

The Autobiography as a Genre in Crisis in Ali Smith's *Companion Piece*

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Abstract: The dialectic between autobiography and the novel is that of a "literary cannibalism." Initially a branch of autobiography, the novel has become just as realistic, owing to Lejeune's assertion that all the literary techniques used by autobiography to persuade its audience can equally be employed by the novel. Lejeune's claim suggests that autobiography as a genre is outmoded and fading. By reproducing the referential pact within a fictitious cosmos, Ali Smith demonstrates in *Companion Piece* (2022) that the autobiographical pact alone is insufficient to construct referential truth.

Keywords: dialectic, autobiography, literary cannibalism, novel, realistic, outmoded.

Résumé : La dialectique entre l'autobiographie et le roman est celle d'un « cannibalisme littéraire ». Issu à l'origine de l'autobiographie, le roman est devenu aussi réaliste que celle-ci, en raison de l'affirmation de Lejeune selon laquelle toutes les techniques littéraires utilisées par l'autobiographie pour convaincre son public peuvent également être mobilisées par le roman. Cette affirmation de Lejeune montre que l'autobiographie, en tant que genre, est dépassée et en voie de disparition. En reproduisant le pacte référentiel dans un cosmos fictif, Ali Smith a démontré dans son roman *Companion Piece* (2022) que le pacte autobiographique ne suffit pas à construire une vérité référentielle.

Mots clés : dialectique, autobiographie, cannibalisme littéraire, roman, réaliste, dépassé.

Introduction

How should one name the opposite of fiction, or rather the opposite of a fictional representation? (Boillet, 2020, chap.2). The answer to this question, which seems obvious, is in fact confusing: non-fiction? Boillet offers no clear resolution. The critic or reader may arrive at their own response to the inquiry while reflecting on this citation:

En ce qui concerne le mot « factuel », dans une représentation non fictionnelle, on trouve des idées, des opinions, des rêves, et on ne trouve donc pas exactement que des faits. L'adjectif « référentiel » présente également une certaine ambiguïté. Car en un sens, les fictions sont elles aussi référentielles. (Boillet, 2020, chap.2).

So, the answer to Etienne Boillet's investigation is likewise "fiction." The crisis of the autobiographical genre thus stems from its evolution, if not its rupture. In the same chapter, Boillet clarifies the notion of *faire-semblant* as emerging from non-fiction. Non-fiction, which we assume deals with factual narrative, precedes fiction as its natural development. Implicitly, a form of "cannibalism of survival" (Rouby, 2023, p.2) sustains the evolution of fictitious narrative: just as humans consume humans to survive, fiction swallowed non-fiction (literary cannibalism) in order to exist. With the advent of the French writer Philippe Lejeune, structural and paratextual elements introduced into the field attempt to disentangle fictitious from non-fictitious narrative. The principles of autobiography developed by Lejeune have merely intensified the latent tension between referential and non-referential writing.

Ali Smith's *Companion Piece* (2022) embodies that autobiographical tension, blending fiction and non-fiction by suppressing the boundaries between them. In her work, Smith

creates his own referential codes, producing henceforth a narrative that is deeply intimate and personal, as the autobiography is supposed to be.

To analyze the effacement of boundaries between the two genres, we will draw upon the principles of autobiography and narratology, the discipline that examines narrative structures. Lejeune's principles will help us highlight the homodiegetic aspect of the narrative and reveal their limits as a source of discord. Through narratology, autobiographical narratives and fictional discourses will be juxtaposed, in order to observe whether their modes of writing about textual truth and referential truth converge or diverge.

This work is organized into three parts. While the first section examines the limits of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the second and third explore the questions of generic fragmentation.

1. The Crisis of the Autobiographical contract

The paratext plays a significant role in the genre classification of the autobiography. The authenticity of the autobiography, as Lejeune points out, is not tied to the autobiographical narrative. According to him, the referentiality of the autobiography is defined in the paratext, through a contract signed between the author and the reader. The contract grants the character a referential dimension, and his story, a realistic tone. Philippe Lejeune says:

le texte lui-même offre à son extrême lisière ce terme dernier, le nom propre de l'auteur, à la fois textuel et indubitablement référentiel. Si cette référence est indubitable, c'est qu'elle est fondée sur deux institutions sociales : l'état civil (convention intériorisée par chacun dès la petite enfance) et le contrat d'édition ; il n'y a alors aucune raison de douter de l'identité. (1996, p. 39)

So, the paratext, along with homodiegetic narration, are key components in the categorization of the autobiographical genre. Ali Smith's *Companion Piece* adheres to the two aforementioned keys of autobiography. In the paratext, Smith writes: "This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. (Smith, 2022, iv)." This contract, though denser than the autobiographical pact (Lejeune, 1996, p. 29), produces the same impression: that of the referentiality of the following homodiegetic narrative. The writer's intention to dissipate the autobiographicality (Ghazaryan, 2025, p. 7) of her work betrays her enterprise. Her effort ultimately tells the reader that her work is both a biography and an autobiography.

