THE FRAGMENTATION AND RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE EGO IN MAX BLECHER'S PROSE

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***Abstract**: The present work intends to reveal the identity hypostases of the author Max Blecher fictionally transposed in his novels, appealing to Jaques Lacan's grid of psycho-analytical interpretation. The analytical step is sustained by the graphic representation of the tridimensional figure, Moebius' band, in order to approach the theme of the contraries, in the case of the mentioned writer – the division of the human psychic in superego and the ID. The fragmentation of the ego has as its leaving point the schizoid sequence of the human being in « the abstract character » and « my real character », but also the escape of the character in the cursed areas (the park of the city, the bank of the river) and the well intended ones (the royal throne, the attic of the house, the castle from Berk and the garden) which cause the double personality. From the perspective of the reconstruction of the ego, the previously shown dihotomy proves to be a false opposition, because the multiple facets of the ego co-exist due to their continuity and remake the complete and complex personality, the way the writing has.*

***Keywords**: Moebius' band, psychoanalytic, schizoid.*

The act of reading entails that convention between writer and reader which stimulates the propulsion in the universe of ideas, an invasion of the actant in the literary intimacy of the actor, of the authorial presence. Simona Sora discusses this concept of *literary intimacy* in her critical essay, *Regăsirea intimităţii* [Recapturing intimacy], tackling the two inherent components of this affective topos: *imaginary intimacy* and *reading intimacy*. As she claims, it triggers

> a double antagonist movement, on the one hand, one of internalisation, of descent into the depths of the discovered self, and simultaneously, one of exteriorisation, of exposure of the inside, insisting on the lived body, on corporeality, on the secret of intimacy [Simona Sora, 2008: 13].

This theory of psychic matter applied on literature reminded us of writer Max Blecher, who frames, in an exclusivist manner, "the bizarre adventure of being a man" [Max Blecher, 2014 : 40], as confessed by the narrator-character of his debut novel, *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată [Adventures in Immediate Unreality]*. The novelist provides an unsettling, metaphysical prose, a novel artistic experiment of "the writing of the self" [Carmen Mușat, 1998 : 45], "a problematic and spectacular case of reception" [Ada Brăvescu 2011 : 3], a ludic and lucid "against biography" [Doris Mironescu, 2011 : 3], with defining notes of existentialism and surrealism.

As the central theme of his novels is ontological crisis, a true metaphorical obsession of a soul tormented by disease, we have proposed an analytical approach to the textualist hermeneutics, in view of identifying the author's identitary hypostases. The ontological matter has an obvious psychoanalytical sub-layer, which is the reason why we have resorted to Jacques Lacan's interpretation grid, thus placing Blecher's works under a lens able to reveal the congruence of the instances of human psyche. An exegete of Sigmund Freud, individualised by his philosophical, anthropological and

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linguistic system of thinking, Jacques Lacan discusses the psychology of the ego as pertaining to discourse, in the sense that the subconscious is structured like a language.

Referring to the ego-superego-id triad, the human psyche will be further represented graphically by using Möbius strip specific to topology. Lacan resorts to this three-dimensional figure in order to illustrate the paradigm of opposites, which eventually proves to be a false dichotomy. Therefore, at the centre of the imaginary triangle, we will place the Ego, as centre of conscience, but also comprising a subconscious component. The empirical, biographical Ego is the writer Max Blecher, but this hypostasis has no identity, because, in reality, it is the other, the small other (*autre* in small initial letter), which is the peer, the projection of the Ego. This apparent inadvertence of identity is assumed through the presence of the reflected image; in our case, the mirror is the artistic product, i.e., the book. This explains the placement of the alter-ego at the level of the narrative discourse, under the guise of the narrator and characters. The next step is to place the terms superego and id on the sides of the triangle, in view of completing the profile of the human psyche. Having outlined the theoretical background, we shall further apply these concepts on the universe of Blecher's novels.

Let us remind of the schizoid sequentiality of the being in the incipit of the novel *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată* [Adventures in Immediate Unreality], where the homodiegetic narrator focuses on a fixed point, as a fad, as critic Nicolae Manolescu states.

