OBSESSIVE METAPHORS OF THE IMMEDIATE UNREALITY IN MAX BLECHER' S PROSE

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Abstract: *This aproach has a starting point in Charles Mauron' s statement in his Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel. The obsessive metaphors in Max Blecher' s novel – Adventures in Immediate Unreality are cinema, wax status exhibition, theatre, and many other spaces which give us the idea of artificiality. The paper underlines the idea of how these spaces become an alternative to real life. Max Blecher suggests a way that investigates, rediscovers life, and radiates beauty from suffering.*

Keywords: *Obsessive Metaphors, Immediate Reality, Artificiality, Mimesis.*

The metaphors of *the immediate unreality*, exclusively of this type are the cinema and the panopticon. To these, the fair, the sculpture workshop and the theatre are added, in order to satisfy the narrator's declared need of artificiality, as he is impressed by "every imitation" (Blecher, 2009: 58).

The narrator-character's own belief: "after all there is no clear distinction between our real person and our various imaginary inner characters" (*Ibidem:* 54) clearly leads to the idea that Blecher's character lives as many lives in their corresponding realities as the imaginary stances projected himself.

Once these spaces become conscious as well as assumed by the character, the transfer of the existential state and experimenting other realities will begin. "It sometimes occurs to me, that I get so thoroughly absorbed by the film, that I suddenly imagine myself walking round the parks on the screen, or leaning against the railings of the Italian terraces, where Francisca Bertini was pathetically performing, her hair let loose and her arms waving like scarves", (*Ibidem*: 54) or "I believe that if ever the instinct of any goal in life were born in me and if this drive had to be connected with something truly profound, essential and unchangeable within myself, then my body would have to become a wax statue in a panopticon and my life an endless contemplation of the windows of the panorama" (*Ibidem:* 56).

Thus, the films, the theatre and the fair create a parallel reality, enriched from the aesthetic viewpoint and also enlarging it to an overdimension through the artificial element.

The decadent adage: "the world does not exist, all I can see is all that there is" can, to some extent, be identified in this first excerpt from Blecher, as well as on those to follow. The decadents' schopenhauerian manner of looking at *the world as a representation*, still with specific connotations, can also be deciphered in Blecher's text, as the narrator-character seems to have the same outlook, namely not seeing what it is, but what he sees is what really is. This decadent postulate, when properly integrated, can help us interpret Blecher's text. However, in his case one does not encounter either the decadents' pessimism, who were influenced by Schopenhauer's will theory, or discouragement as a result of it. What brings Blecher's texts close to those of the decadents is the excellence of imagery, almost paintlike, found in his work.

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The presence of parallel realities so minutely created by Blecher makes us think of Aristotle's theory of imitation, which, according to the Greek philosopher, is no more than man's capacity of creating fictitious worlds, having their own order of things. These "spectacular" and "decorative" worlds invented by Blecher work according to a simple rule: "in life one should act in a false and ornamental way" (Ibidem:53).

The Blecher cinema hall in *Adventures of the Immediate Reality*, "long and dark, like a sunk submarine", where the front doors were covered with crystal mirrors reflecting a part of the street", offering "a free performance to anyone in the hall", creating the image of an "amazing screen on which the street appeared in a greenish, dreamlike light, with people and carriages moving as if moonstruck in its waves" (Ibidem) reminds of the character, Gavrilescu, in Mircea Eliade's story *With the Gipsy Girls*, who enters a sort of immediate unreality in order to discover his own true identity.

Gavrilescu experiments passing through the three stages that are between the two worlds, symbolically represented in the text by the three gipsy women.

The first of these stages is the Chikay-Bardo state, representing the state of consciousness which a dead man has between the two moments: of death and of reincarnation. While being in the Chikay state, the dead man experiences the contact with the dazzling light, which is a reflection of Buddha. If the soul recognizes the light and is not scared, then it is given the chance to come out of Samsara, to transcend the phenomenal world and to enter Nirvana (the ether). Hence Gavrilescu's tragedy of life is an illusion. If the man who has such an experience does not recognize the light, he falls into the second state, chanyd, in which he meets his own repressions.

Gavrilescu is one who does not recognize the three deities (the three gipsy women), because, if he had recognized them, he would have entered a pre-Nirvana state. Failure to recognize leads to the fall into the third state – sidpa, in which the deceased gets into a new reincarnation which he chooses himself. Gavrilescu will remember Hildegard.

Experiencing death is also one of the recurrent themes in Eliade's prose. Adrian from *In Dionysus Court* experiences the encounter with the dazzling light (the first chikay state), which he does not lose, as it happens with Gavrilescu, the character in *With the Gypsy Girls*. However, he will lose the second state, chanyd, because he looks back.

Of the three states that the dead person's soul has to pass through, the second one is the most frightening, because the soul experiences fear, being afraid to confront its own repressions. Here occurs the tyranny of the forms to which the soul is subjected.

The scene in which Gavrilescu meets his own image in the labyrinth is a symbolic one. He does not recognize his own illusions: his own feelings (the Greek woman), his own intellect (the Jewish woman), and his own inertial form (the Gypsy woman). Both Gavrilescu and Adrian from *In Dionysus Court* lose this second state of consciousness, thus failing to enter the pre-Nirvana state.

The moment when Blecher's character identifies himself with the film characters could be an equivalent of *falling in sidpa*, since he simply chooses a desirable identity. These kinds of choices and searches of the character will also continue in the other novels of Blecher. André Gide's writings were definitely known to Blecher, as the two authors were contemporaries. The attempts of Blecher's characters to build their inner self beyond any dependent relationship, overcoming the constraints and determinations imposed by the illness state, remind of the will showed by Gide's character, Theseus. The burning of the cinema does not mean giving up the search; on

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the contrary, it constitutes a reason for a new attempt to find another identity in the *immediate unreality*.

