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SUBJECTIVENESS AS AN IMPRESSIVE THEORETICAL PROPOSITION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

In the strong urge to study memories, to examine the relation between culture and memory, especially in the context of telling the story, I have recognized a guidepost in the "insomnia" of my investigative wandering through the chosen texts of this paper, yet a slippery path on which I tread and trip on the ambivalent attempts to make some classification of a non-fictional and fictional autobiographical letter. After countless times I peek in the theoretically-literal texts that deal with the thesis for its double, "Janusian", referent-fictional origin; I go over the affirmations on its historical and geographical veracity, psychological credibility and authenticity. And while my outlook toward its primary identification is seemingly plain: for me it represents a story for the person who signed it, and until then, he the signee.the author, shares with it a more complex connection. In every personal story the experience of the very person has been sublimated in the text, experience that is not solely a personal experience, but an experience of a culture, language, education, Otherness.

Keywords: Storytelling, privacy, referentiality towards the public, "autobiographical conspiracy"

Introduction

According to Jacques Derrida, autobiography, which acts as a strange kind of mediator between philosophy and literature, a conclusion the author came to by curiously exploring the roadmap to "something in writing that is neither one nor the other" (Derrida:1992;34), which is neither strictly literature nor philosophy, is perhaps the least inappropriate name, for it remains the most enigmatic, the most open, even today. What irresistibly attracts me, peering through the keyhole of the secret chamber filled with the shadows of individual and collective myths, is the problem of human subjectivity as one of the most striking theoretical premises of autobiographical discourse, but as a concept that, with its problematic nature, transcends the line of interest in autobiography in the traditional literary-institutional sense, or speaking more in philosophical terms, how to address my environment of literary texts in order to understand "human subjectivity". In front of me are pages of a written text that narrates life as an eternal coming, a return to oneself, as Derrida would say, but I still strive to start the discussion away from the strict aspect of the author's life, so as not to get stuck in the shallows of the subjective "auto" (αὐτός) and "bio" (βίος), and at the expanse of the dimension of writing that has very often been excluded from the interests of the multitude of texts that make up the corpus of autobiographical theory. It is to the "grapho" (γράφειν) that I try to give the greatest importance, but again I am not entirely convinced that this is where autobiography begins, here where the autobiographical element overcomes the interest in the details of one's own life, history, and begins to speak about the meaning of autobiographical thought in which the paradox of human subjectivity is conceptualized.

In Derrida's thinking about autobiography, subjectivity as a concept refers to an internal psychological space, which in its topological content is determined by a series of mental subconcepts, named as identity, consciousness, rationality, will, thought, feeling, understanding, perception, intuition, intention, etc. However, the dominant impression is that the conceptualization of autobiography, in Derrida's thinking, significantly violates the primordial boundary between interiority and exteriority: so, the "autonomous" inside one's own thought becomes contaminated by the "heteronymous" outside of one's own life. I think that this understanding of the primordial disruption of the boundary between inside and outside, provokes a reconceptualization of subjectivity, mostly through the argument that each individual subject should be understood not through previously given ideas about how the inner-psychic space should be structured, but much more by thinking about the way in which the external-life circumstances of each of the individual forms fundamentally influence their characteristic responses to those same circumstances.

The "Specular Structure" of Autobiographical Writing

Where is that mysterious place from which I could begin the narration of life, while simultaneously inscribing in metahistory with words the existential understanding of human subjectivity, based on the difficulties that encompass the actual experiences and events of one's life? Thinking about the problem anew brings me back to Derrida, to his thoroughly grounded work on the conceptualization of autobiography. Namely, Derrida is known for inventing many new words, neologisms, as a way, on the one hand, to encompass traditional philosophical problems, but on the other hand, to rename them, illuminating their fundamental shortcomings. One of the many neologisms he invented in connection with autobiography is the word "heterothanatography". Whereas autobiography denotes "the life of the self", the neologism "heterothanatography" denotes the opposite, i.e. "the death of the other", viewed from a new and provocative aspect of autobiography – its reconceptualization, the second term, the neologism, is set as a condition for the possibility of autobiography (Clark: 2011; 2). In a deconstructivist approach to writing, such work first and foremost assumes the placement of the process on the basis of autobiographical research, thereby introducing the anonymous parts essential for autobiographical discourse: "self–other" and "life–death."

