

University of Tartu  
Department of Semiotics

Mkrtich Mkrtchyan

COMMUNICATING MEMORIES THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A SEMIOTIC  
ANALYSIS OF *MAYRIG* by HENRI VERNEUIL

Master Thesis

Supervisors: Peeter Torop, Prof.  
Merit Rickberg, Ph.D. st.

Tartu  
2021

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
Background and the aim of the thesis .....	4
Research questions .....	5
Methodology .....	5
Structure of the thesis.....	6
1. MEMORY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY .....	8
1.1. Memory Studies .....	8
1.1.2. Collective and other forms of memory.....	10
1.2.1. Autobiography as a genre.....	15
1.2.2. Ambiguous character of the autobiography .....	20
1.3.1. Autobiography as microhistory.....	24
1.3.2. Autobiography and memory transmission .....	26
2. <i>MAYRIG</i> : A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS.....	33
2.1. <i>Mayrig</i> as an autobiographical text .....	33
2.2. Structural analysis of <i>Mayrig</i> .....	38
2.2.1. The architectonical aspect: Paratextual analysis .....	38
2.2.2. The narrative aspect: The autobiographical message .....	41
2.2.3. The narrative aspect: The author-reader communication .....	44
CONCLUSION .....	57
REFERENCES.....	59
ANNEXES .....	65
KOKKUVÕTE.....	67

## INTRODUCTION

The autobiography is a life narrative written by the autobiographer. It is always a one-sided view of events where the truthfulness of depicted events is subjective (Smith; Watson 2010: 13). Several works questioned the genre of autobiography. It is considered a hybrid genre (Schmitt 2017: 29) due to its blurred limits with other genres such as memoir or autobiographical novel.

To make it easier to distinguish autobiography among other genres, French literary critic Philippe Lejeune (1996 [1975]) proposed a pact between the author and the reader, which presupposes that the author's name coincides with the name of the main character. This contract is the guarantor to conceive the autobiography and not confuse it with other genres. Of course, according to this autobiographical pact, it is up to the reader to decide whether the narration is trustworthy or not. The autobiography has also been considered autofiction (Dubrovsky 1977), which implies that the autobiography is the fusion of facts and fiction. Nowadays, autobiography is at the intersection of several research areas. One of the research fields involved in autobiography studies is Memory Studies, a burgeoning field of academia interested in different forms of memory and its transmission between cultures, time, and space. Several scholars have proposed various ways to understand how memory can be framed socially (Halbwachs 1980) and how autobiographical memory becomes an autobiography (Fivush 2013). Another aspect that has gained researcher's attention is the mechanisms of transmission of memory and its effect on the later generations. Memories are transmitted through different media, from literature, photography to autobiographical and documentary films, music, museums, etc.

The traumatic events of the 20th century have triggered a new discussion about traumatic memory transmission to the next and later generations. Hirsch (2012) studied family albums of Holocaust survivors and concluded that memories of traumatic past of family members that one has not lived personally could impact the individual's life. Sometimes, these mediated memories can be perceived by the individual as his own. This phenomenon Hirsch dubbed as "postmemory."

The individual's life story is unique, and at the same time, it can work as a reflection of the life of a community. Additionally, as memories are never sealed off, and they are

socially framed, autobiographical memories of famous people could reflect an entire communities' life, their collective memory.

Another theoretical concept that focuses on individuals' lives is microhistory, which relates events concentrated on small history units such as individual, city, district of a town, etc. Microhistory is similar to the autobiography as the autobiography is the individual's life story where the autobiographer relates not only his life but also details his house, the city, the community, and so on. Moreover, the autobiography of a famous person from a national minority could be considered microhistory of that community. For example, *Mayrig*<sup>1</sup> is the autobiography of French Armenian prominent filmmaker Henri Verneuil where he narrates his traumatic past, his family's integration into the French society, and he also speaks there of his postmemory of the Armenian Genocide. Given that Verneuil was a renowned person in France, his autobiography *Mayrig* could be considered the microhistory of the Armenian community of the early 20th century Marseilles.

Like any text, the autobiography has its target audience, also named prospective readers. The autobiographer narrates his life for some model readers and some purpose. The purpose is the driving force behind every autobiography. At the same time, the reader is the guide for the autobiographer in choosing strategies to make his autobiographical message delivered to that target readers.

The relationship between author and reader has been studied primarily in literature. One of the major works done in this field is Umberto Eco's *The Role of the Reader* (1979), where Eco proposes "Model reader." In its turn, Juri Lotman, in the article "The text and the structure of its audience" (1982), uses the term "target audience." As all these terms refer to the same notion, they are used interchangeably in this present work.

As far as the autobiography is concerned, the author-reader relationship is underdeveloped (Smith, Watson 2010), and it hasn't received much attention. Nonetheless, some works paid attention to this question. In general, the research has been done from the perspective of establishing the genre of the autobiography (Lejeune 1996[1975]). Furthermore, there are still attempts to analyze the reader's reaction to the autobiography through selected letters about it (Strasser 2011).

---

<sup>1</sup> Henri Verneuil's autobiographical book *Mayrig* (1985) could be considered also autobiographical novel. This is further discussed in the Chapter 2.

Another aspect that makes the autobiography as a whole from the reader's perspective is the book cover. Several scholars from different angles have examined the role of the book cover. For example, Torop (2019) considers the book cover as the representation of the main text and the contact zone between the reader and the author. According to Mossop (2017), the book cover is the translation of the main text. These works have questioned book covers in general, but the autobiographical book has unique features that make it a unique case study. The autobiographical books differ from other books. The autobiographical book, in general, bears the picture of the autobiographer, some biographical notes about him, and it might also include his citation or his catchy phrase. These strategies make the autobiographical book cover unique as the autobiographer becomes the co-creator of that book cover.

In this sense, the semiotic analysis of the author-reader relationship in *Mayrig* would help find the purpose of writing the autobiography and the strategies that the author uses to convey his message and his traumatic memories to his target audience. The target audience is the guide for the autobiographer to communicate his traumatic memories and even participate in the book cover making.

*Mayrig*, in its turn, has not been studied from memory studies, semiotics perspectives. The searches in Google didn't bring anything valuable in English nor Armenian, Russian or French. Thus, this thesis is somehow the first attempt to analyze *Mayrig*. Moreover, it might fit in the first steps in exploring the memories of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide, which, unlike the Holocaust, are not widely analyzed in academia.

## **Background and the aim of the thesis**

On April 24, the radio and TV stations in Armenia broadcast documentary films, movies, testimonies related to the Armenian Genocide. As a child, I was always watching *Mayrig* (1991) by Verneuil. Although I didn't understand the movie's real message, I sympathized with the young boy and his family's difficult situation as a migrant in a foreign country. The scene that I liked most and which stayed in my memory and I think in the memory of many Armenians was the pakhlava scene, especially the misunderstanding that so lovely dessert for Armenians could be treated as a "sugary mess."

The autobiographical movie *Mayrig* by Verneuil is based on the autobiographical book by the same name and by the same author. The film was shot because Verneuil was

requested by his French audience and Armenians of France and Armenia when he visited Soviet Armenia.

I became interested in how an autobiographical book could become so successful that the author could shoot a film based on his own autobiographical book. There are plenty of success stories of books that laid the ground for film adaptations. The specificity of *Mayrig* is that it is an autobiography of a famous filmmaker where he relates his postmemory of the Armenian Genocide, his nostalgic and traumatic memories. All these themes were not directly related to his target French audience, but they liked it, and the reception of the book was very successful. *Mayrig* is Verneuil's autobiography, and it is also the narrative about the Armenian Genocide and its consequences on an individual –exile, migration, and adaptation into French society. Hence, this success of the autobiographical message triggered a desire to understand how that autobiographical message is narrated and how an autobiography could eventually become a part of cultural memory.

The **thesis aims** to understand Verneuil's strategies to convey his autobiographical message- his traumatic and nostalgic memories, his postmemory of the Armenian Genocide. The author-reader relationship is essential in every text, even so in an autobiography. Moreover, the autobiographer has the target audience in mind even before writing the autobiography. The prospective reader guides the style, the language, and the content of the autobiographical message. Thus, analyzing the autobiography *Mayrig* from the semiotic approach will aid in revealing the autobiographer's strategies that helped *Mayrig* become a successful autobiography and its message delivered to the target audience.

### **Research questions:**

- What are the specificities of autobiography as a medium of memory?
- What are the strategies used by Verneuil in communicating his memories to the target readers?

### **Methodology**

The first chapter discusses several concepts of memory proposed by different scholars to answer the first research question. The optimal definition is Astrid Erll's (2011) proposal to

consider cultural memory as an umbrella term to define all these adjectives that go along with memory.

The notion of autobiography and its genre is also examined in this chapter. The aim is to expose the autobiography as a medium for memory transmission and conveying traumatic memories.

One of the key concepts for this thesis is the postmemory proposed by Marianne Hirsch (2012). This concept is helpful in describing the traumatic memories of the Armenian Genocide that Verneuil conveyed in his autobiography *Mayrig*. Moreover, Caty Caruth's (1997) definition of trauma as "a mental wound that must be addressed and the best way to handle it is through the literature" suites best to show that autobiography is a medium for conveying traumatic memories despite its hybrid nature. Finally, the notion of microhistory is discussed by different scholars; it focuses on the small units of history. It is necessary to show that the autobiography's success could make it the microhistory of a community. In this case, *Mayrig* as the microhistory of the Armenian community of the 20th century of Marseille.

After establishing the specificities of autobiography as a medium of memory in the first chapter of the theses, I analyze the autobiography *Mayrig* in the second chapter to answer the second research question on Verneuil's strategies in communicating his memories to his target readers. The second chapter examines the structure of the autobiography *Mayrig*. First, it is necessary to show that an autobiography is a text, and its structure could be analyzed in two ways: architectonical and narrative. Hence, Gerard Genette's (1997) paratextuality is discussed, and the book cover of *Mayrig* as a paratextual element is examined. The narrative aspect of *Mayrig* includes several notions such as Bakhtin's (1982) theory of dialogue, Genette's (1983) theory of narrative functions, Lotman's (2000) concepts of translation and semiosphere.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The master thesis consists of the introduction, two chapters, the conclusion, the reference list, the annexes, and the summary in Estonian. The first chapter discusses the present situation of memory studies, the different kinds of memories. Then, it gives a theoretical description and a general understanding of autobiography, its particularity as a genre. The next move is to discuss the transmission of memory, trauma, and postmemory due to "inherited" trauma. This

chapter explores how the autobiography *Mayrig* could be considered microhistory of Marseilles' Armenian community.

The second chapter discusses the autobiography as a text woven through different threads. Then, it moves to analyze the structure of *Mayrig* from two aspects: architectonical and narrative. This chapter outlines the strategies such as dialogue and translation that Verneuil used to deliver his autobiographical message to the prospective reader.

# **1. MEMORY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

It is impossible to cover such a broad and burgeoning field as “memory studies” in an MA thesis. Still, it is necessary to give an overview of it to construct the big picture of the areas interested in memory in a culture where autobiography has its unique place from the memory transmission perspective. Therefore, this chapter begins with an extensive theoretical overview of memory and the autobiography. It is vital to understand the complex notion of autobiography and its role as a medium to convey the memories of the past.

This theoretical background has two aims. First, to provide knowledge of different types of memories. Secondly, to discuss autobiography as a genre. This chapter’s analytical part examines the role of autobiography as microhistory and a medium of memory transmission. Since autobiographies, in general, are written by famous people, the memories of tragic events depicted there could become the reflection of the life of an entire community that lived the same tragic circumstances. In this sense, it is necessary to conceive the autobiography as microhistory.

To begin with, the research focus on memory is at the front and center of different disciplines ranging from literature, history, semiotics, sociology, philosophy to anthropology. At the same time, memory is at the center of popular culture, particularly in the visual culture, where the past became the center of the industry. The reference to memory is prominent in popular culture and academia related to autobiography and biography, and other forms of life-writing.

When someone starts to write his autobiography, they rely heavily on their memory. The memory is the pillar upon which the autobiography rests. Memory studies examine this relation between memory and the individual, culture, society, and their means of interaction.

## **1.1. Memory Studies**

Memory studies is a burgeoning academic field that aims to study the ways of remembering the past at a collective, individual and national level and the means of collecting and transferring the past to the new generation. Henry L. Roediger and James V. Wertsch (2008) posit that memory studies are currently a multidisciplinary field, and they hope to see it as an interdisciplinary field. Indeed, memory is a hot subject that interconnects different research areas. Brown, Gutman, and Freeman (2009: 117), discussing the interdisciplinary character

of memory, argue that “[t]he identification and acknowledgment of the interdisciplinary interest in memory has been referred to as “memory studies””.

The scope of research interests related to memory is broad; how and by which means the past is remembered, why it is remembered, or how the past influences the nation, the public, the political discourse, and the individual. To understand how the all-pervading phenomenon of memory functions, it was fragmented into various processes and systems such as long-term and short-term memory, individual and autobiographical memory, etc. Endel Tulving (2007), in his article “Are There 256 Different Kinds of Memory?” studied the word memory and its modifiers (cultural memory, collective memory, individual memory). Tulving collected over 256 modifiers of memory, i.e., the adjectives used with the notion of “memory.” By writing his essay, of course, the list could have been enlarged and still might be now. However, here are some examples of his findings: false memory, unconscious memory, involuntary memory, picture memory, semantic memory, episodic memory, etc.

Nowadays, the research is fruitful in the area that connects culture with memory. This interconnection of memory and culture attracts many study fields that are as diverse as history, media studies, sociology, semiotics, history, etc.

The interest in memory and its connection to culture boomed after World War Two, and it overgrew in the late 20th century. Now Memory Studies has its international peer-reviewed journal “Memory Studies,” and the aim of the journal is as follows on its website;

Memory Studies examines the social, cultural, cognitive, political and technological shifts affecting how, what and why individuals, groups and societies remember, and forget. The journal responds to and seeks to shape public and academic discourses on the nature, manipulation, and contestation of memory in the contemporary era<sup>2</sup>.

There are several anthologies (e.g., Erll; Nünning (eds.) 2008. *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, Levy 2011. *The Collective Memory Reader*) that present a collection of texts dedicated to the memory and culture seen from a different perspective. It is worth noting the groundbreaking book “*Memory in Culture*” (2011) by German professor Astrid Erll at Goethe University Frankfurt. In this book, Erll gives a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the place of memory in the culture, its background in culture. Erll also provides a comprehensive overview of its contributors and the main works on memory and its state of being.

Memory is omnipresent in the individual's life in collective or national form; moreover, “memory occupies us in our free time, in the form of a thriving heritage industry”

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/description/mss> accessed 08 January 2021.

(Erll 2011: 1). The study of memory interconnects different research areas in humanities, and it is an international phenomenon not limited to a specific country.

### **1.1.2. Collective and other forms of memory**

Collective memory is a concept introduced by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). Leaving behind two fundamental works on memory (*The Collective Memory* (1980), *On the Collective Memory* (1992)), Halbwachs changed the perception of memory, the research on it as he was the first to mention the collective nature of memory. He notes that “[...] our memory is not a blank tablet and we feel able to perceive in them, as in a distorted mirror, features and contours (illusory perhaps) providing us an image of the past” (Halbwachs 1980: 25).

Being a sociologist, Halbwachs underlined that society could have a collective memory. He stated that memory is collective, but it is the individuals who remember. As individuals are different from each other, the remembrances of the same event might be various too. Halbwachs writes, “I would readily acknowledge that each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory, that this viewpoint changes as my position changes, that this position changes as my relationships to other milieus change” (Halbwachs 1980: 48).

The individual being part of one milieu will remember the past event, but the remembrance will change when the individual changes his milieu.

