

**Communicating the own life:
patterns in autobiography and pseudoautobiography**

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SUMMARY:

The issues that emerge from the consideration of the autobiographical genre are as varied as studied. However, it is assumed a match between the person subject of the story and the author who writes the text. On the contrary, a number of problems of identification could arise depending on the synchronization among the creative person, the author and the narrator, aesthetics and content of the (alleged) self-representation might be affected. Thus, the equivalence, or not, between the person described and the author may create a dilemma that can be called autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical. Leaving aside the American criticism, which considers the autobiographical as a novel category, questions of definition and classification are shown especially controversial. International critics have not reached any agreement with regard to issues of synchronous definition, neither as regards to the diachronic matters of genesis or origins that can help understand this phenomenon completely.

KEYWORDS: autobiography, pseudo-autobiography, author, creator, narrator

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Overview:

From the theoretical point of view, the autobiography, as a genre, has proved difficulties, while leaving room for multiple interpretations. Studies regarding this kind of work have increased much in recent years. The review of different countries, especially the French and the American, has been discussed in extensive discussions without reaching agreement on the one hand, on a clear and functional definition of the autobiographical and its subgenres, and, second, on the various assumptions made about its genesis and evolution.

These two aspects are fundamental to clarify the position that autobiography occupies in a classification of literary genres. They have given two different critical perspectives: First, the formal-deductive orientation deals with defining, in a synchronous key, a modern model as opposed to other related and neighbouring forms with respect to other types of writing. The historical and aesthetic orientation is concerned, however, with the evolution of autobiographical forms in the History of literary genres, studying its characteristics in different historical periods, influences of a model in later works, or possible transformations, partial or total.

According to the review of the different countries, just one or the orientation develops predominantly and, in general, from the seventies, we may find more formal methods, semiological and deductive. These have been gaining ground on the historic, aesthetic or empirical methods.

The theoretical difficulty of the genre seems to derive from its intermediate position, riding in a double border: the *literary-extraliterary*, one the one hand, and the reality-fiction on the other. The uncertain placement between literary/non-literary has been noted by several critics, since, as it is known, only some of the texts called autobiographical meet aesthetic requirements. The constant presence of the author as subject can nullify the aesthetic character of the work, because at the base, is it present all-time with her/his absence, separation, inevitable departure, autonomy, otherness...

The problem of the literary status of autobiographical texts is a complex one. Critics such as J. Kristeva notes that "literary" is a label that depends and varies according to the times, ideology or culture of a society. And all along the same lines, M. Butor believes that if we reflect on the notion of genre, it becomes clear that what is called "literature" is nothing more than a literary genre among others. The tendency to separate literary writing from the rest of the written production is balanced when it comes to be defined, for which, you have to relocate it with respect to the entire written production.

Regarding the opposition written work/text, the autobiographical can be embodied, according to the will of its author, in subgenres that are more responsive to the demands of the work, such as the Autobiography, Memoirs, Confessions etc ... or subgenres that correspond more with the notion of text, such as Journals, Notebooks, Pieces, etc ...

When talking about texts, the sense is that of authors like Roland Barthes, in which "text" and "biography" are two concepts closely related. In the text, the author describes her/himself as one of its characters; she or he becomes, therefore, an *author of paper*. Her/his relationship with what it has been written is not paternal and privileged, as this relationship is found in the work, but fun: her/his life is no longer the origin of her/his stories, but a story challenging the book.

The Break: autobiography

At this point, it is necessary to talk about the autobiographical and pseudo autobiographical privileged and organic relationship. Both genders are inclusive and encyclopaedic, which can adopt the same expressive procedures. The autobiography, because of his peculiarities, behaves as a willing recipient assimilating other genres: first, because the self representation is not subject to the rules of time or rhythm; second, the author does not follow any stylistic guidelines; third, the author can and is able to choose the more convenient way to write the images that he or she wants in order to describe/write/imagine themselves.

The first group would gather autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters and self-portraits, and in all of them the condition of the triple identity between author-narrator-character would be fulfilled. Among the latter group, it should be considered the different types of the novel: autobiographical (as well), epistolary etc. .., in which, however, the identification occurs only between the narrator and the character, not to the author.

The issue of identification is a problem that affects the aesthetics of the literary work. As Bakhtin suggests the identification between author and main character is a *contradictio in adiecto*. The author is the artistic whole and, as such, may not match with the character that is only part of it. Personal coincidence in life, between the person who is speaking and the speaker does not eliminate the difference of these two moments of artistic whole.