> When I gaze for a long while at a fixed point on the wall, I happen sometimes to forget who I am and where I am. I feel the lack of identity from afar, as if I had become, just for a moment, a complete stranger. This abstract character and my real person dispute my conviction with equal forces. [Max Blecher, 2014 : 19]

The abstract character - real person duality is a split of the one who finds himself in a fragile zone, between sleep and wake, in that *doreveille* which determines the suspension of the Ego. In the terms of oneiraut Robert Moss, this is the image of the *active dreamer*, a privileged dreamer to whom the world reveals and speaks differently. It is, a short-term revelation, sufficient, nonetheless, to induce identitary confusion. This brings us back to identitary multiplication nourished by the wilful trance of the individual, perceived by the narrator through the two-dimensional image of a stereoscopic sight, which, by operator error, creates over imposing. Thus, the Superego is the abstract character, whereas the Id is the real person, both representations finding applicability in the fictional universe. The deconstruction of the Ego entails soul confusion, inasmuch as the necessity of plunging in the deepest areas of the psyche. The super-ego is placed by Jacques Lacan in the symbolic plane of speaking, being at the same time the law and the destruction thereof. It has "a meaningless, blind character of sheer imperative and mere tyranny" [Dylan Evans, 2005 : 289]. The super-ego is the Other, the great Other (*Autre* with capital initial) which denotes alterity, a locus in which speaking takes shape. Therefore, this illusory embodiment of the imaginary orders to subject to rejoice, and the imperative will to rejoice fully assumes "the supreme being into evil" [*Ibidem*].

The id represents the complex of unknown forces of the human psyche defined in linguistic terms by Jacques Lacan. This is construed as an unconscious origin of speaking, something symbolic, beyond the imaginary Ego, the super-ego. Lacan reformulates the theory of the German psychiatrist Georg Groddeck, "Man is spoken by something" [*Ibidem.*,p.280] and comes to the conclusion that "man is lived by something/ someone" [*Ibidem*]. Thus, going back to the identity scheme, we observe

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that the Ego self-deceives through reflection, the super-ego rejoices and saddens at the same time, whereas the id speaks, tacitly or deliberately confesses the ontological experiences that shatter its being.

The sequence of the dissolution of the ego in Blecher's novel is just an impulse to break out from an immediate reality, a secondary, artificial, kitschy, prefabricated reality which proves much more authentic than day-by-day reality. The protagonist wishes to be assimilated by this "curious underreality", in Eugene Ionescu's view, but the experience is only lived in childhood and in the moments of self-imposed, intransigent lucidity. The symbolic space explored by the hero belongs to corporeality, which possesses a *physical inwardness* which claims prevalence through the act of evading from himself, in search for regaining inner balance. Nicolae Manolescu speaks of an affectivity topos: "The eye shut inside wakes up, but not towards the narrator's experiences, but towards his chimeras" [Nicolae Manolescu, 1998 : 559]. Access to this temporary freedom is granted through an attack on the being, through euphoric states caused by *damned spaces* and *benevolent spaces*. In his study dedicated to Blecher, *Prin nişte locuri rele* [In some evil spaces], the literary critic makes an apology of the space, describing places that are apparently antagonistic and, in fact, similar, as they are, at the same time, "infernal and paradisiac, closed, secret places, overloaded with obsolete objects forgotten under thick layers of dust, and connected with a certain mystery in the narrator's imagination" [*Ibidem.*, p. 569].

Let us begin the inventory of the places considered evil discovered in childhood, the town's park, the river banks near the oil factory, and the unknown, closed rooms. These "invisible traps" [Max Blecher, 2014 : 20] call out the being from its depths and, once the threshold is reached, the identity crisis is unavoidable and the super-ego holds prevalence.

The small clearing in the town's park represents that *somewhere in the world* to which nobody has access because no one dares to walk the path at whose end there is this stark, desolate, wild scenery, with dusty, sunburnt leaves. The sullen, heavy, canicular air liquefies, turns opalescent and contaminates the new-comer, giving him "a bizarre sense of uselessness" [*Ibidem.*, p. 21]. The strangeness of the place is all the more evident through the distorted echo of the trumpets that bring forth sadness. This halt of the wanderer accentuates the solitude, the definitive and irrevocable imprint of the id.

