

Education and the Boarding School Novel

The Work of José Régio

Filipe Delfim Santos



SensePublishers

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DVLCISSIMÆ MEMORIÆ
CLARISSIMORVM PARENTVM
FILIO PIENTISSIMO SACRVM

Between childhood, boyhood,
adolescence
& manhood (maturity) there
should be sharp lines drawn w/
Tests, deaths, feats, rites
stories, songs, & judgements

James (Jim) Morrison (1988, 22)

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THE STUDY OF SCHOOL FICTION FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The purpose of the present inquiry is to demonstrate the importance of literary studies to education, and specifically to the philosophy of education, when school novels are taken as primary sources and their authors are subjected to psychological scrutiny. My method is different from the traditional biographical approach of literary criticism: instead of using the life of the author to elucidate a work, I will use the oeuvre to understand the author.

Autobiographical material, such as autobiographies, autobiographical novels, confessions, memoirs, letters, or diaries, is of paramount importance to such an exploration of authorship. Still, my main goal is not the biographic study of writers,¹ to which I don't deny legitimacy, but the reconstitution of an *authorial psychobiography*, within the broader discipline of the study of authorship.

Anguish and suffering take, indeed, an unfair share of the full human experience and are copiously reflected in literary production. Therefore, the focus of this study is on *Leidensgeschichte*. This German concept embraces all literature about suffering: accounts of ordeal and pain, like the Passion of Christ; trauma narratives, confinement stories (about prisons, convents, boarding schools, etc.), pathographies and thanatographies (on disease and death), accounts of disasters and catastrophes, or even the manifestations of psychological ailments such as melancholia and nostalgia, which constitute a substantial part of many an artist's writing compulsions.

In Portuguese literature, an author who would be a natural choice for such an inquiry is José Régio, the authorial persona of writer José Maria dos Reis Pereira (1901-1969). In his oeuvre, elements of autobiography and creation (in the Goethean sense of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*) are inextricably linked: 'truth' (whatever it may be) blends in his pen with the higher psychological truth of creative invention. He wrote a long autobiographical confession, a sorrowful diary, and countless melancholic letters, where he didn't shy away from embarrassing topics and strived always to be authentic. In all his writings he presented himself in flesh and blood, with all his wounds and malaise, his nostalgia and his deep disappointment with life—and death. He theorised a literary movement, *presencism*, in which sincerity and the inner life of the artist form the sap of authentic art. With his life suffused by his art, and vice versa, Régio provides a vivid depiction of *Leidensgeschichte*'s powerful and perennial appeal.

TYPES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

*Everything that is not autobiographical is plagiarism.*²
Reina 2012

Autobiography is a discourse on one's own life. Virtually any text has autobiographical elements, more or less creatively rendered. Reflections of life experience may be found in narratives, poetry, drama, essays, and interviews, as well as in those works called 'autobiographies', memoirs, diaries, and letters.

Autobiographies are the most recognizable examples of accounts about one's life experiences. Intended for public consumption, they are probably not as truthful or intimate as diaries or letters written to close friends, but they are always a *true* portrait of their author:

[...A]utobiographies offer an unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men. Even if what they tell us is not factually true, or only partly true, it always is true evidence of their personality. (Pascal 1960, 1)

José Régio, the author to be studied in the subsequent chapters, would recall here the difference between truth and sincerity: sincerity is truer than the truth of the mind, because it is the truth of the soul. His arguing for sincerity in literature followed Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*:

I have mentioned three conditions of contagiousness in art, but they may be all summed up into one, the last, sincerity, i.e., that the artist should be impelled by an inner need to express his feeling. (Tolstoy 1897|1899, 154)

Autobiographies as documents on the self may place emphasis on a particular aspect of the author's life, as is the case with intellectual, spiritual, professional, political, and artistic autobiographies. Usually they follow the succession of events in an individual's life, sometimes starting even before the author's birth, with astrological charts, options taken at incarnation (Silva 1986a), and even the disclosure of previous lives. However, by definition they must finish before the author's life ends, although they may include the final sickness and dying experience as *autopathographies*. Literature allows the writing of *posthumous autobiographies*.

A special type of autobiography is one that involves the disclosure of controversial deeds or the acknowledgement of humiliations and defeats suffered by the subject, somehow invoking a sense of shame, guilt, sorrow, and, perhaps, repentance. This genre called *confession* is derived from the ecclesial practices of self-criticism and follows the tradition of Augustine and Rousseau. José Régio adhered to this tradition. We know from a passage of *The Old House* that Régio was committed from his youth to turn his life into written word, first and foremost through writing his intended memoirs. He was to turn that project into a *spiritual autobiography* that he wrote as a fierce response to Nietzsche (mostly to the latter's *Ecce Homo* autobiography and to *The Antichrist* manifesto), bearing the

Rousseauian title, *Confession of a Religious Man* (Régio 1971b). The genre according to Régio satisfies ‘one of the deepest human needs: to confess’ (Régio 1937, 34). In foreign literature, the closest models of his *Confession* are the confessional works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Tolstoy.

