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Memoria e identidad: una experiencia autobiográfica

Memory and Identity: An Autobiographical Experience

Memória e identidade: uma experiência autobiográfica

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Resumen

En este trabajo se presenta un acercamiento a la obra de Sergio Pitol, en particular un libro que reúne tres libros: *Trilogía de la memoria*. Lo que se pretende es realizar reflexiones en relación con la memoria y la identidad desde la experiencia de lo autobiográfico. La obra de Pitol puede ser vista desde distintas disciplinas que le dan validez a una escritura posmoderna, intertextual y que tiene un mecanismo de construcción más cercano a lo aparentemente autobiográfico.

Palabras clave: autobiografía, identidad, literatura, memoria.



Abstract

This work presents an approach to the work of Sergio Pitol, in particular the book that brings together three books by the same author *Trilogy of Memory*. What is intended is to make reflections in relation to memory and identity from the experience of the autobiographical. Pitol's work can be seen from different disciplines that give validity to a postmodern, intertextual writing that has a construction mechanism closer to the apparently autobiographical.

Keywords: autobiography, identity, literature, memory.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma abordagem da obra de Sergio Pitol, em especial de um livro que reúne três livros: Trilogia da memória. O que se pretende é fazer reflexões em relação à memória e identidade a partir da experiência do autobiográfico. A obra de Pitol pode ser vista a partir de diferentes disciplinas que validam uma escrita pós-moderna, intertextual e que possui um mecanismo de construção mais próximo do aparentemente autobiográfico.

Palavras-chave: autobiografia, identidade, literatura, memória.

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Introduction

Memory can remake and reconstruct a past event, but not as it really was: it becomes a simulation of meaning, since it has an analogical form of what was experienced. This recreation is not an instrument for the reproduction of the self, but rather for the construction of the identity of the self. In autobiography there is a substitution of what has been experienced by the analogy created by memory.

According to Halbwachs and Blondel (cited in Mendoza, 2004), collective memory is a social process of reconstruction of a lived past. In memory is contained what is worth keeping. In Bartlett's notion (1932, cited in Mendoza, 2004), "memory schemes" are under the control of an affective attitude. When we try to remember something, the first thing that comes is not the memory as such, but an affect or a loaded attitude, and one way to perceive it is through a narrative. The memory, in the autobiography, frames the experience of what



is narrated and, therefore, the experiences are ordered from a new point of view that is based on interpretation. Thus, when narrating from memory, the alterations are obvious, since what has been lived is never fully recaptured.

Method

We will take a tour of certain notions of memory, identity and autobiography. All these concepts based on the notion of narration, since it is from the construction of the narrated that experientiality is based. Halbwachs and his theory of collective memory will give us the foundations to settle the above. Above all we will try to distinguish two proposals of the autobiographical as a way of narrating.

More specifically, we will focus on the work of Sergio Pitol and compare it with other writers who, in some way, have similar ways of understanding literary creation, based on the search for identity and, in turn, contradictorily, seek to "disappear" as subjects and be a character. In the end, this work has documentary sources to bring us closer to those complex, abstract notions that we talked about above.

Discussion

Some aspects of memory

When we speak of memory we refer to a phenomenon in which all of us as human beings are involved. Memory is remembering the events we experienced in the past and bringing them to the present. However, to speak of memory is to discuss a complex concept. Studying memory is entering a field of knowledge where it is necessary to investigate what it is, how it is built and, above all, how it achieves transcendence. From a micro level, it implies taking into account the experiences lived by people from the individual; from a macro perspective, all those experiences that social groups have together and that turn out to be relevant to them so much so that they last over time. These relevant facts for a particular social group is what is known as collective memory.

The main reference in the field of collective memory as a field of study is Halbwachs (1968, cited in Méndez, 2008), who strips memory of its individual character to propose the idea that all memory is of social character and therefore collective:



Any memory, even if it is very personal, exists in relation to a set of notions that dominate us more than others, with people, groups, places, dates, words and forms, that is, with the material and moral life of the societies that we have formed. part (Méndez, 2008, p. 126).

