

WRITING ON SELF, WRITING ON THE OTHER:

literary journalism as theoretical
parameter for the biographical genres

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ABSTRACT – This text proposes a theoretical approach of the biographical genres from the field of Literary journalism, having in perspective the discursive possibilities involved in this narrative construction. The “writing of oneself” and the “writing of the other” pass through frontiers of discourse in which Literary journalism, as it has been conceived in the contemporary world, also moves. To improve this debate, we bring the knowledge of Narrative and New History theories, in which there is an intense discussion about the work that unites objective data of reality and the capacity to elaborate a discourse that deepens in subjectivities. Our central argument is that Literary journalism, when articulated with biographical texts, can contribute to the theorizing and production of works of these genres.

Key words: Literary journalism. Biographical genres. History. Narrative. Speech.

ESCRITA DO SI, ESCRITA DO OUTRO: jornalismo literário como parâmetro teórico para gêneros biográficos

RESUMO – Este texto propõe uma abordagem teórica dos gêneros biográficos a partir do campo do jornalismo literário, tendo em perspectivas as possibilidades discursivas envolvidas nessa construção narrativa. A escrita de si e a escrita do outro transitam por fronteiras do discurso em que o jornalismo literário, tal como tem sido concebido na contemporaneidade, também se movimenta. Para aprimorar este debate, trazemos os conhecimentos de teorias da narrativa e da nova história, em que há uma intensa discussão acerca do trabalho que une dados objetivos da realidade e a capacidade de elaborar um discurso que se aprofunda em subjetividades. Nosso argumento central é o de que o jornalismo literário, quando articulado com os textos biográficos, pode contribuir para a teorização e produção de trabalhos desses gêneros.

Palavras chave: Jornalismo literário. Gêneros biográficos. História. Narrativa. Discurso.

ESCRITA DEL SI, ESCRITA DEL OTRO: periodismo literario como parámetro teórico para géneros biográficos

RESUMEN – Este texto propone un abordaje teórico de los géneros biográficos a partir del campo del periodismo literario, teniendo en perspectiva las posibilidades discursivas involucradas en esa construcción narrativa. La “escritura de sí” y la “escritura del otro” transitan por fronteras del discurso en que el periodismo literario, tal como ha sido concebido en la contemporaneidad, también se mueve. Para perfeccionar este debate, traemos los conocimientos de teorías de la narrativa y de la nueva historia, en que hay una intensa discusión acerca del trabajo que une datos objetivos de la realidad y la capacidad de elaborar un discurso que se profundiza en subjetividades. Nuestro argumento central es que el periodismo literario, cuando se articula con los textos biográficos, puede contribuir a la teorización y producción de trabajos de esos géneros.

Palabras clave: Periodismo literario. Géneros biográficos. Historia. Narrativa. Discurso.

1. Introduction

The writing of someone’s biography or the recollection of one’s own experiences, that is, the telling of a life that had, in different degrees, repercussions and follow-ups in its time entails a series of obstacles. It is necessary to find trustworthy sources, to collect testimonies as precise as possible, check on recollections, go over footsteps, investigate details and sniff out the tracks that, not rarely, were long since covered up. The chore, already arduous in the collection of facts, gains even more complex outlines when it comes to building a narrative around facts compiled. It is then that new elements that thread through aesthetics come into play, overcoming the condition of a mere report. It is necessary to keep in mind the desired result, to the plot the life under scrutiny may draw and to the outlines the human dimensions have to offer. It is at this point that the journalistic work, the historic investigation, the interviewing techniques to come to revelations and uncover memories requires the elaboration of a narrative that may come close to literature.

When we think of possible connections between biographies and autobiographies and literary journalism, it is clear that the process of elaborating such works gain aspects that widen the

gap that separate it from a bureaucratic text. The reconstruction of an individual life, now in the form of a narrative, takes on many dimensions that further deepen aspects and formulate meaning. This demands a perception distant to simplism. The use of literary narration techniques along with an even more precise journalistic screening, thus achieving particularities and generally ignored details; the establishment of cause and effect relationships, connecting people apparently far apart, as well as interpreting interviews, documents and memories, all require a complex method.

This is the core issue of this article. In our conception, studies of biographies and autobiographies may grow and become more consolidated if undertaken in close dialogue with the reflexions of literary journalism and its critical fortune. The proposition herein is to include the narrative and discourse theories that make contact with investigations and comments made around other genres and also promote contact between the objective world – the reality of facts – and their reconstruction by means of a text. History, particularly the approaches that lead to a less rigid debate concerning the report and the historiographical condition – including the role of the writer – is one of these spaces where such confluences may reverberate. The place occupied by the one who narrates and by the one who recollects the facts transformed into discourse in the biographical genres – in autobiographies the genres come together – is also to be considered, thus leading to another possible association with literary journalism, due to the discussions therein on the objectivity of the report.