Another type of autobiography is the autobiographical novel, here considered as essentially indistinguishable from autobiography proper, for reasons explained below. As Smith and Watson have remarked, ‘Ultimately, the attempt to distinguish “autobiography” from “autobiographical fiction” may [...] be pointless [...]’ (2010, 259). Autobiographical novels, too, can include some doses of confessional speech:

After Rousseau—in fact in Rousseau—the confession flows into the novel, and the mixture produces the fictional autobiography, the *Künstlerroman*, and kindred types. (Frye 2000, 307)

Confession is an integral element of José Régio’s autobiographical novels. To him, confession was always liberating:

I have been daring to say almost everything, but only indirectly, through artistic creation. Art is my own personal way of confession: of confession and likewise of liberation.³ (Régio 1994b, 69)

If autobiographies narrate the events of one’s own life, from the beginning to the present day, chronologically arranged or presented methodically, memoirs are centred around specific events that one has taken part in, during well-defined and particularly momentous periods of one’s life. They may take the shape of an anthology of life episodes with little or no connection between them, selected and limited in content; they may cover only one’s childhood; or one’s school years; one’s public or private life; a professional activity; a crucial affair; a travel; or an acquaintanceship with a famous person. They tend to be written once enough life experiences have been amassed:

Memoirs are written generally at the end of one’s life and they are often misleading, for the mirages of the past are commonly as deceptive as those of the future. (Chaves 1978, 8)

Usually, the fictionists, like the memoirists, can only write about their childhood and adolescence many years after they left it behind, when the impressions and sensations from early life had become almost impersonal to the point of reaching literary shape.⁴ (Lins 1951, 109)

Diaries, on the other hand, are letters to oneself. And José Régio enjoyed adding to his *Diary* (Régio 1994b) a number of transcripts of other letters sent and received by him, along with his reading notes. To him, a diary was not so much literature in the artistic sense but more of a document about life:

As an artist, I am compelled to arrange, to choose, to fashion and cultivate even the sincerest feelings, sensations, emotions and thoughts. That is to say: *I resort to myself* as source of my artistic creation. And a diary does not allow

CHAPTER 1

that, it should not be that ... A diary is shapeless or disordered, untidy, spontaneous! It is not, at least in matters of form—a work of art.⁵ (Régio 1994b, 69)

A timestamp separating the different entries is essential in diaries, like it is in letters. The diary can have an intimate tone as much as a letter written to an old friend or to a loved person, or it may be intended for (im)mediate publication.

Because it is hard to maintain a diary throughout a lifetime, diaries tend to be written in periods of crisis, of great expectation, of achievement, of travel or when on probation or confinement.

Writing an autobiographical piece is an entirely different endeavour from publishing it. Most people don't find their lives interesting enough to share, apart from the oral transmission of scattered episodes and anecdotes within their familiar circles. Others are afraid to break or damage the perception of success or integrity achieved through years of (apparently) public good conduct. Others still, at the end of their lives, overcome with frustration and cynicism, want to sever all ties with society, isolating themselves behind a dense wall of grief. Thus, most of human experience is not relayed and becomes forever lost. The little that is preserved from the merciless claws of time requires doses of narcissism and exhibitionism in healthy proportions to reach the printed page.

The autobiographical works of writers have a different character, not merely because they are enriched by an artistic writing technique, but also because of their outcome: to writers, autobiographies become part of their authorial corpus and are another reason for their reputation and a further celebration of their art:

Few autobiographies lack some sort of interest, but some have a peculiar quality—'Autobiographies are the most entrancing of books, and sometimes they are works of art' (Bonamy Dobree). (Pascal 1960, 2)

In the writer's autobiographies and memoirs, there is material to support a better understanding of their respective fictional oeuvres, since they are considered to be a key to their life, ideas, and creations, and can become the crowning glory of their entire literary career. Portuguese writer Rodrigues Miguéis was 67 years old when he was still hesitant about his future writing plans, noting:

But I don't write memoirs, and maybe I never will, unless transposed into fiction... (Miguéis 1968, 99)

Though Raúl Brandão and Teixeira de Pascoaes had both written somewhat hasty memoirs in their fifties, that was definitely not the rule—a writer would generally wait until his seventies (Jorge Amado, Pedro Nava) or eighties (José Saramago) or, even more likely, would leave them in manuscript form to be published posthumously (Júlio Dantas, Aquilino Ribeiro), preserving their testimony for posterity without having to face the shockwaves caused by their not always innocent disclosures. As Chateaubriand put it in his *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb*:

