

The Imagery of Max Blecher's Text

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Abstract

Using Hans Robert Jauss' grid, the present paper goes through the three levels of reading (reading, re-reading, post-reading) in order to understand the meanings of the literary work and to discover the metatextual and the hypertextual significances of the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* by Max Blecher.

Key words: imaginary, discourse, psychoanalysis, ipseity, Magritte's paintings

A book is the Philosopher's stone that requires to be discovered by the neophyte who climbs the steps of knowledge, initiating himself into a game of transcendence from reality to fiction through *corpus callosum*, resorting to guided thinking that becomes phantasmal thinking through the act of reading. The psychoanalyst Gustave Jung defined the concept of "metaphorical, symbolic, imaginative" thinking (Samuels, 1986: 91), associating it with the image, whose interpretation lies on the mutual relation between the conscious and the subconscious. However, what part of the ego will authentically live the aesthetic experience, what instance of the human psyche will enjoy the privilege of the literary delight? Of course, the literary product imposes a certain attitude on us – lucid, reflective, meditative, dreamy, lunatic, and why not, playful, the meeting of the text enabling the epiphany to occur. Thus, the reader transfigured into an alchemist will decipher this sacred object even more carefully and, pushed by curiosity, will save his species from ingratitude and ignorance. He will take the role of the actor, a bit shy at the beginning, who listens to the voice of the text, and then he will subject it to his own requirements, reporting it to his personal vision of the world. He will become the "critical spider" and the cobweb woven will be "the critical vibratext" (Ursa 2005: 7) that facilitates the decoding of the literary work message.

Like a vigilant observer of literary writing, the reader always goes back to the texts that have marked his existence and offered him the pleasure of choice, of complexity and complicity of finding himself in his latent states, willingly encrypted and locked in the temple of his being. It is important to remember the plea for the multiple reading invoked by Vladimir Nabokov, who tells a great truth: "One cannot read a book, one can only re-read it", statement that Matei Călinescu turns into a paradox, being an amusing rephrasing of the famous hermeneutical circle: to understand the whole, one must understand the parts, but to understand each part, one must previously understand the whole." (2003: 34).

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An eloquent example is the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* written by Max Blecher, which requires re-readings for reliving the discursive imagery, that capacity of the verbal matter to transpose the visual matter. Resorting to a playful exercise dictated by impulse, instinct and appealing to the voluntary memory, the reader tries to remember what he has already forgotten and what has come back to him has matched his expectations: "the imaginary, the surrealistic, oneiric or mythical eye" (Manolescu, 2001: 561).

By adopting Hans Robert Jauss' grid, the present paper goes through the three levels of reading (reading, re-reading, post-reading) in order to understand the meanings of the literary work and to discover the metatextual and the hypertextual significances of the novel. The fragment in focus here captures the visit the narrator-character pays to Edda, moment that ennobles the protagonist, enlightens him in terms of his introspection. By calling forth the prototype of the ideal woman, the character lives the present moment somewhere between reality and unreality, which offers him the honourable position of being the messenger of his own reveries.

Thus, the first reading presupposes comprehension that has led to a progressive orientation of what the discourse tries to convey. The initial reception impresses through the unusual, almost absurd, situation in which the character is and, out of the desire to break out of his own body, he is capable of surprising visions. Moreover, a question arises: who has never imagined oneself being a tree, yes... a tree from the top of which to be able to see the whole world? The view is always changing; the bird's eye view offers stunning perspectives on the reality that are progressively turning into miracles. Thus, from the treetop, one comes to see red dahlias, and, the moment the frame of reference moves several centimetres away, one notices with stupefaction that they are really red scarves. This is, on short, the intense experience of the character in "*Adventures*" who strongly believes in an immediate reality called unreality. Ada Brăvescu brings together the concepts "unreality", "fantastic", "lucidity", when she deals with Blecher's universe, invoking some literary critics' opinions, and concludes that Blecher's world lies on "the exasperating lucidity, hallucination and dementia and last but not least on the dream" (2011: 68). In fact, this sequence, or, any other, randomly taken from the debut novel, is an authentic representation of what the title allows us to understand: "the fantastic reality of things, this reality that is itself an appearance, is closer to the ultimate, essential reality than the everyday factual reality that disturbs the hero" (Ionescu 1936: 2).

