PAUL ZARIFOPOL AND THE ECHOES OF A DIFFICULT LIFE

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Abstract: A complex personality of Romanian criticism and essayism, placed under the seal of multiple hypostases and perceived by literary critics in terms of opposition, Paul Zarifopol did not only represent the effervescent spirit of the time, entirely devoted to the pen, but he brought the whole example of a life lived outside the spotlight, with trials and hardships, but which has raised itself by its intrinsic strength, by the model of courage and confidence that it inspires. He devoted his whole life to writing, he was appreciated and criticized alike, but what has remained in his pages with the passage of time is precisely the verve and enthusiasm with which he crafted his creations, making each letter vibrate to his own rhythm. The lifespan of his texts is prolonged by the passion with which he wrote, by his iconoclastic spirit sometimes pushed to extremes, by the erudition he conveyed in every sentence and by the authenticity of the ideas he projected in polemical games, stirring his opponents into real literary battles, ending in sparkling and savory dialogues.

Keywords: Paul Zarifopol, life course, challenges, unpopularity, literary criticism

Paul Zarifopol has left behind hundreds of valuable essays and studies, he has outlined new conceptions, continued those already circulated, taking the pulse of literary life day by day. He was never interested in popularity, and yet he stirred up a wave of appreciation and criticism, becoming visible not through publicity, but through the spectacle he provoked in his writings. Even though he was not fully recognized until the end of his life and afterwards, Zarifopol did not put a price on affirmation, but made his literary journey away from public opinion; he concentrated his entire concentration on the page, not afraid to write according to the tastes of the time and the ideology of the period. He exuded pure sincerity, impressed by his refined spirit, his high erudition, but also by his fervent iconoclasm, offering real lessons in literary analysis to his predecessors. Zarifopol, who composed his essays using complex procedures, was the writer who knew how to put point and comma in his speeches, who was the one who conveyed his views in a clear and forceful way, exposing all the acts of illiteracy and imposture practiced in society. But what lies behind this impressive effervescence and erudition? What are the factors that have contributed to the formation of today's writer? What is the essence of his soul and his intellectual structure? What are the mysteries he carries and defines?

The answer has its origin in a throwback, in the biographical retrospective and all the events that led to the formation of the man Paul Zarifopol, the one who divided and conquered not by his intellectual agility, but by his undeniable talent. While still at university, he discovered his talent as a writer, making his debut in his second year of study (1897) in the magazine "Arhiva", writing a review of a historical study. But it was also his teachers who inspired him, and he enjoyed the presence of such prominent names in the literary world as A.D. Xenopol, A. Naum, Al. Philippide, Aron Densușianu, Ioan Caragiani, etc., teachers whom he fondly remembers and from whom he confesses that he learned not only the book, but also the main rules of life: "I learned books and rules of life from people who, by their honesty and intelligence in their work, made me think of them, when I was in foreign schools, with unceasing admiration and gratitude"[1]. Student life was complemented by

[1] Paul Zarifopol, *Pentru arta literară*, vol. II, Ediție îngrijită, note, bibliografie și studiu introductiv de Al. Săndulescu, Ed. Minerva, București, 1971, p.302.

Zarifopol's involvement in the founding of various student societies, such as the "Carmen Sylva" society, an extension of the old "Solidaritatea" society. The young enthusiast was distinguished by his liveliness and enthusiasm, his desire to get involved and to commit himself, aspects which were to be replaced, in the course of time, by a clear rejection of organizations, societies or committees of various kinds[2].

After graduating from university, Zarifopol decided to go to Germany in order to obtain a doctorate, his training as a philologist and philosopher began to take shape. His years of study are also enriched by numerous philosophical and historical readings, reading great names such as Woringer, Rickert, Wundt, Tarde, Riehl, Croce, Marinetti, Guyau, etc. He is most attracted by the study of the methods of literary history and style, and he is increasingly interested in French literature from its origins to the present day. After obtaining his doctorate, Paul Zarifopol decided to settle in Leipzig, wishing to live in a city where he could cultivate his passion for music and reading: "in a university town with a huge library and the best bookshops in the world"[3]. After his marriage to Ștefania, he moved to Berlin, where he met Caragiale, and the two became increasingly close friends.