I prefer to speak from the bottom of my coffin; my narrative will thus be accompanied by voices that have something sacred about them, because they come from the sepulchre.⁶ (Chateaubriand 1849, 5-6)

That was also Régio's choice for his *Confession of a Religious Man*, which met its public two years after the death of the author. Notwithstanding, as R. Pascal remarks,

Posthumously published autobiographies are on the whole no more indelicate or scandalous than those published during the author's lifetime. (Pascal 1960, 63)

Diaries and correspondence, where autobiography and memoir are conveyed in fragments, are permanently works in progress and are only really complete when life has found its completion; so they also generally demand a posthumous publication. Régio's *Diary* was started in 1923 but was distinctly intermittent and was never really completed; it suffered the same fate as his confessional autobiography and was published even later, in 1994 (Régio 1994b).

Irwin Stern noted in his article on Portuguese literature suppressed by official censorship that in Portugal,

[I]n the 1930s, a great number of memoirists [emerged] who evoked with *saudades*⁷ (nostalgia) their childhood and university years. Since the Portuguese were officially encouraged to recall their glorious history and traditions, these works generally faced no difficulty with censors. (Stern 1976, 55)

Stern makes the interesting suggestion that what was deemed to be the recollection of 'real life events' will end up suffering less scrutiny and repression than what is estimated to be (more or less purely) 'fictitious', thus pointing to the more subversive nature and greater power of engagement of 'fiction' over 'factuality'.

Autobiographical fiction has an added subversive potential: under the guise of artistic license, one can exercise absolute control over the selection and treatment of the biographical material and get a potential excuse through the label of *fiction* for whatever is being revealed—a device that can further induce audacity and freedom of speech. A more pragmatic reason to prefer autobiographical fiction to an autobiography published during one's lifetime is that it is easier to find readers and publishers for it.⁸

But unlike Stern's allusion, neither memoirists nor novelists used to evoke their childhood or school years with nostalgia. In fact, the Portuguese tradition of autobiographical school novels and school memoirs adopts mostly a critical and negative approach to schooling and boarding.

José Régio was to exceed most writers of his generation in the cultivation of the literary genre of the self, being one of the few to write not only extensive autobiographical fiction but also a *spiritual autobiography*, along with keeping a (not so regular) *Diary* and generously filling his *correspondence* with a plethora of insights on his life and work. Other prominent *presencistas* felt similarly drawn to

autobiographical genres: Gaspar Simões published his memoirs (Simões 1974) and his correspondence with Régio and Fernando Pessoa, but he did not maintain a diary.

A few words about Régio's spiritual autobiography: as Stern noted, the freedom accorded to this genre meant that his *Confession of a Religious Man* (Régio 1971b) suffered no problems with being published, despite its controversial and provocative ideas, like denying the divinity of Jesus. Among the reasons for this was the prestige of Régio's name when the text was published two years after his death—a time when the authorities were particularly keen to express respect for his legacy. One of its main topics is the *Imitatio Christi*—not only does literature imitate life but life itself is all about imitation, or *mimesis*, as R. Girard's mimetic theory reminds us. The serpent in *Genesis* 3,5 said: '*Eritis sicut Dei...*' or 'You will imitate the gods...', and, since then, mankind has always mimicked the gods with an endless albeit hopeless desire to overcome the limits of the human condition. Gods are too inhuman to be suitable models. It is more judicious to try to imitate Jesus, who himself imitated God and was, as Régio says, His best imitator. Being a man himself, he was the model of perfection for mankind, and Régio's upholding of Jesus' role as an ideal for his fellow humans led him to deny his divinity. This gross departure from official Christian doctrine did not cost Régio a Christian funeral when he died, but did lead the rites to take place in his old house instead of in a church (see Ferro 1980).

Thus, this surprising *Confession* was partly inspired by the *Imitatio Christi*, partly a recollection of memories from boyhood and early adolescence, partly a polemic with Nietzsche over Jesus and God, and partly a confession in the sense of being an acknowledgment of his imperfections and doubts—but not regret. By the end, the book becomes an essay on art and religion and a psychological self-study. Its specific combination of genres and motifs makes it unique among Portuguese autobiographical narratives.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SCHOOL NOVELS AS SOURCES FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Most research by philosophers of education has generally ignored the vast field of world literature. And the few exceptions to this neglect⁵ tend to overlook the intrinsically pedagogic domain of autobiographical novels and short stories covering an author's school years, as well as memoirs on the same subject, a corpus consisting of not only a selected set of canonical masterpieces but also of works that, while less acclaimed by the critics or the public, are nevertheless equally interesting, in the hands of the educationalist, for a number of readings other than the strictly artistic ones.