The distinction between author-person author-creator is essential, in the sense that the latter is constantly present in the work but does not become part of a new figure, objectified within it. Although the author creates an autobiography or an absolutely truthful confession, her/himself, as created, is outside the represented world. At the time of writing the writer is already out of space and time in which the event takes place. The world can be represented the more realistic, the truer, but it can never be chrono-topically identical to the real world shown, in which the author-creator finds his/herself.

In the same opinion, S. Briosi speaks of a false equivalence, both the novel and the autobiographical, between author and narrator. In both genders, the narrator-witness is necessary, albeit for opposite reasons. In the novel, through their presence, the author is free to identify with the character without believing that it is him/her, while in the autobiographical, he/she becomes the recipient of the narrative. In the same line, C. Segre believes that it is essential the distinction between author and narrator. The narrator that says "I" reveals a moral personality, with individual reactions, and a specific idiosyncrasy, not to be confused with the real author, of whom stylization is voluntary and sometimes unfaithful.

The issue seems more complicated if we take into account the trend of the structural review, especially the French and the Anglo-Saxon New Criticism, when separating the author from her/his text, founding the theoretical status of autobiography on philosophy, literature, sociology and psychology, but regardless of the historical references or ideologies. Consequently, they proclaim the *death of the author* (Barthes) in a genre, which commemorates more than any other, the triumph of the subject.

The answer of P. Leujene to all these objections is that the subject's relationship with the subject-author-character is not that of identity but of identification to something that has been given the name of a person. The autobiography is the literary genre that, by its very own content, best expresses the confusion between author and person. The deep

subject of the autobiography is the name by which the person named author, claims her/his entire existence. The proper name placed on the cover of the book is an extra-textual reference, which refers to a real person, who, in this way, places the responsibility for the enunciation of all written text. In many cases, the presence of the author is reduced only to the name, but the space reserved to this name is fundamental: it is attached, by social convention, to the commitment of responsibility of a real person, whose existence is beyond doubt.

As we have seen, this notion of a real author, who Leujene included in the definition of the autobiography, is according to N. Catelli, a real *contro natura* act in contemporary criticism. And indeed, Leujene, aware of the extratextuality of this element, corrects himself partly using the theory of utterance to say that there is a target consisting of the proper name, and therefore, it changes from individual to individual. In the proper name, the real person and the speech articulate before joining the grammatical person. So, when the reader grabs an autobiography, it is expected, unlike in the novel, the truth about the author's life. Exceptions and abuses of this trust to the reader confirm no other than the general credit of this kind of social contract.

The shapes of the autobiographical pact may be very different but all of them are designed to honour the signature itself. The reader may ruminate about the resemblance, but not the identity. So, Leujene reformulates the definition of autobiography and other autobiographical genres (diaries, self-portraits, essay...) in this way: the autobiography (which tells the life story of the writer) assumes the identity of the name of the author (with her/his name on the cover, at the top of pages), the narrator of the story and the expressed character. This triple identity between author, narrator and character, which is reflected in the name, can be set in two ways:

1. Implicitly, through the autobiographical pact of the author-narrator, by means of two actions:
 - a) The title, which leaves no doubt about the fact that the first person refers to the author ("Story of My Life", "Autobiography of", etc ...);
 - b) Preface or comments within the text, in which the narrator engages with the reader to behave as the author.
2. Explicitly, through the name that the narrator-character is given in the text, which is the same as the author of the cover.

Pseudo-autobiography

For pseudoautobiographical texts (such as the novel of memoirs or the epistolary novel), also written in first person, a covenant pseudoautobiographical act can be considered. This happens because the autobiographical project is mixed with the novel structure that responds to a "novelistic pact". This pact holds an opposite sign which includes two aspects: non-identification (the author and the character does not have the same name), and the nature of fiction (novel subtitle on the cover of the book).

The autobiography and diary triple identity also ensures ethical and moral convergence. The author and narrator represent the same moral values, whereas in the novel in a diary form or autobiographical novel, the lack of this identity may mean differences in the sense that, between the author and the events described, a storyteller ensures a limited vision, with own judgments and opinions.

Concurrently on the autobiographical style, aesthetic vision of the author is an irreducible surplus relative to the ideological vision of the character, whose life and discourse are encompassed in the optical appearance of the author. The events of her/his life are just an artistic activity. In a pseudoautobiography, it may happen that the character speaks the moral, political or religious ideas of the author, but at the same time, the work assumes an aesthetic value, a separation occurs between them. The artistic vision of the first dominates the ideological vision of the hero or author-person.

