CAMIL PETRESCU THE HUXLEYAN

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Abstract: History writes itself. For one to check the truth of these words, it is quite sufficient if he/she looks around or if he/she tries to remember the latest achievement or disaster anywhere on the Globe. Since one moves on, any disaster ought to be overcome and achievements in any domain welcomed. Literature grants moments of success simply due to its endless changing and to its resemblance with life; therefore, it's foreshadowing.

In terms of theories and accomplishments, the twentieth century was fruitful; Freud's theory on the psyche and Carl Jung's conception about memory were found impressive by writers. They enriched the psychological novel with "levels of connotative expression"[1] and with a greater "depth of treatment and significance."[2]

As a result, Aldous Huxley's thorough analysis of his characters' thoughts and of their incursions into their past caught my eye. What determined me to read Huxley further was "Point Counter Point"; in the setting, a multitude of characters give shape to a society who has lost all of its values. Types dealt with satirically, disgust and desperation constituted the basis of Huxley's earlier works of prose. Still, it is in "Point Counter Point" that he caricatures efficiently, destroying the idols of that time.

Both authors have their characters confronted with doubts and fears, their dramatic levels varying. Forever surrounded by a firmament of ideas and thoughts, these personas firmly believe in their destiny. This way, regardless of the hardships, they pursue further in attaining their scopes.

In Romanian literature Huxley was an inspiration especially for writers Camil Petrescu and Mircea Eliade. The latter had the same spiritual affinities as Huxley; both had an Indian experience and were interested in religion. Eliade incorporated Huxleyan patterns of thought in "Huliganii" ("The Hooligans"); the British author's formal solutions also influenced Eliade.

World War I had given birth to a generation that used hedonistic lifestyle and excessive individualism to hide its fear and uncertainty. Characters in both "Point Counter Point" and "The Hooligans" act as such; the technique of juxtaposition is present in each of the two works and builds parallel situations that intersperse at one point. The tragic parts in "Point Counter Point" are the death of a child, a suicide and a murder while in "The Hooligans" they are a theft, a rape and a suicide. In other words, such events are part of life; if they were preceded/succeeded by ironic or grotesque elements then they resemble reality.

Camil Petrescu took the model of the intellectual from Huxley's works; this persona is continuously dissatisfied with whatever he acquires and it is new; that's because he is always searching for something that keeps him thrilled but once he has it, it is not long before he is bored with it; take for example Walter Bidlake, Phillip Quarles ("Point Counter Point")or Ştefan Gheorghidiu ("Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război") and Gelu Ruscanu ("Jocul ielelor"). The huxleyan characters are willing to fight for their identity or accept a compromise while Camil Petrescu's die for their truth and ideals.

[1] Burlui, Irina, *Lectures in Twentieth Century British Literature*, Editura Universităţii Al. I.Cuza, 1980, Iaşi, p.3.
[2] Burlui, Irina, *op.cit*., p.3.

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In the vast domain of literature, readers learn of various writing styles and of numerous achievements. In the modernist trend, Aldous Huxley had a significant contribution due to the new techniques he invented. His first five works of fiction are most huxleyan due to the presence of characters symbolizing intellectuals and due to their continuous analysis of false idols and people's meaningless aims.

In "Crome Yellow" Denis pops in the group and steps out from it; his coming and leaving don't change anything among their circle. This directs the eye to a daily routine each character manifests. No one in the house interferes with somebody else's work or ideas in this matter; each one is busy with her/ his thoughts, activities. This aspect, together with funny, magic features like Wimbush's ageless look, Priscilla's crazy attitude, Mr. Scogan's idle talk grant the novel circularity. The work is structured as a tour around Crome or an episode of a film series presenting last events in the lives of special characters, most of them stubborn, flat.

If "Crome Yellow" is vaguely reproduced, in "Antic Hay" characters' inner sides are revealed. The overall state in the novel is that of futility; Gumbril Senior's absurdity lies in his hope that he will one day build his architectural models; this will never happen. The characters see the world around them as a chaos, a jungle in which they have been abandoned. Each one of them tries in his/her way to face facts, their despair and agony. As expected, they live by extremes, a detail that makes them more parodic.

One's lifetime is filled with both glorious moments and real nightmares; anything happens for a reason, everyone having his/her own fate. Good and bad events simply occur to one whether he/ she likes it or not. In "Those Barren Leaves", try as she might, Mrs. Aldwinkle cannot make Chelifer fall in love with her; Calamy's relationship with Mary is not as simple as it looks. They want different things; their separation enables Calamy's meditation. The characters represent the barren leaves, slowly drifting in different directions, according to what their instincts tell them. They are barren due to their fading away, since time is irreversible.