The event of the Armenian genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire as a tragic episode of the Armenian nation is remembered across the globe as Armenians live in almost every part of the world, thus the way of remembering the past that refers to the genocide and its consequences is varied too. Thus, Armenians who found refuge in France, for example, will have a different story to tell about their traumatic experience and the consequences of it compared to Armenians who found refuge in the Soviet Union where they were forced to grieve in silence for many decades.

The Armenian genocide also became a part of the cultural memory of Armenians as there have been numerous books: autobiographies, testimonies, and novels that narrate the collective traumatic memory from the individual experience. Numerous films convey the tragic events of 1915: the last one that gathered attention was “*The Promise*” (2016), directed by Terry George. All these cultural artifacts help the new generation remember the past keeping the memory alive. They also relate about the genocide and its traumatic memory from different perspectives: as someone who witnessed, lived the consequences, or even

found the ugly secret of the family (Fethiye Cetin, *My grandmother: An Armenian-Turkish Memoir* (2012)).

Although Halbwachs contributed with his notion of ‘collective memory/ *la mémoire collective*’ to rethink the place of memory in culture, he never elaborated the theoretical background of the concept. There are still some discussions on how to understand this concept. Some researchers (Gedi; Yigal 1996) find the idea of collective memory as “the stumbling block in Halbwachs theory.” They write, “[a]ll “collective” terms are problematic - and “collective memory” is no exceptions – because they are conceived of as having capacities that are in fact actualized only on an individual level, that is, they can only be performed by individuals” (Gedi; Yigal 1996: 34). They propose to understand the notion in the metaphorical sense because speaking of the collective is “to commit the fallacy of “concrete generalization,” namely of treating a generalization as though it were some concrete entity” (Ibid, 34-35).

In the same vein but less explicitly, Erll (2008) proposes to understand collective memory as an “umbrella term,” moreover she considers cultural, collective, and social memory as words referring to the same concept, or semiotically speaking as signifiers referring to the same signified:

“Cultural” (or, if you will, “collective,” “social”) memory is certainly a multifarious notion, a term often used in an ambiguous and vague way. Media, practices, and structures as diverse as myth, monuments, historiography, ritual, conversational remembering, configurations of cultural knowledge, and neuronal networks are nowadays subsumed under this wide umbrella term. Because of its intricacy, cultural memory has been a highly controversial issue ever since its very conception in Maurice Halbwachs’s studies on *mémoire collective*. (Erll 2008: 4)

The National Geographic encyclopedia define “cultural memory” as “the constructed understanding of the past that is passed from one generation to the next through text, oral traditions, monuments, rites, and other symbols” and “it also creates a form of shared identity and a means for communicating this identity to new members”<sup>3</sup>. As per the role of the cultural memory in culture, the authors of the entry argue that “[c]ultural memory enables culture to endure; it enables people to adapt to their culture; and it enables cultures to adapt to new circumstances by retaining traces of what worked in the past”(Ibid).

Cultural memory is a tool that helps the culture to preserve its uniqueness and its cultural characteristics and to pass the essential memory to the next generations. In sum, cultural memory is the “identity card” of the given culture.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/cultural-memory/> accessed 08 January 2021.

Interestingly, semiotic and anthropological theories (Posner 2004) understand culture as collective construction of reality comprised of three semiotic dimensions: the social (people, social relations, and institutions), the mental (artifacts and media, ideas, values, and conventions), and the material (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities, and texts in a broad sense) (Erll 2008:4; Herman, Jahn, Ryan 2005: 90).

Meanwhile, Marek Tamm (2015) argues that “[t]he concept of ‘cultural memory’ is more ambitious and broader than ‘social’ or even ‘collective memory’: it is largely synonymous with the concept of ‘culture’ itself, stressing its mnemonic function” (Tamm 2015: 127).

The all-pervading concept of “cultural memory” has been introduced by Jan and Aleida Assmann at the end of the 80s. In his article “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, Jan Assmann underscores that;

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (Assmann 1995: 132, cited in Erll 2011: 29)

Later, this approach of Jan Assmann was elaborated by Aleida Assmann. Marek Tamm resuming the legacy of Aleida and Jan Assmann writes:

[t]heir approach rests on the understanding that shared memories of the past are not accidentally produced by interacting social groups, but a consequence of cultural mediation, primarily of textualisation and visualization. While collective memory circulates orally too (a process called ‘communicative memory’ by Jan Assmann), its character is definitively shaped by all kinds of cultural mediation channels, such as texts, images, objects, buildings and rituals. (Tamm 2015: 128)

The contribution of Jan and Aleida Assmann was to give an overview of different types of memory (communicative and cultural memory), their means of disseminating it (media, forms, carriers), and temporal structure. The nascent phenomenon of “cultural memory” generated a research field that united different fields of academia such as history, media theory, and literature, religious studies. It is worth noting that the concept of ‘cultural memory’ contributed to the cultural turn of memory studies.

It should be highlighted that Jan and Aleida Assmann were influenced by the works of Tartu Moscow School of Semiotics, especially by the works of Juri Lotman and Boris Uspenskij. Semiotics and culture, from Lotman’s perspective are interdependent; therefore semiotics is primarily the semiotics of culture (Lotman M. 2013: 262). As per culture, semioticians of Tartu Moscow School of Semiotics consider it as the nonhereditary memory of the community.

We understand culture as the nonhereditary memory of the community, a memory expressing itself in a system of constraints and prescriptions. [...] Furthermore, insofar as culture is memory of what the community has experienced, it is, of necessity, connected to past historical experience. Consequently, at the moment of its appearance, culture cannot be recorded as such, for it is only perceived *ex post facto*. (Lotman, Uspensky 1978 [1971]: 213-214)

In this sense, culture is somehow similar to the history, as history also records *post-factum*. Remembering, memory, in general, is always *post factum*; one tries to recall his childhood and tries to fill some gaps with the help of some people, especially family members. If someone wants to remember his childhood and write it down, he reevaluates his childhood from the adult's perspective; of course, it depends on the narrator's age too.

Concerning history, Hallbwachs (1980) claims that history is a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man. It is artificial, composed of dates and events selected and put in the books of history. History is conceived as a 'crowded cemetery,' "where room must constantly be made for new tombstones" (Halbwachs 1980: 52). Indeed, history selects some dates and events. With the time it accumulates so many that not to overwhelm the memory, the historians sort out the most critical dates from annals to pass it to the next generation in the form of textbooks. The idea is to keep the memory of important events vivid and not leave the less important dates and events out entirely and keep them for narrow specialists. Cultural memory is a mechanism that participates in forming the national identity, which is linked to the cultural past of that identity. Here it is worth remembering what Assmann writes about the function of the cultural memory;

Cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ("We are this") or in a negative ("that's our opposite") sense. (Assmann 1995: 130)

However, it is essential to underscore that cultural memory is not just a reservoir but also a mechanism, which helps to retain what is critical to the cultural identity of the society and the nation. In this sense, Juri Lotman has already underlined that "memory is not for the culture a passive depository, but part of its mechanism of textual creation" (Lotman 2000: 676). This creation happens through repetition, and the repetition helps to preserve the memory and pass it onto the next generations. Ann Rigney wrote in the same token:

[...] it is through recursivity – visiting the same places, repeating the same stories – that a cultural memory is constructed as such. When acts of remembrance are repeatedly performed they can become part of a shared frame of reference. Arguably, texts and images play a particularly important role in this process, both because they themselves are infinitely reproducible and because they are tied down neither to any particular time nor to any particular place. (Rigney 2005: 20)

According to Halbwachs (1980: 52), there should be two sorts of memory: “internal or inward memory and external, or personal memory and social memory. I would consider more accurate “autobiographical memory” and “historical memory. The former would make use of the latter, since our life history belongs, after all, to general history”. Then Halbwachs explains that “[...] historical memory would cover a much broader expanse of time. However, it would represent the past only in a condensed and schematic way, while the memory of our own life would present a richer portrait with greater continuity” (Ibid, 52). He continues to claim that the collective memory differs from history; it is a ‘current of continuous thought’ whose continuity is not artificial, “for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive” (Halbwachs 1980: 80).

The memory is at the intersection of different research fields, and it has been studied and fractioned from different angles. Psychologists fragmented memory in subcategories trying to integrate cultural studies achievement in psychology. In their article “A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories” (2008), social psychologists David Manier and William Hirst distinguished three types of memory: collective-episodic memory, collective-semantic memory, and collective procedural memory. Astrid Erll (2010) also differentiates three types of memory systems: collective-autobiographical information, collective-semantic information, collective-procedural phenomena. Erll explains her decision to use ‘collective-autobiographical memory’ this way:

I use the term ‘collective-autobiographical memory’ to refer to the collective remembering of a shared past. Psychological studies of the individual autobiographical memory emphasize its dynamic, creative and narrative nature, as well as its identity-creating functions. On the social and media level, too, ‘autobiographical’ versions of the past are highly constructive and fulfill the function of self-description (‘our past, our identity’). Through collective-autobiographical acts of memory, group identities are created, the experience of time is culturally shaped, and shared systems of values and norms are established. (Erll 2010: 105-106)

As Halbwachs (1980: 48; 51) pointed out, individual memory is never sealed off and isolated, and the collective memory ‘draws strength’ from the group of people; it is always the individual who remembers. The individual is indeed a part of the social milieu. As already mentioned above, society influences the way the individual recalls, and this remembrance, whatever form it takes, will bear the characteristics of the social milieu of the individual.

Autobiographical memories are episodes recollected from an individual’s life (Williams, Conway, Cohen 2008: 22). Thus, being recollections of episodes, autobiographical memories have functions too. According to Helen Williams, Martin

Conway, and Gillian Cohen, there are three functions; directive, social, and self. They argue that the directive function consists of using past memories to shape current and future behavior. This function serves to solve problems and predict the future. Social function is the fundamental function because sharing memories with someone else facilitate social interaction. They underscore that “ [s]elf-disclosure of autobiographical memories with someone who was not there at the original event is a means of increasing intimacy, of pooling experiences, of giving and receiving understanding and sympathy, and of “placing ourselves” in a given culture and context” (Williams; Conway; Cohen 2008: 24).

The relationship to the self is the characteristic function of the self. The authors of the fractions of these functions claim that “[m]emory for our own personal history is of great importance as it is an essential element of our personal identity, and many memory researchers view the interaction of the self and memory as the most important function of autobiographical memory (Williams; Conway; Cohen 2008: 25).

Here it remains to understand how the autobiographical memory becomes an autobiography. Robyn Fivush claims that autobiographical memory is a way of accounting for what happened. He continues, “[i]t is not simply that something happened, but how and why, who was the agent, and who is responsible? It is in this sense that autobiographical memory becomes autobiography” (Fivush 2013:14).

Our memories are socially framed, and the man is always part of a social milieu and to understand the individual, one must situate the individual, his autobiographical memories in the context of the social milieu and as Rédei and Ranta (2016: 148) posit, “[...] our autobiographical memories are intertwined with collective memories as they are mediated in forms of stories, history books, films, literature, and so forth”.

### **1.2.1. Autobiography as a genre**

At some point of a lifespan, famous people - politicians, heads of governments, stars alike decide to write their life down to pass it to the next generation, or to make available some part of their life story to the public, to their target reader. This desire to self-express has become one of the driving forces of the cultural industry. Although self-expression has always been with the human being from ancient times, it has intensified in the digital age. Still, numerous books are published every year about a famous person’s life written by that same person or another. Despite the different media available for self-expression, the book

seems to be an intimate way to interact with the public. The interest in the other's life is the driving force, and "life-writing, in general, is a staple of mainstream publishing for which the appetite of the reading public seems insatiable" (Benton 2009: 1).

It might seem pretty straightforward to define what an autobiography is, and for a layperson, it could be considered a narrative by the author about his life. In practice, it is not that simple to give a comprehensive definition of it. The definition of the autobiography by Philippe Lejeune (1975: 14), who is considered as one of the prominent scholars of autobiographical studies, is as follows, "A retrospective prose account that a real person makes of his own existence, when he emphasizes his individual life, especially the history of his personality" (my translation – M.M.)<sup>4</sup>.

James Olney (1980: 13) advocates the idea that the autobiography tells "the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within" and "offers a privileged access to an experience that no other variety of writing can offer." Paul John Eakin (2020[2004]: 3) posits that the autobiography is "a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell about ourselves day in and day out, autobiography structures our living". Autobiography according to Helga Schwalm is "difficult to define and denotes all modes and genres of telling one's own life"<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, the editor of the *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction* (2019) writing about the book conceives of autobiography in a wide sense "that includes memoirs, diaries, self-portraits and autofiction as well as media transformations of the genre"<sup>6</sup>.

Autobiography which derives from Greek as a combination of three words *autos* (self) + *bios* (life) + *graphein* (to write) became widely used in Western Europe only in the 19th century. The term autobiography in its modern sense firstly appeared in German as *Selbstbiographien* which has been composed by the proposition of Herder. The term then has been used in French on the model of English *autobiography* according to Fernand Baldensperger (Grève 2008: 23). Grève writes that as a prototype to autobiography can be considered *The Confessions* (*Les Confessions*) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782) and the terms referring to autobiography became widely used in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid, 23). Meanwhile, as Edward Seidensticker (1999: 47) claims autobiographies were not

---

<sup>4</sup> Récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/129.html> accessed 06 February 2021.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110279818/html> accessed 27 February 2021.

popular in the West before modern times, “[t]hey were commoner in the East, and perhaps commonest, if a rather broad definition is given to the word, in Japan”.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* go further differentiating between different ways of narrating life to make clear their position about this concept:

We understand *life narrative* [...] as a general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer’s life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital. In other words, we employ the term life writing for written forms of the autobiographical, and life narrative to refer to autobiographical acts of any sort (Smith, Watson 2010: 4).

This distinction between different life narratives is interesting because it underscores that life writing can have a different shape and that there are various media for telling one’s life account. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson continue to underline the multiple means of conveying an autobiographical story; short feature and documentary films; theater pieces; installations; performance art in music, dance, and monologue; the painted or sculpted self-portrait; quilts, collages, and mosaics; body art; murals; comics; and cyber art (Smith; Watson 2010: 95).

David McCooey (2017) defines autobiography as a for-runner of life-writing studies. He continues:

The move from auto/biography studies to life-writing studies has therefore involved expanding the object of study from putatively literary texts to life narratives as they might be most broadly understood: testimony; autoethnography; digital life writing; and so on. This move has allowed for the consideration of graphic, audio-visual and transmedial forms. These include graphic memoir (or comics more generally), photography, auto/biographical film and video and social media. (McCooey 2017: 277)

Autobiography, biography, memoir, and other forms of telling a life story from music performance to documentary films are part of life writing<sup>7</sup>.

The classification of the genres of life narratives is problematic due to somehow blurred lines between them; for example, memoirs are used interchangeably with autobiography in the United States, whereas in France, they are considered different genres (Eakin 2020 [2013]). Autobiography as a genre has had different approaches. As a result, they are drastically different. Some authors claim that it seems outdated and unnecessary to classify literary genres at all (Lecarme; Lecarme - Tabone 1999), while according to others, the autobiography is a sensitive genre (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019), or it is a literary genre but problematic (Grève: 2008). The autobiography is even considered a hybrid genre due to its ambiguous character. As Arnaud Schmitt (2017: 29) underlines in the autobiography, the

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/oxford-centre-life-writing-oclw> accessed 03 March 2021.

“hybridity has become a highly fashionable hypothesis whereas the idea of a clear-cut genre is now increasingly frowned upon. There is no denying that a genre is never sharply defined and to be effective, its definition must remain as flexible as possible”. Martin Löschnigg (2010 [2005]: 34-35) argues that “[w]hile in a wider sense all fictional writing is autobiographical, autobiography as a genre may be defined as a comprehensive non-fictional narrative in prose in which the author renders the facts of her/his own life, usually in first-person form”. Then he continues that “[d]eviations from the standard first-person form have been more frequent since the beginning of the twentieth century, using first-person/third-person shifts in order to express a sense of the fragmentation of individual identity”.