As counterpart we propose that literary journalism, and a developing discipline gaining growing attention and support as to its theoretical consolidation envision, in the biographical genres, a place of study and experimentation. Biographies, so often considered correctly as report-books and the autobiographies that are frequently considered historical registers, have many identification points with the cornerstones of an author and narrative journalism. Be it in the collection of data for such a discursive narrative, in the forms this lapidating takes, or in the discursive encounters possible with such a reunion of meanings, literary journalism and the biographical genres have much to offer each other. It is from this perspective that we now broach the following considerations.

2. History and the narrative of lives

Biographies (life narratives of individuals written by third parties) and autobiographies (narratives produced by the subject of biography, presented as memories, testimonies, and declarations that gain a plot, intent and meanings) aim at telling life stories with a narrative that generates interest. In order to do so strategies from fields other than writing are used and are joined so as to reveal to the world profiles and episodes oftentimes unknown or lost from rushed or prejudiced approaches. The biographer, of self and of others, aims at shedding light on such facts, minutely detailing the subjects' paths, and thus provide a fuller picture of their lives so that readers have a clear image before them.

In this terrain we find historians, writers and journalists, each adopting the screening methods and narrative procedures they find most pertinent. Such a framework is of complex outlining, requiring an architecture of hues so that the most diverse aspects of personal existence – which invariably echoes upon other existences when not upon a larger group – may be contemplated. Biographies and autobiographies demand careful organization so that the larger picture may be glanced without losing track of the elucidating detail, the curiosity as personal characteristic, the casual encounter that generates practical consequences.

It is necessary to deal with unpredicted variables, conflicting information, source lapses and documents, with deductions and inductions that require both care and daring. These are books that recall the humanity of historic figures – shown in their most fragile and prosaic dimensions –, that place the anonymous under the spotlight, that delves into individualities to the point of obtaining the most intimate and secret confessions. A writing art that demands effort in excavation and organization of data, that includes extensive testimonials or hunting for registers long forgotten, and the capacity to transform all this into a logical narrative with all its under plots.

Biography and autobiography, bringing the debate to the realm of Literary journalism, come under formative and informative novels about a certain life and its respective repercussions. In this way we consider that this genre is a possibility of doing journalism with literary techniques while preserving the “reading contract” – in the understanding of Verón (2004) and Alsina (2009) – of a product that proposes to make a veritable and trustworthy report, but without abdicating of a text that uses pertinent literary elements that apply to a given situation. Among these resources it is worth mentioning scene

descriptions, details observations, inclusion of thoughts revealed or registered by interviewees, employment of figures of language, consciousness fluxes and revocation of strict chronologies. These are elements that contribute towards a comprehension of the text in its complexity, its polyphony and polysemy (Bakhtin, 2002).

This is in harmony with the very spirit of this kind of work as a life is not told with pre-established bureaucratic formulas. All lives hold some magic, destiny, surprise and drama. There are no biographies that don't have almost unbelievable moments, turnabouts, moments of emotion, tension, grief and joy. François Dosse (2009) submits that the advent and development of the Social Sciences brought new perspectives to reports on the past, including biographies as portraits of their subjects within historical frameworks. This phenomenon is intensified in the writing of History from the 1920's and hits biographies in the 1980s, with what the author calls "age of hermeneutics".

In the classification Dosse (2009) proposes, the "age of hermeneutics" the third of a series that starts with the "heroic age" – narratives of great doings that were object of laudatory biographies – and is followed by the "modal age" – in which biographies are subjected to the same logic of historical reports, with more objectivity concerning data used. In the "age of hermeneutics", the subject gains prominence, with the biographer having more liberty to express subjectivities which, obviously, require from the author deeper levels of interpretation and not just naked descriptions. There is, therefore, a "variation of the analytical focus by the constant change of scale, which allows one to arrive at different meanings with respect to the biographic subjects" (Dosse, 2009, p. 359). The theorist states: "if we detect a chronological evolution among these three ages, we may realize that the three types of biographical methods may be combined and appear in the course of a same period" (Dosse, 2009, p. 13). Dosse proposes a new vision of the biographical genre, less Cartesian. The concept of narrative in Ricoeur (2012), who finds in Time the path to re-work that which is reported, and the "writing of History" of Certeau (2017) all come together with this proposal. This is done with verification and diligent research, but also with the capacity of translating it into a text. Literature may be a possible inspiration.

It is not, however, literature but rather a report that maintains the objective of informing on who was, or is, a certain person. There are parameters for verification that must be exposed and upheld; there are lines that must not be crossed; there is accountability towards readers.

Masforrol recalls that “biography was not appreciated by historians” (Masforrol, 2012, p. 39, our translation)¹, and this only began to change what she refers to as the “axiological turnover”. Nevertheless the Professor singles out that one of the first biographers in the XVIII century, James Boswell, when he published his classical *Life of Samuel Johnson*, stated that “one of the main problems faced in a biography”² is to ensure “the credibility, an issue so porous and delicate”³, concerning which the smallest error “may impugnate a whole work” (Masforrol, 2012, pp. 39-40, our translation)⁴. This, however, should not curtail more creative conceptions. At this stage, biographies and autobiographies reverberate in Literary journalism, and may be included in reflections on this discourse as one more possible modality arising from the encounter between information and enjoyment of a text, between reality and the ways to present it, between the ethic of correspondence with objective elements and its transformation into discourse.