The crisis of autobiography, though perceptible in the norms regulating the genre, derives from the versatility of the subject treated, the self. For Eakin: "Lejeunian autobiography could hardly pass for a literature of fact despite its referential pretensions, for however historically "real" the name shared by the text's protagonist, narrator, and author, the "I"-figure so named remains no less a creature of fiction." (1999, p. 17). Eakin argues that the principles sustaining the Lejeunian autobiography do not fit into any literary genre. Following his explanations, narrating the self is about embracing: "a mysterious reality, mysterious in its nature and origins and not necessarily consubstantial with the fictions we use to express it" (Eakin, 1999, p. 10).

Asserting a different literary framework, autobiography, obliged to convince through a prosaic genre, is often regarded as a work of fiction. The comparison between fiction and

autobiography pushes Lejeune to present the latter as the counterpart of the former. Lejeune writes : « Si l'on reste sur le plan de l'analyse interne du texte, il n'y a aucune différence. Tous les procédés que l'autobiographie emploie pour nous convaincre de l'authenticité de son récit, les romans peuvent les imiter, et les a souvent imités ». (Lejeune, 1996, p. 26). Citing autobiography before fiction, Lejeune positions the fictitious reading pact as an imitation of the autobiographical reading contract. While the reading pact has always been regarded as the announcement of the writer's intention, Lejeune turns it into an implicit contract between writer and reader. The pact is implicit because the reader did not sign it.

Because we often forget that a literary critic is also a reader, Yépri reflects on the referential aspect of both autobiography and the novel. He emphasizes that the critic's perspective inevitably combines analytical distance with the reader's engagement, which shapes how these genres are understood. He highlights the referential dimension of both autobiography and the novel, noting that:

L'erreur serait vraiment grande de prendre un personnage d'un livre pour une personne vivant dans la réalité. Ce serait le résultat d'une lecture bien naïve tout simplement. Cependant, refuser tout lien entre personnage du livre et personne vivante est une autre absurdité¹ ».
(1987, p. 35)

Yépri's position in this textual fragment highlights the fragility of the autobiographical contract, which cannot ensure the truthfulness of a narrative. In contrast, other critics, such as Holladay, state more bluntly that: [...] an autobiography simply cannot be true. (p. 7). For Samin, autobiography exists only when it is fictionalized. He cites Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, where the author chooses to reveal the truth about herself in a "fictionalised autobiography" (2001, p. 3), thereby sustaining the idea that: "identity can best be reconstructed through fictional devices." (Samin, 2001, p. 3).

The reconstruction of identity through language remains a precarious ambition. Once the self enters language, it abandons referential reality and becomes absorbed into textual reality. In that space, the self loses control over itself. Addressing the notion of the textual self, Smith writes:

And one of the most exciting things about language, that grammar's as bendy as a live green branch on a tree. Because if words are alive to us then meaning's alive, and if grammar's alive then the connection in it, rather than the divisions in us, will be energizing everything, one way or another. It means an individual person can be both individual and plural at the same time. (Smith, 2022, p. 95).

The citation clearly responds to Philippe Lejeune's defense of the single self, expressed in his definition of autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, with the focus on individual life and, in particular, the story of personality. Once the self enters grammar, it slips beyond its own control. The scriptural life of the self thus becomes a new existence. That is why Eakin asks: "But who is the 'I' who speaks in self-narrations? And who is the 'I' spoken about?" (1999, p. 9). A quick survey of the literary landscape suffices to show that the autobiographical genre is widely rejected as a reflective narrative.

¹ The mistake would be truly great to take a character from a book for a person living in reality. That would simply be the result of a very naïve reading. However, to refuse any link between a character in a book and a living person is another absurdity. My translation.

[...] Northrop Frye classifies autobiography as a subdivision of the novel, or when Barrett J. Mandel calls autobiography "literature with a difference," or when Paul de Man argues that autobiography is "not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading," or when Georges May argues that "autobiography is neither a genre, nor a form, nor a style, nor even a language...but a literary attitude. (Abbott, 1988, p. 3).

