

## **A Review of Nothomb's Autobiographical Works Based on the Theory of Lejeune and Doubrovsky**

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### **Extended abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

Amélie Nothomb, the Belgian writer, has nowadays taken notoriety in literary circles because of applying her specific point of view in her books. In many of her works, frequent references to her past life and childhood can be noticed, which has been excessively criticized by her critics. In this article, we intend to understand Nothomb's autobiographical writing style and explain it through Doubrovsky and Lejeune's beliefs. We will also respond to how autobiographical roman functions in consoling psychological traumas.

#### **2. Methodology**

Based on Lacan, human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an "I". The infant identifies with the image, which serves as a gestalt of the infant's emerging perceptions of selfhood, but since the image of a unified body does not correspond with the underdeveloped infant's physical vulnerability and weakness, this imago is established as an Ideal-I toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life. This is a key to let us enter to the weird world of Nothomb. In this case, the specific type of writing which is in direct contact with symbolic order of Lacan's theory would like to inform us why she wants stick to this imago.

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### **3. Discussion**

The definition of autobiography based on Lejeune's point of view consists on all fictional texts in which the reader can find the similarity with the identity of its author and protagonist, while the author does his best to deny this identity, or at least not to approve it.

In the past, autobiographical writing style was only a genre for women writers to release them from the ordeal and social requirements, but nowadays this type of writing is to cognize their identity, experience being themselves, and enjoy it. The identity subject is one of the feminine writing features which demonstrate their narcissistic personalities. Since Nothomb has experienced many displacements in her childhood, we probably could say her identity formation has faced too many problems. Therefore, exploring this issue could help her to find a proper image of herself.

One of the methods to explore the identity is to return to childhood because it is the key period for mental and physical growth. Through writing, we realize how to discover the identity. We have no other choice except referring and returning to the past especially to the childhood.

The use of "I" in the stories of her books has a therapeutic aspect for Nothomb, because through this action she could recover and rehabilitate her life again and that is one of the reasons this author writes almost three or four books per year. In fact, this means of writing has an important consoling role for Amélie Nothomb who faced in her childhood with many tribulation such as sexual assaults, perpetual displacement in different countries and as a result feeling always lonely. She would like to share her feeling, agony, and pain in hope of being able to alleviate all the miseries.

Philippe Lejeune who has perfectly explained the theory of child growth, indicates that one of the important stages of the growth is knowing oneself in the mirror stage. This mirror could be considered as everything or everybody that could reflect the child action or show who he is. This is very crucial for a child to be able to have a good image of himself and in the future make him to adapt to society, otherwise he will have many complexes and hates in the unconscious. Unfortunately, Nothomb has not succeeded to gain a good image of herself and that is one of the reasons she couldn't find a real friend. Clearly, in this situation, a writer has recourse to write under the format of autobiography to present more herself and make others sympathize with her.

### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, we not only considered autobiographical works of Nothomb such as *Loving Sabotage, not Adam nor Eve* and *The Character of Rain* as a report of the author's childhood and adolescence and true narrative of the events of her life, but also according to the content of her books which are apparently fictional, such as *Hygiene and the Assassin, Péplum* and *sulfuric acid*, as a record of author's private and real life. As a matter of fact, in this article we tried to clarify the

writer's reasons for selecting autobiographical or autofictional style, and to understand why Nothomb makes frequent references to her childhood in her works. Finally, based on this study and the eventual domain of review on Nothomb's artistic works, we recommend the future researchers to analyze her from a socio-psychological point of view.

**Key words:** Amélie Nothomb, Autobiographical roman, Autofiction, Doubrovsky, Lejeune

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