Biography and autobiography are situated in an ample discursive communion between the factual and the imagined, what is said and what is silenced, the remembered and the forgotten. According to Bakhtin (2002), there has been an incipient debate on the genre since the early Greeks with works such as *Socrates’Apology* and *Fedon*, basis for modern biographies, and this debate has matured due to the developments discourse has undergone. Bakhtin states that, at that time, such narratives were separated into biographies and autobiographies with rhetorical characteristics called “paths of life” wherein the subjects’ teachings and personal philosophy were also focused, shedding light on very specific political conjunctions and factors, differently from aspects posteriorly explored (Bakhtin, 2002).

Julia Swindells (2003) criticizes the fact that texts of the genre are either considered a transparent truth of existence or a product of subjective ideology. She ponders that when so doing, the relations among these narratives and the social contexts from which they emerge and produce their reports are forgotten. Agreeing with the author we may use Foucault’s (2007) concept of “formative discourse”, according to which all discourse can only be apprehended when all its various formative elements are considered, including the time and space wherein such enunciations emerged.

Biographies and autobiographies effectively exchange symbolic knowledge and are exposed to elements that attain a level of abstraction uncommon in the genres of non-fiction. “What is

remembered? Whose memory is it?" These two fundamental questions asked by Paul Ricoeur (2014, p. 23) how important having these answers is to perspective when writing a biographical narrative. The same author, in another work, states: "that which is re-signified by the narrative is that which has been pre-signified by human action" (Ricoeur, 2012, p. 138). An interval of time where the narrative, telling and "re-signifying" an action of the past, presents once more situations that may not be seen in the same way by different sources. Journalistic know-how and its commitment to the truth may find in the gaps of memory powerful and sometimes unsurmountable obstacles.

In a spiny debate that considers fundamental deontological issues New History is an interesting reference as it admits that the building of a historical discourse is exactly that: a discursive construction. This uncontested fact does not transform historiography into a succession of assumptions or random conclusions, arrived at the author. On the contrary, it is a hermeneutical process necessary to better comprehend processes and happenings without which there would be no context and or signals as ways of comprehending the past, as underlined by Dosse (2009).

New History, represented by the reflections on the so called *École des Annales*, breaks with paradigms that immobilized such apprehension, re-dimensioning research procedures, its objects of analysis and its "writing of history" (Certeau, 2017). Marc Bloch (2001) considers that the collection of data and document research are pertinent only if they acquire "meaning" by means of interpretation. These objects can only be useful when accompanied by a discourse in which their effective importance may be seen. New History is a movement that promotes the exploration of other possibilities for reporting History and, consequently, the life of those who were or are a part of it. "Never, [in any science] has passive observation generated anything fertile. If passive observation, that is, is indeed possible" (Bloch, 2001, p. 79). Towards the study of biographies New History and its theoretical parameters have a huge contribution to make, whether in the collection and analysis of data, or even within the structure of these narratives, guiding ways in which to choose testimonials, documents and overcoming blanks, contradictions and silences. This is only possible if meaning is conferred upon such materials, within transparent procedures and criteria, built upon valid interpretations.

Historian Jörn Rüsen (2005) claims History is narrative, casting the characteristics that make this relation so fundamental. He elects "three qualities and their systematic relations" to develop a narrative

theory of History. In his vision, the historical narrative – and here we may set a parallel with biography and memorial writing – “brings together” the tips of memory “mobilizing past experiences” so they may “make the present comprehensible”; “organize the internal unity of the three dimensions of time” [past, present and future] so they result in a “conception of continuity”, emphasizing experiences and influences among them; and, finally, “establish the identity of authors and readers”, thus ensuring a measure of “permanence and stability” even face with the changes of the world (Rüsen, 2005, p.11).

Paul Ricoeur believes, in turn, that there is an “indirect derivation link due to which historical knowledge proceeds from a comprehension of narrative without losing its scientific ambition” (Ricoeur, 2010, p. 152). This leads directly to the assumption that the historical report and its writing are a discourse. “Going back to History I, history-object, covering all human happening, of any type, in all places, and during all time; history II, history-discourse, it is always the narrative of fragments of this absolutely unlimited object” (Novais & Silva, 2011, p.17). An ‘unlimited’ that gains expression with discourse: “It may also be that, attaining to the *discourse* and its fabrication, one may better apprehend that nature of the relations it has with its other, reality. Does not language have, as a rule, the implication – albeit being place as *other* than itself – of the reality spoken of?” (Certeau, 2017, p. 5 – italics by the author). This question leads to the debate between the discursive frontiers, that exist but are not impenetrable.

Luiz Costa Pinto defends differentiations not only because they are “different disciplines”, but also because history and fiction have different prerogatives and proposals, elaborating the empirical “in very different ways, in which what is proper to one is improper to the other” (Pinto, 2006, p.117). According to the author, the writing of History perceived that a naked description was not enough but was careful to not embrace excessively creative approaches or strings of imagination that might put its credibility at risk. The facts, however, impose interpretation challenges that made historiography look for other paths: “the writing of history converts heterogeneous facts into a temporally explained assembly” (Pinto, 2006, p.128).