The autobiography is consequently denied a clear literary space. For many critics, the term "autobiography" as a genre is more appropriate for other non-generic forms. Without explicitly mentioning the word on their book covers, they assume that an author can fully textualize his life. If the reader pays close attention, he can detect an explicit autobiographical pact within a fictitious self-narrative. According to Lejeune, the referential pact is what defines autobiography as an autodiegetic text, meaning that the author, the narrator, and the main protagonist are one and the same.

Ali Smith's *Companion Piece* does not directly challenge Philippe Lejeune's model of autobiography. The contract of verisimilitude established with the reader in the paratext does not require a shared identity of name between author, narrator, and protagonist. Ghazaryan, however, speaks of the mutation of the "I" into a third-person narration:

"However, regarding narrative form, the author does not always directly present their perspective. Indeed, it can be said that classical literature is significantly characterized by the third-person expression of the authorial 'I' (as seen in the works of Dickens, Tolstoy, and others), which is explicable by the authors' artistic intentions" (Ghazaryan, 2025, p. 2)

This literary attitude of the author can be explained by the fact that he shifts the focalisation many times in the narration. The "I" narrating splits when it is narrated. Here again, the single self is fragmented as it steps in literary societal world. The episode featuring a character's confusion about his own passports is revealing of a fragmented identity. At a border control, Inglis is turned into an homodiegetic narrator. She writes:

I know. I'm sorry, I've probably just given you the one I didn't travel out on, wait a minute. A passport you didn't travel out on, the man behind the screen said. I've got two, she said. She fetched her other passport out of her inside jacket pocket. Dual citizenship, she said. (Smith, 2022, p. 7)

The passport section is not merely about travelling; it questions Lejeune's attempt to ground the stability of identity in the autobiographical contract. The duality of Inglis's identity reveals a deeper crisis of selfhood. As a genre, autobiography can no longer guarantee truth or coherence in contemporary literature. This is partly because words, once inscribed, escape the writer's control.

Punctuation marks, though seemingly soulless symbols, play crucial roles in one's life, as defended by Sand, the main narrator. She says: "And it only looks strange because we expect spaces round punctuation, I say, and we expect punctuation and syntax to do very expected things. But why do we? Why do we have conventions at all? Because how would we live properly without —, she says". (Smith, 2022, p. 39). Writing about the self is not only about words or signifiers; it also involves conveying meaning through syntax and punctuation. A dot or a hyphen is not merely a static symbol but can stand as a meaningful image. The episode of Inglis at the border becomes a metaphor for contemporary identity reconstruction. Words alone cannot prove identity, even if the autobiographer writes extensively. Just as the narrator's friend was checked to prove her

identity despite possessing two passports, the autobiographer must also demonstrate the truthfulness of her story by means other than focusing solely on external events of the self.

Virginia Woolf defends a deeply internal form of life-writing. For her, autobiography is also abstract, unfolding through sensations such as the feeling: "All these colour-and-sound memories hang together at St Ives – was much more robust; it was highly sensual. (Woolf, 1985, p. 65)." Autobiography is not limited to what is visible; it also engages with the inner domain of the autobiographer. When Woolf writes:

Here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties. One of the reason why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: "this is what happened"; but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened. (1985, p. 65),

She is revealing not only the difficulties faced by life-writing artists; above all, she points to the many possibilities of invention available to a writer when speaking about the self. When Woolf writes that they say "this is what happened," she suggests that the *what* in the sentence is never certain to have happened.

2. Third Dimension and the emergence of hybrid forms

Ali Smith blends autobiographical elements with fictional invention in *Companion Piece*, creating an unstable narrative space. This hybridity is clearly perceptible on page 15: "No, she said. It wasn't anyone. Well, it was, someone. Just not bodily. Just – what I mean is. I could hear someone speaking, like someone was there in the room. But there was only me in the room. It was weird. And what it said was weird. (Smith, 2022, p. 15)." The duplication of the narrator's voice signals a duality in narrative perspective. At this moment, the narrator no longer speaks of herself; the story shifts to an imaginative voice. This imaginary actant becomes the center of the narrative. Consequently, the register of the novel changes, moving from direct self-narrative to imaginative storytelling. The "disembodied voice" (Smith, 2022, p. 24) introduces a zone of uncertainty within the factual space. It also creates a psychological layer, transforming the voice itself into an actant. As Robert Sayre notes, Smith's text establishes "connections between autobiography and fiction through their similar reliance on the literary elements of themes, characters, structure, narrative technique, setting and style." (Kamal, 2020, p. 6).