The Pseudoautobiography and autobiography are distinguished by a different aesthetic position of the author. In the first, the author is out, and this exotopy is the determining factor of his/her artistic vision; the second, the artistic form depends on the dialectic of the author's identification with his/her character, which if it is full, it would be reduced to zero all the artistic condition.

The author-person autobiographically accounts of his/her own image and presents her/himself with a direct word. The author-creator or pure author of the novel is continuously present, since the pure principle representative takes place, but he/she never becomes part represented, his/her image is subtracted by the invisibility and silence.

Autobiography and Pseudo-autobiography

The autobiography is configured as a path that goes from subject to subject, as text that can be done without the artistic element; the pseudoautobiography is essentially a work which is based on *the other*, the position that triggers is not the 'I', but the *other*, the same work is characterized as alien, autonomous with respect to author. As Bakhtin says, the actual aesthetic activity begins when the author leaves the work to express her/himself, his/her experiences, because the author while acting in the sphere of art gets out of life, and vice versa. In this sense, in some autobiographical genres, such as diaries or letters, life/art tends to neutralize themselves in the total identification of the author with the character; in these cases, the word of the author is the objective word of the author-person, and not the objectified word, indirect, distanced from the author-creator, characteristic of the novel.

The author / character relationship, as a relationship form/content relationship, is the literary word with the word extraliterary life. In this dialectical relationship between artistic representations of the world that, despite jump in life with all its extra-aesthetic values, has an external point of view. This view constitutes the *otherness*, which is specific to the creative arts form, and involves a creative point of view of the author, in her/his outside position on the represented life.

In the case of the autobiographical character, so that the text assumes the form of an artistic work, the author must find a way to stand out of it; otherwise, the work will have a different tone, and will be presented as a philosophical work or introspection-confession. The literariness of autobiographies depends precisely the distance between the author and the character, the complete non-adherence of the former to the latter.

The literary work stands outside of life, and in this respect bears some relation to death, contemplating earthly things with irony, or with a more or less accentuated comic attitude according to the literary gender and its variants. In the autobiographical work, the aesthetic attitude of the author toward the character and her/himself, as a character in the play, is regarded as someone destined to die, *moriturus*, looking at life from outside, from a

transcendent point of view, understanding not only from within but also loving from outside.

The "I" of the author, who is related to a living experience, when becoming narrator turns into another, related, however, with the narration. The past of the "I" is a pre-linguistic unity that the narrator turns into a totalizing word. The narrator is an author who has given up acting in the world, and it does not matter if this renounced action belongs to either his/her own or to another person. Whether he/she gets a position away from her/himself (in the autobiography), or he/she approaches the character (in the novel), the result is the same: a life told as a very possible reality.

When the autobiographical style slips into the realm of fiction, the "I" that appears in the text is not existentially taken by anyone, and refers to a pure invention. Some authors, like Barthes, Blanchot, Sollers, Genette, Derrida or Foucault have helped to fuel a "general discredit of the traditional interest for the author as a real person, interest suspected of being fatally prey to illusions of referential type".

Pseudoautobiography and autobiography may overlap when using certain resources, but, as noted by Starobinski, the characteristics of a genre when transposed to another can change its sign. The novel can appropriate the use of the first person singular, an autobiographical feature, and this latest can take over the third, typical of the impersonal narrative. Especially in the dialectic of Past and Present, when the "I" becomes yesterday's "her/him" because the static script fails to follow the fluctuations of the past. Now, in the autobiography, often using the third person, instead of causing the disappearance of narrator, it is highlighted. The events placed in the foreground will increase the glory of the main character. However, it may happen that the exclusive statement of "I", typical of the monologue ends up depersonalizing her/him, foregrounding the event.

In the absence of the first person, other substitute signs distinctive of the autobiographical style appear. The reference to the writer may be a periphrasis ("the writer", "who is writing"), or the identification between the author and the character is set in the introduction or context. It is not uncommon to use the proper name, which, when it is replaced by a pseudonym leads the autobiography to the border of the fictional story. Another variant could be the extension of the third person singular, which appears whenever the "I" who writes takes distance from the "I" in the Past –because of modesty or cleavage.