Even though "Point Counter Point" is representative for the genre "novel of ideas", "Brave New World" is Huxley's lasting success; the reason for this is that in numerous respects the dead society in the novel is the destination we are heading to at present.

A Romanian writer inspired by Huxley is Camil Petrescu. Both authors have their characters confronted with doubts and fears, their dramatic levels varying. Forever surrounded by a firmament of ideas and thoughts, these personas firmly believe in their destiny. This way, regardless of the hardships, they pursue further in attaining their scopes.

War has been one of the most inspiring themes in literature, gathering brilliant minds that described scenes on the battle field as realistically as possible. Its significance is due to the numerous shifts and meanings it holds. The idea itself of people's involvement points to a mixture of feelings and thoughts that shape any piece of writing.

In his novel, "Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război" (Last night of love, first night of war), Camil Petrescu succeeds in making a difference by innovating, changing completely the point of view. The subjective perspective of the first person narrator is focused on apparently simple, irrelevant aspects(the fever, the cold, the stomach aches, the fear, the lack of food, etc.). They might seem insignificant at first, but their mentioning actually plays a huge role in reaching the aim of this writing: to demystify the meaning of war, the feeling of glory surrounding it.

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The succession of events in the novel ”Ultima noapte” is seen and interpreted entirely through the eyes of Ștefan Gheorghidiu. This involved narrator, at the same time a character, reasons anything appearing within his sight.

Living in the world of ideas, faithful to philosophy and phenomenology, Ștefan rejects immediate reality. His inner crisis caused by Ela’s infidelity is rendered to the letter, with emphasis on his continuous suffering and his moral decay. Any faithful reader who follows the course of the telling ought to be on the narrator’s side, taking into consideration the thorough analysis of Ela’s smallest gesture and glance. Just like Chelifer and Calamy (” Antic Hay”), for Ștefan, discontent and spiritual torment is useful to the extreme since they are reasons to keep his mind active. But still, the reader should be trustful up to one point; that of recalling that Ștefan is the story teller. The insistence on his struggle in a fairytale losing its glow may not be that convincing. It is as probable that his wife might or might not have flirted with charming, dashing Gregoriade. Like Ștefan, Denis (“Crome Yellow”) finds himself in an unexpected, strange situation which he overanalyses; in the case of Denis it is the new group.

This way, the argument that Ștefan is obsessed with the idea of loving Ela proves rather plausible. He admitts his acquaintances’ sayings that he’s the jealous type and that he married Ela especially for her reputation as ”the most popular girl in college”. Bearing no affection for her at first, Ștefan regarded Ela as a suitable place from where to start the building of his ”ideal world”. Initially she was but an object of his interests, since Ștefan was attracted by her beauty, youth and innocence. Day by day, used to Ela’s presence, her ways and moods, Ștefan started to care about her until that feeling turned into adoration. It is not love, however. Ștefan praises Ela simply for fitting into his standards, for resembling a perfectly wonderful prize. She is but a representation in Ștefan’s mind, like the way Italy and its landscapes are reflected through Mrs. Aldwinkle’s viewpoint in ”Antic Hay”; the objects, the individuals don’t exist at an objective level, but only in people’s perceptions.

Camil Petrescu’s feminine characters, just like Huxley’s, are objects of knowledge for the men, rather than independent beings in the structure of the novel.

During the family discussion on the inheritance his uncle would leave him, Ela’s interference was a shock to Ștefan. Her sudden interest in the prospect of a significant financial improvement caught Ștefan’s entire attention. He couldn’t continue to see her as pure; she might no longer be part of his ideal universe, for she wasn’t as valuable. In contrast to the above, it is a fact confirmed in the sequence of events that Ela is far from being an upstart, a goldigger respectively. Ștefan can’t cope with her new lifestyle (different company, smart dressing), her willingness to acccess high-society. He used to be happy with their modest living, having been isolated from the outside. Witnessing his mind absent, castaway in absolute, Ela’s love and respect for him slowly fade. Back from the battle ground a changed man, wounded physically and mentally by war’s horrors, he divorces Ela on account of her deceits. To my mind, the intensity and unrest surrounding Ștefan could be inspiring if we take his word for it concerning his endless suspicions. However, they could also be ridiculous to sad if it’s nothing but a fictitious setting, built up by his mind. Both Huxley’s and Camil Petrescu’s characters become aware of the fact that consciousness is the only reality that can be checked, the only source of the absolute truth.

War, a necessary evil, introduces him to a distinct hierarchy, a system of values he hadn’t expected. Ela and her double-crossing are now far from his thoughts; regrets of the past and a dreadful fear for the future lead to an awakening. Ștefan reaches to a true light, becoming capable of telling right from wrong. Appreciating his mates a bit more enables him to remain hopeful at times. “Come what may”dominates his beliefs. The war part is fundamental to the novel, since its events are of present time, whereas the love story is an incursion to the past. Happenings on the front are harmful, shaping his mind and perceptions.