The part of the truth that is preserved and separated from the wide circle of countless human small and large truths, becomes the central point in the autobiographical discourse on which the individual truth, or even the truth of a time, rests. Everything can be changed, but the core or its spirit remains like a distant whisper that I listen to with unusual pleasure. In the voice that whispers calmly and dignifiedly to me, I recognize the eternal narrator of the story and life turned towards all the deep truths and great secrets. At the same time, I have a strong impression that the narrator in the autobiographical text knows much more than what he tells, because his divine face, illuminated by the Olympian perspective of absolute knowledge, sees much more than I, as a listener (reader), need to know. And I am aware that the entire infinity of human existence at one important moment can be perceived by the eye of the storyteller, but it cannot be identically conveyed in the story intended for the reader. The position of the author who narrates is always between the immense mass of the objective world and the readers to whom he narrates. So, no matter how much he builds his story on the basis of everyday life, truth and history, autobiography can never be only about facts, because the narrating subject takes into account the interest of the reader while narrating and his possibilities to capture what is being presented to him. In order to maintain such interest, autobiographical narration has a rhythm of calm, serious and harmonious speech that envelops us with an atmosphere of pleasant swaying in an uninterrupted interval that lasts from the beginning to the end of the autobiographical text. And just as the author's life, trusting the author's word, becomes mirrored in the autobiographical text, so he, the author, becomes simultaneously object and subject in his own discourse. Philip De Man refers to this strange performative self-division as the "specular structure" of autobiographical writing. He points out the impossibility, primarily because of this performative dimension of autobiography, of classifying it taxonomically as a genre, but that this also undermines the authority of the author as a subject who guarantees total and complete self-knowledge. Arguing on this problem, De Man highlights it not only as a requirement in romantic autobiographies, but also in most contemporary autobiographical texts. "The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals certain self-knowledge - it does not - but that the autobiographical text shows in a striking way the impossibility of closure and totalization (that is, the impossibility of returning to what was) of all textual systems made of tropological substitutions" (De Man: 1984;71).

I, You, He: the process of creating identity

The identity of the narrator and the main character in an autobiographical text, as one of the conditions that an autobiography presupposes in order to be called an autobiography according to its definition, is most often indicated by the use of the first person. In this regard, I would like to refer to those elements of the definition that the French theorist Philippe Lejeune highlights as decisive for every autobiographical text, because they alone make a strict distinction between autobiography and its related genres. We are talking about the element "identity of the narrator and the main character" within the category of the Position of the narrator and the element "identity of the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator" from the category of the Situation of the author, conditions that

Lejeune says do not allow for either a transitional form or breadth. "Identity exists or does not exist. There is no possibility of gradation, so even the slightest doubt itself entails a negative conclusion" (Legen: 2000;203).

But the concept of this meticulous Philip Lejeune discussion, which is based on the attempt to refine and clarify as much as possible the terms that autobiography as a genre encompasses, provocatively problematizes several aspects of its definition. As a basic one, I will emphasize the aspect of the clarity of the components that make up the definition of autobiography, which was actually of interest to several of the classical theorists from the last century. In their discussions, they most often discussed the relationship between biography and autobiography, leaving rather theoretical questions open and unresolved, because they mostly repeated facts that were already obvious and known. Why is this so? The answer is clear: because they did not put themselves in the position of the modern reader who, in the diversity of autobiographical texts whose common content is the retelling of someone's life, tried to establish a distinction of a certain order. I agree with Lejeune, who very critically perceives the situation in which the one who tries to define autobiography finds himself, because he simultaneously specifies and relativizes in his definition. In fact, the one who defines is trying to specify, as theoretically autobiography should specify, the relationship of a certain historical and temporal period in the history of literature, in which a period the personality of its author is situated and the development of that personality in the period that is described chronologically. However, this does not mean that the objective view of events and personalities is completely protected from any touch of subjective creative infection, because the narrator of the autobiography, i.e. the author by definition, simultaneously sees and encompasses everything that was and is at the moment of narration and suddenly captures himself narrating with a voice whose tone and rhythm are so reshaped as to appeal to the reader's consciousness. In this way, a double role is obtained for the narrator, because he is both here and there, because first he shows himself as completely separated from the medium for which he is narrating, the readers, and then he completely identifies with that medium, and thus a double position is created, specifying and relativizing the one who is trying to define the autobiography. The aim is not, as Lejeune says, to canonize autobiography as a literary genre, which I would say could easily happen if the interpretation of the autobiographical text starts again and again from that narrowly defined field limited by the author's inner life. And it is indeed difficult to interpret the autobiographical text starting only from the author's position in the text, a position that is not sufficiently comfortable and pertinent. That is why I agree with Lejeune that from the position of textual analysis one should start from the position of the reader ("and that is my position, the only one that I know well"), because only then can I understand more clearly the way in which texts function, that is, to understand the differences in the way in which they function, since they were written for the reader and only truly function when I read them.

