, fără digresiuni și pitoresc voit, o eleganță ieșită din simplitate și din discreție, o rețineră evidentă, un amestec judicios al limbii curente a omului de cultură generală, fără excесе de specializare, cu neologisme și arhaisme venite din locul lor și topite într-o masă solubilă, un ton de detașare cuvințioasă față de obiect, și de respect de sine și de cititor, o îmbinare de răceală aparentă și de pasiune conținută. O fluiditate ce nu se confundă cu ușurința și frivolitatea fac din acest stil o operă de artă..."
- [6] Anastasie Lascar, the son of his father's brother, had defended his doctoral thesis in medicine at Leipzig in 1832, while Ion Mincu, his mother's brother was a famous architect.
- [7] *România liberă* is a newspaper which was founded in 1877.
- [8] *Convorbiri literare* was the publication issued by Junimea, a literary society which had its headquarters in Jassy, where it had been founded in 1863. This monthly publication appeared first in Jassy (between 1867 and 1886), and then in Bucharest (between 1886 and 1944). Almost a century later, this monthly publication is resumed again in Jassy, under the editorship of Cassian Maria Spiridon.
- [9] *Fără titlu* or *Without a Title*
- [10] *Alte orizonturi* or *Other Horizons*
- [11] *Imnuri păgâne* or *Pagan Hymns*
- [12] *Poesii nouă* or *New Poems*
- [13] *Pe Marea Neagră* or *At the Black Sea*
- [14] *Poesii alese* or *Selected Poems*
- [15] *Novele* or *Short Stories*
- [16] *Novele romane. Frica* or *Roman Short Stories. Fear*
- [17] *Furfațo. Trei nuvele* or *Furfațo. Three Short Stories*.
- [18] *O muză* or *A Muse*
- [19] *În fața vieții* or *Facing Life*
- [20] *Lume nouă, lume veche* or *Old World, New World*
- [21] *Lydda. Scrisori romane* or *Lydda. Roman Letters*
- [22] *Metafizica cuvintelor și estetica literară* or *The Metaphysics of Words and Literary Aesthetics*
- [23] *Bosforul și Dardanelele față de interesele românești* or *The Bosphorus and The Dardanelles with regard to the Romanian interests*
- [24] *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc*, Editura Academiei, București, 2004, p.86
- [25] *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, Editura Univers enciclopedic, București, 2009, pp. 487-490

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