SELF- SEARCHING IN MAX BLECHER'S NOVELS

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Abstract: *This aproach has a starting point in Dominique Maingueneau' s statement in his Literary Discourse. The protagonist finds himself in an eternal self-searching as he declines both his identity and background, being secluded due to his incurable deasease, fighting and trying endlessly to create a new identity of his own, the so called ,,paratopie". In Blecher' s case, the identity of his protagonist might be temporarily suspended by creating imaginary spots, but it' s never lost. The protagonist constantly rejects his own group, a group of ill people belonging to the real world. He finds himself reinventing his own world in countless attemptions of creativity, a new space for himself. We can define Blecher's protagonists through Kirkegaard' s concepts used in his The Sickness Unto Death as they all obviously decline to admit who they are or they desperately want to get rid of their tormenting self.*

Keywords: *self-searching, paratopie, literary spaces.*

In the Heideggerian view being authentic means being aware of your own finality. It may sometimes be a crisis of identity. A common place not only in modern and postmodern literature - the crisis of identity can be identified in the classical character Ulysses who tells the Cyclop that his name is Nobody. His modern counterpart, Joyce's character, Leopold Bloom, fights his own fears while undergoing a crisis himself.

The first scene that opens Blecher's narrative, *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, presents what the writer himself calls "a crisis" and the literary critics completed "of identity". "When I stare at something on the wall for a long time I find myself wandering who I am and where I am. That's when I feel the lack of my inner self from afar, as if I had become a completely different person for a moment. This abstract character and my real self fight for my convictions with equal forces" (Blecher, 2009: 19).

The novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* is nothing but the narrative (story) of shaping an identity, of the ultimate and desperate attempt to shape an identity, a different one form the present one. The purpose of this narrative is therapeutic, being revealed directly by one of the auctorial statements of the narrator- character: "When I keep thinking of these things, trying in vain to blend them into something I could call myself (...); when my hand tries to write this weird incomprehensible simplicity, then it seems to me, for a moment, just like a convict who briefly becomes aware of the awaiting death, unlike everybody around him (and would like his struggle to be different from all the other struggles in the world, managing to free him) that all this will suddenly engender a new authentic fact in a warm and intimate manner which will define me clearly as a name and will echo inside me in a unique outstanding tone, which is that of the meaning of my life..." (Ibidem: 42)

In *Literary Discourse. Paratopie and Enunciation Scene*, Maingueneau identifies three types of paratopies: identity, spatial and temporal paratopies.

The identity paratopie, metaphorically rewritten in Dominique Maingueneau' s terms - "my group is not my group" (Maingueneau, 2007: 106) can be identified in the

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mentioned novel by Max Blecher, the dilemma of the narrator-character, from the beginning of the novel, is related to his inner self.

With Blecher, the identity paratopie becomes maximal because from a physical point of view his characters cannot belong to humanity being excluded because of the illnesses they suffer from: "I had many opportunities of encountering such desperate cases, doomed beforehand. In a sanatorium in Switzerland an old woman consumed by a terrible pancreatic cancer she had no idea about (she used to say she had a little acidity which made her stomach sour after meals), in another case a young lady who a few days before being operated on (which she hadn't been told yet) was planning a voyage in the south of France, and other cases when those around a sick person knew the situation was extremely serious while the patient completely ignoring everything would go on living in a slight dizziness and in the unconsciousness of his petty daily concerns" (Blecher, 2009: 12).

In the case of Blecherian characters the inner self can be suspended – by creating some paratopical literary spaces, but it cannot be lost. "The true anxiety of Blecher's character is revealed only now: and it does not consist in the fear of losing one's identity but in the helplessness of doing it. Being but yourself: here is the existential suffering of the hero" (Manolescu, 1983: 74). Thus the Blecherian character rejects the group of sick people in the topical society, does not recognise it as being his own group often tempting to configure some relatively topical spaces. In Kierkegaard's terms, Blecher's character might be defined by what the Danish philosopher calls in *The Sickness Unto Death*, "the despair of not wanting to be himself or wanting to get rid of himself".(Kierkegaard, 2006: 95) In this sense, the narrator-character in Blecher's novels imagines himself in a Kafkian way as either a tree or a red scarf in a dahlias bouquet or a little joyful dummy in a shopwindow. Blecher's character becomes aware of his own despair, finally understanding that his inner self cannot be lost, but suspended through hallucinations and visions at the most.

