
FROM SELF-REPRESENTATION TO SELF-TRANSFORMATION – SUBJECTIVITY AND AUTHORSHIP

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Abstract: The proposed paper aims to question the established concepts regarding writing and authorship, and to examine the possibilities of defining authorship as a phenomenon in literature and culture overall. We strive to explore bilingual writers not only from the perspective of the applied idioms but also regarding the creation of the writer’s selfhood in his work. Our analysis is focused on two Macedonian authors who share diverse cultural backgrounds – Erol Tufan and Luan Starova, whose works reexamine the notions of cultural context and identity, prone to transformation. The discussion about the postmodern decline of the Cartesian subject, on a discursive level, presupposes a need for a more in-depth analysis of how the subject/self is constructed in language. Rosi Braidotti claims that modernity is in fact a reassessment of “the universal subject of knowledge”, in terms of the possibility of its determination on a biological and historical level. If the self is taken into consideration as a particular individual in the historical and cultural process, this implication proves the fragility of this concept (as Irigaray implies). Regarding the strategies of what is called “politics of subjectivity”, we are striving to demonstrate how adopting a more nomadic point of view, in fact, helps to determine the subject more appropriately. The French term “assujettissement” demonstrates how subjectification is a material and a semiotic process that defines the subject through a number of variables. In that sense, the subject is understood more in the complex relationship with the strategies of signification – it undermines the process by which one side is determining and the other is merely adapting to what is stated as truth or fact. By taking into account the nomadic state of being, one can discern that it is the “set of conventions” and cultural norms that are re-examined, not in a sense of an actual spatial and/or temporal change (a state of being ungrounded by the constant change of habitat and context), but in terms of questioning the modes of thought and behavior. This approach also involves an analysis of nomadism as a language phenomenon and a strategy that does not imply a strict cultural perspective. The author’s identity is taken as a whole that consists of different parts, and in that sense Erol Tufan underlines the idea of multilayered consciousness, which does not discriminate any aspect of the experience it is involved in. Luan Starova, on the other hand, affirms Balkan exile as a point of no return, thus creating a vision of a neighboring, but hostile and unfriendly culture. By representing his own return from the European culture of his further education, he envisions a circular movement that provides the closure of conflicting viewpoints and desires. If willingness to transgress borders is the *differentia specifica* of Starova’s standpoint, in Erol Tufan’s poetry it is the affirmation of the multifaceted subject, which does not transform into hybrid being but resolves in the affirmation of different cultural backgrounds that prove their influence to the creation of the artistic identity.

Keywords: subjectivity, authorship, cultural identity, Erol Tufan, Luan Starova, multilingual writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of stability of the subject and its possible transformation in the literary work is analyzed in this paper by adopting several different methodological stances. They are not mutually exclusive, but combined in order to provide a more thorough insight in the problem of subjectivity in literature. The discussion about the postmodern decline of the Cartesian subject, on a discursive level, presupposes a need for a more in-depth analysis of how the subject/self is constructed in language. Rosi Braidotti claims that modernity is in fact a reassessment of “the universal subject of knowledge” (1994, p. 98), in terms of the possibility of its determination on a biological and historical level. If the self is taken into consideration as a particular individual in the historical and cultural process, this implication proves the fragility of this concept (as Irigaray implies). Regarding the strategies of what is called “politics of subjectivity”, we are striving to demonstrate how adopting a more nomadic point of view, in fact, helps to determine the subject more appropriately. “The French term *assujettissement* renders both levels of this process of subjectification: it is both a material and a semiotic process that defines the subject through a number of regulative variables: sex, race, age, and so forth” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 99). In that sense, the subject is understood more in the complex relationship with the strategies of signification – it undermines the process by which one side is determining and the other is merely adapting to what is stated as truth or fact. By taking into account the nomadic state of being, one can discern that it is the “set of conventions” and cultural norms that are re-examined, not in a sense of an actual spatial and/or temporal change (a state of being ungrounded by the constant change of habitat and

context), but in terms of questioning the modes of thought and behavior. This approach also involves an analysis of nomadism as a language phenomenon and a strategy that does not imply a strict cultural perspective.

