



REVISTA INCLUSIONES

SEMINARIO BRASIL
AS REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS NO CONTEXTO DO BRASIL

Revista de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales

Número Especial Octubre / Diciembre

2019

ISSN 0719-4706

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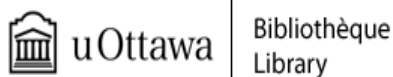
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PARADOXES OF PERSONALITY IN THE PAGES OF GEORGII EFRON'S DIARY

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Fecha de Recepción: 18 de junio de 2019 – **Fecha Revisión:** 30 de junio de 2019

Fecha de Aceptación: 20 de agosto de 2019 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 25 de septiembre 2019

Abstract

As a genre, the diary provides rich material for analyzing the contradictions of a personality. In accord with other researchers of the genre, the diary's most important function (especially those kept between the ages of 14 and 25) is psychological: it substitutes or compensates for parts of the author's psyche that do not find release in other forms; it allows the writer to voice hidden spiritual needs. The diary provides a unique chance to express the zigzagging thoughts of a person at a given moment, and to understand the hidden essence of a person. It is no accident that Kafka willed that under no condition should his diaries ever be published.

Keywords

Diary – Georgii Efron – Personality – Alienation – Isolation – Dandyism – Contempt

Para Citar este Artículo:

Steven, Gabriel Nussbaum; Krilov, Viacheslav Nikolaevich y Mikhailova, Maria Viktorovna. Paradoxes of personality in the pages of Georgii Efron's Diary. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 6 num Especial (2019): 772-778.

Introduction

Presented to a wider audience in 2004 by the publisher "Various," Georgii Efron's "Diary" provides new material for insight into the final years of Marina Tsvetaeva's life, and her voluntary departure from it. At the same time, it is a priceless source for understanding the atmosphere of the pre-war period and the first years of the war. However, no less importantly, it reveals to us the mind of a person acculturated in the European tradition, with a keen sense of self. It helps rebut some of the unpleasant legends that still spring up around Tsvetaeva and her relationship with her son, as has previously been shown in Tatyana Gevorkyan's brilliant article "Myths and Guesses in Light of Facts. On New Materials About Marina Tsvetaeva"¹. However, as with any diary, Efron's text also gives us the image of a person, a young man from the late 1930s and early 1940s. It is formed in the diaristic genre, with all of its essential problems and difficulties. One paradox of the literary persona in the diary is that of narrator. Philippe Lejeune, the famous French researcher of autobiographical genres, wrote about this: "the potential personality of the person narrating, the literary ego of the narrator, and the social figure of the author of a book are different things, and only with great difficulty can they be united"².

Methods

In our study, we will draw on poststructural views (Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Kristeva and others), in which the ego is presented as a constant self-interpretation in interaction with an interpretation of the world by the Other. We also use the structural-systemic method, which enables us to clarify the peculiarities of the poetics and the specifics of the diary as a genre. The study of the image of the personality in the diary is based on the theory of autobiographical genres. Finally, we find great significance in the methodology of studying the image of an "other"³, along with analyses of a text based on its genre's specificities.⁴

Results and discussion

Efron's image as perceived by the reader appears paradoxical and contradictory. Researchers (Veronika Losskaya, Irina Shevelenko and others) have already written about his monstrous egoism, coldness, snobbery and haughtiness. In truth, however, one must mention here that G. Efron's diaries are not evidence of exceptional callousness and coldness (especially when one connects the entries to his letters, and also to evidence in the diary stating that the son strove not to offend his mother).

¹ T. Gevorkyan, "Myths and guesses in light of facts. On new material about Marina Tsvetaeva", Questions of Literature, num 5 (2006).

² P. Lejeune, "In defense of autobiography", Foreign Literature, num 4 (2000) Retrieved from <http://magazines.russ.ru/inostran/2000/4/lezhen.html>

³ J. McVicker, "The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston and Winterson (Review)", An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, Vol: 27 num 3 (2004): 635-638; Z. Zinnatullina & L. Khabibullina, Analyzing the "internal other" in English literature: Welsh characters in J. Fowles' "A Maggot" and A. Burgess' "Any Old Iron", Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Vol: 10 num 2 (2018): 87-94 y Z. Zinnatullina; L. Khabibullina & I. Popp, "The opposition of East and West in the novel Long Day Wanes by Anthony Burgess", Tarih Kultur Ve Sanat Arastimlari Dergisi-Journal of History, Culture and Art Research, Vol: 6 num 4 (2017): 623-630.