On the other hand, speaking of memory implies speaking of events that have a specific place and time. This is another of the fundamental points to take into account, because if you think of a study that puts memory as a starting point, you must take into account how these memories are acquired. Halbwachs divides these sources into two branches: vivid memories and historical memories. The lived ones are those memories whose source is the personal experience of the subject about a certain event and the historical ones are indirect knowledge of an event or historical moment that are obtained by a source external to the own experience (Muller and Bermejo, 2013, p. 250).

It is interesting to pay special attention to the issue of the sources of collective memory and how it is transmitted to others. We comment on the above because that collective memory is directly related to identity, since it recreates an autobiographical form. Do institutions with power shape certain events to be remembered in a specific way? Is identity recreated, memories created? Are our memories really ours? Remembering is recreating an autobiography?

The means by which we appropriate and adapt memory play an important role. The arrival of the Internet was, and continues to be, revolutionary and differential when it comes to understanding the world and how it is constituted. This is due to the fact that it is no longer the traditional communication companies (television, radio, written press, among others) that are in charge of configuring that memory; We reiterate that the Internet and social networks have contributed to the members of a community being able to tell their own biography.

In today's society, social networks have played an important role in the so-called misinformation because anyone can publish any issue. And furthermore, these publications generate forms of behavior. These, in turn, create the illusion of an experiential form that is often confused with life itself.

Although the facts do not change, because it is something that has already happened and the past is immovable, what does change is the way in which each member of a social group remembers them. "Every past runs the risk of being represented by an image that does



not correspond to the reality already starred" (Nieto, 2006, p. 84). In some way each one remembers an event depending on the role he played, or how the information was transferred to him.

Another issue to take into account when talking about memory is identity and how they endure. Why do we remember what we remember? What determines which things are worth remembering and which will be forgotten? As human beings we are clear that it is not possible to remember absolutely everything we have experienced, it could be a matter of relevance, how much impact certain events have on our individuality and on the social that are worth remembering or, on the contrary, how irrelevant something has to be in order to be forgotten.

Narrative and autobiography

The narration of oneself restores an identity to offer an image of the self. It is the memory that builds the past event, which represents an analogy of what has been lived, an instrument for the construction of the self's identity. In an autobiographical account, the self is constructed by the text, the experience is subjective. Although it is true that the narrator determines what he wants to tell us, that repertoire comes from memory, that is, the image that he claims of himself is made through the reconstruction of his life story.

The perspective of the narration in the autobiography is that of a narrating self; This narrating action occurs at the level of social exchange, it is a source of information about a subject and an object in the world. The claim of the one who relates his own life story is to identify himself as an actor within an event, and this is an act of recognition of the social image in front of others.

When we read an autobiography we know that the story we are told is about the life of a person written by himself. Therefore, the feature that all autobiographies share is to show us the experiences or life experiences that only the autobiographer can tell us and that lies in an intimate or private event.

The autobiographical study appears when a subject who talks about himself builds a text. Many authors, including Pozuelo (2006), tell us about the complexity of this genre due to the border relationships that are established. There are some authors who consider this



genre "non-fictional" and others consider that there is an "intrinsic fictionalization" that all narrative writing has. (Pozuelo, 2006, p. 17)

Pozuelo (2006) assures that the border situation is not a recent discussion, this idea has been present since the creation of the modern novel, since Lázaro de Tormes, since this novel is proposed as an autobiography. And so begins a path in the literary context where "literature will always want to play with the limit of fiction/truth, which it wants to situate in the testimony of a self that defends the truth about itself" (Pozuelo, 2006, p. 24)

Autobiography as a literary manifestation has a "status of fiction" and a version of "reality" because this literary manifestation is built from the identity of a subject that has its own projection through that story.

Pozuelo (2006) would say that this conflictive meeting of different territories has caused autobiography to be a phenomenon where different perspectives are involved, and it is taken not only in a historical or literary disposition, but also in other studies such as psychological, sociological, among others.