The writer of a diary or an autobiography has a special relation with him/herself and with the reality. From this attitude, a special type of writing emerges, and a specific way of structuring the same work with its own rules, a kind of own speech. Even this unwittingly attitude causes a number of effects and functions to the text, which are:

1. - Demonstrative effects: The text is set up as a bet the writer makes to her/himself as well as others, to demonstrate the full value of the "self" in relation to society, or at least to prove the identity of the "I". This feature is evident in the extensive use of demonstrative pronouns, especially different types of *deixis*, creating the illusion of an immediate connection with the events and times, past or present.

2.- Recurrent comparative effects: By which facts or indications are continuous not consecutive scenes, but juxtaposed to each other in chronological order, compared with each other and with the present script, recurrent variants of a single scene (childhood in the autobiography, initial, anyway, in the memoirs or diaries) as an internal preference rule or censorship.

3. - Descriptive purposes: According to which, each narrative element instead of contributing to the moving image of a story, a narrative, shapes the fixed image of a self portrait. They are, therefore, elements that construct a description, analysis, rather than a story.

4. - Conclusive effects: For each passage, each entry in the end becomes a maximum, a judgment, a conclusion about him/herself. These effects appear from the beginning, from the very first scene: findings in the presentation, when introducing the own secret, as it happens in the diary. This presentation is addressed not only to the contemporaries but, and above all, to future generations, who are supposedly the contradictory addressees of the alleged autobiographical writing. However, regardless of the typological classification, we found that autobiographical and pseudoautobiographical genres mix their waters in modern literature, because of a new relationship between subjectivity and narrative.

Conclusion:

Modernity is characterized by a subjectivity that is, above all, through the language which means, also in the novel, the prevalence of speech. This insecurity, rather than being manifested in the actions, appears through the discourse of the work. In this context, the characters are defined not by what they do but for what they say or, at least, beyond the narrative scheme of the protagonist-antagonist, which considers the narrative as a duel between the two. Modern narrative gets away from the principles of narratology in order to be set up more like a movement of subjectivity, which is manifested not only in the discourse but also in the narrative, in the actions, which takes the form of books. In fact, the trip and the subjectivity appears in great contemporary authors like Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Arendt, etc...

Another separating feature between pseudoautobiography and autobiography is the referential character and, therefore, the engagement with the reality of the first one versus the fictional character of the second.

According to M. Viano, in autobiographical writing, there is a political dimension which is headquartered in the need to socialize an experience that, through the assessment of the reader, tends to change some social aspects. In this regard, among the motives of the author to talk about her/himself, along with self-esteem, vanity and narcissism, it is important not to forget the need to be, with the narration of one's life, a useful member of/to the society and culture of their own time. The most significant features of a life also assume those of the historical and cultural situation in which it is developed.

The referential nature of the autobiography sets, through the text, a separate communication. The autobiographical text consists of a set of statements/utterances, as opposed to pseudoautobiography, which is consisting of phrases or sentences. From any point of view that considers the term "statements/utterances" is determined by the actual conditions in which it occurs, i.e., by their immediate social situation, while phrases or sentences do not need a context. The statement –as Volosinov declared- comprises three implicit aspects: space and time of the utterance (where and when), the object or subject of the utterance (what is said), and the relationship of the speakers with what happens (valuation).

The autobiographical discourse, through the plurality of discursive subjects and internal languages, sets within the text a dialogue, where the word is addressed towards a particular social recipient. The top recipients – God, posterity, fame - provide the right answer, in a metaphysical space, or in distant historical time. In the dialogue of "I" to her/himself, this higher target figure as the "third" of the dialogue, which is silent present, not participating, but 'it' understands, and this understanding is part of the interpretation of the text and, in some way, transforms the overall sense. This understanding will bring a third-target-answer, not an answer from the existing or next targets.

In each "I", there are three *dramatis personae* or three voices: the I-for-me (who does not exist outside of the recognition of the other), the I-to-the-other (reflected in the otherness), and the third genuine voice that does not recognize one or the other, and that does not exist outside of the own-another, of their own conscience. The position of this third party (the truth) gives the speech a reference value.

The third moral (the future truth) involves the future ideological discourse. The exercise of the autobiography discourse, especially in some subgenres as the diary, confirms the conception of Bakhtin on dialogical thought and the absent third, since the same inner monologue is dialogue among many. The multiplicity of the subject goes through *intersubjectivity*: the "I" talks with "me" or "what others think of me", and the "social group" to which he/she belongs. In the autobiography, the complex position of the author and character reveals a new polyphonic structure of the human image, similar and different.

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