Despite the considerable age difference between the two, Caragiale felt a strong affinity for Zarifopol, bringing them together not only his passion for music, but also their common intellectual and spiritual predispositions, affinities of ideas, sense of humor, genuine cult of art, taste for irony and paradox. Caragiale was attracted by Caragiale's erudite spirit, his analytic and dissociative criticism, his iconoclasm, but also by his ingenious polemical play: "Through his intellectual mobility, his analytical incisiveness, his dissociative criticism, his tendency to slander, his disrespect for the idola tribus, the young Zarifpol succeeded in seducing the circumspect spirit of the master, who was not too difficult about his gallery, but neither did he entrust his intimate friendship too easily"[4]. Moreover, it was not only Caragiale who gained a trusted friend, but Zarifopol also benefited from a mentor at the beginning of his literary career, constantly exercising his critical spirit and getting closer and closer to the comic genre, Caragiale's work becoming a real source of inspiration for him, but also a constant object of analysis, as evidenced by the numerous studies published on his art and the three critical editions he initiated.

In 1908, Zarifopol begins a series of collaborations with the periodical "Studdeutsche Monatshefte" in Munich, where he debutes with an article on Flaubert and in 1914 he publishes the articles *Maupassant der Sentimentale* and *Kunst und blosse Literatur*. Zarifopol did not, however, enjoy much success with his publications, for very soon after his debut he was forced to leave the country in 1915 because of the outbreak of war. He returns, therefore, to Romania, but he cannot enjoy the comfort in which he was accustomed to live here either, for because of the war, money has suffered a great devaluation, and the entire amount he had obtained by selling the estate of Cârligi, had a minimal value. They are thus forced to live in an increasingly straitened financial situation. At the same time as his arrival in the country, he published an article in Arghezi's "Cronica", entitled *Război și cultură*[5]. In 1916, he took refuge in Iași, becoming increasingly destitute and saddened by his situation. He is offered a professorship at the University of Iași, but he definitively refuses the possibility of taking up a professorship, justifying his decision on the grounds that he has no pedagogical vocation.

He then retires to Sinaia, where he continues his complex readings, but he is dominated by a feeling of hopelessness, missing the life he had before the war: "The bitter thing is the teaching of poverty. I have cursed many things for years now, but none so much

[2] Mircea Muthu, *Paul Zarifopol între fragment și construcție*, Ed. Albatros, București, 1982, p.10.
[3] Alexandru Săndulescu, „Prefață" la Paul Zarifopol, *Pentru arta literară*, vol. I, Ediție îngrijită, note, bibliografie și sutdiu introductiv de Al. Săndulescu, Ed. Minerva, București, 1971, p.8
[4] Șerban Cioculescu, *Corespondența dintre I.L. Caragiale și Paul Zarifopol*, F.P.L.A., București, 1935, p.6.
[5] Constantin Trandafir, *Paul Zarifopol*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1981, p.30.

as the good I once lived in. It has ruined me, and it has prepared for me equally hard times. Perhaps God will help me if the devil takes me before I become worse than I am today. For more evil seems inevitable"[6]. Moreover, he expresses the desire to publish a book, but he cannot find the time or the resources to do it, as he has to write all day long for newspapers and magazines, which is the only way he can make a living. This is the moment when Zarifopol resumes contact with G. Ibrăileanu, and through the correspondence between the two, a close and long-lasting friendship is forged. Knowing the essayist's keen intelligence, Ibrăileanu informs him of the re-establishment of the magazine "Viața Românească" and offers him to collaborate on it. After the correspondence between the two became more and more frequent, Ibrăileanu urged him to start writing for real and not to limit himself to non-literary matters. Even if he was hardly convinced, Zarifopol timidly steps into the literary space and sends his first text to the magazine "Viața Românească". He titled his first text *Pentru explicarea lui Rochefoucauld*, after which, very shortly afterwards, he sent two other texts, namely *Sentimentalul Maupassant* and a sketch on Anatole France.