There are two critical currents or two interpretations about the autobiographical problem:

- 1) It is believed that any narrative of a self is a fictionalization inseparable from the construction of identity. This position of the fictional nature of autobiography and that wants to extend that all literature is an autobiographical form is supported by Nietzsche to Derrida, among others, that is, "all autobiography is a literaturization" (Pozuelo, 2006, p. 24).
- 2) On the other hand, other authors are reluctant to consider any autobiography to be fiction. Despite having certain novelistic construction procedures, they are not novels, but a discourse that affirms a historical specificity, that proposes true testimonies used as a documentary basis.

Autobiography as a genre is important to the extent that "the problem of the constitution of the idea of the subject and its linguistic construction is raised" (Pozuelo, 2006, p. 31). The self is constructed by a text, which is authentically referential. When the subject self-constitutes himself narratively in some way, he portrays himself and tries to capture a reality suspended from himself. Following Pozuelo (2006):



The center and crucial point of the debate about autobiography is raised as follows: is there the possibility of discriminating when the self, subject of the enunciation and of the statement, is a real person and when it is simply a character, that is, it is feigned and mimics the actual act of enunciation? Is the person speaking a real person? (p. 26)

There are several paths that autobiography has as the direction of cultural studies, a field that is important in the theory of the autobiographical genre due to its contributions of a cultural and social nature. This criterion helps us to account for the processes of development and historical change of a place or a moment that we can observe from an autobiographical discourse. Those phenomena that help to reflect certain circumstances, as is the case of Salvador Novo's biography.

Sergio Ortega (2008) clarifies where the autobiographical genre comes from, whose origin is of a social nature:

It is at the beginning of the 19th century when the concept of "life history" arises from a scientific point of view. Life history is originally organized and sustained around biography, autobiography, testimony and memories, that is, any written form that is based on an experiential action within a community. Therefore, life documents are the databases for the scientific study of society and culture. (p. 60).

Another issue raised in autobiography is that, in the retrospective account of someone's life, there is a unifying view of the theme of self-identity that fits into a canonical text. Let us observe what Ortega tells us about it (2008):

The autobiography belongs to the written action, that is, it is a product of the action of telling oneself something relevant —an experience of one's own existence—, in the first instance, and that is considered important to be known by others. It is made up of a personal story. It is the product of a deliberate action: the story is thought, meditated, recorded and corrected until an explicit communication of what is meant with who will be its reader is achieved. It is usually preserved in written form, although today it can be preserved electronically. (p. 64).



In this work we explore the question of memory, identity that Lejeune (1994) also poses as a substantial orientation of autobiography studies that starts from the "construction of the self". This interest is supported by Sergio de Pitol's Memory Trilogy (2007), particularly in *El arte de la fuga*, an autobiography in which we observe the theme of the identity construction of a subject, that image that claims of itself and the sense of belonging, which he does through the reconstruction of his life story and tells us from memory:

After a certain age, any modification that one discovers in the environment acquires the character of an offense, a painful personal mutilation. As if, with the change made, someone gave us a macabre wink, and that renewal of an advertisement for blond cigarettes became, like the death of Beatriz Viterbo, an unexpected memento mori, an announcement of our future and inevitable death. (Pitol, 2007, p. 68).

One way of approaching identity is by talking about the self. To make a brief reference we will take Bruner (1998). This author tells us about two ways of thinking: narrative and paradigmatic. Bruner (1998) argues that narratives serve to account for identity, which is a self that disguises itself to have a certain personality and distinguish itself from others.

The modality of narrative thought deals with human actions and also with intentions, trying to situate the experience in a certain time-space. This thought gives meaning to our daily experience or even appeals to our memory.

Narration is a way of knowing that is located in human intentions and where the evaluations of these human beings about themselves also come into play. Bruner assures that we have a predisposition to narrative thinking that arises from the interaction from childhood with the actions and expressions of people who are formed in the contexts where we develop.

This reflection on the construction of identity belongs to an experience that can transform the image or vision that the subject claims of himself, it is an individual dimension of the experience and the social construction of his role as a person.

The individual is constructed when it is assumed as a person with different characteristics, possessing those characteristics at a specific and delimited moment. From the eighteenth century, according to Pozuelo (2006), "the narration of oneself becomes a



phenomenon of personal salvation in front of oneself and others, the past is restored as a way of conjuring the transience and restoration of life lost” (p. 32).