Anyway, the specificity of autobiography as a literary genre consists in telling the life story (or a part of it) of oneself retrospectively. In this sense, autobiography is closer to the biography.

The critical difference between the two is that the biography is the story of a life told by another person. In contrast, the autobiography is about the life or a part of that person's life written by himself. In other words, the autobiography is a story of a life seen from within, whereas the biography is a story of life seen from outside- an external record of someone's life.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms* claims that autobiography is a subgenre (the most important one) of biography, as per biography the definition is as follows:

A narrative history of the life of some person; or the practice of writing such works. Most biographies provide an account of the life of a notable individual from birth to death, or in the case of living persons from birth to the time of writing; but some treat the connected lives of paired subjects or of groups (known as ‘group biography’); and since the late 20th century the term has been stretched to cover accounts of non-human subjects such as houses, cities, or commodities, in which case ‘a biography’ really means an intimate or gossip history<sup>8</sup>.

According to Eakin (2020 [1992]: 42), the “fundamental difference” that separates autobiography from the biography is the ability to see the subject from the outside, “[w]hat separates biography from autobiography is what separates us from each other, namely, our subjectivity and the envelope of the body that contains it.”

Pascal Roy (2016[1960]: 2-3) claims that “[t]here is an autobiographical form, and indeed a convention, which one recognizes and distinguishes from other literary modes” and “autobiography is sometimes confused with some other literary forms nearer to it.” Roy (2016[1960]: 3) continues that there is an apparent difference between diary and

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1237?rskey=tpsXSc&result=1> accessed 21 February 2021.

autobiography, “[t]he latter is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time. The diarist notes down what, at that moment, seems of importance to him [...].”

However, Roy argues that a diary can be used as material in writing an autobiography because “diary-entry will provide the material for a vivid picture which otherwise might have escaped memory [...].” (Ibid, 3). Edward Seidensticker (1999: 48-49) asserts that a diary is more detailed and an autobiography can’t be based upon a diary; otherwise, it would be “shapeless”.

Autobiography has even been considered as a “sort of historiographical writing, as texts that are ‘true’ or at least ‘truthful’ reports of person’s life” (Wagner-Egelhalf 2019: 1). It seems that this idea comes from the fact that both historiography and autobiography have historical and factual built-in characteristics. Hampl and May (2008: 3) posit that memoir and history are “goalposts making the extremes of nonfiction,” and it is “the vast playing field of memory” that separates and connects them. Hence, memory could be considered as a bridge that unites and at the same time disconnects them. Hampl and May continue:

Though both forms are narrative and require the storytelling arts, they reverse each other – memoir being personal history, while history offers a kind of public memoir. A tantalizing gray area exists where memory intersects with history, where the necessities of narrative collide with mundane facts. The record always retains blank spaces – whether the record emerges from archival sources or from personal memory. Onto that blank space writers in both genres bring the remnants of the past they select in telling their stories. (Hampl; May 2008:3)

Although autobiography and life writing, in general, could be considered as a historical document and function as a source of evidence, however, Smith and Watson (2010: 13) underscore that it cannot be reduced to a mere historical record. They continue, “[w]hile autobiographical narratives may contain information regarded as “facts,” they are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event” (Ibid, 13).

Löschnigg (2010 [2005]: 35) argues that “[t]he focus on inner life distinguishes autobiography from the memoir, which emphasises the author’s public role among well-known contemporaries.” Meanwhile, Gusdorf (1980: 36) puts forward the idea that the autobiography has two sectors of existence; public or private, and that autobiography written in defence or glorification of a man, national hero, a career, or a political cause is “limited almost entirely to the public sphere of existence.” The private face of autobiography lies in the act of recalling that “is carried out for itself, and recalling of the past satisfies a more or less anguished disquiet of the mind anxious to recover and redeem lost time in fixing it forever (Gusdorf 1980: 37).

Gusdorf (1980: 36) posits that the public sector of the autobiography provides a compelling testimony that "the historian must gather together and criticize along with other testimonies" but "[o]ne should not take the narrator's word for it, but should consider his version of the facts as one contribution to his own biography." Gusdorf (1980: 36) claims that for the public men's life stories, the exterior aspects dominate and the events told in those narratives can be a valuable asset for the historian and the latter "is well aware that memoirs are always, to a certain degree, a revenge on history." Gusdorf (1980: 36) claims that for the public men's life stories, the exterior aspects dominate and the events told in those narratives can be a valuable asset for the historian and the latter "is well aware that memoirs are always, to a certain degree, a revenge on history." On the other hand, Gusdorf (1980: 37) advances that autobiography presumes "the task of reconstructing the unity of life across time." He continues stating that while it "is not received from the outside," it should be noted that certain "events influence us; they sometimes determine us, and they always limit us."

Dorrit Cohn (1999: 18) distinguishes between history and fiction, where history is more concerned with events and changes that affect the entire society rather than those that impact the lives of individual beings. The autobiography could be considered a genre that depicts the events and changes in society from the narrator's perspective: it is direct evidence of those events and changes on the individuals that make a part of that society that interests the historiography.

### **1.2.2. Ambiguous character of the autobiography**

Autobiography presupposes duality of truth and fiction associated with objectivity and subjectivity. An autobiographer sometimes employs techniques of the invention to entertain the target reader. As Martin Löschnigg (2010 [2005]: 35) postulates, "[a]lthough it is basically a nonfictional genre, the dynamics of memory as well as selection and narrative structuring provide it with an element of fictionality." Consequently, autobiography is likely to fuse facts and fiction. The reader expects the autobiographer to narrate the truth in his life narrative. Because the truth is always subjective, Smith and Watson (2010: 13) affirm that autobiographies "offer subjective "truth" rather than "fact"".

Sometimes it could be not very clear to differentiate between the autobiography and the novel too. The dividing line between autobiography and the autobiographical novel could be blurry, making the differentiation an arduous task to achieve. The autobiography and the

novel have a beginning, an end, a plot, and as Jakki Spicer (2005: 398) advances, “autobiographical writing is entirely reliant on the tradition of novel writing.”

Autobiography is always diachronically narrated. When the construction of the narration is synchronical, it leaves room for self-portrait: a metaphorical term as it is borrowed from the painting (Lecarme; Lecarme- Tabone 1999: 27). Autobiography is a sort of life review when the narrator looks back at his life, judges, and reflects on some period of life that has been already lived. As Pascal Roy (2016[1990]: 11) indeed points out, an “[a]utobiography is an interplay, collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past.”

The autobiography is a reconstructed narrative. It is a process of selection of dates and events. As a result, the autobiographer heavily relies on his memory. Autobiography is not a simple repetition of the past. As Georges Gusdorf (1980) posits, it is a remediation of the past experience from a position of a person who rethinks his life by judging the past from the moment of narration. Gusdorf writes:

[...] autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it. In the immediate moment, the agitation of things ordinarily surrounds me too much for me to be able to see it in its entirety. Memory gives me a certain remove and allows me to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space. (Gusdorf 1980: 38)

The narrator remembers at the same time he lives his life. Thus, remembering can change due to new events in his life, which can trigger a fresh rethinking of his past.

Gusdorf (1980: 45) claims that “[e]very autobiography is a work of art and at the same time a work of enlightenment, it does not show us the individual viewed from outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been.” Thus, an autobiography is a work of art that implies creativity, but at the same time, it is also based on lived and experienced facts. All these facts are remembered, recreated and due to its not static essence, memory can also be treacherous.

Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (2019: 2) claims that literature has “something” to do with the author even when the author does not depict his life story. Thus, here comes the interconnection of ‘true’ or ‘fiction’ in literature, in autobiography. Wagner-Egelhaaf argues that “true” or “truthful” autobiography is a “naïve conception” because “human memory is deficient, and, on the other side, human beings are narcissistic, which means they are not at all neutral and objective when it comes to looking at themselves and others” (Ibid, 2).

As the use of creativity and imagination in the autobiography is somehow unavoidable, a new concept has been introduced to describe the phenomenon - autofiction. Serge Doubrovsky introduced this term in the preface of his book *Fils* [Son] (1977). Frank Zipfel (2010[2005]: 36) puts the idea that "[a]utofiction is a homodiegetic narrative that declares itself to be fiction – by being called ‘novel’ on the front page, for example – but actually relates events of the author’s own life and identifies the author in the text by his or her real name.” He continues affirming that autofiction was later connected to "fictional autobiographies.” Jan Tlustý (2014), discussing Zipfel’s conception of autofiction, writes:

Autofiction thus supplies contradictory reading instructions: on the one hand it tells the reader to view the narrative as a truthful image of the author’s life, on the other hand it contains signals that warn the reader about the fictionality of this image. The tension or oscillation between these two poles does not necessarily lead to the reader’s confusion but [...] it can mediate an aesthetic effect. (Tlustý 2014: 225)

Autofiction has been accepted differently; some authors argue that it is an umbrella term (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2019), while others claim that it is used “often” in France (Smith; Watson 2010). Scholars proposed to abandon the discussion about autofiction (Arnaud 2010) due to the non-static nature of memory.

Georges Gusdorf (1980: 39) asserts that “the task of autobiography is, first of all, a task of personal salvation” and the “man who recounts himself is himself searching his self through his history; he is not engaged in an objective and disinterested pursuit but in a work of personal justification.” Indeed, examples of famous people who narrate a part of their life are many. The purpose is to explain their acts, to find some salvation and understanding from the public. These autobiographical narratives mainly accentuate some part of their life that marked their career but left uncertainty to the public.

In the last decade, French politicians or people linked to politics or some scandalous affairs in France, for example, published books which interestingly had similar titles such as judge and politician Jean-Louis Debré’s, *Ce que je ne pouvais pas dire* [What I couldn't say] (2016), politician from Socialist party and candidate for presidency Ségolène Royal’s *Ce que je peux enfin vous dire* [What can I finally tell you] (2018), former security officer and deputy chief of staff to the French president Emmanuel Macron, and protagonist of the scandalous “Benalla affair”, Alexandre Benalla’s *Ce qu'ils ne veulent pas que je dise* [What they don't want me to say] (2019). Even the robber of American pop star Kim Kardashian, Yunique Abbas, authored a book narrating the robbery of Kardashian in Paris in 2016, the book is entitled *J'ai séquestré Kim Kardashian* [I kidnapped Kim Kardashian] (2021). All these recent books are pointing to the fact that they have something to tell and explaining, but

more importantly, some readers expect them to explain or tell more about those events that marked their career/ life.

The titles of these books confirm that there are justification, salvation, and some confession to someone. It is up to the implied reader to decide whether they are sincere in their self-narration or not and which position to take towards the events depicted in the autobiography. In the autobiography or the narrative, distinguishing fact from fiction depends on the reader, the addressee. Barrett J. Mandel (1980: 56) postulates, “[t]he truth of literature is created as much by the reader as by the author.”

To help solve the problem with the differentiation of true or false of a narrative or whether a text is autobiographical or not, the French critic and specialist of autobiography Philippe Lejeune 1996 [1975] proposed an idea of “autobiographical pact.” This pact suggests some ‘contract’ with the reader to read the text as autobiography. The pact implies that the name of the author seen on the book cover is identical to the name of the narrator and protagonist in the text or the subtitle indicates to the reader that it is an autobiography, for example, *My Life, Autobiography*, etc. And if it is not the case and there is nothing that could indicate that the book is an autobiography, then it is an autobiographical novel. In practice, it can be somehow challenging to follow this contract; for example, in the case of *Mayrig*, nothing is indicating that it is an autobiography. According to Lejeune’s pact: the title bears only *Mayrig*, a Western Armenian word for mother. The events in the book are the story of the autobiographer Verneuil’s childhood, his family, and more specifically, an autobiographical text about the relationship between the son and mother(s).

Hélène Jaccmard (1993) argues that the term autofiction is an “oxymoronic pact”. Autofiction unites two opposing notions – the fiction and the reference to the self, which supposes a reality (Franco 2016: 117).

Franco (2016) remarks that several notions compete to denote the autobiography, “the “roman personnel [personal novel]” or, in Anglo-Saxon critical criticism, the notion of *faction* (a synthesis between *fact* and *fiction*), or even *autobiographical novel*” (Ibid, 117)<sup>9</sup> (My translation – M.M.).

Marcou, Renner, and Jullier (2016 [2001]: 12-13) in their collective work *l'Autobiographie et Autres Ecritures de Soi [Autobiography and Other Self-Writings]* postulate that Lejeune's criteria for autobiography as prose is legit for the majority of cases

---

<sup>9</sup> Plusieurs notions se concurrencent pour la designer, le «roman personnel» ou, dans la critique critique anglo-saxonne, la notion de *faction* (synthèse entre *fact* et *fiction*), ou encore *autobiographical novel*.

but some autobiographical texts of the 20th century "adopt poetic constraints (versified writing, division of the narrative into stanzas, etc.)". To illustrate their point they bring the following examples; *Chêne et Chien* [*Oak and Dog*] (1937) by Raymond Queneau and *Quelque Chose Noir* [*Something Black*] (1986) by Jacques Roubaud. However, in addition to the personal life story mentioned by Lejeune, the autobiography might give an image of the social and cultural milieu where the narrator lives. The autobiographer offers an understanding of society from the prism of the moment of narration.

Memory is socially constructed. Moreover, the researches in developmental psychology affirm that "we learn in early childhood what people around us and, by extension, our culture expect us to remember" (Smith; Watson 2010: 22). Thus, society changes, and naturally, the way we remember the past changes with it. Therefore, an autobiography can contain some interesting facts for a historian or anthropologist to explore society. And whether these facts in the autobiography are true or false can sometimes be checked by comparing them with other available sources.

*Mayrig*, as the autobiography of Verneuil, is a creative work. At the same time, it is about true events of Verneuil's life and of the postmemory of the Armenian Genocide. This hybrid genre of the autobiography creates ambiguity from the point of the truthfulness of events. Still, one should consider that the creativity of the narrative is necessary to convey the message to the target readers. In short, this hybrid genre makes autobiography unique.

### **1.3.1. Autobiography as microhistory**

There are tragic events that shape the life of an entire community. The individuals from these communities who later become famous and write about their life would become the community's voice. The events depicted there would become the history of that community from the inside perspective.

Microhistory is a genre to call history that focuses on small research units such as an individual's life, an event, a settlement, a city, a town, etc. According to (Peabody 2012), microhistory appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. While Carlo Ginzburg (1993: 10), one of the founders of microhistory, mentions the term's date as 1977.

According to Giovanni Levi (2005 [2001]: 98), microhistory was one of the possible responses to the historiographical crisis "which laid emphasis on redefining concepts and profoundly analysing existing tools and methods". Sue Peabody (2012: 2) posits that "some historians invented the genre of "microhistory" as a means of recovering the "lost histories"

of early modern European peasants by relying on the rare surviving records of the “*exceptionale normale*,” those cases that reflected the norms of peasant experience but happened to be collected and preserved in the historical records.”

Microhistory is opposed to macrohistory. As Helen Steele underscores, they are both subfields of “new history,” focusing on ordinary people. However, macrohistory tends to over-generalize, while microhistory might select someone who is not a true representative of the common man or woman<sup>10</sup>. Helen Steele affirms that “microhistories use a variety of sources, including trial transcripts, journal and literary pieces; writers of macrohistories seem to use more narrow criteria for their sources” (Ibid).