The autobiographical text oscillates therefore between personal memory, imaginative storytelling, and cultural commentary, as expressed in this textual fragment:

I'd heard how Black people were terrorists for organizing themselves into a protest movement that demanded equality and an end to racism. I'd heard how environmental protesters were terrorists for organizing themselves into a movement that demanded we attend to the ruination of the planet. I'd heard, beneath the lines, beneath the lies, how new laws would be voted through parliament so that protests like these would be outlawed and protesters like these would be curtailed and jailed. (Smith, 2022, p. 29).

According to Ghazaryan (2025, p. 5), the application of autobiographical principles does not necessarily imply that factual events from the writer's life are being exposed. Critics such as Renza argue that autobiography belongs neither to fiction nor to non-fiction, nor even to a blending of both. He defines autobiography as a "unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, the project of self-presentification, of converting oneself into the present promised by language." (Renza, 1977, p. 23). This paradox in autobiographical practice—simultaneously allowing and inhibiting—creates a hybrid form that reflects the crisis of the genre, increasingly absorbed into autofiction and experimental narrative.

In *The Female Autograph* (1984), Domna Stanton shifts attention to form rather than content, emphasizing writing the self above narrating the account of a life (Kamal, 2020, p. 15). For Stanton, the self is created in autobiography through "narrative action" (Abbott, 1988, p. 3). This device, borrowed from fiction, enables creation within autobiography and opens up "a new space of indeterminacy located between fiction and non-fiction in which the differences between past and present, fiction and truth are blurred." (Samin, 2001, p. 4). Autobiographical narrative is thus situated in a third dimension, between fiction and non-fiction. Ali Smith illustrates this in *Companion Piece*: "One day when my mother was a child in Ireland and one of her sisters was very ill, she was sent to fetch the doctor. She was eleven years old. On the way across the fields she met a young Traveller woman carrying a baby. The woman asked her for money." (2022, p. 84). This section recounts Sand, the main protagonist, reporting a fragment of her mother's life. Between the mother's experience and its narration, the daughter, Sand, becomes an eyewitness.

The autofictive perspective of the story lies less in what is said than in the way it is presented. The narrator recounts an episode from her mother's childhood as if she herself had witnessed it. In this moment, Sand, the homodiegetic narrator, shifts into a heterodiegetic position. Elevated to the role of creator, she gives birth to her mother's story and assumes the stance of an omniscient focalizer. This narrative technique adopted by Smith resists the rigid format proposed by Lejeune, which presupposes total control over language and over the self. Addressing the elusiveness of autobiographical language, Holladay writes: "[...] in my attempts at autobiography, it was acceptable to learn about my life as I wrote, that in telling about a life, I would find it 'at once a discovery [and] a creation.'" (p. 5).

The denial of autobiography's literariness is also linked to its confinement, as Lejeune defends, within the European sphere. In the African literary cosmos, for instance, a novel can be fully regarded as autobiography. Yepri, a renowned literary critic, writes about Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953): "L'autobiographie en tant que telle, dont le roman de Laye se réclame, n'est pas 'africaine'." (Yépri, 1977, p. 53). This citation, in attempting to deny the Africanity of autobiography, ends up creating a "heterogeneous genre" that interferes with "national histories and traditions" (Kamal, 2020, p. 5).

The struggle to find an appropriate term for self-narrative has led to a proliferation of overlapping and sometimes confusing labels: autobiography, autonarration, self-narration, autofiction, autobiographical novel. Each of these terms, in their effort to delineate the genre, opens the door to debate, as Abbott exemplifies: "There are also works now classified as fiction but originally published eponymously, like *Robinson Crusoe*, that were probably read in this way as 'biographies of the author'—when they first appeared." (1988, p. 6). "Biographies of the author" thus emerges as yet another definition of autobiography.