Ibrăileanu and Zarifopol continue their correspondence, which becomes increasingly personal. They discuss, for example, the health problems that afflict them both, Ibrăileanu struggling with hypochondria and Zarifpol with anxiety, neurosis, insomnia and depression. These conditions were not treated lightly by literary critics either, with Șerban Cioculescu emphasizing his inclination towards exaggeration and the similar nature of the other members of his family: "I have known them all and admired their somatic nature"[7]. These moods are exacerbated by his precarious financial situation, then by his wife's illness, the children's departure to different schools and the death of Caragiale's son. This perspective, however, contrasts with the reminiscences of Mihail Sevastos, who collaborated with Zarifopol on "Viața Românească". He described him as a cheerful, communicative man, with a sparkling intelligence and irony, contrary to public opinion: "He had a slender stature, a quick step. You were struck by his youthful vivacity... You were carried away by the silvery stream of his communicative laughter.... Beneath his bulging brow was a mind abundantly endowed. He was an intelligent, slim, highly cultured man. He had the gift of handling ideas with astonishing skill"[8]. Moreover, Zarifopol himself says that as he gets older, he begins to need more and more sun and light, a curious fact considering his depressive nature: "Since I've started to grow old, I like the sun. I walk around bare-headed and can sit on a bench for hours. I can't get enough of the light, the clear sky, the sun, lots and lots of it...."[9].

The perspective that Sevastos presents is not, however, a constant one, as these moments of vivacity and enlightenment occur only in particular situations, and do not change the essayist's general state. As he grew older, Zarifopol became more and more withdrawn, bored and dissatisfied with life, all of which were repercussions of the war, from which he suffered greatly. He could no longer afford the luxuries of his life in Germany; he had to return home prematurely because of the increase in the value of money, had to leave his comfortable life and give up his massive library; he no longer had the time to read everything he wanted to read and enjoyed, as he had to write for the newspapers to earn a living, and his family life was not easy, passing through a financially straitened existence. Therefore, he had every reason to withdraw into himself and be dissatisfied with the life he was living, but what helped him to overcome these repercussions were the beautiful friendships he made and his discovery of his passion for writing essays, analyzing the works of great universal writers.

[6] M. Bordeianu, Gr. Botez, I. Lăzărescu et al., *Scrisori către G. Ibrăileanu*, Ediție îngrijită de M. Bordeianu, Gr. Botez, I. Lăzărescu, Dan Mănucă și Al. Teodorescu, cu o prefață de Al. Dima și N.I. Popa, E.P.L., București, 1966, p.292.
[7] Șerban Cioculescu, *Itinerar critic*, Ed. Eminescu, București, 1973, pp.99-100.
[8] Mihail Sevastos, *Amintiri de la <<Viața Românească>>*, EP.L., București, 1966, p.391.
[9] Mihail Sevastos, *Amintiri de la <<Viața Românească>>*, EP.L., București, 1966, p.391.

Zarifopol began to become more sociable and more willing to engage in productive conversation, but his wings were quickly clipped due to Romania's affiliation with the left-wing movement and all the reforms that took place. Al. Rosetti takes a closer look at this problem and confirms the hypothesis: "The whole character, seized by a genuine spleen, was extremely interesting and sparklingly conversational. He was passionate about social issues, as a socialist of Gherea's old guard. But in our country, he had found himself in an era of savage repression of left-wing movements"[10].

Moreover, because of his sudden return to the country, but also because he belonged to the socialist category, he did not enjoy such a warm welcome, and was often rejected. He was, however, pleased with the appreciative way in which Ibrăileanu made room for him among his friends, expressing his gratitude in one of his letters for the patience and understanding he had shown him. Even though Zarifopol was often labeled a skeptic or a cynic, his desire to socialize and keep abreast of literary productions was evident not only in the numerous exchanges of letters he exchanged, but also in the debates in which he intervened or initiated them himself. It was during this period that he sent more and more essays to the magazine "Viața Românească", becoming one of its best collaborators, and he also began to collaborate with other magazines such as "Adevărul", "Cuvântul liber", "Vremea", "Flacăra", "Adevărul literar și artistic", "Săptămâna muncii culturale și artistice", etc. He uses two pseudonyms: Anton Gherman for "Viața Românească" and Costin Adam for "Adevărul literar și artistic". Zarifopol translates many of his studies published in Germany and republishes them in Romanian, believing that he is not sufficiently well informed about Romanian literature to write about it. The essays published in "Viața Românească" were the raw material for the publication of his first volume, "Din registrul ideilor gingașe". Zarifopol also began to give lectures in order to gain extra fame. For example, he gave a lecture on Kant's aesthetics at the University Library, a lecture that turned into a study published in "Viața Românească"[11].

