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DUILIU ZAMFIRESCU'S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract: *Duiliu Zamfirescu's short stories mark an important moment in the evolution of the Romanian genre by the sober, equilibrated construction. The author's interest hovers over the individual drama, the conflict that springs between the character and his environment or inside the character's conscience. The search for the inner identity is depicted in the short story* ***Good night*** *(**Noapte bună**), caused by love, one of the disturbing elements which helps the author to investigate the mechanisms of seduction and the 'enigmatic behaviour of the woman in love'. In Durand's terms, compared to Caragiale' extroverted heroes, D. Zamfirescu's characters are subtly re-placed in the romantic patterns.*

Key words: *short story, individual drama, conflict, romantic patterns, realist notation, love theme.*

1. Introduction

Consistently oscillating between the influence of the sentimental romanticism (Alexandre Dumas, Paul de Kock, George Sand), on the one hand, and the realist notation, (Balzac, Maupassant, Zola), on the other hand, also a keen reader of Tolstoi and Tugheniev, Duiliu Zamfirescu is successful in the realization of an important moment in the evolution of the Romanian short-story, not only by anticipation of his most accomplished novels, *Viaţa la ţară (Life at the Country), Tănase Scatiu*, but also by the sober, equilibrated construction, realised with 'economy of epic and descriptive devices'(Zaciu, 1967, 94).

The author's interest hovers over the individual drama, the conflict that springs between the character and his environment where, for some time, he seemed perfectly fit. Or, if the liaison with this existential environment was not one of the most harmonious, at least it was acceptable for the character.

One of the disturbing elements, which produces the turmoil in the hero's conscience, is love, a theme which is present in three of the most valuable of D. Zamfirescu's short-stories: *Noapte bună (Good Night)*, *Spre mare (To the Sea)*, *Subprefectul (The Vice-Governor)*.

2. She and he in the "Noapte bună" (Good Night)

Noapte bună (Good Night) is the first short-story published in 'Convorbiri literare' in 1886, and, from a letter addressed to Maiorescu, the mentor of Junimea, comes forth the fact that the mentor had read the text and interfered in it before its publication in 'Convorbiri literare'.

The first part of the text gravitates around the hero, the President of the Court

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from Hârşova, *'a boy of thirty and a little, tall, dark-faced and well-built '*.

The man, depicted with obvious irony, is a Don Juan of Bucharest, cheerful, with a passion for high-life, lover of women, courteous, shallow and trite. '*The man was not mean by nature, but he was like those innumerable young Romanians who laugh, with or without cause, at everybody; court, in Bucharest, the entire feminine population, going through all ranks: from the shop-assistants to the most refined ladies*' (Zamfirescu, 1988, 63).

The irony of fate carries the young man to Dobrogea, and as the President of the Court, he is condemned to a painful exile, by contrast between the Bucharest's ebullition and the quiet life of Hârşova. Vitalist by nature, the man does not despair, and the solitary contemplation of the Danube doesn't determine him to search inside himself for his inner identity, nor directs him towards the deciphering of a great mystery of the universe. He sits on the shore and becomes a gentler and simpler man, not necessarily more profound.

In this context, one night he sees a young Turkish woman. His reaction to her sight is typical for a shallow character – he doesn't see her features from a close look, so he doesn't know whether she is beautiful or not, but it suffices that she is a Turkish woman and a promise for an exotic chase: '*That he would like her from a close look, he had no doubt*' (Zamfirescu, 1988, 64).

The love, for her, and the adventure, for him, takes place from the distance, at first, as a chase for a glimpse, when the two heroes spy on and study each other, to move on, daily, with significant gestures. More and more thrilled by the apparition of the girl with '*cheeks as white as milk, and hazel lustrous hair'*, with '*a white arm and a round, full elbow'*, the president neglects his job and, every morning, he presents himself at the distance meeting with Aişè, the qadi's daughter.

From this point forward, the entire analysis shall be focused on the emotions of the girl, who becomes the main character of the novel. The unique experience Aişè lives makes her evade from the daily routine and overflow with an extraordinary inner energy. What is for him one more adventure, for her turns into love. The apparition of the man manifests as an irresistible force for the girl. His tenacity to see her every morning will be followed by a risky date for the two protagonists, but not lacking humour: dressed in women's Turkish pants, too short to hide his own pants and boots, helped by an old Greek woman, the president manages to enter Aişè's house. Only now he can fully admire her beauty: '*Her white round face started to enlighten with inner delight, which painted her cheeks with thin rose lines*' (Zamfirescu, 1988, 67).

