INADAPTABILITY OF THE INTELLECTUALS IN CAMIL PETRESCU'S PROSE

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Abstract: *The inadaptable, the type of character chosen by Camil Petrescu in his prose and also in his drama, is the artistic representation of an intellectual who "has seen ideas" and carries the burden of the absolute and of the lucidity under the imperturbable zodiac of contemplation and cerebral work. This character exceptionally reveals a superior person, capable of serious goals, aspiring to hold absolute truths and, consequently, a problematic, inadaptable human nature.*

In Camil Petrescu's prose, inadaptability may be regarded from a double perspective: the social inadaptable, who outlines the separation between the individual and his social environment, and the erotic inadaptable, who applies in love and existence its own vision cheated by his ideal.

Key-words*: inadaptable intellectual, dilemmatic intellectual, inadaptability.*

In accordance with the objective pursued in the present paper, we must say that a large and significant category that we have identified in the creation of all the inter-war writers is the intellectual misfit. Born in turmoil, skepticism, intellectual power, human ethics, Camil Petrescu's heroes are looking for a strong sense of certainty. They are misfits, intransigent intellectuals in a constant struggle with social order, business relations, politics, and mondenity. This literature creator proved his interest and preoccupation in the intellectual's destiny as well as in "an educated person's drama, who can no longer find his balance and has lost his inner support" (ZELETIN, 1991: 211), in a society marked down by profound and rapid renewing changes.

Camil Petrescu cultivates "a voluntary character, intransigent in his ideal structure, with a developed conscience, capable of authentic knowledge" (HEINRICH, 1984: 132). A misfit intellectual, of superior class, we may add. And this is also confirmed by George Ivaşcu in his article published in *Contemporanul*: "Camil Petrescu's intellectual is not the traditional type of the inadaptable present in the literature of Vlahuță, Brătescu-Voineşti, Sadoveanu etc., continued by Radu Comşa in Cezar Petrescu's work, but he is a visionary, a poet of the intellectual activity and of illusion, comparable with Eminescu's prose hero. Defeated, they do not fall awkwardly like these anemic and timid characters, driven by a social complex, but pathetically, like heroes of ancient tragedies overwhelmed by destiny.

The Inadaptable to the Social Life

One aspect that needs to be mentioned here, as it concerns direct coverage of the issues approached in the present paper, facilitating the comprehension of the literary phenomenon of inadaptability - is the antibourgeois sense that can be detected in Camil Petrescu's work. And in his prose, inadaptability is seen from the perspective of the separation between the individual and his social environment. But what requires to be

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obligatorily emphasized in this context is that the tangency point ends up here. As it is pertinently showed by Gh. Lăzărescu, in the work of such authors as "Delavrancea, Vlahuță, Brătescu-Voinești or Sadoveanu [...] inadaptability is mostly observed at social level, while with Camil's heroes, [...] the lack of adherence to an unjust society and devoid of ideals is evident in terms of mental life" (LĂZĂRESCU, 1983: 37-38).

In spite of the fact that the author, along his entire life, had to face insurmountable material difficulties, being decided to live exclusively in writing, it is not the lack of bread slices that generates its characters a poorly placed opprobrium society. What we discover is a structural incompatibility between educated individuals and society, contingent, one of them being more profound, resulting thus inextricable social causes, which go beyond common understanding.

On the other hand, the reason which entitles us to exclude any possibility of considering the camilpetrescian hero - as a misfit – only from the narrow angle of a simple lack of harmonization to upgraded social circumstances, is that the character in the novel *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*, for instance, is neither in conflict with other characters in the novel, nor with the society.

The external events become important insofar as it generates various representations in the hero's mind. Thus, Ștefan Gheorghidiu experiences a continuous inner disturbance stirred not by the facts, but how to confront the revelations of these facts in consciousness.

The exemplary figure of the intellectual inadaptable to the voracious society, dominated by trivial, materialistic, narrow ideals, is represented by Ștefan Gheorghidiu, a character who feels *alienation* in Bucharest mondenity world and repeatedly makes a so-called lucid analysis of the events he takes part in – his relation with Ela, his wife, his familial environment or the battlefield of the First World War.

Love and war represent the two modalities of his inner analytical investigation: the first marks, as the author acknowledges, the brand of *the individual experience, of knowledge through love,* and the second is *the experience of a dramatic war* in which he encounters the fear for his own life, camaraderie, sacrifice, a strong sense of honour, and he discloses a deeper love than the selfish one he had for Ela – the collective love, the unconditioned solidarity and the sense of responsibility for the lives of those who are his subordinates.