Hayden White (2001), however, has a more open understanding on this issue:

In reality, history – the real world and its evolution in time – acquires meaning in the same way a poet or a novelist try to attribute meaning to it, that is, conferring upon that which is originally problematic and obscure the aspect of a recognizable

shape, because it is familiar. It doesn't matter if the world is conceived as real or imagined: the manner of attributing meaning to it is the same (White, 2001, p. 115).

Applying the same reasoning to Journalism, we find a similar situation. Even faced with a report on reality, there is discourse, a writing that requires interpretations. Even within journalistic information the same process goes on, in spite of its peculiarities. When speaking of Literary journalism the issue becomes even more pronounced as the writing itself brings forth other visions, associations and the use of more resources to highlight its complexity.

Research on the theme has, already, some tradition (Olinto, 2008; Chillón, 1993) and has been growing in Brazil (Pena, 2008; Bulhões, 2007; Castro, 2010; Borges, 2013; Martinez, 2016) and abroad (Leman, 2015; Sims, 2009; Cumming 2014; Walters, 2017). In common there is an effort to demonstrate the Literary journalism is not incompatible with informative quality. Chillón ponders that it is “vital to overcome the false contraposition between denotative language (journalism) and connotative language (literature)” (Chillón, 1993, p.29). The author comes to the point of using the expression “documental journalism” to define the modality. In his reflection, Chillón believes that Literary journalism has the potential to “improve, set the context and override” traditional journalism (Chillón, 1993, p. 131) Hence the pertinence of gathering the journalism, History and life reports in this debate. The objective fact does not exist in discourse if it is not woven in. And the act of telling it is also the act of providing it with meaning. After all, “to write is to re-write” (Ricoeur, 2010, p. 256).

The debate is present in journalism. Constructionists theories reveal that the journalistic discourse, even though disciplined by its social commitments, is exposed to influences, pressures, and subjectivities (Alsina, 2009), supported by the sociological school of Symbolic Interventionism that agree with idea of “social construction of reality” with “objectivities” permeated by subjectivities.

The reality of everyday life is not only full of objectivities; it is only possible because of it. I am constantly surrounded by objects that 'proclaim' the subjective intentions of my peers, even when I find it hard to know for sure what one certain object is 'proclaiming' (Berger & Luckman, 2010, p. 53).

This thesis reverberates on the image we make of reality and so on objective and verifiable facts with which journalism works. According to Ponte (2005), news “are what they are” due to a series

of symbolic or tangible building blocks that contribute to the format of the discourse elaborated on, or due to, a determined event, to a specific personality within a given context. “In societies that are open and plural as to their composition, and therefore dynamic and unstable, to reflect on the community is also to analyze how the closeness of *others* is experienced” (Ponte, 2005, p. 135, italics from the original). Society and people influence each other continuously, going through changes in their statutes, reassessing postures, behaviors and updating codes and registers.

Discourses that consider themselves credible convince that they are trustworthy. In this process there is a similarity to what occurs in life-like fiction, once the reader must also “believe” in what is being told. The “truth effect” demanded by Barthes (1999), the legitimizing of truth in the narration of facts (Sodré, 2009) or episodes in journalism and History are part of this debate. “A fact is, therefore, a complex combination that includes events involving things, people and texts. Its characteristic marks are, activity, relation and time” (Gomes, 2009, p. 30). These three dimensions, of the act, the interaction amongst people and things and of time, support the framework from which discourse becomes effective.

These reflections are applicable to the biographical genres. Such works have at their core the debates that are also found in journalism and History. Biographies and autobiographical registries use both systems, strengthening historical data and informing journalistically of personal paths. In journalism, the reading contract (Verón, 2004) is that of real and proved information, and as in History has similar and more intense demands, as the take on scientific connotation. Biography is also, in many ways, History.

3. Biographical genres and literary journalism: challenges of the discourse

The issues referred to so far, especially as to the ways in which the biographical discourse constitutes itself are oftentimes neglected. When we think of life reports as discourses and the role of the “I and the Other” (Ricoeur, 2014) in the narrative this becomes clearer as one works with representations, even when searching for facts, of a past. The biographical genres compose multifaceted pictures. It may be that the best option is not to classify them but rather to narrate them. “That is the reason why, in the consciousness of those who

speak the report, the discourse, is no longer a submissive reflect of things but rather an individual values” (Todorov, 2003, p. 114).

The establishment of a parallel amongst the different narratives – journalistic, historical, literary and biographical – does not seem uncalled for. Journalistic profiles are examples that may be used. They cover an individual with the challenge of deepening the insight. Biographies and autobiographies chose their heroes and their villains, dramatic and redemptive situations. We may say that such is the practice of Literary journalism, even if coming from a differing *locus*. According to Tom Wolfe (2005), an exponent of the literary journalism in the U.S.A, particularly important during the 60’s, that “the autobiographical work arises in the XVIII century. It is the only form of non-fiction with almost the same force as a novel” (Wolfe, 2005, p. 69) and is designated as New Journalism. The journalist says that “many reporters who try to write New Journalism use the autobiographical format (...) exactly because it seems to solve so many technical problems That is why New Journalism has been many times qualified as “subjective” journalism” (Wolfe, 2005, p. 69-70).