As Virginia Woolf argues in *Sketch of the Past*, the autobiographer's personality should stand at the center of life writing rather than the events themselves. This stance raises the question of characterization in autobiography: is the autobiographical figure distinct from the character in a novel? To this, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson respond in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Lives* (2001), noting that "life writing and the novel share features we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so on" (Odiboh, 2025, pp. 9–10). Ghazaryan, when discussing the representation of the author in autobiography, writes that

In their works, the principle of autobiographicality found appropriate expression within the novel genre. The formation of the hero, as a methodological principle of character construction, led to the theme of childhood and adolescence occupying a special place within the autobiographical genre. (2025, p. 7)

Ghazaryan defends the view that the construction of characters in autobiography and in the novel is essentially identical. Both can therefore be regarded as actants performing specific roles assigned to them. For Algirdas Greimas, however, actants are not simply projections of human beings and cannot be considered their substitutes; an inanimate actant can be just as performative as an animate one. Smith illustrates this with the line: "Well I went over to the wall, and I said, beg your pardon, could you repeat that please? And it said it again. Curlew or curfew. Then it added: you choose" (Smith, 2022, p. 16). Although uttered by a disembodied voice, this sentence initiates conflict in the novel. Up to this point, the narrative has been moving toward this moment: a repetition of two words by a nonhuman source. The pronoun "it" signals that the origin of speech is not human. This approach underscores how a fictive story can shape our lives with greater force than a true account.

As Smith and Watson argue, the truth of the autobiographical character "is not that of lived or historical experience but that of the narrator's authority" (Odiboh, 2025, p. 5). In light of this claim, self-narrative can simultaneously take the form of autobiography, autofiction, or the autobiographical novel. To address this plurality of terms, we propose the concept of *autobiofiction* as the act of narrating one's life through a textual self that draws on both factual and fictional modes of representation.

3. Contemporary Context and Fragmentation of Voices

Because society evolves with time, both the novel and the autobiography reflect contemporary social realities. The point of contention between Lejeune and other critics lies in his defense of the purity of autobiography as a matter of identity alone. Kamal, citing Lejeune, writes: "It is the identity of the name (as a real person), not the resemblance of the narrative to real life, that is the cornerstone of autobiography" (Kamal, 2020, p. 8). The paradox of Lejeune's theory is that it ultimately affirms what it denies: autobiography is not merely about the single sentence that establishes the identity of author, narrator, and main character, but about the unfolding of events in a person's life. Indeed, we may assume that these events are of primary importance, since their development provides the means to assess the individual.

Just as Descartes (1637) famously declared *cogito ergo sum*, where the self is defined as the complement of thought, in autobiography the self emerges as the complement of events. The modern crisis of autobiography mirrors the broader crisis of subjectivity, since the self cannot be narrated in isolation. This crisis aligns with the fragmentation of the self, as postulated by psychoanalysis. Sand illustrates this fragmentation when she writes: "My father is waiting for me on the path by a pile of cut-down trees in a clearing.

It's his birthday. He is his old self, I mean as opposed to his young self" (Smith, 2022, p. 58). Although the passage refers to two selves, it in fact narrates a single person. This openly deconstructs Lejeune's notion of a solitary, narratable self. The narrated subject splits into two in order to fulfill the author's intention of recalling two birthdays. The act of recollection is thus always a "reactualization" of the past, if not its "presentification".

The Covid pandemic shaping the narrative led to political uncertainty and linguistic breakdown. All of this contributes to the construction of the self. The following conversation is an example of linguistic collapse:

What about all the texts you've been sending her? Eden Pelf said. What texts? I said. I didn't send any texts. Oh. Wait. I did send one text. One text! Eden Pelf said. Liar. No, the they twin said. Truthfully, Ede, we did only find one text on there. Yeah because our mother'll have deleted the others because they were incriminating, Eden Pelf said. (Smith, 2022, p. 93).

Communication in this section is fragmented. Both parties in the conversation are afraid of the truth, each trying to protect themselves from saying a word that might incriminate. The fear of Covid is the fear of the word, the signifier rather than the signified. Social experience can therefore contaminate the fluidity of a narrative, even when it is about the self. This part mirrors the linguistic breakdown of contemporary autobiographies, which are no longer conflict-free literature. Reminiscence and memory collide, projecting a personality shaped alongside the narrative.

Language does not always succeed in recounting event. No, it is the other way round. Language, by capturing tension in human communication has shown that it can capture and reflect social fragmentation. The apparent failure of language to connect both parties in the textual fragment above is at the same time its success to portray textual reality. The autobiography is no longer a solitary act of self representation, but is interwoven with collective anxieties and external voices, as exposed in this textual fragment:

I sat on a felled dead tree alive with ivy. Above me the trees were bright with the beginnings of their new green. A bird hurled across the piece of sky through the greenness, called beyond itself. The trees spoke their language. The light and dark took turns. What I knew was my own absence. What I sensed, clear as unruined air, was the ghost of a chance, a different presence. (Smith, 2022, pp. 79-80).