For the story to mean something to us: Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere

Flipping through the pages of a book that I have had in my home library since my high school days, I came across a text by a Macedonian author, whose title is irrelevant to this discussion, who in the subtitle of the text explains that it is a critical commentary on Prlic's "Autobiography" and who immediately in the introductory paragraph takes the position that I called above precise for all those who comment on autobiography in their more or less successful attempts to "define", "criticize", "analyze", "interpret", to give it importance, but at the expense of the author's inner life. Similarly, the author of the text in the book I am talking about says that meaningful autobiographies were usually written by people who were aware of the exceptionality of their personality or people with rich experiences and drama in their fate, which they wanted to leave to posterity as experience, knowledge, a message. Without leaving the limited field of reflection on autobiography, the author does not at all try to move his position a step further in the text, but rather strengthens it even more by quoting Grigor Prlichev, who himself said that he would not have written his autobiography if he had not been convinced that biographies are quite useful booklets. The purpose of my reference to the introduction to this text is not that it was provocative to me or in some sense worthy of quoting or paraphrasing, but that it would help me in textual analysis, to confirm my theory of establishing relations that will try to discern some order in the multitude of autobiographical texts that I had to read in the course of my work on this paper. Namely, for Prlichev's autobiographical text to mean something to me as a reader, first of all, his narration must be coordinated in such a way that throughout its course, a close and warm

rhythm of the narrative voice will be felt, regardless of the fact that that voice belongs to a certain time neatly packed in the drawers of historiography. Given that Prlichev's "Autobiography" conveys real events from the period of the first half and the middle of the 19th century in Macedonia, the author's story in a certain way, viewed from a historiographical aspect, is "coincided" with those events and on the basis of their accuracy the "accuracy" of the story is also assessed. But, if the reliability of every historiographical argument is verified by the accuracy of the events that occurred in the past, which can be read from documentary records, reports, official correspondence and other archival documents, but not from other texts, then what about their transmission in a literary text? Can that transmission be separated from "facts" and "reality", and yet leave no doubt that the author did not go one step further than the real thing.

While the interest of autobiography in historical discourse (récit historique in Gerard Genette) is due to the fact that both discourses share the status of a text in which events that actually happened in the past are narrated, until then autobiographical discourse is obliged to place the self (the subject-I) at the center of the speech act, and it is precisely this I that places itself as the object of the statement in the spatio-temporal perspective of the record; the I observes itself as a story, tells itself as a self-story, which is certainly a result of the interest that autobiography shares with subjective, intimate speech or the speech of fiction. I will use again an example from Prličev's ”Autobiography” to support the position I presented above in the paper, which is that depending on whether the individual directly participates in individual or collective memory, he behaves accordingly when approaching the recording of memories in the text, which can be a completely opposite behavior from one case to the other. In the context of this, Albvaš's thinking naturally arises for me that the dates and national events they represent can be, at least seemingly, completely external to the circumstances of our lives, and as soon as we reflect on this later, we come to numerous discoveries, we discover the basic features and reasons for numerous experiences (Albvaš; 35-36). When, as an adult man, he wrote his autobiography, Prlichev, reflecting on the various social events situated in the first ten years of his childhood, is much more likely to have filled the frame of memory by looking at the individual events as they were transmitted to him later, at an age when he could understand them and even more, take a stand on them. Without the necessary experience based on collective memory, Prlichev would not have been able to illuminate that early phase of his life in a way that would be a step further towards the exit from the tunnel shaped mostly by the poor potential of personal memory. I think that the first real event that stirred the author's soul and left him with a bitter impression of the existence of class differences was the meeting with his mother at one of her parties in wealthy families, at a time immediately after the death of Prlichev's grandfather. We see him running down the steep slope towards the street where the wealthy Tančevci lived, but before he reached the corner of the street he heard the heavy sighing of his mother, who was carrying a heavy, washed carpet on her head. Then he cried as if someone had killed his mother, aware of his own and his family's subordinate position.

Conclusion

Although autobiography is most often defined as "narrating one's own life", with a strict veto on the imaginative signal, nevertheless, by taking fragments of events in reality and, through the process of literary transformation, interpolating them into the fictional discursive context (because no empirical truth in the spatio-temporal duration can, as if through indigo, be mirrored in the linguistic medium), autobiographical discourse abolishes the boundaries between fiction and reality, as if a continuous dialogue between possible and real life. It is precisely this duality in the nature of the autobiographical text, this lucid relationship between two opposing principles: the principle of fictionality and the principle of truthfulness, through whose diopter a retrospective of a real world is made (although my existence does not lie in the eyes of others, I must be seen, to speak, in order to justify myself and convince the reader), that convinces me that they mix, that they rotate and complement each other, but do not exclude each other. This realization directs me to consider this topic from a pragmatic aspect as well, the one that refers primarily to the reader, assuming that the reach into time and space, into the characters and events of one's own life, is receptionally motivated, that it is a deliberate way of gaining the reader's attention, a completely conscious offer of an "autobiographical contract", according to Philip Lejeune.

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