Nicolas Leman (2015), dealing with these frontiers, refers to biographical works that draw on less orthodox profiles. He recalls the daring techniques of Tom Wolfe in detailed observation and in the delving into secrets hidden in the thoughts of his interviewees. Although admiring the mentioned writer’s talent, he warns: “Non-fiction is more than, literally, an absence of fiction. Non-fiction has a mission that differs from that of fiction” (Leman, 2015, p. 54). Noam Sims (2009) sees biographies as a genre with deep connection to the challenges Literary journalism accepts in moving among discourses and their hybrid offspring. “There are frontiers between literary journalism and shape surrounding it such autobiographies, fiction, scientific fiction, unconventional journalism and history” (Sims, 2009, p. 11). It is interesting to note that he places autobiographies as more of a fictional product, suspicious of its clinging to reality. “We may be reasonably skeptic that people will be honest and truthful about themselves. If it is found that an autobiographical or memoir work – or even, God help us, a journalistic work – is embellished or untrue, we react unfavorably. That is the difference between them” (Sims, 2009, p. 14).

Patrick Walters mentions that “many studies on the relations between journalism and autobiography/memoires have focused on New Journalism” (Walters, 2017, p. 26). Douglas Cumming (2014) quote journalist Marshall Frady who, when writing the biography of

Billy Graham, uses terms as “ultra-biography” or “total biography”. He identifies in the work the effort in discovering each bias treated without, however, losing sight of he calls “caretaking of the observation for journalistic integrity” (Cumming, 2014, p. 86). In Christopher Wilson’s perspective, journalism and biographies are genres that allow us to see what there is “behind the facts” (Wilson, 2014, p. 64).

A kind of news-piece book, it is not an accident that biographies have become an area for exercise of journalists, bringing their experience to a field previously belonging to historians. “In order to write a biography, no one needs to be a journalist, anthropologist, astronomer, physicist or historian. It is enough to be a biographer” (Villas Boas, 2002, p. 17). The historian and the journalist have a common commitment to the “truth” of the facts they shed light on. According to Villas Boas (2008), six guidelines should be present in these works: background and origin, fatalism, extraordinariness, truth, transparency and time. Such benchmarks not foreign to journalism nor History and are also used in fictional literature. Fatalism and extraordinariness may be translated as criteria for the notability of the facts, corresponding to tragedy, coincidence and originality. Transparency and truth are commitments at deontological levels in journalism and History, not excluding genres such as biographies. Even if the truth be constructed, it remains as a reference to be followed, the “north” to be observed or else it is another category, that of fiction.

When Villas Boas speaks of “background” and “fatalism” he is speaking of an investigation of data that, when organized, hierarchized and interpreted gain a specific connotation that outlines the profile of the subject of the biography as a character. It is also an invitation to not simplify the personality under focus in the text. To Villas Boas “it is a mistake to believe that what is not quantifiable or formalized does not exist or is only residual to that that is real” (Vilas Boas, 2008, p. 142). This issue is central to the debate on the idea of truth.

May a biographer reach the truth of his subject? May one re-compose, philosophically speaking the totality of a life in writing? No (...) As in the writing of History, that is a provisional answer on the past, biographical writing also transports the weight of the writer, such as personal impressions, education, life history, the commitments made to the society that molded her/him (...) – the same ample values that make up the subject of the biography” (Vilas Boas, 2008, p. 153).

The author justifies such a position, polemic up to a point, by stating that biographers and their subjects are neither exact entities

without contradictions. Each has a personal logic and the meeting – adding up the unquantifiable number precious datum that is lost, found and changed over time and circumstances – is an assemblage that should not be as a Cartesian group. “And thus it may be seen that the false becomes true, the relevant detaches itself easily from the rest and the cumulative testimonials may be challenged by distillations of the very author from masses of informative pages” (Villas Boas, 2008, p. 163).

In the discourses based on verifiable facts such a debate was considered, for a long time, almost heresy. As put by Gaye Tuchman (1999), the ideas of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality are more than just professional procedures: they become the ethic to be respected, making journalistic work legitimate. In the opinion of the author, these ideas are more of an ideal than an actual goal. This does not however, invalidate the theory that is the framework of the profession, which would throw such disciplines – and the duty to inform and register – into a relativism that could let distortion filter in. Gomes recalls that “journalism is an activity totally affected by the law of veracity” (Gomes, 2009, p. 10). He refutes statements that attempt to make this characteristic flexible. “Journalism does not only make a commitment to the consumer the obligation to be truthful, but also the commitment to use all possible resources to ensure no mistakes or errors occur” (Gomes, 2009, p. 11).