The periphery of the Blecherian town conceals a grotesque playground through olfactory and tactile aggression of the rancid, mildew and humid environment. In the hollow riverbanks, the refuse of an oil factory were collected, sunflower seeds husks which, in time, had made a flank which children used as a corridor to go down to the water. A delirious scenery, of a paranoid, imbruting, typically surrealist fantastic calls forth and chases away at the same time. Here is an aestheticizing form of the foul-beautiful imaginary: "the rain had sculpted long streaks of fine cracks like arabesques, but hideous as some unhealed wounds […] rags of the flesh of the clay […] horrible scars" [Max Blecher, 2014 : 21]. The olfactory sense induces the hypersensitivity of the character, creating an identitary split. The aggressive "jelly-like stench of decomposing" [*Ibidem*] and the "pleasant, warm, domestic" [*Ibidem*] smell determine the sensorial transformation of the being, through "a pleasant, intoxicating faint" [*Ibidem*, p. 22] continued with a rush towards a small cave, as terminus point of the induced rapture. The corporal shudder fights the blood fury, and the return to reality takes place in a quiet, intimate space, which, this time, gives prevalence to the id. The expulsion of the ego and the bringing of the super-ego to the surface last just a moment but the

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inconsistency of this moment throws the being into sadness even more, to stigmatise the id under the aegis of the tragic.

The hermeticism of the rooms induces a sure, sudden crisis – the welcoming, reassuring atmosphere gives the sense of beatitude. The tyranny of things is defeated. The object is bereft of the material and turns into immaterial, with an inert, suspended image. Levelling takes place – the being assumes the status of the object which has just gained its freedom. The moment of vital lust is felt as "a hovering outside any world, pleasant and painful at the same time" [*Ibidem.*, p. 23].

Coincidentally or not, we can see that childhood is under the sign of the damned spaces, anticipating Pott's disease. As a paradox of human existence, the grown-up years are marked by this implacable malady, which also affects Emil, the protagonist of the novel *Inimi cicatrizate [Scarred Hearts]*, the character-narrator of the posthumous work *Vizuina luminată [The Lighted Den]*, but also the novelist Max Blecher himself. In this situation, the hero can only save himself through a break out, but not to the damned but to the benevolent spaces.

The cinema hall, the panopticon, the fair, Weber house, the den of the window, the attic, the royal throne cabaret, the Elseneur villa, the wall at the outskirts of the town, the garden in the dream – all illustrate the immediate unreality recovered by the character by merging the being and the matter in a much more painful form. Let us provide of few examples of these defining spaces for the abstract character and real person and super-ego and id oscillations.

Grandpa Weber's house resembles the image of a panopticon, with its dusty rooms stuffed with anachronic objects. The hero's favourite place is the attic with a window to the roof, which gives him a panoramic view of the "grey and amorphous" [*Ibidem.*, p. 56] town. The protagonist experiences the sensation of inner balance which defines *normal life* of immediate unreality, but for that the metamorphosis into a birdman is necessary. The fear of being accidentally shot down is inculcated in his body like a gangrenous pain which he wishes he could extirpate. The facing his fears is achieved by making some banal, exact, exaggerated gestures: "to read, to eat or to sleep" [Max Blecher, 2014 : 57], which give a sensation of "indefinite, undermined" [*Ibidem*] due the inconsistency and fragility of the matter. It is here a subtle slide from super-ego to id, a constant oscillation between up and down, unreality and reality.

Another welcoming space is the town cabaret which gives forth a certain mystery to the character, his steps walking through a maze of rooms with many doors, long corridors which lead to the attic, halls with small rooms and a stair to the stage, with a doorway to the basement stuffed with used objects which guard the prompter's cage and the royal throne. This "solemn armchair" [*Ibidem.*, p.70] gives "the most pleasant sentiment of solitude" [*Ibidem*], as the hero knows that he is far from the world, in a place in which the deafening silence stirs happiness, beatitude. The objects' chaos builds walls for this centre of the world – "it was the common place for all my dreams" [*Ibidem*]. The infectious nostalgia of this hiding makes him come back to this place every day, as in a ritual climaxing with the supreme happiness of solitude, a recurrent exercise of the definitive settlement of the super-ego to the detriment of the id by breaking out into unreality. However, "these daily trips" [*Ibidem.*, p. 71] end as oddly as they began: with the meeting of a sick woman in the cinema cabin, which saddens him. And again the super-ego is abandoned, allowing the id to assimilate all the sadness of of the world "beyond the skin" [*Ibidem.*, p. 231].