Jill Lepore (2001: 130) argues that “any attempt to define microhistory is vastly complicated [...]”. While discussing the difference between biography and microhistory, Lepore (2001: 132) writes that there is no “salient difference” between them. However, Lepore continues underscoring that:

[...] If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's life and his contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole. (Lepore 2001: 133)

With all this discussion in mind, my argument here is that the autobiography could be considered microhistory because it is life writing firsthand. Its testimony is of exceptional value as it gives some details on the events and changes in society that directly impact the individual's life. Moreover, it is a personal view on events, even though that individual can be an influential person and that individual view could later become the dominant narrative.

The autobiographies of migrants who pass through a difficult journey to reach safer and, in general, prosperous countries to seek better life can serve as an excellent example of microhistory. The autobiography of a migrant can serve as a basis for a researcher to make a big picture of migrant life in some periods and some particular places. An illustrative example was the Armenian migrants after and during the Armenian Genocide when they sought refuge in different countries to save their lives. By examining their testimonies and autobiographies and putting together the events depicted there the reader, the historian can make broader conclusions on their painful and dangerous journey to exile.

Here it is noteworthy to quote Carlo Ginzburg (1993: 21), who states that “[h]istorical knowledge, obviously, involves the construction of documentary series. [...] Any document,

---

<sup>10</sup> Helen Steele, Microhistory and Macrohistory: Different Approaches to the Analysis of History, available at <http://www.guernicus.com/academics/pdf/macromicro.pdf> accessed 21 February 2021.

even the most anomalous, can be inserted into a series. In addition, it can, if properly analyzed, shed light on still-broader documentary series”. Indeed, this series of testimonies can make a historical document, for example, on the life of Armenian migrants after the Armenian genocide.

The very general knowledge about the Armenian genocide is as follows - a horrific event that happened at the border of Europe, in the decaying Ottoman Empire. Turkish nationalists brutally deported and killed the Christian minority Armenians. Still, to understand the events of the Armenian genocide, the history books will present a chronicle of dates of what, when, and how it happened. To understand the events from a more narrow perspective, one must read or watch/see what the individuals who experienced the genocide had to tell from first hand. In this perspective, autobiographical novels, and movies are best to get experience with the events. However, it will always be a subjective or personal point of view on the events. Still, at least it will give an overall understanding of what an individual experienced during that concrete event. Therefore, autobiographical memory is of exceptional value to understand the events in which historians are not always interested. As Robyn Fivush pointed out, “[a]utobiographical memory is a socioculturally constructed narrative of one’s personal life, and as such, is culturally saturated and must be understood through the subjective lens of individual meaning-making” (Fivush 2013: 13). Hence, the autobiographical memory is a point of view on the events influenced by culture and society. Thus an Armenian living in France and remembering the genocide and the exile to France will tell another perspective on the traumatic events from those who found exile in Syria, the Americas, and elsewhere.

*Mayrig* is the autobiography of Verneuil, but somehow it is also the microhistory of the Armenian Genocide survivors who found refuge in Marseilles.

### 1.3.2. Autobiography and memory transmission

Memory is a dialogue between past and present. With the help of memory, the past is remembered, reevaluated, and transmitted to the future generation. The collective memory is somehow a bridge that connects the past with the present, which is especially relevant for traumatic memory.

The notion of trauma has no firm and accepted definition. That is why different scholars give their conception of trauma, which can differ from one another. The term is derived from Greek, which initially had the meaning of physical injury. Caruth (1996:3)

posits that in the later usage in the medical and psychiatric literature and, more specifically, in Freud's text, the term trauma is conceived as a psychical wound, rather than physical; in other words, it is used as a wound inflicted on the mind, than on the body. Erll (2010: 87) affirms, "[t]he term 'trauma' is used to refer to experiences which, as a result of their extreme emotional intensity, cannot be worked through sufficiently, meaning they cannot be narrativized." While, Caruth (1996), in her reference to Freud's works, remarks that literature is the voice to which Freud addresses to analyze the traumatic experience. Caruth writes:

What the parable of the wound and the voice thus tells us, and what is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 1996: 4)

The trauma, the belated truth that cries out to be addressed, could be expressed through literature. Fortunati and Lamberti (2008), discussing the mnemonic role of media, rightly single out the singular role of literature as a medium of memory transmission:

Media representations, cinema, television, photography, the visual arts (and more recently, the Internet) have been, for at least sixty years, the fundamental vehicle by means of which traumas are transmitted, judged, and remembered. Literature, in its diverse expressions, and theoretical studies have played an important role in the representation, the transmission, and the critical (or mystifying) elaboration of traumatic events. (Fortunati, Lamberti 2008: 130)

Indeed, literature is omnipresent among other mediums in transmitting cultural memory. Thanks to hybrid genre of autobiography it is the optimal medium for conveying the traumatic memories. Additionally, autobiography is considered, in general, as the medium of self-expression and salvation.

Passing the trauma memory on the future generation, disseminating it through various means is necessary to alert people, nations about various crimes against humanities, dramatic consequences of civil wars and forced migration and social problems such as child abuse, and so on. Sharing traumatic memory with others not only bonds people, the survivors, and their children, but it is also necessary to prevent future crimes. It is a way to self-express and self-translate, to seek salvation. The remembering of the same tragic event can change from generation to generation, even remembering changes under different political regimes.

The survivors of the Armenian Genocide, for example, conveyed their traumatic memories differently, depending on their place of living. In the Soviet Union, for a while, it was forbidden to self-express about the Armenian Genocide. The death of Stalin gave a bit of

freedom, but still, it was forbidden to fully self-express. Thus, the political and social systems influence the narrative of trauma.

American development psychologist Katherine Nelson (2003: 126) claims that “[b]asic memory is [...] a knowledge source that anticipates future needs; it is not about the past but about the future. By retaining information about both common and novel events, it provides the basis for taking action in the present and anticipating future needs”. Daniel Kahneman 2002 Nobel Prize winner for his work on behavioral economics, in his notorious book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2013: 212), writes something similar about the anticipated future. He affirms that “[t]he idea that the future is unpredictable is undermined every day by the ease with which the past is explained. [...] The illusion that we understand the past fosters overconfidence in our ability to predict the future.”

It is vital to raise awareness of the consequences of the genocide on an individual’s life. For that reason, testimonies of genocide survivors, the effects of that trauma on future generations should be shared with others to make them a part of the collective memory of humanity.

Stefan Ihrig (2016: 7) postulates, “[t]he Armenian Genocide is not “owned” by Turks and Armenians; rather, it is part of our world history and heritage, a dark part, indeed, but one that we, as humans, have to accept and integrate into our understanding of ourselves. He continues:

And it is not just any part of our dark history: the Armenian Genocide is perhaps the original sin of the twentieth century; indeed a double original sin: first, killing or letting a state’s own citizens die, almost to the extinction of an ethnic group (their citizenship perhaps distinguishes this from previous colonial crimes); second, failing to punish the perpetrators in the aftermath. (Ihrig 2016:7)

Hitler, in his Obersalzberg Speech in 1939, referred to the Armenian Genocide and gave *carte blanche* to its troop to attack Poland (Anderson 2011) and commit a massacre. Alexis Demirdjian (2018: 514) claims that he [Hitler] was “sending a depressing reminder of the effects of impunity.” The impunity of the Armenian genocide still resonates a century later. The consequences of this impunity of Turkey were visible on its military and logistical support of Azerbaijan in the war against Armenians in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Turkey’s indemnity and the international community’s silence again refreshed the collective traumatic memory of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 among Armenians.

The recollection of the past tragic events shapes the survivors’ lives and generations to come. Marianne Hirsch (2012: 243) remarks, “memory is necessarily an act not only to

recall but also of mourning, mourning often tempered by anger, rage, and despair.” Tragic events survivors’ children always bear the consequences of the mourning and the displacement and the feeling of being uprooted. Hirsch argues, “[t]he children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the destruction of that home, remain marked by their parents’ experiences: always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora” (Hirsch 2012: 243). This phenomenon Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory.” Postmemory is the traumatic heritage that the genocide and other horrendous events survivors’ children bear as if those memories were their own. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. Marianne Hirsch defines the notion of postmemory as follows:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors<sup>11</sup>.

Notions like postmemory are here to remind once more that the memory is never separated from the outside. It is never alone, and it is collective.

Postmemory could also bond the community. It can somehow act as “glue” that unites the survivors and their generations of the tragic events. In this way, postmemory could help to integrate into the society but not assimilate. The remembrance and also the narrative of postmemory can change over time thanks to events and change in mediums. The postmemory of the Armenian Genocide unites the Armenians around the world for recollecting that tragic past, the wounds of which are still fresh. That postmemory also bonds Armenians, especially in different countries, to work together regardless of their professional background to lobby for recognizing the Armenian Genocide by their respective countries. The narrative of postmemory has also changed due to several facts. First of all, it is fair to mention that scholars, especially in Europe, started to elaborate notions to address the trauma after the Shoah. These notions are now used by Armenians or by scholars who are interested in the Armenian Genocide.

Intermedial and transmedia storytelling also helps to self-express and address the wounds on collective and individual levels, primarily through social media. An example of this could be the memories shared by the social accounts of celebrities and museums devoted

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.postmemory.net/> accessed 21 February 2021.

to the research of such as genocide museums where they post pictures depicting the deportations, the suffering, and even the death of people during genocide. In general, these pictures are followed by a description of it and, if available, by the photography source.

The intergenerational transmission of traumatic memory from the first-hand eyewitness to the next generations creates inexactness, an approximate and secondary account which Victoria Aarons and Allan L. Berger (2017: 40) call a “borrowed memory.” Collective memory for the generation of survivors “might be thought of as an act of defiance in the face of absent memory, in its transmission creating a collage of individual, collective, and historical memory, linking personal and collective identities within moments of traumatic history” (Aarons; Berger 2017: 45-46). Autobiography, as already discussed earlier, thanks to its hybrid genre of fusion and facts, has its unique place in memory transmission. Through its microhistorical character, the autobiography of an influential person can become the community’s voice; moreover, it can also become part of cultural memory. As already mentioned, every 24 April is the day that various mediums serve as a mnemonic function to rethink and remember the Armenian Genocide, its consequences for the Armenians as a collective identity and individuals. Henri Verneuil’s *Mayrig*, among other movies, is aired on Armenian TV channels. The autobiography *Mayrig* (book and movie) is remembered as a medium that voiced the traumatic legacy of the Armenian Genocide on the collective and individual level. That microhistory of Malakian family interestingly became part of cultural memory of Armenians, especially of France and Armenia. In the tribute to Henri Verneuil’s death, Jacques Chirac, the acting then president of France, mentioned Henri Verneuil’s embodiment of the French dream - from migrant to the proud son of the nation<sup>12</sup>. The recognition of Verneuil’s contribution to the French culture, his social mobility is the example that Verneuil’s autobiography is the reflection of the microhistory of the community of migrants that became part of their hosted country. This autobiography is also the microhistory of the Armenian community of Marseilles.

It’s the 2019 December issue, the French magazine *Historia* dedicated to the Armenians of France. There, Laurent Lemire, in his article about Henri Verneuil, writes, “In the arts or industry, they made a name for themselves and wore the binational colors of

---

<sup>12</sup> INA Actu, 2012. *20h France 2 du 11 Janvier 2002 - Mort d'Henri Verneuil | Archive INA* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpAazhiG-JM> accessed 02 April 2021.

France and their homeland. Meeting with plural ambassadors of Armenianness” (Lemire 2019: 45) (My translation- M.M.)<sup>13</sup>.

Jeannelle Jean-Louis (2008) distinguishes between major lives (vies majuscules) and ordinary lives (vies minuscules), where the major lives work as landmarks and the ordinary lives reflect the humble life of the ordinary people (Eakin 2020: 67). Thus, the “ambassador” Henri Verneuil’s *Mayrig* is the landmark of the Armenian community of France. This microhistory of the embodiment of the French dream could be an attempt to raise awareness of the Armenian Genocide and the need to recognize it because France officially recognized the Armenian Genocide only in 2001.

The autobiography as the medium of traumatic self-expression is an example of autocommunication. As Lotman (2000: 20) remarks, “there is an organic link between culture and communication.” That autocommunication, according to Lotman, is of two kinds, “those with a mnemonic function and those without” (Lotman 2000: 27). Autobiography *Mayrig*, in this sense, could also be an autocommunication with a mnemonic function for the Armenians in France. It could be a narrative to keep their memory alive. *Mayrig* could also be the autocommunication for Verneuil’s fellow Armenians to be thankful to France and, at the same time, instead of assimilation, to choose the integration into the French society which supposes love and respect to two nations - Armenian and French.

\*\*\*

This chapter aimed to give an overview of the state of studies on memory and autobiography. Given the highly complex nature of these two notions, it was necessary to cover the umbrella term cultural memory, the autobiography, its genre, and the transmission of memory. Then this chapter examined the microhistorical character of autobiography and how *Mayrig* could be considered an artifact of the cultural memory of Armenians living in Armenia and France. To sum up, autobiography could be considered not only as a medium to the inner world of the autobiographer but to the society too. Autobiography is microhistory as it is the story of the individual, the community, the place, the city from the individual’s perspective.

The structure of the memory and the absence of referent for the autobiographical text might create polemics of reliability of the narrated events and the objectiveness of the author

---

<sup>13</sup> Dans les arts ou l'industrie, ils se sont fait un nom et ont porté les couleurs binationales de l'Hexagone et de leur terre d'origine. Rencontre avec des ambassadeurs pluriels de l'arménité.

himself. The autobiographer can use techniques of fiction to convey his life. As Barrett J. Mandel underscores, the usage of fiction “does not turn an autobiography into a fiction any more than Dvořák’s use of folk motifs turns the *New World Symphony* into a folk song” (Barrett 1980: 53). According to the “contract” proposed by the French literary critic Philippe Lejeune, it is up to the reader to decide whether the autobiography is trustworthy or not.

Due to the misconceptions and myths surrounding the autobiography and its complexity, the autobiographical texts are studied by literary scholars, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists. Moreover, there have been discussions about considering these texts as sources, in other words, as documents (Depkat; Pyta 2017). Therefore, as Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (2019) rightly points out, the interdisciplinary work on autobiography has only started. The study of the autobiography shouldn’t be restricted to the disciplinary frameworks; instead, only collaboration and cooperation between different research areas can pose questions and find answers to the problems that an autobiography presents to the readers and scholars.

The research question that has been posed as the basis of this chapter was the following;

- What are the specificities of autobiography as a medium of memory?

The discussion has shown that autobiography, due to its hybrid genre, becomes an influential medium for self-expression about trauma and postmemory. It is also a convenient medium for communication and autocommunication. If the autobiography becomes successful, it creates images that remain in the culture. For example, speaking about Claudia Cardinale, the Armenians would use the word “mayrig” to refer to her<sup>14</sup>. Some scenes from autobiography (book or movie) are cult, for example, the family making of pakhlava. These examples explain that this autobiography is part of the cultural memory of Armenians, at least for Armenians of my generation of Armenia and France. The autobiography can become part of cultural memory if the autobiographical message has been delivered to its target audience. In the next chapter, I will analyze what strategies Verneuil used to reach this goal.

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.armmuseum.ru/news-blog/2017/4/15/-180> accessed on 24 April 2021.

## **2. MAYRIG: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS**

The first chapter discussed autobiography as a medium of memory transmission and the role of autobiography as microhistory for a community. In this chapter strategies that helped the autobiographical book *Mayrig* reach its readers will be discussed.

First of all, the chapter discusses the autobiography as a text. Secondly, the discussion focuses on the author and narrative functions that the author uses in the text. *Mayrig* is analyzed in two aspects: architectonical and narrative. Architectonical elements are necessary to complete the autobiographical message. The book can be a text on its own and a mediator between the reader and the text – a contact zone between them (Torop 2019). The narrative aspect is analyzed in two ways; firstly, the autobiographical message of *Mayrig* is exposed. Secondly, the semiotic analysis of the main text helps to complete the big picture of the autobiography. Undoubtedly, there are many ways to analyze a complex phenomenon like an autobiography, but the aspects mentioned above seemed more suitable for applying in this thesis analysis.