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His searching for a new experience reminds one of Denis . Just like Casimir Lypiatt (“Antic Hay”), Ștefan sees in a failure the beginning of a different life-chapter.

The soul, the most well-hiden treasure, can at times be witness to a variety of fervent feelings. In addition, a confidant of somebody who expresses sincerely his every thought, his most intimate emotion, cannot be but overwhelmed, if not shocked or sensitized to tears.

Anybody having read ”Patul lui Procust” (”Procrustes’ bed”) must have had a certain tension of any kind: disappointment, disgust, pity, etc. Fred Vasilescu’s structure has the purpose to thrill; this character is of the lineage ”desireable, loved but unable to love”, like Gelu Ruscanu. One of the richest and most attractive bachelors of the Bucharest society in interwar period, Fred Vasilescu is considered by his circle of friends ignorant, stupid. The pursuit of understanding him turns, therefore, into a delight since Fred’s deep insights and interpretations reveal his emotional and loving side.

The novel is organized as such that lady T. and the Author tell the story of Fred, leaving Fred to tell the story of Ladima. The latter’s statements in his letters move Fred profoundly, facing him to a compassionate, caring side of his he had never known of. The more Fred reads, the more he gets involved, having later the will to learn the reason of poet G.D. Ladima’s suicide. This, on the other hand, is just the pretext; while reading the pile, Fred connects the dates of the letters to what he was doing at the time. The idea of parallel worlds, parallel lives is a fundamental one, present both at Huxley and Camil Petrescu. These parallel realities, on the one hand, reveal the beauty of life in diversity, but on the other hand they make social understanding or communication impossible. Fred feels close to his old acquaintance Ladima, now knowing him much better. But, actually, the dates aimed at awakening his memories of the on and off love affair with lady T.

Too conceited to bear his love for lady T., Fred projected himself a special, unusual target; nothing like a relationship with the loved one. Such relation meant far from wonderful, complete to him. It wouldn’t have been enough, though what he felt for her was pure. Huxley and Camil Petrescu’s intellectuals can no longer feel because thinking overruled their feelings. Loving his woman would have anulled Fred’s perceptions about himself. He wasn’t able to stagnate in an earthly, simple relation. His yet unknown reasons support his position as distinct character. Gifted poet, ambitious columnist, G.D. Ladima is imposing and not at all amenable. In the discussion with Fred on clothing, Ladima doubted his companion’s principles on good taste, demanding further, standing arguments. Ladima defends his points of view persuasively and with energy. Therefore, this negligent, delicate man with worn-out clothes and teacher-like attitude is by all means an intellectual. The unfitting part of the puzzle is his adoration of a cheap, inconsiderate actress. Ladima’s ”Emy” is the prettiest girl, lovely, pure, generous and just any quality one would think of. Reality bites: Emilia sees herself as a talented artist; being a prostitute enables the big fish to propel her in theater. Apparently blind to most readers, including Fred, Ladima has an obsessive passion like Ștefan Gheorghidiu. Offering Emilia great attributes makes his imaginary love story pertinent to him. Ladima endures misery and moral decay, consequences of poor financial conditions; Emilia’s existence consists his dreamland. Ladima’s focus on Emilia indicates his refusal to accept the truth about her, the poverty and nastiness surrounding him.

Seeing Emilia along with individuals suiting her interests leads him to suicide. The letters sent to her prove his devotion and his boldest of wishes. The poet’s hardships and tragic end are brought to light by Fred, who decided from the start to investigate Ladima’s deeds. His one last pride shows the appeal to dignity; Ladima dies with quite a nice sum of money in his pocket and a false letter by his side, pointing lady T. as his lover. Ladima’s attempt was not to be thought of that miserable; his actual motive, the shame of loving an inferior creature like Emilia, is kept by the ones who were close to him and appreciated his writings.

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The odd- looking, incisive type, Ladima impressed with his reasoning and persuading. He complains about his depression and the dump he lives in the same as much when stating the success of the newspapers he works hard at. As most heroes of Camil Petrescu, he cannot write anything unless he feels it and unless he is true to himself. Huxley's Theodore Gumbril tries desperately to integrate into the external world to which, actually, he doesn't belong. The difference between Camil Petrescu's and Huxley's intellectual is that the latter can have a split personality while the former finds it impossible to look like what he is not; his creed is to preserve his identity even with the cost of being an outcast.