In 1924 he published his first volume, entitled *Vedenii*, a translation of a volume of stories from fantasy literature. In 1926, at the insistence of G. Ibrăileanu, he published his first volume of essays, *Din registrul ideilor gingașe*, a collection of studies scattered in the pages of "Viața Românească", which were published with difficulty due to the writer's skepticism[12]. Ibrăileanu was the one who urged him to publish his work as soon as possible, being very enthusiastic about the content that Zarifopol delivered, namely the full pages of analysis of writers or works that were treated from new points of view, each essay embodying a true declaration of authenticity. What brought Zarifopol so close to Ibrăileanu was not so much the trust shown in his early writings and the polemical game that developed between the two, but the almost brotherly love that the latter had for the essayist. Confessing in his *Letters* that the tone of his writing was becoming more and more sullen and surly, Zarifopol reveals the empathic character of the critic, who continually showed his willingness to overcome all the whims, whims and irritations found in the content and to penetrate the text to its luminous core.

His *Letters* also reveal his high artistic conscience, advocating painstaking writing, meticulousness, attention to detail, writing sometimes becoming an exasperating exercise, which raises doubts about his vocation as a writer: "Thoughts that have been running through my mind for years, that I know them all faces, do not want to be fixed in writing except with exasperating toil. It seems that I was not made for the pen; it is only an absurd urge that

[10] Alexandru Rosetti, *Călătorii și portrete*, Ed. Sport Turism, Dolj, 1977, p.127.
[11] Henri Zalis, *Paul Zarifopol*, Ed. RECIF, București, 1995, pp.8-9.
[12] *Ibidem*.

sometimes leads me to take it in hand"[13]. As he himself admits, the drafting process is a slow one, as he does not deliver any content to his readers until he has gone through it and reread it under a careful, analytical eye, processing it down to the last detail, which makes it difficult for him to write: "It's a pity that my drafting is so difficult; it is mostly a torment. I am laborious up to and including sickness"[14]. Despite these hesitations, his first volume was very well received, especially by the younger generation, who fell in love with his erudite and modern spirit, his sharp sense of irony, his iconoclasm, but also the rationalist attitude he imposed on his texts. He was supported by writers such as Mihai Ralea, Mihail Sebastian, Camil Petrescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Mircea Eliade, Alexandru Philippide, etc. The only opposition came from the young people grouped around the magazine "Falanga" and "Gândirea"[15].

In 1928, Zarifopol decided to settle in Bucharest in order to feel more closely the pulse of literary life, a place where he continued to collaborate with the same magazines in order to support his family, as he had no financial support after the death of his father. Although writing for various publications felt like a chore at first, his literary work has, over time, brought him many rewards. He gathered both friends and adversaries around him, taking constructive criticism to heart. He made himself easily appreciated by his high spirit of culture, which, on the other hand, also brought him some adversaries. Despite not enjoying the popularity he deserved, Zarifopol managed to reap some of the fruits of his life's work. He had, for example, the great honor of preparing the three critical editions, which were a tribute to his good friend Caragiale. He also began to make a name for himself in Bucharest, being invited to lecture at the Nicolae Iorga Athenaeum and at the Radio Broadcasting Society, giving lectures on the great Romanian and universal prose writers such as I.L. Caragiale, Guy de Maupassant, Gustave Flaubert, etc. In the same year he published his second volume, *Despre stil*, which, however, did not enjoy the same enthusiasm as the first. The volume contains a series of essays on style, focusing in particular on classical style, which he felt had been discredited by the new aesthetics of the younger generation. Two years later, in 1930, Zarifopol published his third volume, *Artiști și idei literare române*. This was the first time Zarifopol changed perspective and brought Romanian writers into his field, approaching them with a surprising indulgence compared to the harsh way he analyzed foreign writers[16].