The wax panopticon replaces those in the film, the narrator identifying himself until becoming one with them, being convinced that this represents: "the only authentic thing in the world, they were forging live themselves ostentatiously, being part of the real air of the world, through their strange and artificial immobility" (*Ibidem:* 56).

The dismal perspective of the world, like a place with wax figures, where the unimaginable terror of the world is expressed, is also present with George Bacovia.
"Lonely I was watching through spy glasses/ Lost in the deserted museum…/ And in the world of spy glasses/ I was trapped in dismal thoughts-/ Wax bodies all around me/ With hideous and sad eyes" (Bacovia, 1976: 56).

The wax figures viewed by Blecher's character " an Austrian archduke with pale and sad complexion", whose face "infinitely more tragic than any true death… a woman wearing black lace garments, with a pale, shining face… and blue eyes, as clear as glass" (Blecher, 2009: 56-57) do not induce in Blecher character the same effect that the wax figures have on Bacovia's lyrical ego: "And then I ran, totally seized with fright/ From the somber, terrifying museum" (Bacovia, 1976: 56), on the contrary, Blecher's character is convinced that: "in the panopticon and only there, there is no contradiction between what I was doing and what is happening" (Blecher, 2009: 56).

The nostalgia for the panopticon will be felt like a permanent state by Blecher's character, the panorama of the fair will satisfy, at a certain point in his life, this need for the artificiality: "in the panorama of the fair, I identify the common place of all these waves of nostalgia, spread throughout the world, which being put together makes up its particular own essence" (Ibidem). His admiration for one of his childhood friends – Paul, will also be driven by the same obsession of the narrator-character for the imitation of existence, an occurrence which this time is present in the image of the variety show in town: "I still loved Paul for the secret life he was leading, beyond his daily activities, of which I could only get echoes, being whispered with stupefaction by the great people around me. Paul would spend all the money he was earning on women, at the variety show" (*Ibidem*). Thus, humankind is desirable in the context in which one relates with its perfect replicas. Life is mirrored in a distorted way within all these spaces, intending to capture the essence of life.

The attraction for all these places will somehow end the moment when, being inside the theatre, the narrator-character experiences a strange meeting with another character, who seems the very personification of the disease he will suffer from. Not accidentally, this experience was followed by an attempt to suicide and the first attack felt as "losing a great amount of my own self" (*Ibidem*:112).

At the end of the novel *Adventures in the Immediate Unreality* the narrator-character experiences the first conscious crisis on the one hand, and on the other hand, he clearly expresses his wish to get rid of the inner self which was given to him: "it would be great if I could replace that little joyous dummy! In the middle of the books and balls, surrounded by clean objects, placed properly on a blue sheet of paper. Knock! Knock! Knock! How nice, how good it feels in the window! Knock! Knock! Knock! Red, green, blue; balls, books and paints. Knock! Knock! Knock! What a beautiful autumn day!" *(Ibidem*:113-114)… This is also the point when the narrator, in a kirkegaardian manner, becomes aware that h is not meant to be other than what he is, nothing else: "There is actually a category of things in the world to which I have never been meant to belong, uncaring and mechanical dummies, strong boys who never have a headache. Around me, through the trees, in the sunlight a vivid and abundant stream

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was flowing, full of life and purity. I was meant to stay at its verge for ever, soiled by darkness and by weakness from fainting fits," (*Ibidem*:115) or: "for the first time I felt my head tightly squeezed in my skull. A terrible and painful imprisonment." (*Ibidem*:122).

The immediate effect of being aware of his state is that his inner self becomes free to imagine the outer world according to his own perceptions. So, the illusion that he has, imagining the view of a huge bunch of red dahlias instead of the scarf on the bedside table, relates with Karl Jesper's theory, according to which secondary illusions can be interpreted as being influenced by the person's background or current situation: "Those red dahlias, so beautiful…/ -Which dahlias?/ - What do you mean…, which dahlias? I got up and rushed to the shelf. Thrown over a pile of books, lay a red scarf" (*Ibidem*:119).

According to Jesper's theory, Blecher's character seems to have two options: either he falls into desperation, or he takes a step towards what the German philosopher called Transcendence. Therefore, by choosing the second option the character confronts his own limitless freedom – his own state of being, finally experiencing the authentic being. The character experiments what is beyond the space and time of our world.

Also, the end of the text highlights two major problems that Blecher will develop in his following novels: the character's "nausea" and awareness of his own death. "Nausea" brings Blecher's character close to Antoine Roquentin, Jean Paul Sartre's character from the famous novel by the same name, due to the fact that both heroes experience this feeling, as a result of their own state of being. In addition, Blecher is heideggerian, as the end of the *Adventures in the Immediate Unreality* triggers a long line of interrogations about death – seen from the perspective of someone being in his full life: "when my hand is trying to write this strange, incomprehensible and utterly simple thing, it seems to me for a moment, similar to a convict who is aware for a second, unlike everybody else around him of the death awaiting him (and wishes his turmoil were different from all the other turmoil in the world, succeeding in turning him free), that out of all this, something warm and intimate, a new and authentic fact will emerge, which will clearly bring me down to my essence, like to a name, and will resound in me like a unique, unprecedented tone, which will be that of the meaning of my life" (*Ibidem:*128).

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