Complicated, with its ups and downs, lady T.'s dalliance with Fred wasn't meant to be a lasting, fruitful one. Devoted hopelessly to one another, the woman chose to make the step and admitt they can become one. Shocked by his rejections, lady T. feels useless while watching her losing Fred.

When Fred first makes a pass at her, she stands fierce on the outside and chic as always, refusing at the beginning. Later, while he discovers her tensely, step by step, lady T.'s intimate portrait is of a shy smiling girl, far from the sophisticated, though woman. In this magical moment, Fred is filled with gladness and surprise at the sense of her delicacy and at the sight of an amaizing body. Lady T., central female character, is viewed by more than one man; her prettiness is governed by her state of mind. Affectionate, cultured, the descriptions of her remind one of an old tune or a foreign perfume, with a drop of exotic sensuality. Such detailed descriptions cannot but be in opposition with those of Myra Viveash("Antic Hay"), who is just a bored woman. She sees as a must escaping in searching for novelties that would at least seem to fill her inner emptiness.

Owner of a modern furniture shop, lady T. reads and admires fine art, being happy with life's small things. No wonder Fred feels inferior to her; confessing his love would mean becoming his woman's slave. The need for lady T. to feel adored, to have a partner is even more alarming when seeing Fred with another woman, moving on. She feeds her ego even with shabby, disgraceful D., flirting with him due to her moment of weakness. Lady T. is from the cattegory characters in love but not loved.

Hasn't everyone had an epiphany during an ordinary day?! Everything is observed from a different perspective, one believing he/she holds the key to the Universe. The way one chooses to take is destined to be the right one regardless of where it takes or what it leads to. Someone caught in the world of ideas takes even self-destruction as part of a "glorious rise".

In the play Jocul ielelor ("The elfins'dance"), Gelu Ruscanu takes a glance at the dance itself while strolling in the woods with his lover, Maria Sinești. Nothing would ever look the same to him, his existence taking a turn distanced from reality. Gelu feels he has just awoken, remembering Maria's one time cheating. Learning the truth about his father's death triggers Gelu's drama; from his young years to his adulthood, he looked down at his father, a dignified, honest figure dead in a hunting accident. Actually, Grigore Ruscanu, a passionate gambler, had great debts due to an embezzlement. Like Ladima, he shot himself, for the woman he loved, a vulgar, untalented actress, who didn't care about him.

Both Denis and Gelu find the world of ideas simple and easy to seize; the real world, on the other hand, proves to be unclear, unfair, extremely difficult to comprehend because of its contradictions and mess. If Gelu has a blind idealism, Theodore Gumbril ("Antic Hay") sees the sharp difference between ideal and reality. He searches how to adapt to the objective level, whereas Gelu is crushed to witness his wish of absolute justice come true. He is distinguished by Casimir Lypiatt who has hope in a future triumph.

Gelu's tragic fate evolves according to some exact stages; he is first disappointed with Maria's betrayal, believing love is infinite and pure, immaculate. Gelu cannot describe love otherwise; he's uncompromising and intolerant with anything against the principles he stands for.

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Șerban Saru-Sinești's statements on the circumstances his father died plunge Gelu in a sea of uncertainty and despair. This way, he starts to identify with his role model to the minutest aspect; Gelu is faced with an enlightening, the answer to moral completion his father had: death. Having been brought to his attention that just anything is relative, including love, justice , Gelu finds he has nothing left; nothing that could pertain to him, to his conscience. His friend Praida's philosophy left alone, Gelu is stuck with his emptiness. Visualising each of his father's steps, the anguish faces him to suicide. It is easier to integrate into the misery than to rise above it; this is what Cardan (Antic Hay) becomes aware of, as well as Gelu.

Maria, Gelu's ex-lover, tries to convince him to let go of the voices in his head and build a new start with her. Married to a cold-hearted manipulator, Maria is a grown-up with an existential crisis. Her infantility resembles that of Myra Viveash who longs for raspberry syrup and is fascinated by flickering sky-signs from Piccadilly Circus. Maria remained the reckless, spoiled child she once was. Obsessed with anything, depressive and unbalanced, she seeks and discovers the key to salvation: her love for Gelu. He, on the other hand, sees satisfaction in idealism, to which Maria cannot pertain anymore.

Thirsty for absolute, Gelu Ruscanu's mind is isolated from the material world. A misfit in the superior world he wishes to live in, like Ladima and Ștefan Gheorghidiu, he traces a one of a kind destiny. For Huxley and Camil Petrescu, Man's mission is not to be happy but to search and question.

Both authors have their characters confronted with doubts and fears, their dramatic levels varying. Forever surrounded by a firmament of ideas and thoughts, these personas firmly believe in their destiny. This way, regardless of the hardships, they pursue further in attaining their scopes.

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