

Poetry

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Poetry and autobiography are *a priori* different writing experiences and constitute distinct literary genres. In this respect, Béatrice Didier's observation about the diary could be generalised to all autobiographical genres : "The poem is the complete opposite of a diary : beyond the individual and beyond time." However, it is the very proximity between these two sets of genres that makes the distinction necessary. Both the autobiographer and the poet have, since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, been concerned with expressing their sensations and feelings, and both manifest the reality of their existence in their writing. As Hegel observes, lyric poetry is a subjective poetry.

From a historical point of view, it is worth noting, in the French-speaking world, the relative simultaneity of, on the one hand, the appearance of self-writing (autobiography and the intimate diary) at the end of the eighteenth century and, on the other hand, the development of modern lyric poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Both these phenomena can be linked to the affirmation of subjectivity, that of a subject possessing an interiority and an individual history. In this respect, Boileau's narrative in his tenth *Épître* [*Epistle*] (1698) remains closer to memoir than to autobiography.

From a theoretical point of view, both sets of genres are concerned with the truth of the authors' lives and feelings, even though, in the case of poetry, this is sometimes subject to the adjustments that are made to the details of personal history and dates, as in the case of Victor Hugo. For, as Käte Hamburger observes, poetry and autobiography consist of reality statements, unlike narrative fiction. Lyric poetry, like autobiography, refers to real experience, albeit in a particular way. Nonetheless, the lyric subject cannot be equated with the autobiographical subject. The sincerity of the former is not conceived according to the same limits within which the latter recounts their personal story.

There is a difference of focus : in poetry the experience of an individual moment takes on an absolute and universal dimension, whereas in autobiography the moment is just one constituent of the narrative of the author's existence.

However, in order to properly consider the question of the relationship between the two sets of genres, it is necessary to examine separately how the question arises in each case, in light of the forms that they take on. Although the lyric subject is generally a subject based in reality, who relates an experience in a way that may be more or less literal, or more or less figurative, some poetic texts play with the boundaries between genres. This is the case, in particular, of autobiography in verse, such as Raymond Queneau's *Chêne et chien* [*Oak and Dog*] (1937) and Georges Perros's *Une vie ordinaire* [*An Ordinary Life*] (1967), as well as William Cliff's *Autobiographie* [*Autobiography*] (1993) and the collections of little-known poets that Philippe Lejeune mentions in *Signes de vie* [*Signs of Life*] (2005). The retrospective account of the author's existence is then supported by the rhythm and musicality of the poetry. Other collections of poetry are organised in the form of a diary and presented as a succession of dated poems. There are many examples of this since the Second World War. These include the volumes of Jean Cayrol's *Poésie-Journal* [*Poetry-Diary*] (1969-1980), William Cliff's *Journal d'un innocent* [*Diary of an Innocent Man*] (1996) and *Le Pain quotidien* [*Daily Bread*] (2006), Jean-Michel Maulpoix's *Journal privé* [*Private Diary*] (1998), Gérard Haller's *Météoriques* [*Meteorics*] (2001), as well as certain collections by Antoine Emaz and Jacques Ancet. The poems follow one another like daily entries, and the collection makes up the diary of a poetic reading of oneself and the world. Alongside this group, the collections of dated prose poems form a somewhat separate group, of which the best known example is that of the volumes of Philippe Jaccottet's *Semaison* [*Sowing*] (1984-2001), but the poetic work of Gil Jouanard should also be mentioned. André Du Bouchet's notebooks of poetic notations, which were not initially written with a view to publication, are also close to this category (*Une lampe dans la lumière aride* [*A Lamp in the Dry Light*], 2011 ; several earlier fragmentary editions also exist).

There is a slim boundary between, on the one hand, those texts that can be read as collections of poems and, on the other hand, diaries with a poetic tonality. In the latter category, contemporary landmarks include Robert Marteau's *Fleuve sans fin : Journal du Saint-Laurent* [*Endless River : Diary of the Saint Lawrence River*] (1986), Thierry Metz's *Le Journal d'un manœuvre* [*Diary of a Manoeuver*] (1990), or Paul de Roux's *Carnets* [*Notebooks*] (1986-2005). Although these works present themselves as diaries, the aesthetic dimension of the individual moment often takes precedence over recording the events of day-to-day existence. However, unlike the dated poetic collections mentioned above, which were mostly written in the second half of the twentieth century, diaries with a poetic tonality have a longer history, which merges with that of the intimate diary it-

self. As early as 1832, in Maurice de Guérin's *Cahier vert* [*Green Notebook*], the intimate outpouring is charged with a poetic tension, which we find again at the beginning of the twentieth century in Victor Segalen's diary of his trip to China (written in 1909-1910). In the particular category of mourning diaries it is difficult to determine the status of a volume such as Michel Deguy's *À ce qui n'en finit pas* [*To That Which Ends Not*] (1995), whose subtitle, "Threne", brings to mind a poetic collection in which the day-to-day notations, with their modulations, sketch out a story. Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque chose noir* [*Something Black*] (1986) similarly refers directly to the disappearance of the author's wife, but also carries out a melancholy work of construction based on numbers.

In the case of retrospective autobiography in prose, the traces of a poetic tonality are more subtle and difficult to identify. However, in Michel Leiris's *L'Âge d'homme* [*Manhood*] (1939) and *La Règle du jeu* [*The Rules of the Game*] (1948-1976) we can see traces of a rhapsodic rather than chronological construction, as well as an attention to the rhythm and melody of the sentence. In Jacques Borel's stories, particularly *Le Retour* [*The Return*] (1970), sinuous, continuously expanding sentences are used to exploit the power of images from childhood. A universe unfolds and solidifies, forming a gallery of paintings of lost faces, a series of traces of past moments. Yet, just as in Yves Charnet's *Proses du fils* [*Prose Writings of the Son*] (1993), the narrative thread remains close at hand and keeps the text on the side of autobiography. Whereas poetry shows the circumstance that gave rise to it in order to better detach itself from that circumstance, autobiography modifies lived experience while integrating it into a history, that of 'the entire course of one's existence' (Leiris) condensed into a few moments.

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