Literary journalism and the biographical genres establish themselves in the midst of all the discussions. Although not quite a battleground it has its share of confrontations and it is at the core that it is necessary to acknowledge that discourse is a representation. According to Ricoeur (2012), narratives may take place in differing spaces and periods. “However, *where* do references for remnants and metaphoric reference meet, if not at the *temporality* of human action? Is it not human time that historiography and fiction literature reconfigure in *common* crossing in it their referential modes?” (Ricoeur, 2012, p. 140, italics in the original).

These are delicate frontiers, and put in perspective both reality and fiction discourses. It is therefore necessary to establish a concept of fiction. When we acknowledge that many works of fiction have elements of reality in their makeup, and vice versa demonstrate the close ties among them. Iser (2013) argues that it is in the universe of language and how it is established in any specific text that doubts are dissipated and the differences made clear. By means of functions, the works travel along what he calls the “triad”: “selection, combination and self-indication”, that every work has in itself. It is by this interpretive

route and reading that “a fictional text shows itself as such, by means of signs of the contract between author and reader” (Iser, 2013, p. 43).

Our present interest is in the realization that fiction has its own internal logical paths, even in its analysis (Ricoeur, 2012), its configurations and discursive constructions. What Iser (2013) calls the “act of faking” is, in essence, the aesthetic character of fictional creation even before named literature and should not be associated with lies or misrepresentations. There is an elaboration of imaginings and objective data for the construction of a work of art, but which have references from the whole world. Vargas Llosa calls this conditions as the “truth of lies”. “The literary truth is one, historical truth another. But even when packed with lies – or, better yet, because of that -, literature tells a story that history, written by historians, does not know how and cannot tell” (Losa, 2004, p. 24).

Tomás Eloy Martínez (2006), bringing the matter into the field of journalism, considers that “News has stopped being objective so as to become individual”⁵ and points out that “Of all of man’s vocations, journalism is that in which there is less space for absolute truths” (Martínez, 2006, p. 235, our translation)⁶. The narration game, the going and coming of verification and possibilities, proof and interpretation, freedom and objective commitments are instigating, as long as well conducted. It is necessary to point out that in the assessment of data and details, collection of interviews and testimonials, in the comparison of versions, there will be lapses, absences and contradictions that are not necessarily falsehoods, Memory, recollections, trauma and forgetfulness all integrate the reconstruction of the past. Discourse will always contain subjectivities. In biographical texts such issues are even more pronounced.

The decisive step towards the conception of personal identity of a narrative is taken when one goes from action to character. It is the character who executes the action of the narrative. The character’s category, therefore, is also a narrative category and its role in the narrative is linked to the same narrative intelligence of the plot. The issue is then to know with which does the narrative category of the character contributes to personal identity. The thesis here argued for will be that the identity of the character is understood by the transference to it of the plot composition operation, previously applied to the action narrated; the character, shall we say, is composed in the plot (Ricoeur, 2014, p. 149).

When dealing with the categories “Self and Other”. Ricoeur discusses the *locus* of identity in discourses about people – or “characters” – and the complexity of constructing (or reconstructing) real individuals

by means of the narrative act. The Self gains new meanings in the position of narrator and of narrator of others, as he/she also acknowledges as narrator the reports collected in testimonials, interviews, documents. The Other is thus an eternal challenge of interpretation and discovery. It is a process that includes the many layers of memory.

On the one hand, memories distribute and organize themselves by levels of meaning, in archipelagos, eventually separated by abysses; on the other hand, memory continues to be the capacity of roaming, of rebuilding the past, while at the same time, nothing, in principle, forbids such movements that need not be continuous. It is mainly in the narrative that the memories in the plural and memory in the singular, differentiation and continuity are articulated (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 108).

Memory makes a discontinued continuity, an endless narrative. According to Ricoeur (2007), personal memory – reminiscences, occasionally blurred recollections – are completed by collective memories, wherein social contexts help – when not outlining or even outlining – certain recollections. Memories that ballast narratives, retrospective looks that avoid anachronisms of events rebuilt at discursive level. This approach establishes bridges between rationality that weaves the complementarity of memory and perception, exactly what occurs in historical, journalistic and biographical discourse. “Our perceptions are doubtlessly impregnated with remembrances (...) does not become present again without partaking of a memory in which it is inscribed” (Bergson, 2006, p.80, our translation)⁷.

This approach to the phenomenon of memory when faced with tangible reality in which it manifests itself – or is stimulated to do so – favors the understanding that objective and material facts should not be analyzed ignoring the subjective gear. Memories tie themselves to objective remains so that certain may be reconstructed in a narrative. Literary journalism, in a different measure, does the same. Experiences, in Gadamer conception, are “units of life, in themselves units of meaning” (Gadamer, 2008, p. 111) thus inserting themselves in this complex equation. Meaning brought forth in the narrative and glimpsed at in the objective report subjectively elaborated.

4. Literature of reality in biographical works

There are many examples of biographical works written by journalists who use all issues discussed in this article. Mention of these

works should not be associated with any judgment of value, but only as examples of how biographies and autobiographies illustrating certain procedures and revealing ways in which such works access the rich and diversified links to Literary journalism. One of the currently most prominent names in this field in Brazil is that of the journalist and writer Lira Neto.