Re-reading the fragment has led to an in-depth interpretation, in the context of a retrospective orientation in which the language has acquired another valence, related to the multitude of the textual approaches. The hypostasis of the character in the image of a tree offers his pantheistic vision to soar spiritually by expelling the being way beyond the skin, by exacerbating the ego. Paradoxically, the man reminds of the vertical position of the tree that soars to the sky, but this ascent is obstructed by fears and complexes dictated by an unstable subconscious.

The revival occurs suddenly and the energy transfer is visible, at least at the level of wishes: “calm, confident, full of light... I wanted, at least once, to come in front of someone complete and unfaltering... Silent and superb like a tree” (Blecher 2014: 86). The road to oneself is sinuous, labyrinthine, and full of obstacles. It reveals uncertainty, the character’s timidity: the heavy wooden door, the cold darkness of the room, the strange clink of the bead curtain, the slow steps, the abstract being that advances on the impulse of one’s thoughts and leaves behind the real self. The state of abstruse loneliness offers the primordial image of the ascetic on the edge of the world: “the sensation of extreme balance, on top of the pyramid of chairs.” (Ibid.) Re-reading the text captures the two hypostases of the character, the abstract ego and the real ego that coexist within the same body, but for several moments the identity split occurs. Looking back on the text, at the level of the phantasmal thought, this moment overlaps with the beginning of the novel, which presents the schizoid episode of the human being, “the abstract character” and “my real character” (Blecher 2014:19), by focusing on a point on the wall. Thus, one learns about the protagonist’s obsession with breaking out of his physical body and with creating another identity capable of giving his interior balance back. With Blecher, otherness is not possible, as Nicolae Manolescu or Simona Sora claim, bringing up Blecher’s pain due to “ipseity” (Manolescu 1998: 573) or to “idem-identity” (*mêmeté* – concept taken from Paul Ricoeur) (Sora 2008: 185). This withdrawal within oneself causes an ontological crisis, an existential confusion kept by the inconsistency of the material that cheats the lost eye. The ontological game of splitting, and then of egos’ overlapping is possible in a cursed or favourable topos that entails a distorted Kronos.

Time loses its coordinate, it starts oscillating, contracts and expands until it liquefies and physically and mentally abuses the character that lives in the immediate unreality. The interior voice shapes the alter-ego that is having an absurd discussion with Edda when he confesses his secret of being a tree:

- ‘Edda, do you know what I am?’
- ‘What are you?’
- ‘A tree, Edda, a tree. (Blecher 2014: 87)

But the thoughts are repressed, and Edda’s stare intimidates him, therefore he looks for a subterfuge to mask the time syncope between them. The epiphany of noticing on the shelf a huge bouquet of flowers is redeeming for the one who persistently refuses communication. He resorts to minimal gestures that make up such a symbolic non-verbal language that the message sent should resonate mentally. The visual inconsistency discourages him, cineaste flashes disturb his sensations and perceptions. He looks away to some place and sets his eyes again on the revealing object, making sure that this is a reference point in reality. Certainty soon becomes uncertainty, and he doubts that his body will react to exterior stimuli due to the self-imposed censorship. The uttered words amaze not only the interlocutor but also the character that had simulated the dialogue. He

admires the red dahlias on the shelf, but Edda denies the existence of these flowers. The reflex of touching his own vision certifies the uncertainty and he finds, to his surprise, instead of the dahlias a red scarf. There occurs the ultimate split between soul and body, and he is painfully aware of the illusion of the interior balance outlined by the image of the tree. Time is revengeful on the one who wants to dominate it; now it accelerates with the biological rhythm of the heartbeats similar to the smashing hammerings, causing the character's immobility, turning him into an immovable object, a statue. And yet, these sorrowful experiences are so authentic that the character's existence goes beyond the limits of the artlessness, the natural, the concrete, and transposes him into the metaphysic, into that secondary artificial reality, much more palpable than the primary reality.

