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Written Between. Taboo (in) Autobiography

ABSTRACT

The aim of my dissertation is to answer the question: can taboo be considered as a new perspective for reading, analysing and interpreting autobiography? In order to answer this question the functioning of taboos in autobiographical publications was examined. The term 'taboo' was redefined and operationalized within the context of autobiographical research.

The dissertation is separated to four parts concentrated on the place and role of taboo in autobiographical narration. The first chapter includes the most important findings of (broadly understood) autobiography researchers. I attempted to determine the scope of meaning of the concept of autobiography. A matter of truth in autobiography has been identified as a key issue, that became a starting point of further reflections regarding the potential of this broad genre, that – when played with – easily adapts and changes. As a result, it can be perceived as a great field for experimental autocreation. This particular game with genre is often actually a gamble with taboo – whose two-faceted nature within the genre of autobiography I describe later within the first chapter of my dissertation, where the redefinition of the term also takes place.

In order to redefine the term 'taboo' I suggested abandonment of the use of the term "prohibition" as a starting point while defining 'taboo' and suggested treating taboo as a source of conventions: prohibitions, orders and norms that should be adhered to under the threat of (possibly negative) usually unpredictable sanctions. Transferring the redefined term to the field of research on autobiography I described the concept of separating it into taboo of autobiography and taboo within the autobiography (a phenomenon that can be shortened to 'a taboo of/within autobiography'). 'Taboo of autobiography' is dictated by the expectations of the readers focused on the genre of autobiography (truthfulness, pledge of honesty, autobiographical pact) while 'taboo within autobiography' describes the limitations occurring due to internal and pragmatic motivations tied to the expectation of adherence to the rules of morality, the violation of which strains the writer's (self-)moral judgment.

The redefined term 'taboo' with the categories of 'a taboo of/within autobiography' allowed to analyse within the next chapters of my dissertation three autobiographies of writers particularly popular in the media: *Rozmowy w tańcu* by Agnieszka Osiecka (1992, 2021), *Autobiografia w sensie ścisłym, a nawet umownym* by Jerzy Pilch (2021) and *Jak zostałem pisarzem (próba autobiografii intelektualnej)* by Andrzej Stasiuk (1998, 2016).

The ultimate aim of the analyses of these autobiographical publications (considered as a case study) became showing that the category of a 'taboo of/within autobiography' proves that this recontextualized term can become a new perspective for reading, analysing and interpreting autobiography.

Within three chapters concentrated on the particular authors and their autobiographies I described the cases of playing with the autobiographical genre caused by the impact of 'taboo of/within autobiography'. The analysis of the autobiographical book is always preceded by the presentation of the image of the writer. This part is supplemented by included in interviews and

autothematic texts, statements made by the authors themselves, which are often comments on their image or are gestures of creating it.

The autobiography of Agnieszka Osiecka due to the dual/mirror-like/theatrical nature of her autocreation became an enactment of the act of battling forces of taboo of autobiography and taboo within autobiography. In Pilch's case I analysed the strategy which manifests itself in the creation of a kind of self-creation project, strictly intertwined with the idea of a trap set by autothematical writing. In Stasiuk's publication I observed the game that he plays with the expectations of his reader when he introduces unexpected tonal differences and a tendency to banalization, which can be identified as a counter-mythmaking gesture based on manipulating the categories of individualism and authenticity.

By reading the autobiography within the context of the authors' other autobiographical and autothematic statements and within the context of different biographical texts about them that described their public image, the reflections could be confirmed and broadened. The analysis allowed to show that reading the autobiography through the lens of taboo is validated as it plays a substantial role in developing and creating the narration, while at the same time being a part of the anticipated by the writer reception, that influences the final shape of the autobiographical publication.

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