⁴ V. R. Amineva, "The phenomenon of border in interliterary dialogues", Journal of Language and Literature, Vol: 6 num 2 (2015): 246-249 y A. N. Pashkurov & A. I. Razzhivin, "Literary culture: its types and lessons", European Journal of Science and Theology, Vol: 12 num 2 (2016): 155-164.

Many recollections about books that he had read allow one to see how Mur, as a teenager and young man, viewed himself with someone else's eyes, which traces back to the most important pragmatic function of reading — it promotes realizations, allowing readers to observe themselves with different eyes, and in the same way to understand oneself as a part of some commonality⁵.

G. Efron's own words in a letter to A. S. Efron from April 20th, 1943 may be key to understanding the poetics of this diary: "What can I tell you about my life? It's rather sad, but I must admit that, despite an enormous amount of acquired knowledge and experience, I remain practically in the same state as that of 4, 5, 6 years ago. As in those years, I am alone, I have no friends or community... But as a result, my view of everything is different; I perceive my life in the literary sense, and everything in it serves as material for a future novel."⁶.

This evidence of the young man's passion for literary creation, which grew for years, should draw a researcher's attention towards the *literariness* of the diary. Repeated addresses to an imagined reader serve as circumstantial evidence of this aspect: "And so, on the 28th, at midnight, I set out from Kurski Station in the direction of Tashkent (Uzbekistan). You will learn 'what will come of this departure' (as in the feuilletons), in the next part..."⁷. The account of the next day begins: "I am continuing the chronicle of our journey."

In the entry from June 8th, 1943: "I complain of nothing: in this year and a half I saw much, felt and suffered through much, and if at the present time I am sufficiently morally drained, if nothing fascinates me as powerfully as in the past, if materially I find myself in an utterly unenviable state, then all that is the price I have paid for my impressions of Tashkent. Along with all my Tashkent feelings and worries, all this will someday cohere into something massive and positive – both in the sense of life experience, and in the sense of rich material for that novel which I want to write and which will undoubtedly be written by me someday"⁸.

One must note that Tsvetaeva gave her son Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time* for his 16th birthday in 1941, and a year and a half later, in August, he bought this same novel in Elabuga. According to the reminiscences of Maria Belkina, "In Tashkent, during the evacuation, the schoolchildren called Mur Pechorin. He really wore a Pechorin-esque mask, although perhaps this was not a mask... I did not see him laughing, happy, lively, or direct"⁹. His diaries show that this was not a mask. The same M. Belkina suggests that Mur "was imbued with an overwhelming feeling of having been chosen for something, which his mother again instilled in him, and he believed that he was chosen, although he plainly did not understand how and in what way this might appear"¹⁰.

Like Pechorin, Efron views the lives of those around him with scorn, and cold reason seems stronger than feelings within him. The author's constant striving to separate himself from others and to convert a manner of dress and behavior into a self-invented

⁵ R. Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008)

⁶ G. S. Efron, *Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary Experiences from 1941-1945.* (Moscow: E. Korkinaya, V. Losskaya & A. Popovaya Eds., 2018).

⁷ G. S. Efron, *Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...*

⁸ G. S. Efron, *Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...*

⁹ M. Belkina, *Crossing of Fates*. Moscow. 1992.