If at the start the author seemed a bit intimidated by rules that gave him a kind of license to consider himself a biographer, his works slowly gained breadth and entered languages close to Literary journalism. That may be seen in his third biography – *Maysa – Só Numa Multidão de Amores* (2007) (*Maysa – alone in a multitude of love*)⁸. In this book Lira Neto cuts himself free of formulas and turns the turbulent life story of the singer, who was one of the most popular in Brazil, into a kind of drama, almost an opera, with tragic and intense moments. This choice revealed itself perfect to tell what happened to a woman that is still remembered by the force of her personality, by the passion with which she achieved success and dived into decadence, vice and self-destruction.

The spirit of the subjects that emerge from Lira Neto's books are perhaps their most important differential. It is something that can only be achieved if the conventional text is left behind. It is necessary that the author prepare a plot so that so many unique moments be revealed in their human dimension; so that the peculiar characteristics that make a person special within her/his particularities “jump” off the page and become real to the reader; so that a deeper level comprehension is achieved. This challenge of writing moves the very soul of Literary journalism. The biographical genres are, therefore, fertile land for the exercise of the registry of the past, of memory and of events using discourses that lay hand of a fluid narrative while in observance of the verifiable.

This becomes even clearer in Lira Neto's two subsequently published books. In *Padre Cicero: Poder, Fé e Guerra no Sertão* (2009) (*Father cicero: Power, Faith and War in the backwoods*)⁹, he bypasses stereotypes surrounding a very popular religious leader so as to rebuild the profile of a man full of contradictions. He travels among those who adored the priest and those who despised him an a not quite intermediary path but rather in an instigating way to perceive such a personality from less simplistic angles. And the description of his doubtful attitudes, his “claimed” miracles, the persecution he suffered in his lifetime are brought to the reader as if short stories about this mysterious character, owner of a strong and polemic public image.

The biographer strikes a balance, maintaining his narrative force, amongst elements, testimonials and documents oftentimes

radically polarized. How to separate passions and hate from what really happened? How to outline a man who is today considered a saint by thousands but who took part in political deals, made agreements with outlaws and was accused of being a charlatan by the church itself? How to tread on surfaces also home to elements of the supernatural, the inexplicable, the divine? The joining of objective material and a narrative of literary shades was adopted to not incur in a debate that might seem impartial but that does not contemplate the complete and plural approach the character deserve.

The same may be said of the trilogy Lira Neto dedicates to the life story of the ex-President Getúlio Vargas (2012, 2013 and 2014)¹⁰, his most ambitious work yet. The three volumes consumed more than half a decade of data collection, shedding light on some of the most crucial episodes of our political history, understanding a person who liked to confuse, not explain. The famous subterfuges of Getúlio Vargas in his letters and in his relationships was the largest obstacle when mounting this gigantic mosaic, with hundreds of characters and that travels along have a century of national life, still reverberating today, over 60 years after the suicide that triggered other earthquakes of Brazilian politics. The shy youth, the young and ambitious politician, the opportunistic man, the dictator, the conciliator, the crafty old man, the victorious man and the defeated leader, the father of the poor. All these “Getúlios” are revisited, narrated, signified.

For the dimensions of this paper, it is impossible to detail Lira Neto's works. His books are mentioned here as examples of how Literary journalism has been used in such genres, especially when they are signed by professionals who have worked in the press. In this category are also celebrate authors as Ruy Guerra and Fernando Morais. Castro has under his belt texts that became references in the way they establish links amongst language and the discursive construction with narratives that could be considered as literary if were it not the contracts in his works. The biographies of Nelson Rodrigues¹¹ and that of the soccer player Garrincha¹² are two books in which this may be seen very clearly. The difficult moments in the Botafogo Club's player and of the Brazilian National team reach almost epic connotations when one gets to know how that poor boy became a world idol only to a precocious and miserable death.

Nelson Rodrigues trailed a different path, in which the genius of a writer is mixed with secret demons – publicly re-worked upon – to create a “type” of Laissez-Passer that would, in turn, mold other types.

A life in meta-discourse that Ruy Castro could not have changed into discourse had he not understood his subject's very specific dynamic. He establishes a give-and-take dialogue with his subject rather analyzing or explaining him. It is like an exchange of soccer players leading a ball that he establishes with a personality so full of crooks and corners, many of them obscure. Pure objectivity could not have done it, and would show itself inadequate to tell this story. Nelson Rodrigues wove and developed his masks and then took them off. Ruy Castro had to adhere to his game, accept his conditions and agree to his subterfuges. Castro, also an excellent chronicler, mixes with precision the objective and the subjective worlds, the tangible and the symbolic.