The most pertinent point about school novels and memoirs is that they are the product of the recollection of memories by those who had been schooled as youngsters. As such, they are unique in conveying the psychological effects of the schooling experience on the schooled mind. This point of view is lacking in all other sources: statistics, administrative and official reports, and other bureaucratic

documents that cover only the institutional aspects of the school experience; commissioned or sponsored histories of a particular school usually have a biased motive such as propaganda or self-glorification; news articles and court cases deal exclusively with exceptional events that are perceived as unusual and outstanding; interviews are purpose-driven by the interests and agenda of the interviewer (and the magazine in which they will be printed); pupils' letters, written on the spot to family and friends, focus too much on trivia (Tunstall-Behrens, 1999)—in addition, they are often censored, or even intercepted and confiscated by school officials;¹⁰ diaries and adolescent poetry are almost always too naïve, idealistic, or sugar-coated; shorter variants of the school narrative, such as short school stories and novellas, can only capture the most picturesque and picaresque of ingenuous *faits divers*.

Overcoming these limitations, autobiographical novels and memoirs are of an appropriate length to elaborate on and delve into the psychological study of the characters. Offering a closer view into a world that is absent in the other historical documents brought to us, school novels and memoirs are irreplaceable testimonies about school life. Even though they may embellish some details to enrich their plots, they are based on real life experiences—the big picture is authentic and expresses an inner and outer perception of what it actually means to be, or to have been, a pupil at school. In addition, a part of the material we find in school novels consists of something between the unnoticeably ordinary—‘*[W]e are ardent for tomorrow—even though much of life is mechanical repetition*’ (Marshall 2000, 1)—and the strikingly extraordinary, an immense array of thoughts totally absent from other sources. As Cirino explains:

I only recorded those experiences that had some importance to me [...] Most of what was happening was nothing but routine, severe and inflexible—what else do you expect to find in a strict boarding school? (Cirino 1984, 19) All was routine and monotony.¹¹ (*idem*, 55)

Memoirs and realistic narratives become thus essential to reconstruct day-to-day school life:

...a skilful rendition of the densely packed minutiae of [boarding school] life: evocative smells and sounds, familiar objects and everyday things, ordinary routines, ways of talking or passing time, a reservoir of shared references from religious rituals [...] Even as we know full well that we are reading a work of fiction steered by the internal pressures of form and genre, we can be nonplussed by the clarity with which a form of life is captured. Recognizing aspects of ourselves in the description of others, seeing our perceptions and behaviours echoed in a work of fiction, we become aware of our accumulated experiences as distinctive yet far from unique. (Felski 2008, 39)

THE DEMISE OF THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION

The study of school novels may take the place that once belonged to the history of education. Regrettably, this scientific field was abandoned by current research and became marginalised among the humanities. Formidable obstacles threatened its survival: what, after all, should be taught? A global history of education was impractical. But the alternatives were also unsuitable: a ‘national’ history of education was too localised; a ‘classical’ (ancient) history of education too remote; and a ‘Western’ history of education incompatible with a multicultural perspective.

Christianity subverted history, changing it into a salvation narrative. Then, history was overtaken by bourgeois modernity to enforce the myth of perpetual progress, an account of the victory of the bourgeois mentality over the long-lasting mistakes of the past:

Many transmutations were needed before the Christian story could renew itself as the myth of progress. But from being a succession of cycles like the seasons, history came to be seen as a story of redemption and salvation, and in modern times salvation became identified with the increase of knowledge and power. (Gray 2013, 9)

According to this progress myth, our times had innovated too much in education to even allow comparisons with other models: as an example, in former times the families were eager to expel the young, if not to a study place, then to a *pre-work* life:

It was the convention for children in much of pre-industrial Western and Northern Europe to leave home under the age of puberty to work in another household, as either apprentices or servants. (Springhall 2005, 235)

In the past it was also believed that wholesome inner growth did not require any socialising with peers in a classroom, like today. On the contrary, learners needed an idiosyncratic, personal approach, appropriate to character, pace and taste. José Régio’s novel *A Drop of Blood* (1945a) possibly alludes to this view, for he ascribes little, if any, positive value to the interactions that his main character, Lelito, a future author, is forced to engage in with his ignorant and brutal peers.

More importantly, adolescence was seen as a time to be free from any parental co-habitation or even supervision; the young were to be entrusted to the care of professionals outside family and local circles, and boarding schools catered to the requirement of toughening souls and strengthening character and emotional resilience. They fostered autonomy, independence and self-assertion: boys were expected to leave their homes and families and become men by taking risks and re-adapting constantly.

In some countries the nineteenth-century commitment to universal school attendance¹² favoured the boarding school model, on which school novels focused for good literary reasons. Education abandoned the one-to-one standard and became collective, though it is true that it retained the immersion paradigm of the old resident pupil system. The dedicated teaching and tutoring paradigm survived

only in some crafts and in the world of music and fine arts—and remained a favourite topic in literature, in the narratives belonging to the initiation paradigm and in other types of philosophical novels.