The post-reading may offer the reader the most eloquent critical vision on the discourse, that is the text has been projected on the frame of the variations of horizon that have marked the range of interpretations. The language Max Blecher adopts is suggested/ insinuated and, although the words removed from the texture of the page are devoid of connotative meanings, reunited in the economy of the phrase, they become symbol lexemes. This is possible due to the reconstruction of this literary jigsaw that has the capacity of rendering visionary sequences, surrealistic paintings in which the narrator's reveries are transposed. Real paintings of words with a psychoanalytic substrate are obtained. Thus, "the surrealism of Blecher's literary work goes through a pictorial channel into a structural aesthetic oneiric character, coloured by expressionist marks." (Brăvescu, 2011: 214). This conversion of the word into image seems to be more like a republication of the *alphabet-paintings* of René Magritte, in which he confronts words with images. The painter wants to break the general principle according to which words represent the objects they define. One can notice an absurdity concerning the connection between reality, object and the name it represents, but let us not forget the fact that Surrealism is the artistic movement that promotes the game of the random associations, so that the effect should be undiscovered and surprising. The creation method is the hazard, and the invented world belongs to the surreal, mistaking dream for reality. One may find the same vision of the world in Blecher's novels too, when the character's two ontological dimensions overlap and he creates his own world: "It is, I think, the same thing to live or to dream about an experience" (Blecher 2014: 241).

Thus, the plastic works *The Lost world*, *The Book of Dreams*, *Two Secrets* or *The Betrayal of Images* make up a bizarre poetic world. If dahlias may prove to be a red scarf, why should Magritte's pipe painted in a surrealistic way in *The Betrayal of Images* not be the object in itself, but a presupposed representation that hides behind symbols encrypted to an amateur beholder. It is about the obsession of the veil that distorts reality, because every painting or every word is debunked by what is beyond the borders imposed to the visual. Everything starts from the

absurd assumption of the artist (either a writer or a painter) of considering the image of a reality the reality itself.

Magritte's paintings underline, in fact, the existing difference between the object and its two-dimensional illustration. The artist resorts to two representations, the over-dimensional pipe projected on a background of timelessness and the discourse: "*This is not a pipe.*" We will accept both the object and the statement because we refer to a familiar code of meanings. By separating these two graphic representations, we get another side of reality: the words do not make up a pipe, and neither does the painted object represent a definition of a pipe. So, why can we not accept the fact that Edda's red scarf is a bouquet of red dahlias after all? This is where the paradox of contiguity, of the object, image and word play forms itself with Max Blecher.

The correspondences between Blecher's text and Magritte's paintings are the proof of the *language universalities* (Dacoromania 2002-2003: 15) (literary/pictorial), taking into account the fact that the imagery base of the analysed novels is one exclusively surrealistic. Both Blecher's literary work and Magritte's paintings shock any beholder by direct confrontation with the unusual situation and the ambiguous object displayed in the world prone to unreality/surreal. For these to be thoroughly understood, the beholder is required to know the aesthetic receptiveness capable of going beyond the normality, the concrete and the customary line. Blecher's red dahlias and Magritte's pipe are objects removed from reality, but the context of their manifestation gives them the status of symbol that attracts the eyes and thus, the intrinsic will is born, the will to touch them with an invisible finger, exploring parallel worlds. We want to discover that Borges' Aleph, the inhabited interior of the object so that we can capture within a circular vision the expanding universe. In his research, "Art and Visual Perception" Rudolf Arnheim speaks about eyesight as an active exploration: "we go to remote places which we feel, catch, search their surface, follow their outline, explore their texture. The perception of the shapes is an especially active process" (2011: 52). And then the beholder/spectator/ reader goes beyond the visual area and representation and places himself within this world, he vibrates, breathes with the artistic performance, the aesthetic experience being fully accomplished. Synthesising, the knowledgeable eye (aisthesis), the recognizing eye (anamnesis) will determine the affective involvement of the subject of the eye, allowing his own disturbed passions to run free, passions whose pleasant release makes him feel at peace with himself, as if he has recovered from an illness (Katharsis)" (Jauss).

To return to Max Blecher's novel, one must notice the fact that this interpretative exercise, following the reading steps outlined by Hans Robert Jauss, has underlined the imagery power of the discourse that is assimilated to the surreal through the "holy trinity: infantile ingenuity/dream/lunacy" (Horodincă 1970: 72). To conclude, let us add that any critical act is eventually a possible

reading that resembles Roscharch's test, the text functioning like the "ink spot" (Ursa 2005: 16) that needs to be deciphered.

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