¹⁰ M. Belkina, *Crossing of Fates...*

ritual leads us to see in Efron signs of cultural behavior that are tied to dandyism. Leonid Heller provides the following features of dandyism:

1. The assertion of personal freedom, sometimes in defiance of social norms, that at points adopts the form of eccentricity.
2. The assertion of personal value via the symbolic estrangement (isolation) of oneself from a community and placing oneself above others.
3. Good taste that does not bow to what is fashionable (and in fact departs from it) as a criterion of belonging to the circle of the elect; this criterion is based on the assumption that what is external and internal in a person interact as equivalents (clothing, gestures, manners, decor).
4. A sense of the refined as a certain formalism in one's relationship with the world, a conception that what is made is superior to the natural and an artist's will is superior to matter.
5. Imperturbability in the face of any circumstance, sometimes similar to coldness, but in reality signifying a striving towards complete self-control as a means of knowing oneself.¹¹

Practically all of these features can be seen in Efron's behavior. However, Georgii, under the conditions of Soviet reality during the pre-war and wartime periods, could not fully achieve the third prerequisite of dandyism, although he attempted to do so as much as possible. It is characteristic of the dandy that he can "retain elegance even in rags, preserving his superiority"¹². In any case, it is precisely thus that one perceives Efron's repeated attempts, despite quotidian difficulties, to appear refined and free from conventionalities. For example, partiality to French shoes is often recalled in the diary.

"Today - I go out of the metro and meet Kira Khenkin! Uncommonly well dressed - a hat, coat, shoes, yes, and all the rest" (April 30th, 1940). "My shoes are often cleaned, I am trying to dress well" (May 2nd, 1941).

"By some miracle I managed to protect my wonderful trousers from the filth, I clean my Parisian boots every day, I am well polished and maintain my reputation as an elegant man." (August 20th, 1941)

Even in the entries from Tashkent, which are full of the daily battle for survival, the "problem" of his boots is acute. "Speaking generally, the biggest question is shoes; I don't know whether I should sell my coat and with that money travel in a jacket, having bought some tough shoes. For now I only have thin Parisian walking shoes and leaky galoshes on my feet" (January 6th, 1943).

Daily life is again evaluated aesthetically, as in a complaint about an almost irretrievably lost, lavish detail of his wardrobe: "I go around without galoshes, in horribly dirty shoes, and ruin them in an ungodly way: poor shoes!" (January 28th, 1943)

Efron contrasts himself with others not only in his heightened attention to his appearance, his hygiene, and his sense of refinement, but also from the point of view of such essential qualities as tact and courtesy.

¹¹ L. Heller, "On Russian literature and its environs. Articles from various years", *Colloquia Litteraria Sedlcensia*, num 11 (2014).

¹² L. Heller, "On Russian literature and its environs..."

Maintaining the focus on *literariness*, Efron takes the position of an estranged, almost cold observer. Thus, we see such characteristic affirmations: "We will see how events unfold, and we will try to keep further away from them"¹³. Efron's alienation is vivid when he writes about the people around him. It is as if his perspective is off to the side, or foreign.

For example, these are his impressions during the evacuation period:

"Yesterday there was a stop in Gorki. All day, we did not know whether there would be a transfer or still something else... When you look at all these people, only one thing can be said: they all hate organization. This is just some kind of madness, and it is specifically Russian (not Soviet, but precisely Russian)"¹⁴

This theme of national mentality also emerges in the final entries. "Everyone has gone for hot water, jumping across various wagons. To hell with it! I absolutely don't want to go, just to stand in a line for hours. Moreover, it's quite risky... I'm sitting comfortably here in my wagon. Maybe I'll go all the same, if only to see a bit of what's happening. Russia, in the end, is an absurd country, and importantly, very dirty"¹⁵. Efron does not conceal his growing irritation at the behavior of the crowd, i.e. the people, at times using bitter words that evoke the tradition of national self-critique in Chaadayev, Gorki, Bunin, and Korolenko, although we are not comparing the amount of talent that the young author and these Russian writers and thinkers possess: "At every stop everyone runs out to the station to see if there's hot water, milk, any food: there's nothing to swallow. God, how much unhappiness you see around yourself! And all this is tiresome and unpleasant. Only books support me... Although it seems that all this disorder, all this filth, all this awful horror come not only from the Soviets. All this unhappiness comes from the deep Russian essence. Russia is guilty, the Russian people are guilty, with all their habits... I decisively do not give a damn about all this, if only to keep myself calm"¹⁶. Turns of phrase appear that are "as the Russians say:" "As the Russians say, one needs to keep one's ears open," "Properly speaking, one would need to 'clarify the relationship,' as the Russians say"¹⁷. During the narration, something even Nietzschean emerges a few times in the characteristics of his personal worldview. In connection with this, it is interesting that on the whole, the terse, rational and logical style of Efron's diary changes and becomes poetic and lyrical only once. This is the description of a journey on the ship "Alexandr Pirogov," which sailed along the Moscow-Volga canal. This lyric-elevated style of narration is sometimes interrupted by an unprintable word, not rare for Mur and unsurprising for a teenager, but on the whole this fragment stands out from the general informative-narrational and analytic style of the diary. The water, river and music evoke a never-before-seen lyrical hypostasis in him: the refrain "sail, sail" courses through the entire entry of August 9th, 1941. At the same time, the entry intertwines this with his thoughts about himself and others. The same "contemptuous" thoughts appear on the train to Tashkent. "People's interest in everything gloomy, their thirst for disgusting details, their striving for masochism, which automatically leads to banal and whining utterances - all this I deeply scorn in 99% of these gentlemen and ladies"¹⁸.