With the advent of the day school model during the twentieth century, education became fragmented, superficial, and part-timed—deprived of the advantages of immersion inherent to the boarding model. School time became extended because a longer period was needed to achieve results—and much of the positive impact resulting from departure from the family was lost because the pupil remained stuck in both domains, home and school, not belonging fully to either.

Today, adolescents have colonised the family that rears them. They occupy a central position in the household and the family, consuming most of its time, resources, and energy. Co-education, day schools, universal and compulsory education, all of which were unimaginable just a century ago, have become the standard in most societies and, not surprisingly, the former educational paradigms are now seen as a collection of horrors and as an illustration of the psychological abuse and exploitation of the young. Maybe this explains why the history of education as an academic field is on the verge of extinction today (McCulloch 2011; Jones 2013).

Such disregard for the past explains why school novels, insofar as they preserve and echo that past, appear to some as irremediably distant from today's educational concerns, even if they could be seen as chapters in history, written from former pupils' points of view, mirroring mindsets and practices long gone. But not only the history of education could benefit from school novels as sources of information. Within the domain of the philosophy of education, school-based literature has much to offer. Where else can researchers exploring educational principles and goals gain unique insights, mediated by time and maturity, into a given pupil's actual experience, both in and out of the classroom, of dealing with the school as an institution, with the outside world, and the associated feelings, thoughts, painful experiences, and emotional dilemmas? Since school novel authors reveal memories that remain in their minds decades after their school years, their recollections call for an assessment of the school's lasting imprint on the young mind.

Any literary work that unsettles and challenges its reader is both pedagogical and philosophical (Roberts 2013a, 407). In keeping with this view, current researchers within the philosophy of education field have favoured the exploration of the educational implications of literary works that contemplate mainly ethical questions. To this purpose, (Pre-)Existentialist narratives seem most suited such as those by Dostoyevsky or Camus (Roberts, *passim*). Some studies have also focused on the set of ethical values present in literature intended for children and young adults (Azevedo 2005; Guerrero 2008; Eder 2010; Nikolajeva 2012), an arena that encompasses the equally stimulating area of folk tales' ethnography. However, the immense corpus of novels and short stories closely related to, and illustrating school practice, has been approached almost exclusively by scholars of literature, often for comparative purposes.

Philosophy has itself been regarded as literature, or belles-lettres, in China, India, and the West, and it has been conceived as education as well: all philosophy was once a pedagogical undertaking, with every philosopher being a master of his disciples within each school of thought. At the core of the philosophical endeavour were the motifs of initiation and revelation, transmission and tradition—which were also to become embedded in the core of all educational practice.

Plato resorted to the dramatic device of the dialogue and other literary motifs, such as myths. Porphyry (234-305), who tried to reconcile Aristotle with his famous master, engaged in the philosophical exegesis of poetry, namely as in the *De antro nympharum*, a treatise on a few verses of Homer's *Odyssey* 13. In line with Porphyry's tenets that belles-lettres are essentially educational was Dante's approach to literary exegesis, theorised in the *Letter to Cangrande* (c. 1317). He held that a literary work deserving of such a status had to be suitable for a *tropological* reading, which means it had to have an ethical effect on the reader, to operate something of a change or transformation; and to possess an *anagogical* potential, providing access to ultimate principles and ineffable revelations. According to the Porphyrian tradition, we can distil the concept of literature to the message that the reader perceives as having a *changing potential*—changing views, mores, opinions, perspectives—and exclude from it what fails to touch its audience. Literature so conceived becomes not so much a source of entertainment for the leisured class, but a vehicle for growth and inspiration for aspiring souls.

AMBIGUITIES OF THE NOVEL

Classical poetics assigned *pathos* to lyricism, *ethos* to drama and *logos* to narrative. But despite its affiliation to the narrative form, the novel is the most ambiguous, protean, ever-shifting, fluid, and experimental genre, resulting in '*its contradictory, hybrid and compromising nature*' (Moretti 2000, 12). Parsons notes that '*[t]o the contemporary reader the novel may seem one of the most resilient and mutable of literary forms*' (Parsons 2007, 2).

Novels were not held in high esteem in the classical periods of Antiquity, when genres were differentiated by strict conventions and the expression of the self was confined to lyricism: in Greek and Latin literature, the self was largely absent from the novellesque. Instead, novels were populated by a profusion of heroic and non-heroic types and stereotypes, dealing ...