In the dialogue of different cultures, when it comes to the translation of one cultural idiom to another, it is clear that the process is affected by a vast number of preconditions (especially in this globalization era). It is even more complex because there is no simple process of transforming (or adapting) one worldview to another, exclusively by linguistic means. That is the reason why Sherry Simon and Paul St. Pierre regard this process as not just a simple linguistic communication, but a more complex relation, as “writing across languages” (2000, p. 28) that enables a diverse speaking position. In this sense, “writing across” also implies production, not just merely an exchange, because there is a theoretical possibility of adopting a different speaking position even if there is no change in the current context. In our analysis, we are going to investigate two different modes of being. The first one is a classic example of translingual writing, when a person from one culture enters the host culture (which is domestic by tradition and birth), by translating himself to the other idiom (poetically and ontologically), i.e. a sort of immigrant voice. The second one is a more classical example of a subject that is translated to the culture of education by first establishing oneself as a nomad (since there is also a nomad heritage involved).

2. SUBJECT IN LANGUAGE AND LITERARY WORK

Subject’s position in reality, regarding the methodology applied by Emile Benveniste in his article “Subjectivity in discourse” (1975, p. 99), is unequivocally determined by the rise of the subject in language. It is seen as a rebirth, in the realm of discourse, since language cannot be confined to a simple means or a tool for communication. It also draws upon the problem of ethics, as Shin (2022, p. 105) argues, taking into account the notion of identity. This view correlates with the phenomenological standpoint of Roman Ingarden (1973, p. 25), when he claims that objects and state of affairs involved in one literary work of art should not be confounded with the real places and objects. They appear in the literary work on a different level, creating the verisimilar world which also gives birth to the displaced subject across various cultures, or the nomad subject. Literary discourse reworks the concept of reality in the literary work of art (its “as if” character, and the intentional properties it presupposes). This also involves the possibility of producing aesthetic qualities.

The way ego establishes itself in the language and through its use can also be noted in Walter Benjamin’s understanding of language. When he claims that the language expresses mental entities instead of meanings, he clearly points out to the way mental being is in the language, in its essence (and not merely expressed by it). That is why Benjamin makes a distinction between the mental and linguistic being, presupposing that every phenomenon has its language (even objects), and states that “mental being is identical with linguistic being only insofar as it is capable of communication” (1996, p. 62). In that sense, the understanding of language as a property and instrument of man is undermined by the necessity to view mental being in the language itself. It is the level of communicability that conditions and defines language limits. Taking into account Biblical allusions and interpretations of the process of giving a name, as a proper linguistic function (of the human), Benjamin actually reworks the idea of God’s word as an ultimate reality. God names all beings he creates but not man, because he is “invested with the gift of language” and possesses the power to be a creator of the world that expresses itself. In that sense, Benjamin gives the example of man’s Biblical fall, as a moment when he lost immediacy in communication, and the appearance of the word (or the empty word) as a means to establish it. In that sense, we can rework the centralized conception about the speaking subject, understood as determined and confined. When man started to grasp language as a set of words and mental qualities, he forgot its essence and entangled himself in the process of overnaming, which gave birth to sign and its representational character.

The correlation of the empirical reality with the realm of words can be seen in the light of Emanuel Levinas’ understanding of meaning and subject. By taking into account Heidegger’s notion of language as a house of being, Levinas grounds his statements on the founding role of language and its necessity for perception. In describing the relatedness between language and reality, he claims that the objects are not prior to the meaning in language, but they are attributed with meaning only based on language. Levinas paves the way for a more profound rumination on language, and the birth of self by confining it to the limits of being and its expression. “(...) Art is then not a blissful wandering of man who sets out to make something beautiful. Culture and artistic creation are part of the ontological order itself” (Levinas, 1987, p. 82). The incarnation Levinas speaks about can be understood in Merleau-Ponty’s sense of the body as “feeling felt”, by which we can discern the relationship between the subject and object. Again, it is the fundamental role of language that enables perception and its embodiment in art/culture, which can be understood only as a superstructure of the economic needs. It also involves the ideological subject as a knowing subject, “in control of language and meaning” (Pourjafari, 2024, p. 21), which underlines the question of authorship as a possible explanation of work’s hermeneutics (Tasevska Hadji Boshkova, 2019, p. 1846).