In *Trilogy of memory*, Pitol sought his self-construction in the world in which he lived; he warns us of his individual, cultural and social conditions. Where is his identity based? The conflict in the play is about who he is. First, in the search for his lineage, his self-image is modified:

I reread the materials of the book I am working on. It pretends to be a record of steps, the story of an education not yet completed, and I discover traces of snobbery from which I thought I had freed myself. Among others, the tendency to quote visibly prestigious readings. It is not about inventing or falsifying them, I am not at all interested in appearing as a reader that I am not; only that I have excluded other more plebeian or, let's say more normal, and that have been tremendously important in my life (Pitol, 2007, p. 248)

The context or the social life of a person needs a base that increases their symbolic capital, one that allows social mobility. On the individual identity, the conceptions of the dimension in the cultural values in a determined social environment are articulated, expanded and developed. Cultural and social conditions encourage Pitol in his sense of not belonging. He is on the periphery and from there he participates, he reflects it both in his personal position and in his literary work, he is a writer who is not going to compete with the writers of the Mexican canon, where he was trained, since he is recognized as a writer who finds it hard to institutionalize.

I have always resisted consuming the books imposed by fashion. My reading map has been drawn somewhat randomly, by destiny, temperament and much by hedonism. I am fascinated by eccentrics. For more than forty years I have frequented the novels of Ronald Firbank, when in England itself his audience was almost invisible; also the esoteric novels of H. Myers, which have only been approached by a tiny handful of faithful. I wrote about Flann O'Brien when *At-Swim-Two-Birds* must have had only a few dozen readers, all ready to die for this exceptional book. (Pitol, 2007, 248).

The problem of identity construction is a complex and comprehensive concern that is part of the studies of psychology, philosophy, sociology, history. Aaron Gurevich (1997)



says that it is “an investigation of the formation of the human self, of the personality, within a collective nucleus and at the same time the awareness of the distance in relation to it, which is evidenced in the direction taken towards interiority” (p. 18).

On the other hand, Ricardo Téllez-Girón (2001) says that identity is not static, it is transformed through social exchanges: "It is in a constant definition based on the relationships maintained by the members of a self-identified group. and that at the same time is identified by others with whom he interacts" (p. 9).

As an aside, we can see the above in Monterroso in *The Gold Seekers* (1993), when he leaves the Guatemalan consulate with his new passport and reflects on how that document gives him an identity and the possibility of crossing borders. Monterroso, like Pitol, moves continuously on the theme of identity and the group that identifies him. Even in that same passage he tells us that Rulfo questioned his identity, telling him that he should have a Mexican passport and not a Guatemalan one.

It is important to mention for this study, following the ideas of Téllez-Girón (2001), the difference between culture and identity. The two terms are related since they have certain features in common. However, the differences are that culture is a material and spiritual production of human conglomerates that develops from non-conscious processes. Identity has to do with patterns of belonging, they are conscious constructions, made from real situations. Therefore, we can say that the process of identity generation can modify the culture of a group and transform it.

In *El arte de la fuga*, Pitol made a self-portrait of his literary experiences, travels, music, cities; he fictionalizes his experience to reveal a literary practice in writing. Pitol erases the border between fiction and truth, between writing and existence where author, narrator and character converge. That is to say, the autobiography of a self that when referring to itself means the other.

One characteristic of his work is to show us his stay in certain places; It provides us with specific information about his reading and writing practices. Pitol creates a gap between the intimate and the private, and decides to show us only his private environment, without reaching the excess of intimacy. In the temporary distance that Pitol creates, where he reconstructs what has been lived and his experience, what is told is from memory, so in what is told there are alterations, since what has been lived is never fully recaptured.



This constant movement in time provokes the duality that Pozuelo (2006) calls "border dimension", constant opposition between subject/object, private/public, factual/fictional; a testimony is presented or simply an invention of a fact where an "autobiographical pact" is signed, a contract between the writer and reader that is made as long as one tells the truth of his life and the other believes it.