[...] less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds [...]. (Frye 2000, 309)

The novel emerged as the dominant genre only when the bourgeois individualistic approach to life started gaining momentum. Its ambiguity is linked to the emergence of a personal outlook within the narrative genre—and even more among the didactic genre, called 'the fourth genre' (history, biography, essay, etc.). Dialogue, picked from drama, became important too, and finally the novel succeeded in combining the *pathos* of lyric, the *ethos* of drama, and the *logos* of

the epic together, to express the emotions of the inner self and those of the other characters.

The novel can be taken as an anti-epic—in its mock-heroic variety, the novel is also the successor of the ancient epic. Frye remarks that ‘*Fielding’s conception of the novel as a comic epic in prose seems fundamental to the tradition he did so much to establish*’ (Frye 2000, 304). It inherits the formal and thematic ambiguity of the epic genre—since this *Genus commune uel mixtum* (in Greek *koinon* or *mikton*) combined the narrator’s self-speech (*Genus ennarratiuum*) with the speech of independent characters (*Genus actiuum uel imitatiuum*), i.e., the first and the second persons (Silva 1986b, 348). Like a modern epic, the novel is a speech by oneself and others about oneself and others.

In its hegemonic rising, the novel colonized all other genres. It merged with drawing to produce graphic novels and comics; with science, it resulted in science fiction; with history, in historical fiction; with correspondence, in the epistolary novel; with autobiographies, in the autobiographical novel; with pedagogy, in the formation novel; and so on. All novel subtypes result from that all-encompassing hybridism.

It is not a coincidence that the growing popularity of the novel genre overlapped the rise of the bourgeoisie, a social class that had flourished already in the two ‘decadent’ periods of Antiquity that saw the emergence of novels. In fact, the Hellenistic and the Late Roman times witnessed the rise of a new middle class with cultural ambitions and leisure time, ready to produce and consume not only the ancient kind of romance stories—usually the travels, troubles and misadventures of young heroes in love—but also the socially, morally, and ideologically audacious storylines by Petronius or Lucian during the Neronian and the Antoninian eras.

The main difference between the ancient and the modern novel lies in the development of the characters’ state of mind, which is the core theme of the bourgeois *Bildung* paradigm, as will be shown below. Standing for types, the protagonists of the ancient novels, either heroic or naïf, could not experience an inner evolution in character and mood; however hazardous and perilous their adventures were, they kept an unaltered disposition and constant mood: ‘*the novelistic protagonists [are] passive and emotionally static*’ (Tagliabue 2012, 18). To the Romantics, who reshaped the heroic concept of the old epic with the inner psychological conflict, this new dimension of *agon* became the chief struggle (Rowe 1980) that would challenge a more or less autobiographical hero. Literary creation turned to emphasising the self as one’s main source of inspiration, the final and ultimate mystery to be deciphered, as captured in Novalis’ famous quote:

Someone arrived there—who lifted the veil of the goddess, at Sais.—But what did he see?—He saw—wonder of wonders—himself. (Novalis 1846, 109)¹³

Narratives became increasingly autobiographical and linked to one’s own life, aspirations, disillusionments and frustrations. Moving towards the replication of actual consciousness, the modern novel demands a progression in the mind of the hero and/or the other characters—and eventually this feature was to be so developed as

to become the dominant component of *Bildungsroman*, the German type of the novel of formation.

For the Romantics, to be an author required some *genius*, because ...

... it is not enough to possess the totality and continuity of information, not enough the gift of knitting this information easily and clearly to things already known and experienced, or to inter-change peculiar-sounding words with commonly-used expressions, not enough the agility of a rich imagination to arrange the phenomena of (Life) in easily intelligible and strikingly illuminated pictures that either by the charm of composition or the riches of their contents invigorate and satisfy the senses or ravish the spirit by their profound significance. (Novalis 1802|1903, 140)

After the Romantics, the dislodging of the haloed status bestowed upon the creative mind triggered a shift in focus towards ordinary life that led to the extremes of the subsequent Realist movement. For Realist authors, the disjunction of fiction versus reality was no longer adequate—literature had to be more lifelike than life itself.

Undoubtedly, the novel had its heyday during the nineteenth century, when the bourgeois success over the aristocratic classes—the old as well as the new liberal aristocracies—was complete and definitive. Transgressive by nature, as a by-product of the ‘*triumph of bourgeois ambiguity*’ (Moretti 2013, 177), the novel mirrored the ambivalent status of such an intermediary class, which had neither aristocratic tastes (the lineage book, the chivalry novel, the heroic epic) nor folk ones (the hagiography, the chap-book, the fable). The novel was fostered by a new, emerging and hybrid audience—women and young adults—who were, during the major part of the nineteenth century, neither completely illiterate nor truly cultivated. Emerging from within the bourgeoisie, this new mass of readers with distinctive tastes, and increasingly more access to instruction and printed material, gave rise to two major thematic sets: travel and exploration adventures that appealed to young adults and romantic love adventures to women. In turn, the traditional public of adult male readers also began favouring new themes and subjects now found in the Realist and Naturalist novels, i.e., focusing on social plagues and moral conflicts such as prostitution, adultery, corruption, class antagonism, violence and crime.