The war experience is even more important as it reveals *the politicians' unconsciousness,* guilty of the absolute poor condition of the Romanian army, *the commanders' incompetence and their unmeasured egos, the lack of supplies and the general aspect of improvisation and amateurism.*

Apparently selfish and inflexible, the hero has remarkable human qualities (generosity, understanding and honor) and proves to be a *lucid and absolute spirit*, who finds miscellaneous philosophical patterns: the ideal of love, human, justice, liberty. It is from here that the real incompatibilities arise. Among them, it is also the incompatibility between himself and his wife, Ela, the society, the politicians, the business people, and the tragic reality of the battlefield.

The Inadaptable to the Erotic Life

Ștefan Gheorghidiu represents the first type of an inadaptable intellectual to the erotic life. He is the intellectual who can only see his own judgments, ideas, suggesting or invoking numberless times the real position of love inside the human soul, once it

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was still considered an act of concealment. Although he craves for real love, he fails in finding it and he will never discover its real meanings, the author's intentions of making it somewhat hidden, but clear for those who know the real facades of life, so by default, the very large, complex framework of petrescian particularities.

George Călinescu considered Ştefan Gheorghidiu as "a hero belonging to the category of inadaptable intellectuals is a defeated individual. He is a philosopher in a world of cynical illiterates who cheat on him and steal a part of his heritage. He does not know the woman and cannot master her, and the woman makes him suffer. So it is less about jealousy analysis, but more about the case of a misfit to the erotic life of a cripple. And this life handicap of heroes is even more obvious in the novel *Bed of Procust*" (PETRESCU, 1984: 337).

Ştefan Gheorghidiu undergoes a terrible inner turmoil about his marital life. He is torn apart by the uncertainty regarding his wife's infidelity. His drama starts when he realizes that his wife, Ela, does not meet the ideal image that the young man had constructed, but also about women and love, in a broad sense. As compared to the lifestyle adopted by Ela when their material condition had changed, Ştefan envisages an incurable misfit, because he does not find any vocation for luxury and mondenity.

Ştefan Gheorghidiu is therefore *a superior inadaptable* who applies in love and existence its own vision cheated by his ideal, sort of a bed of Procust which has no contingency with the value and the reality of the feminine character. Between ideal and reality there is an obvious disjunction, while between the two spouses there is no authentic soul-to-soul communication.

One of the characters singularized by intelligence, chastity, tenderness, aspiration towards the absolute, distinction of mind and thinking capacity is Mrs. T., alias Maria T. Mănescu. Her inadaptability results from the fact that "she could not be any woman" (PETRAŞ, 1981: 120). Although she is one of the women "loved by all men", having the quality of "the most" (PETRESCU, 1976: 10), though she passionately loves Fred Vasilescu, the heroine's drama is the failure of unfulfilled love. Mrs. T.'s impossibility to be with the man she loves does not take ordinary, current, easily explainable cases. Proud, like all the other camilpetrescian heroes, Mrs. T. is able to fade the passion of her existence, due to her destiny "above earthly laws" (PETRAŞ, 1981: 121).

Fred Vasilescu "belongs to the same soul-related family of spiritual, reflective and complicated heroes, of an extreme impressionability just like Mrs. T." (CREŢU, 1982: 174). Beyond his mondenism, which could commonly denote superficiality and platitude, we actually observe a profound, sensitive, educated personality, with a high level of intellectuality and a rich inner life. We must illustrate, in the context reported here, Fred Vasilescu's portrait made by the author in his book: "Fred Vasilescu's reputation of an illiterate and uneducated individual was as false as one could imagine. I have often talked to him and I have been surprised by his support - somehow impassive, it's true - but much applied. Not to mention his expertise in engines, electricity, or horse racing; this was quite remarkable. I used to listen to him for a long time, explaining me qualities and features… But even so, as he had been a delegation attaché, he had traveled a lot, seen a lot, read a lot, looked like a French diplomat and an English horse amateur, at the same time […]. But as people rarely agree that a beautiful woman could also be an intelligent one, decided that a man devoid of spirit (i.e. incapable of "spirits", jokes, puns, otherwise there was no humor in their barely imperceptible, but penetrating conversation), blonde as an English theater lover, sometimes too quiet, is certainly a stupid person" (PETRESCU, *op. cit.*: 211).