The hallucinations of Blecher's characters make reference to Karl Jaspers' thesis, according to which paranoia is a consequence of biological changes. The character in *The Lit up Burrow* said: "when I am alone and close my eyes, or when in the middle of the conversation I brush my cheek with my hand and I squeeze my eyelids, I find once again the same intimate and well-known cavern, the same cosy burrow lit up by blurred spots and images which is the inside of my body..." (Blecher, 2009: 1) The biographical method proposed by Jaspers can have its correspondent in literature in what Mircea Eliade called "oceanographic method" or the thorough study of life as if we looked at it through an "inverted field glass" (Radu Petrescu). The inner eye used by the narrator-character to see inside himself does not betray the character's feelings but his hallucinations and visions. Going back to the beginning of the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, we easily notice that the narrator-character has the experience of some visual phenomena without the presence of some sensorial stimuli, thus, according to Jaspers' theory, the form becomes more important than what the patient sees, which is the content of the hallucination. These visions-forms create the world of "immediate unreality", through which the narrator saves himself, managing to organise it coherently, just like the one he used to live in.

Blecher suspends death or fear of death as Mihail Sebastian stated, reaching the strange effect of an optimism of resignation. The narrator-character accepts his status acquired during his illness. The ego of Blecher's character is suppressed, illness is not an exception, as with Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, it is an event that pulls you away from the daily automatism. Thus, for Blecher, the biological becomes an important

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reality, any of its struggles revealing the joy of still being alive. In this sense, Blecher is Heideggerian because the concept of death is defined by that of life, even if the stance is always the same – illness.

The perspective of the narrator-character in *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, obviously relates Blecher to George Bacovia. Blecher's performance stands out. In *The Lit up Burrow* the exacerbated sensitivity of the narrator becomes evident in every fragment of the book: "Every moment we imagine life and life remains valid for that moment only and only in the way we imagine it then. Thus, to dream and to live is the same thing. The moment the dream unfolds, its events are valid only for nocturnal moments of sleep, just as in daily life the thoughts and events are valid only for the moment they take place and in the way we imagined them then. Still, if we tried to believe that events are independent from us, it is sufficient that in a tragic moment we close our eyes and we regain an inner independence so rotten and hermetic that we can place in its darkness any memory, any thought and any image we want, we can place in the middle of the tragic moment a joke, an anecdote or a book title or the topic of a film".(Blecher, 2009: 30) Actually, both in the consciousness of the author and in that of Blecher's character, there is a permanent fight between appearance and essence, or better said between immediate unreality and reality.

Blecher's character, Emanuel, from *Scarred Hearts*, lives a similar experience to that of Hans Castrop from the novel *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. The sanatorium becomes for him, as well as for Blecher's character, the reality he relates to, the only one actually. The discourse of both characters sometimes becomes Kafkian. Suffering from tuberculosis, Kafka himself addressed the doctor in this way: "Kill me or else you'll be a killer!" In one way or another Blecher's and Mann's characters suffer just like Josef K from Kafka's *The Trial*, they are locked away: " Josef K must have been defamed by someone because, without having hurt anyone, one day he got arrested". (Kafka, 2007: 1) All the three characters live the illusion of freedom: the sanatorium is a reorganised space, camouflaged, mimesis of immediate reality/ unreality, and Josef K's trial is held only on Sundays creating for the character an image of pseudo-freedom. On the other hand, this isolation gives them the possibility of becoming aware of their own limits, finalities.

The despair of getting rid of himself is perhaps best rendered by Blecher in *The Lit up Burrow*, through the dying character that does not see the point of receiving the eucharist, in fact his discourse stands for the refusal to join the group he is part of.

The retreat of the character from *The Lit up Burrow* in "resting places" – the outskirts of the town, the river banks, the garden with elegantly mown lawns, the country lanes – undoubtedly represent the attempt to escape from the group of sick people whom he does not wish to identify himself with. The way the character perceives reality – as illogical – is also an expression of rejecting the group. The white of the plaster – as a reference point of the topical society he is part of suffocates the world of the character, the only chromatic pseudo-deviation he indulges himself in is red, this alternation actually revealing the same *impossibility of the I of being only I* or in Maingueneau's terms – *the I* does not allow *the he* to manifest itself: " One day, a slight change appeared in the scenery: whereas all the objects in the entire square were still white, on the Bank the dome became red..." (Blecher, 2009: 12)

What the exterior does not offer to the enunciator in *The Lit up Burrow* is provided by the interior – a relatively topical space, where the character finds his peace: "... I often wonder with great excitement what is the meaning of this continuous inner enlightenment and what percentage of the world it represents..." (Ibidem: 67)

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What generates pain – the physical side – engenders a *relatively topical space*. Thus the inside of the body is perceived as a new world where the character travels, as well as the centre of all the dreams. All the relatively topical spaces will stem from here and one will be able to recognise its synonymous space outside – rooms, caves, cellars, etc.

"The moment I write, on small obscure canals, in winding streams, through dark cavities carved in flesh, with a small gargle in the rhythm of the pulse, my blood floods the darkness of my body, flowing through the flesh, nerves and bones." (Ibidem: 68)

The Lit up Burrow – "the world of reality that lies beneath the skin" (Ibidem: 70) is the paratopie of the one who enunciates in this text.