The rise of the novel paralleled the rise of the school. Reading became universal because instruction was widespread across social classes and age groups, from very young to late adolescence. The triumph of one is directly linked to the success of the other: both were promoted by the bourgeoisie, eager for social climbing through instruction and willing to apply that incipient taste for, and grasp of, high culture in a way that sometimes could be light and entertaining, and other times provocative.

Eventually, the novel, as a genre that tried to embrace all aspects of life, came to contemplate school life as well. When they turned their attention to school, novelists found a newer ambiguity to play with: boarding. Despite the circumstance that the school shared some features with the home, like being a place of nurturing and sheltering, it was clearly not home. The boarding school

blurred the borders between the two and proved to be a disturbing place, an ambiguous educational arrangement. In Chapter 3, with the help of Foucault, we will examine the various concepts at play in powerful spaces such as boarding schools, making them *other*.

THE FACTITIOUS AND THE FICTITIOUS—THE DEATH OF THE NARRATOR

Eschewing previous conventions that viewed autobiographical elements in a literary work as the inability to go beyond one's own life experiences, European literature from the Romantics onwards took a distinctively personal turn. It became ever more autobiographical and intimate, a development that strengthened in the early-twentieth century. And by the time novels were drawing heavily on autobiography to build up their narratives, philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were also on the autobiographical path.

Reversing Barthes' announcement of the 'death of the author', the authorial voice instead effaced the narrator, who was formerly the discursive intermediary between author and work, and by its sole presence defined 'fiction'. The author was now ubiquitous and appeared under the guise of the narrator, the protagonist, the deuteragonist, and the supporting roles: *'Don Quichotte, he said with a sad smile, Don Quichotte is me'*, according to Cervantes; and Flaubert: *'Madame Bovary is me—from me'* (Leclerc 2014).¹⁴

Novels developed into an exercise in self-exposure and self-(re)construction of the author, via the varied voices at play. The distinction between the author and the character became of little importance: the creator is mirrored in the creation, so the author evokes as much interest as the characters for a psychological study. Each voice within a narrative, distinct as it may appear to be, is yet another emanation of its author, as theorised by Guerra Junqueiro in his famous prefatory letter to *The Poors*, written by Raul Brandão:

Your book is the anguished narrative of a soul. Which one? That of Gebo, of Luísa, of Sofia, of Mouca, of the *Poor*, in the end? No. Yours. Different narratives converging into a single one: that of your soul transiting souls, of your life wandering lives. Spiritual autobiography [... t]rue confession [...]. (Junqueiro 1906)¹⁵

Moreover, the perilous demarcation of the factitious and fictitious elements of a narrative became superfluous: *'The binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant'*, wrote Paul de Man (1986, 109). Discussions about the factuality of fiction, and the fictitious nature of the supposed factual realm, turned out to be redundant, arising as they did from the lack of perception that such boundaries are as artificial as every border:—*'How false is truth?'*, asked Fernando Pessoa.¹⁶

'Reality' is but an idea, as old religions and contemporary physics remind us. Time and space are not as regular and absolute as we generally assume them to be (Chapter 3, below). So, while life itself was already creation and inventiveness, art too rewrites the book of life in ways original and engaging. Deeds and *mythoi*, feats and fables, memories and recollections, are all the product of the conscience:

[O]ne [should] free the discourse on literature from naïve oppositions between fiction and reality which are themselves an offspring of an uncritically mimetic conception of art. (Man 1986, 11)

Novalis and other Early-Romantics had already pointed to an understanding of literature as a creation emancipated both from the pseudo-factuality of history, news, chronicles, or reports, and from the pseudo-fictionality of fiction— aspiring to higher truths, spiritual and artistic, or, as he described it: *‘the more creative, the truer’*¹⁷ (Novalis 1846, Kapitel 23, 171). It is this supreme reality of creation that Orhan Pamuk also emphasised:

For it is by reading novels, stories and myths that we come to understand the ideas that govern the world in which we live; it is fiction that gives us access to the truths kept veiled and hidden by our families, our schools, and our society; it is the art of the novel that allows us to ask who we really are. (Pamuk 2005)

Between the school memoir and the school novel, the boundaries are fluid and almost imperceptible. In the school novel, the author’s past experiences and feelings are transferred to the characters: imagination and poetic invention blend with recollections of the author’s own schooldays and meld indistinguishably. Indeed, the autobiographer or memoirist does not even deal with ‘facts’ but with interpretations:

For the autobiographer is not relating facts but experiences, i.e., the interaction of a man and facts or events. (Pascal 1960, 16)

In the novel, the author is freed from academic conventions that would restrain and limit what could be written in a ‘serious’ book on education. It is the intimate nature of the autobiographical material included that adds psychological depth and moving intensity to such works. More often than not, these narratives are the result of a need to settle the account with the author’s own traumatic past and to expose the tremendous gap between the high and somewhat naïve expectations such an author as a young person had at entering school, and the inferior reality embodied in the educational practices of the institutions that the young pupil came to attend.