2. SUBJECT'S VARIATIONS IN EROL TUFAN'S TRANSLINGUAL WRITING

In the poetic imagination of Erol Tufan, we are irrevocably confronted with language as a means for constructing the ontological habitat of the author. The meaning of the phrase “being at home”, in his work, actualizes as an ontology of the state of occupying different places, which are not only grounded in temporal relations, but also in the Heideggerian “house of language” he uses respectively. In that sense, it should be noted that the poetic subject is closely related to the nomadic consciousness, which here implies a movement without stopping, in space and time, taking into account different cultural and national backgrounds. As a result, the reader's expectations are varied, thus creating an experience that confirms the well-known hypothesis that the poetic self cannot be exhausted or thoroughly translated. Henceforth, the reader can note the existence of two different poetic essences – one related to the Macedonian heritage, and the other to his Turkish background which is approached a posteriori, following his further education in Turkey. His bilingual poetic collection “Melancholy” actualizes the phenomenon called “translingual writing”, or more precisely “self-translation” (Wilson, 2012, p. 48–49), by revealing the play and the interaction of different language codes. Self-translation is more than a successful and adequate communication of the linguistic meaning. It tackles the problem of creating anew, in the changed cultural perspective, where poetic subjectivity cannot be subsumed under the expected assumptions, so it can be read and understood properly. The poetic writing of Erol Tufan, as it appears in different cultural and linguistic contexts, seems to be extremely problematic, since it reveals a poet who is not an immigrant in the second culture, but a revenant, who affirms his origin by coming back to the cultural heritage. In that sense, by writing in Turkish, he reinforces his family background, as an active recollection. However, this process also underlines the question of what comes first, or in which context the poetic self is more grounded and established, following the domestic affiliation. This is a vital problem when it comes to understanding what is translated (and in what manner), and which idiom is the primary source. This assumption is related to the notion of creative intention, as an initial and spontaneous force, and the transforming potential of translation (Benjamin, 2007, p. 76–77). Benjamin presupposes a certain “language of truth”, as a middle ground where different idioms reach out and connect, or as a possibility of enunciating the last word, which would extract all the truthfulness of/in a certain language.

The poetic collection of Erol Tufan consists of two elements – the dominant nomadic perspective (everything that is described is a sort of regression to what authentic subjectivity is), and the view of reality as a cyclical movement. In the Macedonian version of the poem “Immigrant” (Туфан, 2020, стр. 38), Tufan underlines the perspective of a man who willingly chooses to move in space and time in order to find what is essential, or the meaning of life. “Why did you come back / old to the father's hearth / where the zeal does no longer smoulder - / today I asked / the immigrant / He said: / To bury / my own body.” (The translation of the quotes from the works by Erol Tufan and Luan Starova is provided by the author). However, in the Turkish variant of this poem (Tufan, 2020, p. 40), the title is more instructive in terms of expressing its artistic reevaluation. In that sense, the artist is facing the ultimate truth that as a creator, he cannot escape his origins, so moving in different contexts affirms the inevitable coming back to the ancestors and the cultural heritage. “Today I asked / the nomad artist... / (...) I wrapped myself up in different roles / But I did not find my expression / So I came back here / To bury my old body in the graveyard / Of my family...” Here, the question of poetic self is actualized on different level. It implies that by taking different roles in life, man can come to terms with his fragile existence. In his conscious choice not to use any of the punctuation marks, Tufan affirms the reterritorialization in language as a fragmentary experience. Man is present in language and represented only in parts because its essence eludes any kind of artistic representation. Moving in space and time actually means moving in and through languages that are not the ultimate means to communicate meaning. It is quite the opposite, in fact, and this can be discerned in his attempt to negotiate meaning by taking away its cultural dimension.