Blecher perfectly matches the definition of the writer given by Maingueneau, in the same study, as "a person who does not find his place and has to create the realm of his own piece of writing on its very absence." (Maingueneanu, *op. cit.*, 105) Obviously the group of sick people imposed by the topical society is not recognised by the writer, in the literary space, in sickness and in pain he does not see but a transient situation that he considers of "no illustrious status such as the noble and admirable inspiration in art". (Blecher, 2009: 74) Another metaphor used by Blecher to describe its paratopie is that of the game "pictures to copy" which "when it is badly played and the paper slightly moves during copying, the figures are distorted. It is the point of view, surprisingly new, of the lunatic for whom, while copying life, reality shifted a few centimetres away, that is 'lost his mind' and produced such extraordinary forms." (Ibidem: 74-75) Thus, the way Blecher uses in order to relate at the same time to *the extremely topical society* and to *the relatively topical literary space* which becomes a copy of the topical society – a reality that *has lost its mind giving birth to new extraordinary shapes* – is what actually fuels the act of Blecher's creation. The text of *The Lit up Burrow* will be written according to the recipe proposed by its author: "Well, I noticed this is what makes up the ordeal of suffering, and the conclusion was simple, that is in order to get rid of pain you mustn't "get rid of" it, on the contrary you must "deal with" it as carefully as possible. As carefully and closely as possible. Until the observation of its smallest fibres." (Blecher, 2009: 77) Blecher's writing depicts in detail the suffering, the origin of all paratopies being here. For instance, here is how the restrictions of the topical society he comes from, *of the topical I*, manage to create, paradoxically, by becoming aware of them, relatively topical spaces, paratopies, in which *the he* manifests himself in all his splendour: " I now knew the 'shape' of pain and all I could do was, with my eyes closed, to follow it as a musical piece and to try and carefully 'listen to' all tonalities and intensity levels of pain the same way I followed the modulations and diversities of a concert piece with the same repetitions and the same themes, that I discovered in the composition of pain just like in the music I listened to." (Ibidem: 78) So here is one of the stances of the *nomadic he* manifested as a result of becoming aware of the topical reality. One more stance generated by becoming aware of the *I that is only I* is the one in which it identifies with the comedians who confront superior characters:

"In the comedies I often saw at the cinema, what is comical and makes us laugh is that situation when a strong muscular character fights against another one that is skinny but cunning enough to avoid the strikes, such as the fight between an American policeman and the frail Charlot who always escapes him. The essence of the comical situation lies in this imbalance, in this disproportion of forces which opposes a powerful self-confident one to a weak doubtful one. And this is the situation in my

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illness when a lot of complications appeared. Day by day, a new pain and suffering, day by day one more ache and one more loss of hope, all fighting an exhausted body which only had some force of incomprehensible resistance, created the disequilibrium of forces that generates hilarious situations. When I had an extension fixed and it started to hurt, I felt like laughing" (Ibidem: 80) or a different one "It was a new matter of reality from which now rose the town with me in its centre, undiscovered, fresh, weightless and with no organs, like a mere contour line of myself" (Ibidem: 81). The only way to escape the destined reality is to reject the group, rejection that finally has the desired effect: " In the end the sick person has to die or there must be an improvement that allows him to keep being 'ill' ... and I got this last promise" (Ibidem: 82). In fact, the sick person state in which the *I* is allowed to stay triggers the nomadism of the *he*.

In *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, the cinema hall, the waxworks and the fair also become relatively topical spaces. In these spaces the *I* becomes visible and it is characterised by an unusual freedom: "I used to become so absorbed in the film that I imagined myself walking in the parks on the screen or leaning against the railing of the Italian cafés where Francisca Bertini performed, with her hair hanging loose and with her arms waving like some scarfs in the wind" (Blecher, 2009: 53-54) or "I believe that, if the instinct of a purpose in life ever took shape inside me and if this tendency should be linked to something truly profound, essential and irreparable inside me, then my body should become a wax figure in an exhibition and my life a mere endless contemplation of the surrounding windows" (Ibidem: 56). In fact, the narrator-character admits in the same text how easily he can become somebody else: "This shift of mental states took place under different circumstances. It came stealthily and suddenly changed my inner body" (Ibidem: 63).

The homodiegetic narrator of the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* expressed his intention of creating an identity for himself, of acquiring a NAME through writing, through a story. The act of writing as a way of regaining one's self turns out to be a central approach to Blecher's biography and prose. The crisis of identity is only apparently provoked by certain places, its main cause is, in fact, the infliction of "the I that is only I", as Nicolae Manolescu stated.

Blecher's character desperately tries to build his own identity, yet he fails lamentably because it is not in a human being's power to choose his identity, but only to accept the one he was given. He rebuilds his own identity through writing. This is the ultimate strategy to regain his identity and it is also the only feasible one, because the narrative organisation of memories by remembering things gives coherence and uniqueness to the self, similarity to the previous stances (child, adolescent, adult), as much as possible for a person with identity deficiencies.

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