NOTES

¹ I make here a distinction between the *writer*, a subject within society, and the *author*, who is both a creator and a creature of an authorial process extended through an entire authorial life, a construct derived from the whole of an oeuvre, its reception, its marketing, etc. Inside each specific narrative is to be found a specific *authorial voice*, manifested through the many, at times conflicting, voices of the narrator(s) and characters, with their multiple standpoints. I depart here from Dostoyevsky’s ‘polyphony’, according to Bakhtin’s concept of authorship, which views those many voices as independent from that of the author, since Bakhtin did not distinguish the writer from the author.

² *‘Todo lo que no es autobiográfico es plagio’*.

³ *‘Eu quase já tenho ousado dizer tudo; – mas só indiretamente, através da criação artística. A arte ainda é o meu meio de confissão mais próprio; de confissão, e de libertação’*.

- ⁴ *‘Em geral, os romancistas, como os memorialistas, só conseguem escrever sobre a infância e a adolescência muitos anos depois, quando as impressões e sensações já se fixaram quase impessoalmente ao ponto de adquirirem nitidez e forma literária’.*
- ⁵ *‘Tendo, como artista, a ordenar, a escolher, a preparar e cultivar até os sentimentos, impressões, emoções e pensamentos mais sinceros. Em suma: Tendo a aproveitar-me para a minha criação artística. E um diário não permite isso, não deve ser isso... Um diário é informe ou disforme, desconexo, espontâneo, sei lá! Não é, ao menos pela forma, – uma obra de arte’.*
- ⁶ *‘[...]Je préfère parler du fond de mon cercueil; ma narration sera alors accompagnée de ces voix qui ont quelque chose de sacré, parce qu’elles sortent du sépulcre’.*
- ⁷ In Portuguese, *saudades* (plural noun) with an object is similar in meaning to ‘nostalgia’. *Saudade* (singular) has a different meaning, as will be explained later.
- ⁸ Recently, it was personally disclosed to me by the Portuguese writer and Dutch national Rentes de Carvalho (1930-) that his own autobiographical account of years 0 to 15 entitled *Ernestina* (from the name of his mother), first published in 1998, was turned down by editors if it was to be marketed as ‘*pure autobiography, as it really was*’. They only agreed to publish it under the condition that it would be sold as fiction, in order to secure higher sales.
- ⁹ See Peter Roberts’ work on Dostoevsky (2005, 2012a, 2013a), on Hesse (2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2012b), and on Camus (Roberts et al. 2013b/c).
- ¹⁰ This twist is present in some plots, such as *Pompeia* (1888), and sometimes is even crucial in novels such as *Gard* (1922) or *Peyrefitte* (1944).
- ¹¹ *‘Registrei apenas aqueles [acontecimentos] que tinham importância real para mim [...] As mais das vezes era tudo rotina, severa e inflexível. Que mais pode uma vida de internato rigoroso oferecer?’* (19); *‘Tudo é rotina e monotonia’* (55).
- ¹² At the expenses of the young: *‘The strict enforcement of school attendance in nineteenth-century Germany at a time when families still desperately depended on income from child labor meant that young people had to put in double days of effort, working for pay before and after school. In their recollections of growing up, bitterness about lost childhood and the harshness of parents was a dominant theme’*, Miller 2004, 142.
- ¹³ *‘Einem gelang es,—er hob den Schleier der Göttin zu Sais—Aber was sah er?—er sah—Wunder des Wunders—sich selbst’.*
- ¹⁴ *‘Don Quichotte, dit-il avec un triste sourire, don Quichotte, c’est moi’; ‘Mme Bovary, c’est moi!—D’après moi’.*
- ¹⁵ *‘O seu livro é a história patética duma alma. Qual? A do Gebo, a de Luísa, a de Sofia, a da Mouca, a dos Pobres, enfim? Não. A sua. Histórias diversas que se resumem numa história única: a da sua alma, transitando almas, a da sua vida, percorrendo vidas. Autobiografia espiritual [...] onfissão verdadeira [...]’.*
- ¹⁶ Alexander Search (1907) *Mania of Doubt* (Pessoa 1999, 116).
- ¹⁷ *‘Je poetischer, je wahrer’* (Novalis 1846, Kapitel 23, 171).