Erol Tufan also describes the way linguistic variations actualize different layers of meaning in words, in various contexts. In the Macedonian version of the poem “Stillness” (Туфан, 2020, стр. 11), the state of having no sound has an essential significance to the whole nomadic experience, since it is of utmost importance for the return to the origins. In fact, the nomadic subjectivity in Tufan's cosmology is always marked by the return. In the Turkish variant of the same poem (Tufan, 2020, p. 16), silence is the necessary prerequisite that conditions the encounter of two beings, not only in reality but also on a creative level, where the poetic self meets melancholy or God, thus performing the ultimate artistic act. “The time of silence... / Peaceful and painful / An uncertain but definite teardrop on the corner of the eye / My heart was in pain, but there was no frost / should one surrender himself to the fate in that moment/ or react against it?” Tufan envisions the rise of the new word, which would be liberated from its relation to the being it consumes, or to which it pertains, a word that is elementary, untouched, and a living essential. In that sense, he ascribes to it a certain quality of enjoyment, a sensation, in Levinas' terms (1989, p. 39). The new word as a phenomenon underlines the ultimate quest of artistic poetry, and also the liminal position of the author, who is never in a place of a complete affirmation. This notion is entailed in Tufan's poetry as waiting for the

nominated poet to receive the long-awaited award, being at the same time the critical voice of everyday existence. By questioning the author's identity, as a whole that consists of different parts, the poet confronts the idea of multilayered consciousness, which does not discriminate any aspect of the experience in which it is involved. The poet's multivocal or multiperspective existence in the poetic world is what makes him an open-ended contradiction that does not seek a resolution.

3. SUBJECTIVITY IN LUAN STAROVA'S BALKAN HISTORY

The attempt to write Balkan history, in Luan Starova's novel "Ervehe", is an effort to recreate the meaning of deterritorialization by transforming historical chronological thinking into a story of several interrelated exiles. The focal point is his mother's destiny, to which he attributes several cultural backgrounds that affirm the Balkan existence as living on the border. His mother was born and raised in a dysfunctional family, as an orphan who integrated the Albanian Muslim, Greek, Italian, and Macedonian cultural heritage. This aspect is underlined also in a sense of what cultural hybridity entailed, one century ago, in the reality of the Ottoman Empire. Mother's position, from the beginning of the novel, is established as central to the proper understanding of the changing historical conditions. In a similar way to Meursault in Camus' novel, this character is represented as being "from everywhere, citizen of the world, cosmopolitan" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 30). Ervehe or the Mother in Starova's novel is the exact place where language, ethnic, and traditional differences meet and reconcile. In that sense, geographical places are transformed into ontological ones, where the unique exile consciousness means being situated at the border, where diversities only touch them endlessly, but never properly communicate or intersect. Mother's existence is underlined by hybridity from her very beginnings, as a girl raised in an Albanian Bektashi family, adopting Sufi principles of belief, situated in the small town of Leskovik, at the Albanian-Greek frontier. Her exile does not stop after her marriage, but connects with her husband's, thus creating a whole range of different social and power relations that intersect in subject's existence. It is interesting that the phenomenon of exile, in terms of pertaining to nobody's land, correlates with the subversion of the patriarchal conventions, which are destined to fail in the changed circumstances. Ervehe's family is not a traditional one, but an intersection of various cultural experiences, and the only place they truly communicate is the infinite, transnational, and transtemporal existence of the father's library. "Among the few saved Father's books, in the boat that took us over the border, he noticed the Mother's catalogue *La rinascente*. He looked her nicely. This catalogue successfully crossed the border with the family (...) The word *La rinascente* stayed in the family dictionary for quite a while, with the old meaning attributed by the Mother" (Старова, 2006, стр. 29–31). The arrangement of the books is perfect, as they reflect everything that has ever been thought in that house, placed on the border. Additionally, this is the place where the Mother spends most of her time, transforming her silence and tears into an active recollection of the time past. It is the words that activate recollection, and the way subject is placed in the center of the language. By occupying such a position, Ervehe or the Mother subverts the archetype of the walled woman (Старова, 2006, стр. 162), a motif present in all the Balkan peoples, into a symbol of a woman whose speech is hidden in the secret vault, but still heard, even occasionally. That enables all the differences to take their stand.