Fernando Morais, in his biographies on the journalist Assis Chateaubriand¹³ and the revolutionary Olga Benário¹⁴, among other personalities, does the same. In *Chatô – o Rei do Brasil* (2011) (*Chatô – the King of Brazil*), he dives into the meanest and petty feelings and in the grandiose achievements of a man capable of anything, so much so to build relevant works as to destroy reputations. Chatô did not have a linear behavior. Any attempt at a simplified or stratified drawing of this man would be doomed. That is why his biographer starts the book with a dream of the central character, who is in his death bed in a hospital. Is it the hero as a villain or is it the villain who himself as hero? Contrary to what ones expects in a biography – or even from a journalistic or historical text – the answer to that question is not the most important. That which is necessary to know takes place in a different dimension. The metaphoric cannibalism in which Chatô places himself in this narrative image is a type of synthesis of a life, translated by a fearless Literary journalism.

Personalities as complex also deserve composite narratives. Although mainly in biographies, it may also take place in autobiographies. The genres have narrative phenomena different from each other, but are still linked to constructions that find correspondence with literature in many ways. This becomes even more evident when the memories of the subject of the biography are mediated by a third person. This may be seen in books such as *Às margens do Sena* (2007) (*By the margins of the Seine*), in which the journalist Reali Jr.¹⁵ is led to review his doings and his adventures by the also journalist Gianni Carta. The same happens with Samuel Wainer¹⁶ in the already famous *Minha Razão de Viver* (2005) (*My reason for living*) in which the also journalist is called to instigated to overhaul his life by his professional colleague Augusto Nunes.

In both cases there is the building of a “persona”¹⁷ that may be seen as a figure with traces from fiction, as in a kind of journey of the hero, in which obstacles are overcome, competence rises over envy and the talent is larger than the general incomprehension. Both Carta and Nunes try hard to establish cause and effect relations between their subjects and events of wider amplitude, placing them at the center of relevant fact. They are not common people, they are special, unique. And even with their errors, sins and eventual venality, they are somehow justified. To mold a public image, excuse one’s mistakes and emphasize the positive achievements are common behavior even in the most sincere confessions. The autobiography is, in a different measure, a confession of the openness to expose some intimacy.

5. Final Considerations

All the previous reflections and presentations, albeit succinct, of examples of biographies and autobiographies written by journalists are aimed at, within the limitations of this article, to emphasize the associations, links and correspondences between the biographic genres and Literary journalism, particularly in the discursive dimension. Biographies and confessional texts may, depending on the approach, be considered as reporting books (Lima, 1995). Such a practice does not follow in a conventional form but requires other strategies that respond to wider challenges that are part of lives many times extraordinary – or that at least place themselves as such.

To travel down theories such as New History and that of the narrative articulated with memory is a path necessary for an even more careful reflection on the biographical genres, which in turn places them in the proximities of a less cartesian approach to the very tasks of assessment, interpretation and reports of objective facts. Literary journalism is thus more than an alternative, being closer to a key to comprehension of the biographical genres in what they contain of informative richness and of narrative talent. To rebuild the past – of a people or of a person – by means of a text that includes a series of abilities and competences that put together the documental material and the gathering of witnesses with the adequate narrative so that so much information can be passed on in an interesting and profound way, is a task in which Literary journalism and the biographical genres are

in communion. We believe that the theoretical approach to both of the fields are not far apart, when not the same, allowing us to advance in our reflections on the narrative of reality on both fronts in a combined and articulated manner.

* Translated by Victoria Lobo.

NOTES

- 1 “La biografía no gozaba del menor aprecio entre los historiadores” (Masforrol, 2012, p. 39).
- 2 “Uno de los mayores problemas a los que se enfrenta la biografía” (Masforrol, 2012, p. 39).
- 3 “La credibilidad, una cuestión tan porosa e delicada” (Masforrol, 2012, p. 39).
- 4 “Puede llevar a impugnar el conjunto de una obra” (Masforrol, 2012, p. 39-40).
- 5 “La noticia ha dejado de ser objetiva para volverse individual” (Martínez, 2006, p. 235).
- 6 “De todas las vocaciones del hombre, el periodismo es aquella en la que hay menos lugar para las verdades absolutas” (Martínez, 2006, p. 235).
- 7 “Sin dudas nuestras percepciones están impregnadas de recuerdos, y inversamente un recuerdo (...) no vuelve a ser presente más que tomando del cuerpo alguna percepción en la que se inscribe” (Bergson, 2006, p. 80).
- 8 Biography about the singer Maysa, one of the most popular in the years 1960 and 1970 and that had a tragic death
- 9 Biography about a religious leader considered holy by the people, but not by the Catholic Church, and which today is venerated in the Northeast of Brazil.
- 10 Biographies about of former Brazilian president who was one of

the greatest political leaders of the XX century and who committed suicide in 1954.

- 11 Playwright and Brazilian journalist of great popular appeal in the country.
- 12 Soccer player who was World Champion for the Brazilian National Team in the 1958 and 1962 World Cups.
- 13 Controversial Brazilian journalist who, among others things, inaugurated TV in Brazil.
- 14 Revolutionary communist who, after being captured, was extradited to Germany, where died in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.
- 15 A prominent Brazilian journalist.
- 16 Brazilian journalist who founded the *Última Hora* newspaper, one of the most important of his time.
- 17 “*Persona* originally means ‘mask’ and it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role in social identity” (Agamben, 2014, p. 77).

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