Left alone, the man assaults the girl with passionate hugs and kisses. The girl lives the physical closeness ecstatically; she goes from feelings of abandon to near death experience, she is left motionless, without reactions: '*Than, he lay besides her and started to kiss her again, not knowing what he was doing anymore, his senses enraptured by the smell of her rose perfume; to call her mildly by her name; to press his body close to hers; to caress her cheek and hair – and she did not seem to wake '*(Zamfirescu, 1988, 68).

Duiliu Zamfirescu is intuitive of the feminine soul, is 'preoccupied with the enigmatic behaviour of the woman in love', as Nicolae Manolescu said (Manolescu, 1966, 43). And, he sometimes succeeds to save the text from the clichés of sentimental literature. His merit, followed, of course, by his accomplishments, lies in the search for the

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soul, as one of his heroines underlined, soul which is 'complicated, filled with finesse and with turns'. For Aişè, the moment of the meeting with the president is decisive. Her world, built more on maidenly dreams, awakes. The apparition of a new woman arouses the pleasure of the hunt in the man's soul. His assault is in fact connected with the active role in seduction (Lipovetski, 2000, 60) a role which demands tenacity and extreme daring, even risk. The purpose is curiosity; the cause for the approach of the girl is boredom and a slight desire for competition. After he meets her and the experience is consumed, it is almost passenger, and more, the girl's exoticism and freshness only boost his conqueror ego: *'When he got out from Aişè, the emotion he felt because of her lived only for a few moments, and, once at the gate of the quadi's house, he started to think how to tell his friends from Bucharest about his new and strange victory over women*' (Zamfirescu, 1988, 69).

On the other side, Aişè has an initiatory experience. The longer she thinks about the differences that tell them apart, the more intense her feelings become. The absence, which is turned by love into presence, makes Aişè lose herself in day-dreaming: *'The farthest from her to him and the more differences were disclosed between their souls, the more attracted she felt.*'

The girl's transformation, the passage from day-dreaming to conscious womanhood is closely followed by the author.

Because of the winter and the cold, but also because he started to lack interest for his new conquest, the president doesn't make any attempt to meet Aişè. The girl voluptuously lives from her fantasies, nurturing her desires with his image and the music of harmonica, a refuge which allows her the dreams and the solitary effusion, and also fills the solitude.

When she finds out that the man she loves will leave Hârşova, impulsive and heroic, risking her reputation, Aişè takes the old accomplice with her and waits, freezing, for the sledge which takes the president away. The gesture is overwhelming for her. Frightened and frozen, she wants to explain her audacity to the man: if she was not certain she sees him for the last time, she would not bar his way to stop the sledge. Crossed and compassionate, he, who has already forgotten her, makes promises both know are untrue.

In the end, Aişè repeats the words he said to her the night of their only date: '*Good night…*'

This ending opens the perspectives of interpretations, and the reader is left with the possibility to continue the story of each destiny separately.

The short-story successfully reflects the programme the author draws up in the preface to the volume. In fact, Dan C. Mihăilescu notices, in *The Essential Dictionary of the Romanian Writers*, that Duiliu Zamfirescu's works are the works of 'the first programmatic writer, not only asserted, but also accomplished (…) in the Romanian literature' (Dan C. Mihăilescu, 2000, 913).

Aişè, even if she cannot read or write and lives a simple life, following the 'ancestral customs', belongs to the category, beloved by the author, of the 'superior ones', who feel the 'unnamed longing' for an ideal. Unique in a rudimentary universe, she is one of the chosen ones (as the fairy tales heroes are), she is not afraid to look life straight in the face and 'loves danger, which means the breach of the ethical and religious conduct'.

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3. Conclusion

A peculiarity of Zamfirescu's works must be clearly distinguished, as it influences most of his characters, men or women. This is, comparing to the works of Caragiale, a 'conversion' of the characters to the values of intimacy. If Caragiale's heroines 'conquer' the city, being characterised by extroversion, in Durand's terms, at Duiliu Zamfirescu can be observed, on the contrary, a subtly nuanced 're-placement' of the characters in the patterns of Romanticism.

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