### **2.1. *Mayrig* as an autobiographical text**

To begin with, there is a purpose behind every autobiography. The autobiographer selects some events of his life to relate them to his future readers. These selected events might seem necessary for the autobiographer to confess, to convey to others. In other words, it might be an autocommunication – communication with himself, to self-express or communication within a community (in this case among Armenians of France), and it could also be a communication with the target audience (French audience who might know Verneuil but not his tragic past). Some of those events are portrayed in a more positive or more negative or rather dramatic light. Every autobiography has a message to deliver. It is evident, as the autobiographer undertook the task to write his life narrative down. Every text is written to someone, and that person can be implicit or explicit, fictional or real. For example, Anna Frank's diary is an intimate journal of a teenager written to factual and fictional characters.

Bakhtin (2012: 505) writes something similar when he poses, “[t]he author makes part of the open semantic whole of the work. The work is a subject of artistic creation and artistic perception (listener-reader). [...] The work is always addressed to the reader, and it

anticipates him” (My translation- M.M.)<sup>15</sup>. For the sake of clarity, it should be underlined that Bakhtin wrote about the artistic text. As has been discussed, the autobiography is the fusion of fact and artistic creation to entertain the reader. When the autobiography is the medium for conveying traumatic memories, this creativity makes the narrative more digestible. Thus, Bakhtin’s concepts could also apply to the autobiographical text.

The reader’s role is crucial for the autobiography because the autobiographer should know how and whom to convey his memories. It is particularly true for autobiographies where the author narrates his traumatic memories. Moreover, the prospective reader guides the autobiographer in using appropriate stylistic, semiotic tools (design, book cover, pictures, etc.) to make his autobiography exciting and captivating. It is necessary to consider the autobiography as a message composed from the text and book cover as the (re)presentation of the book. It is a move required to understand how the autobiographer reaches the target audience.

Of course, there are a plethora of definitions of the notion of text. Still, the goal here is not to give a general or narrow meaning to the text but to show how the autobiography would be considered as a text in the present work. For this purpose, it is noteworthy to mention the original meaning of the text as a tissue, a woven fabric (Barthes 1977: 159).

Literary critic and semiotician Julia Kristeva introduces two terms, “phenotext” and “genotext” to underline the split nature of the text. The genotext Kristeva (1984: 87) considers as language's underlying foundation, whereas phenotext denotes “language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of “competence” and “performance”. The phenotext is constantly split up and divided, and is irreducible to the semiotic process that works through the genotext”. Kristeva continues underscoring that:

The phenotext is a structure (which can be generated, in generative grammar's sense); it obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee. The genotext, on the other hand, is a process; it moves through zones that have relative and transitory borders and constitutes a path that is not restricted to the two poles of univocal information between two full-fledged subjects. (Kristeva 1984: 87)

Leon S. Roudiez (1984: 5), referring to the similarity of the etymological definition of the text to the interwoven threads, argues that "the text cannot be thought of as a finished, permanent piece of cloth; it is in a perpetual state of flux as different readers intervene, as

---

<sup>15</sup> Автор входит в открытое смысловое единство произведения.

Произведение как предмет художественного создания и художественного восприятия (слушателя-читателя).

[...]

Произведение всегда обращено к читателю, и оно предвосхищает его.

their knowledge deepens, and as history moves on". Roudiez remarks that the "threads" that make the text interwoven by or within the semiotic disposition is the genotext. Text that is interwoven from societal, cultural, syntactic, and other grammatical constraints is the phenotext. Thus, the text has intrinsic nature to communicate, and as Lotman (2000[1990]: 18) argues, it is also "a condenser of cultural memory". Moreover, Lotman states that "[a] text has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts" (Ibid, 18).

Lotman's remark on the memory within the text is similar to intertextuality, introduced by Bakhtin (Greimas; Courtès 1993: 194), and Kristeva has developed it further. Daniel Chandler writing about intertextuality developed by Kristeva, posits;

The semiotic notion of 'intertextuality' introduced by the literary theorist Julia Kristeva is associated primarily with poststructuralist theorists. Kristeva (1980, 69) refers to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts. Uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes. (Chandler 2017: 252)

Kristeva (1980: 66) remarks that the horizontal axis is the "subject-addressee," while the vertical axis is the "text-context." Thus, the text contains memory and textual cues that will link the author to his reader. Of course, it is up to the reader to decode the meaning in the texts and interpret the author's message. It is also the reader who actualizes the memory in the text. Soviet and American semiotician, linguist Boris Gasparov (1994) stated something similar:

The meaning of any text - prosaic and poetic, artistic and non-artistic - is formed in the interaction and struggle of various, even opposite, meaning-forming forces. On the one hand, the text is a kind of construction created using specific techniques. It is assumed that everyone to whom this text is potentially intended and whose adequate (more or less) reaction is designed to share, to a greater or lesser extent, an understanding of how these techniques work and what do they mean. The reception by a society of any text, even one with a pronounced individuality and unique semantic value, presupposes its correlation with a system of conventions, the possession of which is a necessary condition for communication between members of a given society. Such a system exists outside and before any specific text, in the form of an ideal presupposition that creates certain expectations that the given text fulfills (or violates) to one degree or another. (Gasparov 1994: 274) (My translation –M.M.)<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Смысл всякого текста - прозаического и поэтического, художественного и нехудожественного - складывается во взаимодействии и борьбе различных, даже противоположных смыслообразующих сил. С одной стороны, текст представляет собой некое построение, созданное при помощи определенных приемов. Предполагается, что все, кому данный текст потенциально предназначается и на адекватную (более или менее) реакцию которых он рассчитан, разделяют, в большей или меньшей степени, понимание того, как работают эти приемы и какой они имеют смысл. Рецепция обществом любого текста, даже имеющего ярко выраженную индивидуальность и уникальную смысловую ценность, предполагает соотнесение его с системой конвенций, владение которыми составляет необходимое условие общения между членами данного общества. Такая система существует вне и до всякого конкретного текста, в виде идеальной пресуппозиции, создающей определенные ожидания, которые данный текст в той или иной степени выполняет (или нарушает).

This lengthy quote of Gasparov confirms that text is a complex unit interwoven with threads of semiotic codes that can be decoded by the reader who has the ability, the capacity, and is familiar with the cultural and general information that the text contains.

Umberto Eco (1979: 7) states that to make his text communicative, the author “assumes that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader.” According to Eco, the author has to foresee a possible, model reader who is “supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them” (Ibid, 7). Moreover, Eco argues that through the choice of specific linguistic code, of a particular literary style, the text “explicitly selects a very general reader model of the possible reader” or the texts give “explicit information about the sort of readers they presuppose (for example, children’s books, not only by typographical signals but also by direct appeals; in other cases a specific category of the addressee is named: /Friends, Romans, Countrymen .../)” (Ibid, 7).

Lotman (1982: 83) writes in a similar vein, “[...] the text contains within itself a miniature system of all links in the communicative chain, and just as we can abstract from it the author's position, so we can reconstruct also the ideal reader.”

Thus, the text contains some memory of previous texts, but the text also is the intersection of many “threads” - social, cultural, historical. The text also has an intrinsic capacity to transfer a message to its possible future readers because texts such as the Rosetta stone can be important for humanity when a reader can decode the message. In other words, a text is considered as such thanks to the reader.

The autobiography is indeed a text that is woven through threads of different kinds of memories; the autobiography can also be the ensemble of autobiographical texts, for instance, the book, the photography(s), the movie, the music of the same person.

In the autobiography, it is up to the reader to decode the reference to other texts or to reanimate the different kinds of memories that the text contains. If the reader lacks this ability to decode the message, the author inserts annotations or translates foreign culture to the target reader’s culture to help him interpret his message. It happens when the author understands that his possible future reader will be unable to get the message of his autobiography. To put it in other terms, when the intertextuality doesn’t work, the autobiographer, especially the one who comes from another culture, takes the role of a mediator of two cultures.

When it comes to the structure of the text, Torop (2019: 24) poses that it “can be analytically described as compositional (exposition, developing action, climax, declining

action, resolution, etc.), architectonical (title, epigraph, prologue, chapters, epilogue, etc.) or narrative (plot, story).” Therefore, to analyze *Mayrig*, two aspects of the autobiographical text will be explored here, the architectonical and narrative. The architectonical element of the text is necessary to understand the marketing strategy used to attract the target audience and, overall, the meaning-making of *Mayrig* as autobiography. Moreover, Henri Verneuil could be considered as a co-creator of the book cover, chapters because *Mayrig* bears family pictures of Verneuil. Verneuil participated in the choice of images, or at least, he had given his consent. Additionally, as Torop (2019: 23) suggests, “[t]he specificity of the architectonical aspect of the structure of a text (title, epigraph, prologue, chapters, epilogue, etc.) is embodied in the principle *pars pro toto*.” In other terms, the book cover might give additional information about *Mayrig*, which explains the necessity to analyze it in this thesis. As per the narrative aspect of *Mayrig*, it is necessary to have the general idea of the message of Verneuil that he wants to pass to others. Therefore, the autobiographical message in *Mayrig* will be exposed. Afterward, *Mayrig* will be examined to understand Verneuil’s semiotic strategies to enter into communication with the target audience and convey the autobiographical message to them.

## **2.2. Structural analysis of Mayrig**

### **2.2.1. The architectonical aspect: Paratextual analysis**

The book cover represents itself as the contact zone between the reader and the main text, and it also plays the role of the mediator between these two. As a paratextual element, the book cover could also offer additional information about the main text. The book cover of the autobiography as a paratextual element represents the main text in describing the book's content. It can also take the form of a biography of the autobiographer and give additional information that the main text doesn't provide. Paratext is a notion introduced by Gerard Genette (1997) that he calls "accompanying productions." This accompanying production is the book cover here in this thesis, among other relationships that the text can have with other texts. Genette explains paratexts as follows:

But this text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. (Genette 1997: 1)

Chandler (2017: 259-260) referring to Genette's remarks that "paratext is that which surrounds the main body of the text – such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgments, footnotes, illustrations, dust jackets, etc."

To Genette's enumerated elements Vincent Jouve (2020: 13-14) suggests adding "the table of contents, the notes, the chapter titles, the subheadings, the name of the publisher, the title of the collection, the prefaces and the afterwords." It should be noted that Genette's paratext is accompanying the text where the text is used in its narrow definition, while the text in this work is used as a message – the main body and its surrounding elements.

The book cover, title, illustration, and description are essential for an autobiography from the book consumption and information within these paratextual elements perspectives. The book *Mayrig* in English (Figure 1) translation bears the family picture of Henri Verneuil, where he as a kid is in his mother's arms, and the picture on the cover is framed as in a family album. The publishing house is St. Vartan Press, and the copyright owner is the Diocese of the Armenian Church. The translator from French into English is Elise Antreassian Bayizian. The involvement of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) indicates that the book's publishing is in the interest of the collective Armenian community, at least in the USA. It could be an attempt to raise awareness about the life

stories of the Armenian Genocide survivors. It could also aim to share the microhistory of the Armenian Genocide survivors' difficult life as a migrant in France with American Armenians.

The two original French versions that I refer to here are two renowned publishing houses Robert Lafont (1985) (Figure 2) and Le Livre de Poche (1987) (Figure 3). The front covers of the books bear the family photograph of Henri Verneuil with his mother and Henri Verneuil as a child, all referring to the autobiographical genre of the book but interestingly, there is no description of pictures, there is the only indication of "I" on an original and translated version where Henri Verneuil's word on the back cover refers to the untold love towards his mother;

*"I realize as time passes that all the years we loved each other, we never said that we loved each other. In a shared modesty, unwilling perhaps to ardently proclaim something so obvious, permanent, irrevocable, resorting to words seemed ridiculous. We loved each other from the beginning. All the rest became a superfluous subtitle ..."* (Verneuil 2006) (italics are original)

First of all, in *Mayrig*, Verneuil uses the pronoun "I" to narrate, and according to Lejeune's autobiographical pact, it could be considered an autobiography. Still, the narrator in *Mayrig* is Ashod Malakian, whereas the cover bears Henri Verneuil's name as the author. The only explanation could be found on the back cover of the English version (2006). Moreover, the covers of French and English versions bear Verneuil's confession of the untold love towards her mother. In the English version on the back cover, one can read the description of the content, and there is in some way an implicit allusion that Ashod Malakian is the young Henri Verneuil. Additionally, the English version's book cover's description ends with the phrase that this story is the story "of one boy and one people, but as in all true art, it is the story of us all" (Verneuil 2006).

When it comes to the authorship of the autobiography, Spicer (2005: 391) posits; "Lejeune's "Autobiographical Pact" asserts that the personal entity that stands behind the name of the author – a name that coincides with that of the central character of the autobiography – is the guarantee of autobiography as autobiography." In this sense, *Mayrig* by Verneuil can be considered an autobiographical novel. At the same time, an autobiography bears both the book's description cover that Ashod Malakian is Henri Verneuil. Verneuil himself uses the personal pronoun I and explains that he will miss his mother. Nevertheless, there is also the mismatch of names of the author and the narrator, although it is apparent that they are the same person.

The cover of *Mayrig* by French publishing house Le Livre de Poche bears a concise biography of Henri Verneuil, the history of exile after the Armenian genocide. It indicates the narrator's name Ashod Malakian in the brackets mentioning "future Henri Verneuil."

The title of the book in French and English translation remains the same *Mayrig*. In the description of the English version's back cover, the word "mayrig" is given in the brackets after the word mother, and it is up to the reader to make suppositions about the equivalence of these words. Meanwhile, in the original version, Henri Verneuil himself explains the title, "*God, how I will miss my Mayrig! ... This is how we say mum in my native language*" (My translation – M.M.)<sup>17</sup>. The reader of the English version is more or less supposed to be familiar with the meaning of the title; meanwhile, Henri Verneuil himself explains the meaning of the word for his future possible readers in French.

The title is one of the most critical paratextual elements. The author's name on the book cover for an autobiography is supposed to be known to a large public. The title should be captivating and somehow tell about the content of the autobiography.

*Mayrig* is a Western Armenian word for mother, and yet it remained unchanged. *Mayrig* can embody the image of Verneuil's mother. Still, it is also a family story, and it is an autobiography of Henri Verneuil but not a biography of his mother. *Mayrig* is the incarnation of family, of the motherland that Verneuil didn't remember; the postmemory is hunting him. His otherness is always with him, too, because of his family name, skin color, etc. The book has no table of contents and has no introduction, but it has 58 chapters which bear no titles but numbers. The explanation could be the fact that Verneuil wrote the autobiography under some consequences, something triggered his memories, or it is a semiotic cue. The first and last chapters are devoted to his mother, and in the last chapter, Verneuil describes her mother's final moments, and the last lines are dedicated to her bookshelf. Verneuil mentions the notebook of his father's recipes that his mother was keeping as a family relic; afterward, he takes an anthology of the Armenian poems from where he quotes her mother's beloved passage:

*We were at peace like our mountains  
And you came like the wild winds  
We made a chain against you like our mountains  
And you hurled against it like the wild winds  
We are eternal like our mountains  
And you will pass by like the wild winds.* (Verneuil 2006: 226) (Italics are original)

---

<sup>17</sup> "*Dieu, qu'elle va me manquer ma Mayrig! ... C'est comme cela que l'on dit maman dans ma langue d'origine*".