Pitol, disappear

In *El arte de la fuga*, the narration has a series of features that give it the characteristics of a literary manifestation. We find events where Pitol makes his person a character, full of journeys and a passion for invention, at first a very original imitator who, populated by readings, reflects on his own literary exercise, transmits to us his way of crossing time, an exercise that It is not only the subject of his writing, but it is the subject of his life, the old man who would not dare to live like the young man he once was, an explorer who dwells on the voices of others.

Evoking that time does not make me think that "I was living another life", as is generally said, but rather that the person I am referring to was not entirely myself; it was, in any case, a young Mexican who shared with me the same name and some habits and manias (p. 32).

It is a witness of what is kept for posterity and builds an identity from what it was. Through the story he fragments himself, to cease to exist, and then rebuilds himself to be a single entity. He reveals to us the difficulties of maintaining a single identity within a society of exclusions. The autobiographical life is based on the discourse of the subject within the text by searching for the essential differences between the body, the mind and the ways of knowing the world. It is a self-referential story where the journey, the personal struggle and the confession are matters that start from everyday life. Who narrates is not innocent when choosing what he wants to tell.

Returning to Pozuelo (2006), he considers identity as a dual status, that is, its construction is on the limit between invention and the relationship of a fact that is presented and testifies as real. Again, in an autobiographical account, the self is constructed by the text, the experience is subjective. And while it is true that the narrator determines what he wants to tell us, that repertoire comes from memory.



He unfolds existence and to invoke it he resorts, in the first instance, to temporality, where the starting point is imaginary. He goes through life and tries to repeat it: he makes a trajectory of common experience. It is the affect that links places and moments to configure the autobiographical space:

I find it difficult to write. My hand locks up just remembering that there was a time when living was something close to being a good savage and acknowledging, without rancor, that society, offices, conventions, ended up achieving their mission (Pitol, 2007, p. 33).

Leonor Arfuch (2013), in *Memoria y autobiografía*, says that the autobiographical space begins at home. In the place where we live, ecstatic images are lodged that are part of our memory and define the territory of our memory itineraries. The space has its poetic and dramatic charge, because it defines the movements and being of the inhabitants (Arfuch, 2013, p. 28).

Once again, a house/street dichotomy is constructed. Both spaces represent the intimate and the private; Pitol chooses the street, the exterior to show her as a character that offers her existential cataclysms. She shows us the city as the space where "the footprint of the steps when walking" is left. It is her evocation of the footsteps of another time:

The first time, I repeat, I saw the city blindly, it appeared to me in fragments, it appeared and disappeared, it showed me wrong proportions and altered colors. Over the years I have rectified that vision, each time more portentous, each time more unreal. Somehow my trip around the world, my whole life has had that same character (...). I have dreamed of traveling in that fantastic ship of fools painted by Memling (Pitol, 2007, p. 42).

Travel is a movement that has genealogies, the city keeps the essence between what remains and what changes. As Ricoeur says, "that constitutive otherness of the self". The city as autobiography supposes a past-present temporality, where a social and affective identity is woven that shapes the experience itself. Therefore, it forms a space between what is physically inhabited and what is inhabited by memory.

I return to Mexico in the middle of 1962, the return to my old habits and places excites me. However, I do my best to return to Italy. I don't have a



permanent job; I defend myself with a piece of work that I do at home. After the complete freedom that I knew in Rome, I find the idea of going back to an office intolerable. (Pitol, 2007, p. 54)

When remembering, an image and the affection that causes that image are remembered, the spatial context where a happy scene is remembered, a scene from another time. The rescue of space is far from being an erudite or exotic evocation; rather it becomes the “sensitive places along the way” that memory rescues (Arfuch, 2013, p. 34). Pitol, like Monterroso and Bernard Behan, among others, do a job of interiority without distancing himself from fiction.

The autobiographical aspect not only leads us to the chronological personal story, but it is the gaze on the other, the gaze of his own otherness and the dialogue that he maintains with experience. He is the walker turned narrator who meets his own character, whose daily moment is imaginatively traced by an author who details the voices that stop him on real land, converted into imagined memories.