Also in 1930, the first critical edition of Caragiale's *Opere* appeared, accompanied by an introductory study and analytical comments by the essayist. The edition was continued in 1931 and 1932, a project that was later taken over by Șerban Cioculescu. These editions were the ones that brought Zarifopol fame, being appreciated by literary critics for his deep intellectuality, for his intensely cultivated spirit and for his courage to initiate such an undertaking, compiling a whole monograph of the caragialesque universe. As a sign of admiration and reward for all his hard work, Zarifopol was awarded the prize of the Romanian Writers' Society, recognizing him for one of the greatest undertakings in our culture. The essayist continued his series of publications, bringing out the volume *Încercări de precizie literară* in 1931. He drew the main distinctions between the aesthetic and the moral domains, advocating the aesthetic criterion in the evaluation of works of art and discrediting psychological, philosophical, historical, etc. methods. It was precisely this fact

[13] M. Bordeianu, Gr. Botez, I. Lăzărescu et al., *Scrisori către G. Ibrăileanu*, Ediție îngrijită de M. Bordeianu, Gr. Botez, I. Lăzărescu, Dan Mănucă și Al. Teodorescu, cu o prefață de Al. Dima și N.I. Popa, E.P.L., București, 1966, p.281.
[14] *Ibidem*.
[15] Alexandru Săndulescu, „Prefață" la Paul Zarifopol, *Pentru arta literară*, vol. I, Ediție îngrijită, note, bibliografie și sutdiu introductiv de Al. Săndulescu, Ed. Minerva, București, 1971, p.10.
[16] Constantin Trandafir, *Paul Zarifopol*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1981, pp.31-32.

that triggered the polemics that the essayist would enter into, as he was known as a true partisan of the autonomy of the aesthetic. Three years later, Zarifopol published his last volume, *Pentru arta literară*, the most consistent of all, bringing together numerous complex and fundamental studies for his literary career, written over the years. The volume brings together studies such as *Obiecții lui Flaubert*, *Despre stilul perfect*, *Despre metoda și stilul lui Proust, Artă literară și simplă literatură, Capricii dogmatice*, *Moliere și gustul clasic* etc[17].

As an essayist who has lived much of his life outside the reach of popularity, Zarifopol turned down most opportunities for career advancement. He was not interested in titles and positions, awards and honors; all that interested him was strictly related to his passion for writing. This is also one of the reasons why he did not become such a famous name in the history of criticism and literature, keeping out of the limelight and away from the possibilities of making a name for himself. He let his writings speak for themselves, without getting mixed up in the whirl of everyday formalities, always writing as he thought and felt, without being intimidated or constrained by outside prejudices. Towards the end of his life, and perhaps feeling that he was running out of time, Zarifopol surprisingly accepted the editorship of the "Revista Fundațiilor Regale", becoming the editor-in-chief on August 15, 1933[18]. The first issue of the journal was to appear in January 1934, but the essayist only managed to publish four issues, as on May 1 of the same year he suddenly suffered a heart attack that took his life. Thus, he enjoyed less than a year at the helm of the magazine, his destiny coming to an end all too soon. N. Tatu was of the same opinion, stating that "the most elegant and expressive contemporary figure has disappeared"[19].

Even if Paul Zarifopol has not remained an imposing name in the history of Romanian criticism and literature, he has remained a big name in the memory of those who were close to him and those who discovered him. His merits were only recognized late, but he was never interested in them. He wanted to speak through his profound intellectuality, his erudite and cultivated spirit, his discipline of culture, appealing to sincerity in the journey he undertook in literature. He was and remained authentic because of his critical intelligence, his theoretical comprehension, the subtlety of his reflections, but also his stylistic elegance, being a contemplative spirit par excellence, as Arghezi portrays him in his portrait of his death: "I see his frontal head protruding like the edge of an axe in profile. Nature had destined it for a medal of a pope, who had mistaken his career and his temper... His tight and lipless mouth spoke like his mind exclusively from within, and his eyes were turned to an inward contemplation, as of statues standing unseen on the end of a stone mural pillar"[20]. His texts continue to speak, his criticism continues to remain valid, his reflections continue to go deeper and deeper into reality, his presence in the field of critical and literary history is a vocal one, the lifespan of his writings being prolonged by the powerful authenticity of his ideas, the wide-ranging multilateral reflections and the intellectual spectacle he initiates in each essay.

[17] *Ibidem*.
[18] Săndulescu, Alexandru, ,,Postfață" la Paul Zarifopol, *Pagini de critică*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1984, p.417.
[19] Nicolae Tatu, ,,Pentru arta literară", în *Adevărul literar și artistic*, nr. 705, 1934, p.7.
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