Writing about the self also engages the autobiographer's feelings, embracing the internal dimension of life. Virginia Woolf's *Sketch of the Past* underlines that forgotten aspect of autobiography. Woolf calls for a re-centering of the autobiographer's gaze toward the feeling self rather than the observing self. She writes:

It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.
I could spend hours trying to write that as it should be written, in order to give the feeling which is even at this moment very strong in me. But I should fail (unless I had some wonderful luck); I dare say I should only succeed in having the luck if I had begun by describing Virginia herself." (p.15)

These words from Woolf contest Lejeune's perception of the autobiography as a life narrative provided by someone's memory. The latter is not given key position in contemporary autobiographies. The autobiography would be the expression of someone's feeling at the very moment in which they emerged. Tolstoy says, talking about self-narrative: "To God and fellow beings, love is powerful in childhood. In adolescence, these feelings are drowned out by desire, self-assertion, and pride, while in youth, life transforms these feelings" (1969, p. 433). The emphasis on love at the onset and feeling at the outset highlights the importance of affect in autobiography.

For Woolf and Tolstoy, most autobiographies fail because they overlook the person in favor of his or her life. According to them, life-writing begins when the self is placed at the center of concern, not merely the account of a life. Autobiography should therefore focus on the portrait of the autobiographical subject. Writers like Cardano and Montaigne, as Ghazaryan notes, insert "psychological self-portraits in their autobiographies" (2025, p. 3). The word 'portrait' is not new in the autobiographical sphere. If words are opposed to portrait, then in the autobiographical cosmos, blending the two becomes a contemporary project in self-writing studies. Simple words provide a platonic account of someone's life: a narrated life without color is a life without essence. Woolf writes the following about her impressions and feelings about her life :

"If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green. There was the pale-yellow blind; the green sea; and the silver of the passion flowers. I should make a picture that was globular; semi-transparent. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline. Everything would be large and dim; and what was seen would at the same time be heard; sounds would come through this petal or leaf—sounds indistinguishable from sights. (1985, p.16)

Woolf calls for a vivid autobiography, one that speaks to the senses through its ability to communicate by sight and sound. In the paragraph above, she enumerates what the autobiographer should feel and do. The latter becomes a literary painter, using colors to depict herself. This attitude helps the reader conceive a psychological portrait of the narrated "I."

Ali Smith's *Companion Piece* is more about the narrator's psychological condition than her lived experience during confinement. The whole novel deals with the feeling of loneliness during Covid. This explains why the narrator, despite confinement, is never truly isolated. Her desire for companionship and her need to feel human by speaking with someone are expressed in this textual fragment:

I didn't care what season it was. I didn't even care what day of the week. Everything was mulch of a mulchness to me right then. I even despised myself for that bit of wordplay, though this was uncharacteristic, since all my life I'd loved language, it was my main character, me its eternal loyal sidekick. (Smith, 2022, pp. 4-5).

Language, in this citation, is not just a means of communication. It is a true companion that stands as a character in the novel. This last citation deconstructs the philosophy of the unique self in the autobiography. It also explains why the writer has adapted his reading contract looking fictitious, rather than referential. Finally, the literary cosmos obeys its own rules, which escapes human control.

Conclusion

The genesis of fictional writing is rooted in autobiography. The notion of *faire-semblant*, recalled by Boillet, demonstrates that the novel emerges as a branch of autobiographical practice. Philippe Lejeune's effort to prove that autobiography and the novel follow two distinct modes of writing has become outdated in a century marked by fragmentation. Lejeune's principles of autobiography, reinforced by the art of narratology, have only accentuated the latent crisis. The relationship between autobiography and the novel is best described as a form of "literary cannibalism," in which one genre consumes the very source that originally gave it life.

The autobiography has been swallowed by the novel, to the point that the former now struggles to prove its own existence. Since the referentiality of the novel is grounded in textual reality, autobiography is compelled to abandon the text and to anchor its referentiality outside the text, within the paratext. The latter, often overlooked by critics, leads them to regard autobiography as a novel with its own codes. Concerning the novelistic aspect of autobiography, Holladay observes: "[...] in my attempts at autobiography, it was acceptable to learn about my life as I wrote, that in telling about a life, I would find it 'at once a discovery [and] a creation.'" (Holladay, p. 5). As an autobiographer, Holladay denies the strict autobiographicality of autobiography and its supposed ability to replicate reality.

Fictional autobiographies are numerous, while pure autobiographies remain comparatively scarce. Writers such as Ali Smith have chosen to dilute their life stories into a fictitious mode. In doing so, it is the very foundations and existence of autobiography that become problematized.

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