Going beyond the local universe of the *Adventures*, we will find the same welcoming spaces in the following novels, even though the affective register is more

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nuanced – solitude persists, but suffering is postponed by the moment of balance, of the serene peace. It is possible that the exercises of *Adventures* left behind the definitive imprint of pain, and now the character is in search for happiness, as the super-ego has fulfilled its duty as a tyrant and redeemer of emotions. Thus, in Berk town, on the shores of the ocean, a town which accumulates the entire human melancholy, the pain, suffering and atrocities induced by the scarred hearts infiltrate into the soul like a germ. The deliverance from the burden of the sanatorium, a wax works museum of mannequins of "hags and cotton" [*Ibidem.*, p. 135], and from the shell of the plaster which gave him the paradoxical sensation of "existing and yet not being fully alive" [*Ibidem.*, p. 125] takes place at Elseneur villa. He takes a difficult, arid road, "with dunes as tall as house" [*Ibidem.*, p.185], and the wilderness of the places brings temporary peace to Emanuel, the protagonist of the novel. The character looks in admiration at the paintings in the villa's drawing room and recognises himself in the face of the old man "retired from the world, in an unknown room, calm, alone, amidst old, obsolete pieces of furniture" [*Ibidem.*, p. 189]. This desert, silent, mortuary setting possesses all the attributes of a miracle: "the day had completely changed its appearance, as if it was part of another year and another season, of another reality" [*Ibidem*].

Emanuel doubles himself, feeling his being as a stranger, yet safe, far from the madding crowd of the town he left: "It's like he switched his identity" [*Ibidem*]. The existential fragility of the real person is made aware and analysed with cool, sharp lucidity, become a river flowing through the veins, the contingent reality being wilfully expelled by the *doreveille* state of the super-ego: "how inconsistent was the whole reality of the days flowing through him like a still river whose flow he felt through him when he remained inert, with his eyes shut" [Max Blecher, 2014: 191].

Last but not least, there is also the garden, the corner of paradise, which appears in the premonitory dream as a space of eternal rest. Placed at the edge of a village of Berk, this mythicized space is placed into timelessness. It hides behind "a belt of trees, surrounded by thick and tall walls" [*Ibidem.*, p. 250] and has an old, rusty iron gate covered in wild ivy. It is the privileged place for sheltering sensitive souls. The terrace covered in flowers, the water basin with an artesian well, the monumental stairway with large stairs adorned with bizarre plants, the statues embowered in green – all outline the archetypal space seen in the dream. But this topos will be also abandoned, bringing with it unhappiness, the unfortunate death of the horse, and everything crumbled in memories and regrets.

Describing this Eden in which the character feels the closest to the essence of things, when unreality is ready to take over reality completely, when the super-ego fully rejoice the oneiric vision of the scenery, the id violently reacts and strongly claims that it *is alive*, as Lacan mentioned in his theory.

Reaching the end of this demonstration, we can affirm for certain that the super-ego and the id are not antonymous, just like life and dream are not clearly differentiated in the mind of the protagonist. If every symbolic place is sufficient in itself to trigger the split of the being in the abstract character and the real person, in super-ego and id, the inconsistency of these identitary hypostases has been proved for the most part, as the ego lives through dream and dreams though living: "It is the same thing to live or a dream an adventure" [*Ibidem.*, p. 241].

We cannot equate the identities of the super-ego and the id, but we can observe their contiguity. Assimilated by the ego at the centre of the Möbius strip, the two

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recompose the complete and complex personality of the author, as outlined by the writing.

Let us conclude by asserting that, in Max Blecher's case, there is no antagonism of the identitary hypostases. Placing them on the sides of Möbius's triangle, we have emphasised the presence of the super-ego and the id as an extension of one another. Thus, resorting to deconstruction, we have reached the depths of human conscious, and through the reconstruction of the human psyche, we have outlined the being in its completeness, which eventually proves to be "an opening towards a closed world" [Constantin Noica, 2010 : 201].

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