This passage that alludes to the genocide and the collective trauma of Armenians shows that *Mayrig* is about mother and motherland. *Mayrig* can also be the embodiment of three women of his life; his mother and his two aunts- Gayané and Anna. Throughout the book, Verneuil refers to them as “aunt,” “my trinity of mothers,” “my three mothers,” and “my doves.” The relationship between them is best given in this passage;

My good and dear Anna and Gayané – my mothers who had sealed their fate with ours forever, linked their joys to my happiness, humble servants of my childhood that was coming to an end that evening – indifferent to my abandoned games, it was more than enough for them to know I was in good health (Verneuil 2006: 52).

Paratextual elements are also semiotic tools that help to reveal the intention of the author. They can also help to reveal the possible future reader.

### **2.2.2. The narrative aspect: The autobiographical message**

Different reasons drive the autobiographer to self-express in an autobiographical form. Marcou, Renner, and Jullier (2016: 17-18) distinguish five reasons that motivate an autobiographer to start writing about himself. First of all, it is the desire to explain his past behavior; secondly, to testify. Next is the motivation to triumph over time and death and to leave something for his posterity. Or turn to the past and not let it go into oblivion. And finally, the reason behind an autobiography is the motivation that drives the desire to find a sense of existence. The latter is the essential driving force to write an autobiography, according to the authors.

Henri Verneuil's autobiography is an effort of salvation; it is a confession about his difficult life as an Armenian migrant in the early 20th century in France. It is also an attempt to clarify the reason for their arrival to France. This microhistory of the Armenian migrant family in France begins with their lost homeland, a journey of integration into the French society. Verneuil's autobiography is also full of passages on the Armenian Genocide, which can also be the driving force behind this autobiography – to raise awareness of the Armenian Genocide. The reference to the Armenian Genocide and the passages devoted to it could be a communication with the fellow Armenians to keep the collective memory afresh, and it can also be addressed to the French readers as information about their fellow French Armenian's tragic past.

It is a story of the traumatic memory of a migrant and a traumatic memory of the family's complicated life, a story of dedication and love. Being a child, he couldn't fully

understand the self-devotion of his mother, father, and two aunts, and the deaths of each family member triggered a chain of memories full of love, trauma, and regret, and remorse in the mind of Verneuil.

Taking into consideration Gusdorf's (1980: 36) differentiation, *Mayrig* has more private than public sector because this is a story of a family, a childhood trauma, a migrant journey; in short, this is the story of Ashod Malakian rather than a glorification of the filmmaker Henri Verneuil. The autobiographer writes down his memory in the first person, and there he includes dialogues giving it a fictional style. It would be difficult for anyone in his adulthood to precisely remember childhood, let alone the talks in minute precision; exchanges with his teacher or with his friends, dialogues between family members, etc. There are even passages that Verneuil emphasizes that he remembers them precisely, "I remember as it were yesterday" (167)<sup>18</sup>. Undoubtedly, there are memories of some events that even many years later remain very vivid and fresh in mind, which can be related to strong emotional feelings. But what about the memories of those events that Verneuil depicts in detail in the autobiography? If Verneuil remembers some events very precisely, the others are the product of fiction or the fusion of fiction and fact? Unfortunately, there is no way to answer these questions, nor does the autobiographer give any hints.

The traumatic memory of exile, of being a displaced person in the life of Verneuil, was essential in a way that shaped his life. This trauma is seen, for example, in response to the news of moving out of their rented house. It could be a good piece of information for others, but for a migrant, the displacement can only mean yet a new exile, new trauma, which Verneuil very well explains here:

But of course, that was it, we were going to have a new house!  
Why was I looking for some horror where there was nothing but good news?  
But again, to uncover the root of such fears, one would have to go back to a time when a change of domicile meant a flight from the massacres. (Verneuil 2006: 123)

The autobiography about his life focused on his family, childhood, roots, and traumatic experience. It is a microhistory of Armenian migrant life in Marseilles. The traumatic memory of his painful childhood was shaped not only by the loss of home, estrangement but also by being in a foreign society where even his name was an object of fun for other children.

---

<sup>18</sup> Hereafter, the quotes will be used from the English translation of *Mayrig* (2006), unless it is referred to other books.

Henri Verneuil's message in *Mayrig* is a self-description and also a confession of his remorse and regrets. He felt somehow guilty in the unhappiness of his family members as if he had his share in it. For example, when speaking about Gayané, he feels guilty that Gayané hadn't married and remained single, but if she had married, he couldn't have been able to go to a private school:

So Gayané remained single.

As the years went by she began to slowly gray, that wonderful gray of passing time. She lived in my house right until the day when I held her hands in mine, doctors at her bedside. She looked at me with trusting eyes, since nothing could happen to her as long as I was there.

It was true! Nothing could happen to her ... nothing but that horrifying pallor that marks a lifeless face.

She faded away, slowly, my grand mademoiselle, as she lived, in great modesty, leaving me memories that never forgave what I could have done for her while she was still alive." (Verneuil 2006: 151)

He remembers his father doing night shifts to make ends meet and have a stable income to avoid any risk for his schooling in the private school, which would secure the young Malakian's place in the French society. He recalls a family discussion about giving a "position" to his father in the family business to avoid doing a night shift in the factory and to help the family business instead. Verneuil remembers:

She didn't add: "And we could finally all have the same hours."

She also did not evoke those early mornings when he would return with cracked lips, deep crevices in his forehead, his fingers numb and swollen from the cold, bags under his eyes, and at other times his face worn by the exhaustion of summer's heat. All this physical abuse, which my father dismissed as "trifles," nevertheless left its mark on his body. He had already rejected the idea of quitting the factory several times since, according to him, the fixed salary it assured us was a necessary safeguard against bad times. (Verneuil 2006: 157)

One of those bad times in Malakian's life was the pleurisy of young Ashod that took him several weeks to get well, and all his family was worried about him and spending money on his recovery.

In the meeting with his fellow refugee Armenians who were survivors of the genocide, the young Malakian listened to the sad stories of survivors. Verneuil describes how that collective memory of the Armenian Genocide became an inseparable particle of his memories and identity – a postmemory:

On this 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 1927, at an age when life was conceived in the image of story-book heroes, I was brutally torn from my world of enchantment.

Motionless in my chair, I listened to these men with funeral faces recall their dead, while the world suddenly presented itself to me in its true colors, with its bloody instincts, its indifference to justice, its cowardice for reasons of state, its promises not kept because of nationalistic egotism and its generosity confined to pious discourse.

[...]

But the time of fairies and elves had just ended its fleeting existence, face to face with reality.

I was no longer a child. (Verneuil 2006: 47-48)

The autobiography Mayrig is also a postmemory of the Armenian Genocide because Verneuil hadn't lived the events but had secondary memories of the circumstances; he lived its consequences. Naturally, these events shaped his identity because they were migrants in Marseilles due to the Genocide and the repression that followed against the survivors and other Christian minorities in Turkey. The Genocide was a postmemory for the young Malakian. As he describes in the autobiography, his culture was with him, and although he was ashamed of it as a child (because of being an object of fun by other children), it was the force that drove him to become who he was. He raises awareness about the Armenian Genocide, how it happened, who the perpetrators were. Although the postmemory of the genocide appears through the whole autobiography, Verneuil dedicated chapters to transmit to the possible readers the basic knowledge of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

The postmemory of the genocide in some sort was one of the pillars of his identity. He undertook this autobiography intending to make others aware of his uprooted nation. This autobiography was in some way a tribute to his origins, to his much-beloved family.

### **2.2.3. The narrative aspect: The author-reader communication**

The autobiographer has to consider two aspects of the autobiography before writing – the purpose and the prospective audience. To reach those possible future readers, to make his message understandable for the target audience, the autobiographer selects what to tell and how to tell them, eventually becoming his autobiographical message.

In general, the reader trusts the events depicted in the autobiography because the autobiography is the life narrative by the autobiographer written by him. Moreover, when the migrant autobiographer narrates his traumatic memories of exile, family, and the uprooted nation, he becomes the voice of these events and the mediator between these events and his readers. Verneuil is a mediator of French and Armenian cultures. He is also the mediator between his traumatic memories and his possible future readers. As a mediator and autobiographer, whenever he thinks that there might be a loss of connection between narrated new events and the reader's textual memory, he intervenes to explain and make it more digestible. When taking this initiative, the autobiographer already has in mind his possible future reader and knows more or less the textual memory of the target audience. In other words, the autobiographer opts for cultural dialogue with his prospective reader.

According to Genette (1980: 255-256), five functions reveal the narrators' intervention in the text or, in other words, the narrators' detachment or involvement in his narrative. The first function is the narrative function which is the fundamental one; this role (detachment) is always with the narrator. The second one is the directing function, where the narrator intervenes to make commentaries on the organization of his text. The third function is the communication function in which the narrator addresses the present, absent, or implied narratee, i.e., the text's potential reader. In the fourth function, the narrator affirms the story's truthfulness, his affective relation with it. The last function is the ideological function, where the narrator interrupts the story to introduce general knowledge or instructive comments to the narration. Of course, these functions are not separated from each other, and as Genette (1980: 257) writes, only the first function is the basic to every narration. Genette posits;

These five functions are certainly not to be put into watertight compartments; none of the categories is completely unadulterated and free of complicity with others, none except the first is completely indispensable, and at the same time none, however carefully an author tries, can be completely avoided. It is rather a question of emphasis and relative weight [...]. (Genette 1980: 257)

In *Mayrig*, Verneuil, as a narrator, naturally uses the first and the last functions very often. He intervenes to comment on anything that might be not graspable for the potential reader. This intervention could indeed be considered as a dialogue between the author and the reader. Lotman (1982) considers dialogue as a communication between the author and the reader to actualize the text's memory. Moreover, Lotman claims that the text includes the image of the audience, which helps the latter to understand the text:

[...] any text (and especially a literary one) contains in itself what we should like to term the image of the audience and that this image actively affects the real audience by becoming for it a kind of normatizing code. This is imposed on the consciousness of the audience and becomes the norm for its own image of itself, being transferred from the text into the sphere real behavior of the cultural collective. In this way, between text and audience a relationship is formed which is characterized not as passive perception but rather as a dialogue. Dialogic speech is distinguished not only by the common code of two juxtaposed utterances, but also by the presence of a common memory shared by addresser and addressee.' The absence of this factor makes a text undecipherable. (Lotman 1982: 81)

Lotman's dialogue is similar to the intertextuality as he claims that the communication with the "interlocutor" becomes possible when there is a "common memory";

Of course the poorer the memory the more detailed and extensive must the message be and the less possibility there is for ellipses and passing things over in silence. [...] The extent of his memory and content is familiar to us and intimately known. In need to burden the text with unnecessary details which be found in the memory of the addressee. An allusion is enough to actualize them. (Lotman 1982: 83)

The dialogue is necessary to actualize the memory and add new information to make the text richer and, in some cases, up to date. Lotman (1982: 83) remarks that "the text contains

within itself a miniature system of all links in the communicative chain, and just as we can abstract from it the author's position, so we can reconstruct also the ideal reader."

The text, as mentioned earlier, is a fabric, is a woven thread; thus, it is dialogic. Moreover, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) considers that human life and even his consciousness have dialogic nature. Bakhtin posits:

The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin 1982: 293)

The fifth function of the narration proposed by Genette is also similar to translation, to cultural translation. Verneuil has an Armenian background and writing in French, introduces new information, and comments on it whenever he feels that the French reader might not have enough general knowledge. This narrative strategy is similar to dialogue too. After all, dialogue between author and reader could be considered as translation. Torop (2008: 375) remarks that the translation has a universal character, and "[t]he universality of translation comes from its connections with thought processes." Jurij Lotman (Lotman 2000: 143) poses, "the elementary act of thinking is translation" and "the elementary mechanism of translating is dialogue."

Being at the heart of the conflict, Verneuil opts for dialogue with his reader to translate his trauma into an understandable "language." Verneuil is a translator of two cultures. Being a French Armenian, he translates the Armenian culture to the French reader in an understandable language. Moreover, Verneuil is also an agent of his traumatic memory, of postmemory, of his culture and language. Verneuil is in the position of a bridge that separates and, at the same time, unites the two cultures. The autobiographer of trauma is an agent of his dialogic consciousness; that is why he writes down his life to self-express, to confess. As discussed in the previous chapter, trauma should be addressed, expressed, and Verneuil addresses it in *Mayrig*.

Thus, the autobiographer is positioned somehow on the borderline of two cultures. This position allows him to function as a translator. Additionally, the autobiographer is also an agent between his memories and his reader. The border, according to Lotman's (2005) concept of semiosphere, is always bilingual. Lotman writes, [t]he border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic

mechanism. The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa” (Lotman 2005: 210).

The border separates the two worlds, but they also unite them, “ensuring the semiotic contact between these two worlds” (Idem, 211). The border is, thus, bilingual and “belongs” simultaneously to both the internal and external space, the semiotic border is represented by the sum of bilingual translatable “filters”, passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages), situated outside the given semiosphere” (Lotman 2005: 208-209). Lotman writes that the “function of any border [...] comes down to a limitation of penetration, filtering and the transformative processing of the external to the internal” (Idem, 210). The bilingualism of the border is the mechanism that ensures the contact of two worlds; the border is a filter that knows two worlds well and knows how to make a dialogue to make one world understandable for the other.

The autobiographer, thus, takes the function of a filter, a bilingual border that translates his trauma, his memory to an understandable message for the possible reader. Moreover, Monticelli (2017) writing about the concept of translation in Lotman’s works underscores that in the article “On Semiosphere,” Lotman uses “a whole series of metaphors” to characterize the regulation of borders – “filtering,” “passing through,” “transferring” “adapting,” and these metaphors “hint to different ways of understanding translation” (Monticelli 2017: 28).

Verneuil employs translation as a strategy to self-express, transfer his traumatic memory, his postmemory, and explain something related to the Armenian culture, which could not be decipherable for his possible future reader. It is visible, for example, from the title of his autobiography, which he clarifies on the cover and the first pages of the book;

God, how I will miss my “mayrig!” That is how we say “mother” in my native tongue. In writing it out, I see how poorly the translation conveys the softness and richness of the Armenian. How true that languages retain their beauty only in the original. (Verneuil 2006: 9)

Or, he explains that for paying visits to each other, Armenians do not let know beforehand the person that they will visit;

Soon everyone would come to see us, Armenian-style, without notice. (Verneuil 2006: 22)

Thus, the autobiographer becomes an agent and translates cultural phenomena to his readers. There are two cultural pillars on which *Mayrig*’s narrative is centered around; religion and food. In this sense, Armenian and French cultures are similar because food and belief are essential in these cultures.

In *Mayrig*, Verneuil tells his emotions, the traumatic experience in France in the form of dialogue of cultures. As a young Ashod, he faces barriers in socialization with other French children and his French teacher. Ashod, as an Armenian, was Christian but an adept of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which in the early 20th century was exotic to the French Catholics as we learn from Verneuil's autobiography. Hence, to explain the difference between the Armenian Apostolic and the French Catholic churches, he enters into dialogue with his possible future readers who might not be aware of the religion of Armenians and what an apostolic church is.

When applying for the private school in Marseilles, young Malakian faced a problem; he was Christian but not the "right one." Here is the passage where Verneuil remembers from his first encounter with the owner of the school, Mr. Melizan:

Monsieur Melizan questioned my mother about the level of my studies, asked about my last school, slipped in a discreet allusion to the cost of the institute, and spoke quite a bit about religion. Were we Catholic, practicing members of our local parish?

My mother explained the tragedy of our people, our apostolic church, Christian well before the others, and so close to Catholicism ...

His chin in the hollow of his hand, elbow on the desk, Monsieur Melizan listened. There were a few seconds of silence, and then, for the first time, he turned to me.