¹³ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

¹⁴ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

¹⁵ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

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¹⁷ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

¹⁸ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

Contempt for the provinces often emerges in the diary. For example, utterly unflattering characteristics are given to Elabuga, where he and his mother find themselves. The dismal provincial pictures are contrasted with his dream of Moscow and his future life.

Summary

The analysis has shown that Efron's diary has the quality of literariness. For the author, who was at the stage of creating and uncovering a personal ego, the diary became a unique and irreplaceable means of self-understanding and reflection. In the personality of the diary's hero, paradigmatic behavioral dandyism, as a role, proves to be not very applicable to the context of the late 1930s and early 40s: this is an exception, where the affirmation of personal value via a symbolic estrangement of oneself from community and elevation over others rose above more traditional Soviet values of group solidarity and self-abnegation. Researching the motifs of national identity and self-critique shows that Efron's judgments reflect his dual position as a young man who perceived Soviet reality through the prism of his experience of French life — a duality which ultimately united into the tragic image of a deeply lonely young man who lived in the functional world of literature. In this article, we have only dwelt upon the parts of these problems that are shown by study of his diary.

Conclusions

It is hardly possible to judge Mur for his unflattering statements. This is not any part of the researchers' task, even if they are analyzing an autobiographical text. We will also note that the literary ego of the diary's narrator and the real personality of the writer are not entirely identical (Efron's letters may serve as proof). In the end, Tsvetaeva herself called Mur a representative of "a ruthless generation," "the new man." Despite that, she always loved that same Mur. The audience that received this diary 60 years later knows things that Georgii Efron never could have. If the author of a diary fixates on that which already occurred and can only *glance at the future*, that is, form a projection thereof, the diaristic text perceived by a reader already *knows* about what has been done and how. This knowledge of what has been done prevents the diary's readers from full immersion in the diaristic reality: the reader perceives past events from a position of temporal distance. As a result, there often emerges a tragic perception of diaristic testimony, of what came true and what did not. Such is the case with Efron. For him, one can say that his diary was the only chance of overcoming his personal loneliness, a space where he could develop himself, his thoughts and his impressions of life. During his departure for evacuation, he worries a great deal about taking the diary and not losing it. He dreams of a better future, of the fact that "the future... is preparing innumerable pleasures and joys..."¹⁹. But this was not destined to be. Quite a few pages of the diary are given to a description of the evacuation, to the long and difficult path along the Volga. He speaks about Kazan and Elabuga, he expresses how difficult and unexpected everything was, and how everything changed so quickly. And in the reader's mind, distracted for a moment from what really happened, thoughts arise about a possible alternative to those events. What if Tsvetaeva had stayed in Ashkhabad or in Kazan? How would their fates have developed? While dealing with the minutely detailed and, at points, dreary text of the diaries, we will still be grateful to this man, still young, who exited life so soon, but left behind such a priceless account of himself, Tsvetaeva, and that tragic Stalinist epoch.

¹⁹ G. S. Efron, Notes of a Parisian: Diaries, Letters, and Literary...

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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