In the spring of 1966 I spent a few days in Italy. Passing in front of the bookstore I found it closed; moreover, non-existent. Gone were the cabinets on both sides of the door that displayed the latest editorial news day and night. The sign with the name of the bookstore had disappeared. I felt the wound of time, its malignity, like a terrible intensity. That disappearance was a way of punishing the immense happiness of the young man who one day appeared there, he rummaged a bit in the shelves and went out with Orlando the furious (Pitol, 2007, p. 69)

The representation of himself through metaphorical instances, allegories, allusions are forms that transform reality and wrap it through memory. The self is delineated in the encounter with the other, promising to grant an identity sealed by the name (Arfuch, 2013, p. 39). The reference is on the border between reality and fiction. The art of escape, *The Gold Diggers* (1993) by Augusto Monterroso (1993) and *My New York* (2012) by Brendan Behan are a clear example of the game of “border dimensions”. The three authors constitute a story based on the game between the present and the past, sleep and wakefulness, their self created by memory:



Memory works with the same oblique and rebellious logic of dreams. He rummages in the hidden wells and from them he extracts visions that, unlike those in dreams, are almost always pleasant. Memory can, at the will of its owner, be tinged with nostalgia, and nostalgia only by exception produces monsters. Nostalgia lives on the finery of a past confronted with a present devoid of attractions. His ideal figure is the oxymoron: he summons contradictory incidents, intertwines them, adds them up, disorderly orders the chaos. (Pitol, 2007, p. 73).

In *Trilogy of memory*, the narration has a series of features that give it the characteristics of a literary expression. We find events where Pitol makes his person a character full of journeys, of passion for invention, at first a very original imitator who, populated by readings, reflects on his own literary writing, transmits to us his way of crossing time, an exercise that it is not only the theme of his writing, but it is the theme of his life, the old man who would not dare to live like the young man he was, an explorer who stops at the voices of others.

He unfolds the existence and to invoke resorts in the first instance to temporality. The starting point is imaginary and runs through life, tries to repeat it, makes a trajectory of common experience. It is the affect that links places and moments to configure the autobiographical space.

Conclusions

With this we can conclude that in the autobiography, what is narrated is an event made according to the perspective of the one who tells us the events that seem memorable to them, since memory changes in relationships. It is a plausible but not true act, which acquires meaning through the experiences presented that are relevant.

As Pitol wonders who he is, he is going to tell us a story about the imprint of what happened to him, the things he smelled, observed, heard, experienced and felt. All this marked by the people who participated in his life.

What Pitol does is build the present that corresponds to him to live through memories of his childhood and fragments it to build his identity. He is always in duality: a world of fiction built by another more defined, that of real things.



In *El arte de la fuga*, part of the book *Trilogía de la memoria*, Pitol makes a self-portrait of his literary experiences, travels, music, cities; he fictionalizes his experience to reveal a literary practice in writing.

Future lines of research

Approaching Sergio Pitol's writing is to navigate the path of rote writing. The work is a reflection of what we understand as postmodern writing. In this work we do not want to clarify this statement, rather we want to make it clear that Pitol's writing, like any forceful work, requires reflections from different perspectives. The previous reflections on memory is one of them. Reflecting on Pitol's work in conjunction with the work already carried out by other researchers will contribute to a broader understanding of the writer, but above all we will realize the postmodern universe and that as such it is intertextual and interdiscursive.

Approaching an analysis from the postmodernity of Pitol's work is the path that could materialize, but not only from the vision of this author, but of other authors "similar to him" who have given the universe of literary narrative discourse one of the works more original writing. Approaching the same discourse from a narratological perspective could give us a little more light to understand how narratives are constructed that give meaning and existence to understanding the world a little more.

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Curación de datos	No aplica
Escritura - Preparación del borrador original	“Igual” Guillermo Carrera García, Anayetzy Yuriria Marín Espinoza
Escritura - Revisión y edición	“Igual” Guillermo Carrera García, Anayetzy Yuriria Marín Espinoza
Visualización	“Igual” Guillermo Carrera García, Anayetzy Yuriria Marín Espinoza
Supervisión	“Igual” Guillermo Carrera García, Anayetzy Yuriria Marín Espinoza
Administración de Proyectos	No aplica
Adquisición de fondos	No aplica.