In the novel, the Mother as a character rearranges narrative strategies in terms of their importance for the literary world that is represented. She is structured in a sense of "body without organs" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 18), whose actions are conducted not by desire but by being in correlation with the "desiring-machines". This body is reborn in every experience and in the shared spaces it occupies. Mother's character is firstly differentiated in a sense of universality, as a spot where every other existence articulates its traits. "Mother came to Thessaloniki in the first spring of her life, in the hands of her aunt, the Italian Clementine. She did not have kids of her own. She was in the blossom of her youth. She belonged to an old Italian aristocrat family. They met with Mother's uncle in Rome. It was love at first sight. Love that continued in their marriage and life in the Balkans." (Старова, 2006, стр. 144–145). Here we can note the exact position of the subject as a dislocated phenomenon, placed between cultures and without a stable identity. It coincides with the Balkan history and the way people there intersect endlessly.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator claims that in a religious, Sufi view of the world, even God has a mother. Although this consideration is in a strict opposition to the Islamic standpoint, regarding God and his existence, the author chooses an aspect of family ties to demonstrate how the universal order cannot be understood without taking into account its smaller unit. By being defined outside power and desire relations, the Mother enables the proper communication of different cultural backgrounds. She is a sort of a zero point, determined by the confirmation of various cultural milieus she touches (one way or another), a Nietzschean subject. Its reduction in that way is not just a manner by which the general is presented by the particular, but also a strategy through which cultures intersect. Although borders are the most significant phenomenon in the Balkans, since everything is seen in terms of belonging to one culture or another, there are blind spots where communication is still possible. In that sense, the Mother is the keeper of the keys that were used to open all the doors in their past and recent households, thus

affirming the universal, godly-like dimension of everyday existence. She is the avatar that enables the 20th-century Balkan historical narrative to appear at its full potential, giving birth to the voice of the marginalized and liminal subjects. Consequently, Ervehe's transgressive nature unveils the universal question of the soul, as a creative dynamic power that needs to be focused upon the good deeds. However, there is also the notion of "the uncovered, bare soul" that wanders between "the dead past and the uncertain future" (Старова, 2006, стр. 89), which is in fact a Balkan destiny. Starova affirms the Balkan departure as a point of no return, thus creating a vision of a neighboring, but hostile and unfriendly culture. Still, at the end of the novel, by representing his return from the European culture of his further education, the author envisions a circular movement that provides the closure of the conflicting viewpoints and desires.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The polyvalent subject which consists of different parts and elements, in Tufan's and Starova's works, appears as a factor that determines the reterritorialization of language as a semiotic act. By establishing the poetic self as a nomad, a subject that goes back and forth between different cultures, Tufan, on the one hand, creates a cosmopolitan vision of the world, underlined by its specific transgressive nature in terms of borders and shared traits. The poetic self, defined as the wanderer, goes back to the culture he was born in order "to bury (his) own body" (Туфан, 2020, стр. 38). It is an affirmation of the difference, the nuances that exist between cultures, as means to reestablish the proper unity of the world. However, as Lundberg, Frascini and Aliani (2023, p. 4523) point out, it is not just the context or environment that shape subjectivity. That is why Starova takes on a dissimilar approach, by writing his novel in Macedonian language. He puts into perspective the focal point of the nomad that reactualizes the tradition of nomads. He tackles the problem of the "feeling felt", or the responsibility that is involved in the process of answering the existential dilemmas of the world. The essential difference between reaction and response does not only involve the elements that distinguish animal and human communication (Derrida, 2008, p. 126) but also the answerability to the whole process of subjectification. Language attributes meaning to the objects, and in that sense, Starova goes beyond its limitations to describe Balkan history as a mode of existence on the borderline. "The exile is offering sacrifice to the borders" (Старова, 2006, стр. 130). In terms of the border's importance to Balkan countries, similar to the subjectification that happens in the language, Starova chooses an existence that challenges duality and established notions. Interestingly, this process is not confined to the main character (the Mother), because it also involves the projection he makes of his existence, i.e. the autobiographical self. In fact, by the act of returning to the place of his father's origin (Pogradec), in southeastern Albania, the self-representation undermines the established borderline existences which are confined to the place they currently occupy.

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