"Very well, then, we'll enroll you in the ninth class, young man. [...]" (Verneuil 2006: 59)

Things got complicated when the young man attend the classes. Not being like everyone else in the classroom, Ashod starts to feel alone and marginalized. His name, which was not similar to other French family names and wasn't easy to pronounce for the teacher, attracted more attention from the whole class and made him feel his otherness. This otherness marked his entire childhood;

As I left school, I noticed that I was the only non-resident. I was also the only foreigner, the only one dressed differently from the others, the only non-Catholic, the only one who knew nothing about soccer ... All these "onlys" that made one so alone ... (Verneuil 2006: 68)

Verneuil's traumatic memories of the otherness were founded on the fact that the church for Armenians was part of their identity. Throughout history, the church was the pillar that helped the nation stay united against assimilation. That is why the passage concerning his origin and the church was so crucial for Verneuil. The church was part of his identity the same way as his skin and his name. Verneuil wanted to emphasize the trauma of his childhood when he referred to the "animosity" between him and Father F., who was his religious instructor;

From the first course of religious instruction, the animosity of Father F. towards me, the "barbaric heretic," was quite blatant. (Verneuil 2006: 71)

This “animosity” was translated into ignoring the young man. He was seated at the last rows, and the first rows were for the instructor’s “little favorites”:

When my turn came to be seated, I got only a stern, icy stare. He designated the last row for me and ordered me to stay there permanently. In this way I was condemned to a small personal hell, separated from the rest of the class by two or three empty rows. Separation, which before had been a source of pride, suddenly became hard to bear in this sort of moral quarantine that kept me in such obvious isolation.

As I passed by, I got my last close look at him before taking a seat in the back. His expression clearly registered indignation at my presence among these little children of the Catholic God. (Verneuil 2006: 72)

The isolation and separation from others, the fact of being other was underscored by an incident when during one of those catechism sessions, a classmate of his asked why Malakian didn’t make his first communion;

“Tell us, Father, why isn’t Malakian making his first communion?”

All heads turned in my direction, as if responding to the chapel bell.

Cowering behind my desk at the back of the class, like a hare in tall grass, I felt the sky collapse on me. (Verneuil 2006: 75)

Malakian was in a difficult situation, the instructor seated him at the last row, separated from others, and the child who asked the question knew that he was not French, thus not catholic. The child wanted to make fun of Malakian once more to put him in an embarrassing situation. As Verneuil will later remember, the children’s questions are never innocent;

A child’s questions are never innocent. This one was imbued with a long history of intolerance against those who, by the geographical accident of their birth, had a slightly different itinerary on the road that leads to God. (Verneuil 2006: 76)

Being trapped as a child, Verneuil takes the dialogue as a means of communication with the possible reader, explaining the history of “the ancient church” of his ancestors. Verneuil speaks of the trauma of being marginalized in the religious course but at the same time brings new information to the reader who maybe is not familiar with the history of Christianity. In the form of dialogue, Verneuil mentions something that might be familiar to the reader and, at the same time, brings new information. In some way, he acts as a mediator to disseminate the history of his nation. Verneuil translates Armenian culture to his readers:

I was baptized in the Armenian Apostolic Church, its roots dating back to the age of the apostles. Christianity was underground at first, but then became the state religion in 301, 13 years before Rome, five centuries before Europe. In the same places where thousands were martyred, on the ruins of pagan temples, Gregory the Illuminator built the first Christian basilica in the world at “Etchmiadzin,” a name that resounds like an alleluia and means “the place where the only-begotten descended”. (Verneuil 2006: 75)

This is a passage of the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church by Verneuil in his autobiography. By remembering his traumatic childhood, the conflict of not being Catholic,

Verneuil brings some account of his church, but this “conflict” he solves by giving another piece of history: a dialogue between his church and the reader’s church:

I can still see my mother’s radiant face, full of hope, when Pope Paul VI opened his arms to the Supreme Patriarch Vasken I, and turned over to him relics of the apostle Bartholomew, the founder of the Armenian Church, acknowledging with his blessing that it was indeed apostolic.

But on this great road of reconciliation there are still plenty of Father F.’s, inspired by a blind zeal to the point of sacrifice ... of others. They stand guard before their churches, doors closed, heads filled with theological hatred. (Verneuil 2006: 81)

This passage meant to show the dialogue that the Catholic Church had with the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is also a dialogue between Verneuil and his possible catholic reader or someone who knows well Catholic Church but was ignorant about the Armenian Apostolic Church. And the radiant face of his mother is the sign that the “conflict of churches” has been solved; it is the sign of reconciliation. The radiant face of Verneuil’s mother is also the translation of the Armenian migrant’s church acceptance by the French Catholic society.

The traumatic memory of isolation by the catholic Father was another reminder of being not accepted by the French society. The Armenian Genocide was a hate crime based on their religion, on the fact that they were Christian, and having arrived in Christian Europe of the early 20th century, the same Armenians weren’t spared from the hate from Catholic Christians either.

The church has yet another traumatic layer for Verneuil. The book begins with his memories of the last moments passed next to his mother. And the nearby church’s bells remind him that he is Armenian, and in general, in an Armenian family, parents live their last moments with the family. It is somewhat a solace and an explanation to his possible reader that in a hospital or a “chic clinic,” his mother wouldn’t have felt any better; it is a tradition not to leave the elderly alone at the sunset of their life:

I go with him to the door. Before leaving, he hesitates a moment and then suggests transferring her to a chic clinic, a place where things might be more convenient.

At exactly this moment, like the church bells Ys, a town allegedly swallowed up for millennia and whose bells are heard, at quiet times, rising from the depths of the sea, the bells of our churches toll in my head, a reminder of my roots, my origins, my traditions. I am an Armenian, and our mothers died at home.

No! My mother would not suffer the cowardice of the living who would impose one final journey to a miraculous clinic from which she would clearly never return. There would be no ambulance blaring a futile emergency throughout the town. (Verneuil 2006: 8)

Being a refugee was a somehow stigma. The Malakian family was reminding the young Ashod to behave silently, not to irritate the French because in the worst case, they could have been expelled from the country, and they had nowhere to go:

Refugees, people from nowhere, are subject to twin versions of their childhood, forever parallel.

They have to assume, of course, the original, with its culture and customs, its way of seeing life. But once they have crossed over, they also have to confront a second version, in the manners and language of the adopted country. Always wary that the first version not infringe on the second, or that an overly strong dose of the second not deny the first, a child can end up losing the untroubled innocence that is a prerogative of his age.

I thought I could get past this conflict unnoticed; but I quickly saw that in order to amount to anything, I absolutely had to replace one language with another. (Verneuil 2006: 33)

The ultimate dialogue and conflict in autobiography *Mayrig* are happening around the food. The food for a migrant, for a displaced person, is homebuilding in a foreign place. Hage writing about memory and food underscores that food and home have an essential relation. He writes;

Its ideological power is constantly exhibited in various items of everyday life such as the status of the “homemade” on the food market. [...] It makes it ooze that specifically homely goodness: intimations of sound nutrition, careful choice of ingredients, and careful labor (of love). That is, it becomes a bit of “mother’s cooking”— which, at an important level, is, of course, a continuation of breast-feeding, the most homely of the homely yearnings and fantasies. (Hage 2010: 416)

The first home-making of the Malakian family in France begins with conflict. Verneuil narrates the story of her family’s first dinner where his aunt Anna made her masterpiece and that “masterpiece” had a difficult journey before being baked;

Aunt Anna produced her masterpiece. The leg of lamb was in the middle of an aluminum platter, surrounded by slices of tomatoes, squash and potatoes on which rested small squares of butter. This colorful array was extremely enticing and heralded a very appetizing inaugural dinner on French soil. (Verneuil 2006: 23)

First, the masterpiece is nostalgia from their home country that they wanted to relive the memory of lost home by making their habitual cuisine maybe by habit and nostalgia. Then, the platter of aunt Anna was refused to be baked in the shared kitchen. Still dining in front of the oven, the neighbor refused to leave the table, although according to the decision, they must share the kitchen and eat in their respective rooms. Their French neighbor reminded them that France and it is up to the French to decide when to finish their dinner. First, his aunts tried to negotiate, and then returned, saying that their neighbors were still eating. The father Malakian went there too, the platter in his hands. With some polite expressions of his basic French vocabulary, he tried to convince the neighbor. The French neighbor started to yell in French, making them understand that they are “under the sky of France” and if they weren’t happy, they “could ... and so on and so on”. The angry sound was so traumatic for the young Ashod that the memories of the event were still haunting him:

That gesture incited an inhuman bellow that petrified me. The echo of that horrible sound followed me thirty years later, all the way to San Diego in California. In that city’s zoo, I was shown a red monkey,

also called a howler monkey, that lives in the forests of South America. This animal has a bony drum in its throat that amplifies its voice. It was the same squalling that I heard as a child. Thoroughly aware of how outrageous his anger was, the man pounded his fist on the table to punctuate his verbal assault. He raised his voice, and then made it louder and louder, finally lowering it for emphasis. Through the open door, I saw my father in front of the kitchen, holding the platter in both hands. He shook his head several times as a sign of his helplessness and then turned around to come back. (Verneuil 2006: 24)

Food making and eating is a ritual in Armenian and French cultures. That is why the (traumatic) memories of Verneuil focused around it. The Aunt's masterpieces or other food made by the Malakian family was somehow a home building in France. This nostalgia of home, the eagerness to feel at home away from home, was the driving force that migrants or people, in general, recreate their family recipes. Hage (2010: 421) argues that "nostalgic feelings are affective building blocks" and "[t]hey are used by migrants to engage in home-building in the here and now":

Nostalgia is nothing more than a memory of a past experience imagined from the standpoint of the present to be homely. Clearly, nostalgic feelings abound not only in migrant life but in everybody's life. They guide home-building in the present because one seeks to foster the kind of homely feeling one knows. And nostalgic feelings are invariably those homely feelings one remembers having experienced in the past. Thus, when one yearns for a communal life, one's understanding of such a life is guided by the kind of communal feelings one remembers having had in specific situations in the past. This is why this yearning for homely commonality translates into an attempt to build the past conditions of its production. (Hage 2010: 421)

For Verneuil, his family-made food had something particular in it. Although he says that he remembers nothing from his home country, yet the Armenian dishes that his family was making reminded him of his roots, his "Armenianness," which was different from the surrounding French cuisine and, in general, from French culture. Although this difference was a conflicting point for Verneuil, he turns it into a dialogue in his autobiography. Verneuil employs the image and the name of the French dessert mille-feuille, which is supposed to be familiar with his possible future reader, and compares it with "pakhlava" (an Armenian/Middle Eastern dessert), thus creating a dialogue of cultures. Verneuil reminds his reader that the Armenian pakhlava is similar to the French mille-feuille, which for the English speaking readers, the translator opted for the strudel to make it easier for the reader to understand the cultural equivalence:

With some boldness, my father ventured an explanation to our baker of the recipe for the oriental version of thousand-layer strudel, or pakhlava, which shares only one thing with its French cousin – neither one is made of a thousand sheets. Just as in a thousand thanks and a thousand regards, there is much exaggeration on the quantity claimed. (Verneuil 2006:26)

My father, with a certain temerity, attempted a very perilous adventure by wanting to explain to our baker the recipe for oriental millefeuille, the "pakhlava", whose only point in common with French pastry is that neither one nor the other contain a thousand leaves. Like the centipede, a thousand

thanks, and the thousand friendships, there was a deception on the quantity of the advertised goods. (Verneuil 1985: 33) (My translation –M.M.)<sup>19</sup>

Although my translated version is literal, the goal is to show that the translator of the English version decided to change the equivalence of pakhlava for the English reader to make it more understandable for the reader. The English translation is a bit clumsy because French pastry is well known, and there is no need to change it anymore. Verneuil decides to compare Armenian pastry and French pastry to clarify for his possible future reader: Verneuil translates pakhlava into mille-feuille.

The pakhlava being an essential piece of pastry for the Armenian cuisine from the Malakian family's perspective, is described by Verneuil in a more detailed and nuanced way. The pakhlava preparation is a family affair - a family ritual:

On "pakhlava day," a Sunday of course, we had to get up very early and set aside at least half a day for it. Once the dough was prepared, a small ball was pulled off and powdered with flour so it wouldn't stick to the table. A rolling pin helped to flatten it out and roll it to the thinnest possible texture. Thereafter, our hands took the place of the wooden pin. My father, my mother, my two aunts, seated in a circle around a clean cloth, would grab the sheet of dough in the flat of their hands and begin to pull on it (Verneuil 2006: 26)

Then Verneuil describes the whole process of the pakhlava making, how the entire family would wait until the syrup would "do its job" then cut it, giving the best piece to him.

Verneuil emphasizes that when his father explained the recipe to the baker with his limited French vocabulary, pakhlava seemed a "sugary mess," but it is more than syrup and dough. It is made of layers of family love, the nostalgia of home, homesickness, and a pinch of his culture. Pakhlava was like a bridge that kept them connected to their roots. Pakhlava, as Hage claimed, translates the past into the present home building, and Verneuil uses French mille-feuille to make a dialogue with his possible future reader.

Besides being a nostalgic memory of his culture, a reminder of his origins, about that family Sunday ritual, pakhlava reminded the traumatic memories of his childhood. Ashod was invited to his classmate's birthday party. Being an object of fun and thus isolated from the rest of his classmates, he knew that the birthday party would turn into a mockery of him, but it was a step to enter into French society for his family. Therefore Ashod was unable to make up a story and turn down the invitation. The young Ashod was keeping his lovely family away from his troubles of the school:

---

<sup>19</sup> Mon père, avec une certaine témérité, tenta une bien périlleuse aventure en voulant expliquer à notre boulanger la recette du millefeuille oriental, le «paklawas», dont le seul point commun avec la pâtisserie française est que ni l'un ni l'autre ne contiennent mille feuilles. Comme le mille-pattes, le mille mercis et le mille amitiés, il y avait tromperie sur la quantité de la marchandise annoncée.

When I came home from school on Wednesday evening before the great day, I decided to plant myself before my three mothers, my school bag still on my back, and tell them,

“I will not go to this party!”

But I watched them, huddled around their sewing, lost in their castles in the air, a thousand miles from the real world, and I just stood there, mixed in all my self-serving deceits, and I could not deliver my proclamation. (Verneuil 2006: 91)

The whole family participated in preparing Ashod for the event. He was washed mercilessly with the bar of soap “Marseilles,” the smell of which will always remind Verneuil of his bath with “unbearable hot water.” Verneuil was bathed by his three mothers, whom he calls “three tormenters.” Pakhlava from Malakian’s family perspective was the most precious pastry that an Armenian could offer to someone, and it was a piece of the Armenian family love that should impress the invited party;

They chose the middle pieces for the gift platter, the ones most saturated with the syrup, the ones most golden in color ... in short, those reserved for guests according to the Armenian custom. (Verneuil 2006: 92)

He was even given instructions on how to behave at the birthday party:

In case of thank you’s, I was to respond simply”

“Oh it’s nothing at all, Madame ... just a little specialty of ours.”

The sentence was to end with one of those good wishes in which the oriental languages are so rich, but it seemed too ornate when I translated it into French and I decided to leave it out for modesty’s sake. (Verneuil 2006: 93)

During the party Ashod was the object of fun for the kids, because of his dress –he was well dressed, but like a dandy, in short, he was not dressed like the other French pupils, he was different, and that was the reason to make fun of him. His mothers wanted to dress him well, but their understanding of being well dressed was different from that of the French mothers. The mother of jubilee passed and murmured something to each boy’s ear to pass it on to their parents, and in Ashod’s ear, she murmured: “I should pull your ears... You shouldn’t have.” But then, when she was serving the boys, the young Ashod implemented what he was taught at home:

All those éclairs frosted on the edge and arranged alternately side by side, one coffee, one chocolate, looked delicious.