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The aviator's "dairy" reveals George Demetru Ladima's tormenting drama, of a fearful journalist, a misunderstood poet, the dominant character of the novel. Proletarian intellectual, honest and brave, he is an incurable misfit. Very interested in social problems, but also in the structure of the world where he lives, the vigorous journalist attacks the most severe expression of social inequities. Serving an ideal of justice, Ladima categorically refuses to work beyond the imperative of conscience: "I am a man who writes. And if I cannot write what I think what's the purpose of writing? I cannot do otherwise" (*ibidem*: 173). Inconvenient because of his intelligence and intransigence, he cannot be employed anywhere (or if he gets a job for a newspaper, it is for a short period of time) and therefore he has suffered terrible shortages and misery. But although sufficiently relevant in terms of social vices, the character completely lacks the understanding of the mechanism which generates them. Consequently, he becomes a victim of his own powerlessness to perceive the objective reality and substitutes it with chimeras. For, "a man of high moral conscience, intelligent, sensitive, but "alienated" in the realities world" (PEREZ, 1982: 200), Ladima loves, to his unhappiness, an ordinary, vulgar woman, a semi-hooker, in whom he sees the embodiment of goodness and purity. Despite the fact that the hero polarizes the readers' sympathy, this capacity of self-illusion and especially their intellectual blindness is simply appalling. Fred Vasilescu, together with the readers, tries to explain Ladima's blindness and find a reasonably acceptable foothold to understand what seems incomprehensible, "a feeling entirely born from a tremendous illusion" (CREȚU, *op. cit.*: 176).

George Călinescu observes: "Just as Ştefan Gheorghidiu was defeated in romance, Ladima, the poet, is defeated in everything. Brătescu-Voineşti would not have considered him otherwise. Ladima is sensitive and poet, he is fair and cannot say anything else but the truth, he has honest love and naturally poor. Expelled from the world, due to these poor qualities of adaptation, he has no other choice but suicide" (CĂLINESCU, 1986: 659). Having thus the consciousness of losing his life and the inexistence of another repairing possibility, the unfortunate Ladima commits suicide. But not before taking care to save appearances which meant to have the money and a few love letters for the distinguished Mrs. T. The final gestures denounce the character's pride (otherwise, a definite particularity of Camil Petrescu's characters). As a matter of fact, some forms of pride and innocence were considered his candor and nonconformity.

We must add here that Ladima's inadaptability to the world in which he lives lies in the donquijotism and idealism, in the romanticism of his nature. Our hero is a Don Quijote having the noblest qualities and aspirations, and wants to serve people without any interest, fighting gallantly against lies, injustice etc. A Don Quijote, a candid soul, willing "to sacrifice a minimum of reality for a maximum of illusion" (PROTOPOPESCU, 2000: 30).

The considerations mentioned above regarding Camil Petrescu's inadaptable characters shape and motivate some final remarks. The characters in discussion are in an insoluble contradiction between their ideal and life. But the rush for the absolute truth is just an illusion, trying to save the heroes from a common world which they refuse to join. The conflict cannot be resolved by either of these characters, because the possibility of detachment from the obsessive reality does not practically exist.

Camil Petrescu's heroes suffer the failure when confronting the ideal with the objective, immediate reality, representing a variety of superior alienated people within the typology of inadaptability in the Romanian literature.

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Conclusions

The *inadaptable*, the type of character chosen by Camil Petrescu in his prose and also in his drama, is the artistic representation of an intellectual who "has seen ideas" and carries the burden of the absolute and of the lucidity under the imperturbable zodiac of contemplation and cerebral work. This character exceptionally reveals a superior person, capable of serious goals, aspiring to hold absolute truths and, consequently, a problematic, inadaptable human nature.

It was said that Camil Petrescu's literature obsessively replays the same themes, with some "variations", presenting the same characters, dominated by their aspiration for the absolute in love, justice and social organization. Dilemmatic intellectuals, Camil Petrescu's heroes live with the illusion that the degraded world where they live can be changed by returning to the initial monadic harmony. The temptation for the absolute generates nostalgia and ends with uncertainty, implicitly resulting in the individual's drama, dedicated to permanent experiences.

"Unique in his essence" (SOLOMON, 1958: 27), the hero presented in Camil Petrescu's prose is an intellectual, exceptionally revealing a superior person, capable of serious goals, aspiring to hold absolute truths and, consequently, a problematic, inadaptable human nature. The intellectual's inadaptability results, first of all, from an exacerbated sensibility of his nature, which is the equivalent of timidity, also exaggerated. And this exaggerated sensibility, susceptibility, ambition and the abuse of introspection make the character be shy and almost powerless in decision-making.

In this paper, we tried to present that the conceptual transformation of the literary character brings along changes and a new modality of presenting the inadaptable, an eloquent prose in this case being that of Camil Petrescu. His misfits, Ştefan Gheorghidiu (*The Last Night ...*), Fred Vasilescu, Mrs. T., George D. Ladima (*Bed of Procust*), are exclusively intellectuals with a high moral conscience and thirst for knowledge and absolute. They fail in confronting the ideal with the objective reality.

Therefore, we may conclude in a personal touch: the camilpetrescian hero's inadaptation to the environment - either social or erotic - is complete, and his drama belongs to a superior hero, defeated like so many others by the conjuration of their epoque.

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