I remained unruffled, always keeping with our custom, which my mother reminded me about in her final orders: politely decline the first time and then again a second time, never accepting until the hostess insists a third time; then let her serve you the piece of her choosing. (Verneuil 2006: 99)

Just because the French side didn’t know this Armenian eating code, they didn’t serve food Ashod more than once because they just thought that Ashod didn’t like the French cuisine;

Alexander had rediscovered his cruel tendencies and, noticing my discreet refusal, shouted at that moment that I probably preferred lokhoom, couscous and swallow's nests. The mixture of the Orient, Africa and China provoked yet another explosion of laughter. (Verneuil 2006: 99)

Then, leaving the room, the young Ashod fetched for his coat, opened the servants' door, and saw his pakhlava being eaten by servants. Initially, Ashod thought that pakhlava would be served as the king of pastry, and everyone would appreciate his culture and his family's effort. Instead, the mother of his classmate gave it to servants to eat; thus, pakhlava was something worthless for her. The young boy then imagined some scenarios of why that French woman could have refused to serve the pakhlava but reaching his mother, and he told nothing about;

I stayed a moment in the dark, my head leaning against the large door of wrought iron and cathedral glass.

This had been final attempt at acceptance I had once again found, with my woolen socks and my child's woes, the warmth of my solitude. (Verneuil 2006: 102)

Verneuil narrates his traumatic memory of this event and yet translates every memory to his possible reader. He could have used the French language's richness to make his message clearer, or maybe as he already noted, the French language couldn't fully translate the richness of Armenian? It could be that his memory of the trauma was bilingual- French language that was related to trauma and Armenian that was more relief of the stress of being migrant and being rejected from that French society:

Mayrig was waiting for me at the end of the street, all smiles. But had she perhaps been there right up until her son had left Alexander's, symbol of access to a higher class? She lost her balance when I threw myself against her in a burst of contrived gaiety to tell her yet a different version:

"They ate it ... and their fingers with it!"

This was a great popular compliment the Armenians make about a dish especially appreciated, with the allusion that those fingers, touched by the unforgettable taste of the delicacy, were inadvertently devoured with the same gusto. (Verneuil 2006: 102)

The memory of that event was another layer to add on many layers of pakhlava. Pakhlava was the memory of the Armenian dessert - his family's favorite dessert, his traumatic experience at his classmate's birthday of being mocked by children. Pakhlava translated the Malakian family's love, Armenian culture, traumatic experience, home building nostalgia to Verneuil. The pakhlava was also the reminder of his culture rejected by Marseille's bourgeoisie:

Long after the birthday party, I had to ask myself again about that strange day. Why had I been invited?

Perhaps they had chosen me as a prototype, a yardstick that would measure contentment against those supposedly less happy?

Or was I simply a toy for a spoiled child, a toy Alexander added to his electric train to provide his pals with an additional entertainment?

Perhaps, a bit of both? (Verneuil 2006: 102)

\*\*\*

This chapter began by describing the structure of the text and arguing that the autobiography is a text woven from societal, cultural, individual, and many other threads. It is also the condensation of traumatic memories and nostalgia about the past. It went on to suggest that autobiography as a text can be analytically described too. The next move was to give the theoretical background for the analysis of *Mayrig* from two aspects: architectonical (paratextual elements such as title, book cover, chapters, etc.) and narrative (autobiographical message and semiotic analysis of the traumatic memories).

Thanks to the hybrid genre of the autobiography, Genette's narrative concepts for the study of the artistic text also apply to the autobiography. Additionally, Genette's fifth narrative function that implies giving commentary is similar to the cultural translation when it comes to a bicultural autobiographical text. Furthermore, the discussion focused on the similarity of the dialogue and translation. The universality of translation helps to apply it to communicate the narrative of trauma.

To conclude this chapter, it is necessary to point out that the aim was to answer the following questions;

- What are the strategies used by Verneuil in communicating his memories to the target readers?

The role of the target audience is vital as the autobiographer, as any other narrator takes into account the addressee of the text before even writing it. Knowing the target audience's textual memory of a topic guides the autobiographer's style and narrative functions. Additionally, the analysis showed that the target audience of *Mayrig* is the French readers. Their lack of knowledge about the Armenian culture drove Verneuil to use cultural dialogue and translation to make his message understandable for them.

## CONCLUSION

Different academic fields' interest in the autobiography indicates that the autobiography is a complex yet exciting phenomenon. It is at the intersection of the research focus of disciplines as memory studies, narrative studies, literary studies, semiotics, to name but a few. Each academic field researches the autobiography from their respective academic interests. Additionally, the semiotic analysis provides the opportunity to use a comprehensive toolbox from different research disciplines. This explains why the semiotic approach was used to analyze the autobiography of *Mayrig* by Henri Verneuil as a complex autobiographical message where the reader has its place as a guiding force.

The thesis is divided into two chapters. Each of these chapters had different but interconnected aims. The first chapter aimed to examine the specificities of the autobiography as a medium of memory in the case study *Mayrig*. First, it was necessary to discuss the burgeoning field of memory studies to show how the notion of memory is indeed a compound notion studied from different angles. The chapter also discussed the specificity of autobiography, its role in conveying traumatic memories, the postmemories. It also examined the trauma and the autobiography as a medium to address the mental wound, which is trauma. Next, the chapter compared the notions of microhistory and autobiography. On the case study of *Mayrig*, I concluded that sometimes autobiography could become the microhistory of a minority and community. To clarify this point, it is worthy to remind that *Mayrig* is the autobiography of French Armenian filmmaker Henri Verneuil. *Mayrig* is a complex autobiographical message that includes Verneuil's memories of the past, his family's integration into the French society, and his postmemory of the Armenian Genocide. Hence, *Mayrig* could be considered the 20th century Marseilles' Armenian community's microhistory. To sum up, due to its hybrid genre, the autobiography becomes the medium to address the mental wound. It could also become the microhistory of a community.

The second chapter aimed to discuss the autobiography as a text. Next, the chapter discussed *Mayrig*'s structure from two aspects; architectonical (paratextual elements) and narrative.

The paratextual elements such as the book cover, the title are vital features of every book. Moreover, the autobiographical book is unique because the author takes part in the making of the book cover. The book cover is the representation of the main text or it could

give additional information about it. As Torop (2019) mentioned, the book cover is the contact zone between the author and the reader. Hence, it is interesting to know what the autobiographical book cover includes to interact with the reader. The further study showed that *Mayrig* is addressed to the French readers. Moreover, the author himself explains the title *Mayrig* as the Armenian word for mother to his readers in a quote on the book's back cover.

The image of the prospective reader plays the role of the guide in any narrative, and the autobiographical text is no exception. The analysis of the narrative aspect of *Mayrig* revealed that Verneuil used cultural dialogue and translation to convey his memories to the target French readers. Furthermore, the study showed that Verneuil used cultural dialogue and translation to share his memories. Additionally, the complex nature of translation helped Verneuil position himself as a mediator between Armenian and French cultures. Verneuil even translated his traumatic memories, his nostalgia to his reader in an understandable manner by comparing the pakhlava to the French mille-feuille or the Armenian Apostolic Church to the French Catholic Church, giving additional information about the Armenian culture to his prospective French readers.

Thus, Verneuil's strategies to communicate his memories to the target readers are paratextual elements, cultural dialogue and translation.

The memory boom and the research focus on autobiography as a medium of memory indicate that the autobiography as a text of memory needs to be examined thoroughly, especially from the architectonical aspect. On the other hand, the interconnection of memory and translation that now becomes the preferred strategy to convey one's trauma in autobiographies and, consequently, the research object of various scholars must also be addressed. The length of a master thesis is not enough to examine these topics thoroughly.

## REFERENCES

- Aarons, Victoria; Berger, Alan, L. 2017. *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Abbas, Yunique; Niemen, Thierry 2021. *J'ai Séquestré Kim Kardashian [I Kidnapped Kim Kardashian]*. Paris: l'Archipel.
- Anderson, Margaret Lavinia 2011. Who Still Talked about the Extermination of the Armenians? In: Suny, Ronald Grigor; Göçek, Fatma Müge; Naimark, Norman M. (eds.). *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford University Press, 199–217.
- Antreassian Bayizian, Elise 2006. Translator's foreword. In: Verneuil, Henri. *Mayrig*. New York: St. Vartan Press, 4–5.
- Assmann, Jan 1995. 'Collective memory and cultural identity'. *New German Critique* 65: 125–133.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Trans. Emerson Caryl). Minneapolis, London: Minnesota University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail [Бахтин, Михаил] 2012. Razroznenye listy k "Formam vremeni i hronotopa ...". In: Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Sobranie sochinenij v 7 tomah*. T. 3. Moskva: Yazyki slavyanskih kultur [Разрозненные листы к «Формам времени и хронотопа...». In: Бахтин Михаил. Собрание сочинений в 7 томах. Т. 3. Москва: Языки славянских культур], 504–511.
- Baldick, Chris 2015. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, Roland 1977. From work to text. In: Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. (Trans. Stephen Heath). London: Fontana Press, 155–164.
- Benton, Michael 2009. *Literary Biography: An Introduction*. West Sussex (UK): Wiley-Blackwell.
- Benalla, Alexandre 2019. *Ce Qu'ils Ne Veulent Pas Que Je Dise [What They Don't Want Me To Say]*. Paris: Plon.
- Brown, D. Adam; Gutman, Yifat; Freeman, Lindsey, et al. 2009. Introduction: Is an interdisciplinary field of memory studies possible? *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22: 117–124.

- Caruth, Cathy 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Chandler, Daniel 2017. *Semiotics: The Basics* (3 Ed.). London, New York: Routledge.
- Cohn, Dorrit 1999. *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Cetin, Fethiye 2012. *My Grandmother. An Armenian-Turkish Memoir*. London, New York: Verso.
- Demirdjian, Alexis 2018. A moving defence. *Journal of International Criminal Justice*. 16 (3): 501–526.
- Dobrovsky, Serge 2001[1977]. *Fils [Son]*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Eakin, John Paul 2020. *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Eco, Umberto 1979. *The Role of the Reader*. Blomington: Indiana University Press.
- Erl, Astrid 2008. Cultural memory studies: An introduction. In: Astrid Erl, Ansgar Nünning (eds.) and Sara B. Young (coll.). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1–15.
- Erl, Astrid 2011. *Memory in Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fortunati, Vita; Lamberti, Elena 2008. Cultural memories: The making of Europe. In: Astrid Erl, Ansgar, Nünning (eds.) and Sara B. Young (coll.). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 127–137.
- Fivush, Robyn 2013. Autobiographical memory. In: Keightley, Emily; Pickering, Michael (eds). *Research Methods for Memory Studies (Research methods for the arts and humanities) (1st Ed.)*. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press, 13–28.
- Franco, Bernard 2016. *La Littérature Comparée: Histoire, Domains, Méthods*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Gasparov, Boris [Гаспаров, Борис] 1993. *Literaturnye Lejtmotivy. Ocherki po Russkoj Literatury*. [Литературные лейтмотивы. Очерки по русской литературы XX века. Literary Leitmotifs. Essays on Russian Literature of the Twentieth Century.] Moscow: Nauka 274–303.
- Gedi, Noa; Yigal, Elam 1996. Collective memory - What is it? *History and Memory*, 8(1), 30–50.

- Genette, Gérard 1980. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (trans. Jane Lewin). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Genette, Gérard 1997. *Palimpsests* (Trans. Newman Channa and Doubinsky Claude). Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ginzburg, Carlo 1993. Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It. (John Tedeschi, Anne C. Tedeschi transl.). *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1): 10–35.
- Greimas, Algirdas-Julien; Courtés, Julien 1993. *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire Raisonné de la Théorie du Langage*. Paris: Hachette.
- Grève, de Marcel 2008. L'Autobiographie, genre littéraire? *Revue de littérature comparée*, 325: 23–31.
- Gusdorf, Georges 1980. Conditions and limits of autobiography. In: Olney, James (ed.). *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 28–48.
- Hage, Ghassan 2010. Migration, food, memory, and home-building. In: Radstone, Susannah; Schwarz, Bill (eds.) *Memory: Histories, Theories and Debates*. New York: Fordham University Press, 416–427.
- Halbwachs, Maurice 1980. *The Collective Memory*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hampl, Patricia; May, Elaine Tyler 2008. Introduction. In: Hampl, Patricia; May, Elaine Tyler (eds.) *Tell Me True: Memoirs, History and Writing a Life*. Minnesota: Borealis Books.
- Hermann David, Jahn Manfred, Ryan Marie-Laure (eds.) 2005, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
- Hirsch, Marianne 2012. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Ihrig, Stefan 2016. *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press.
- Jouve, Vincent 2020. *Poétique du Roman* (5<sup>th</sup> éd.). Armand Colin: Paris.
- Kahneman, Daniel 2013. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kristeva, Julia 1980. *Desire in Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Trans. Waller Margaret). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lecarme, Jacques; Lecarme-Tabone, Eliane 1999. *L'Autobiographie* (2<sup>ed.</sup>). Paris: Armand Colin.

- Lejeune, Philippe 1996. *Le Pacte Autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil.
- Lemire, Laurent 2019. Les fils prodiges de la diaspora. *Historia*, 876: 45–52.
- Lepore, Jill 2001. Historians who love too much: Reflections on microhistory and biography. *The Journal of American History*, 88(1): 129–144.
- Levi, Giovanni 2005 [2001]. On microhistory. In: Burke, Peter (Ed.). *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press, 97–119.
- Lotman, Yury; Uspensky, Boris; Mihaychuk, George 1978. On the semiotic mechanism of culture. *New Literary History*, 9(2): 211–232.
- Lotman, Yuri 1982. The text and the structure of its audience (Trans. Shukman Ann). *New Literary History* 14(1): 81–87
- Lotman, Yuri 2000[1990]. *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Trans. Shukman, Ann). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lotman, Yuri 2005. On the semiosphere. *Sign System Studies*, 33(1).
- Lotman, Michael 2013. Afterword: Semiotics and unpredictability. In: J. M. Lotman, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 177–190.
- Löschnigg, Martin 2010[2005]. Autofiction. In: Herman, David; Jahn, Manfred; Ryan, Marie, Laure (eds.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London, New York: Routledge, 34–36.
- Mandel, J. Barrett 1980. Full of life now. In: Olney, James (ed.). *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 49–72.
- Manier, David; William, Hirst 2008. A cognitive taxonomy of collective memories. In Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.) and Sara B. Young (coll.). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 253–262.
- Marcou, Loic; Renner, Florence; Jullier, Laurent 2016 [2001]. *L'Autobiographie et Autres Ecritures de Soi*. Paris: Flammarion.
- McCooley, David 2017. The limits of life writing. *Life Writing*, 14 (3): 277–280.
- Monticelli, Daniele 2017. From modelling to untranslatability: Translation and the semiotic relation in Y. Lotman's work (1965-1992). In: *Acta Slavica Estonica IX. Translation Strategies and State Control*. (Pild, Lea, ed.) Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 16-35.
- Nelson, Katherine 2003. Self and social functions: Individual autobiographical memory and collective narrative. *Memory*, 11(2): 125–136

- Olney, James 1980. Autobiography and the cultural moment: A thematic, historical, and bibliographical introduction. In: *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 3–27.
- Peabody, Sue 2012. Microhistory, biography, fiction. *Transatlantica* 2. (Accessed 01 March 2021). <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/6184>
- Posner, Roland 1989. What is culture? Toward a semiotic explication of anthropological concepts. In: Koch, W.A. (ed.). *The nature of culture*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 240–295.
- Rédei, Anna Cabak; Ranta, Michael 2016. Narrativity: Individual and collective aspects of storytelling. In: Dunér, David; Sonesson, Göran (Eds.). *Human Lifeworlds: The Cognitive Semiotics of Cultural Evolution*. [s.l.]: Peter Lang Edition, 145–162.
- Rigney, Ann 2005. Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory. *Journal of European Studies* 35(1): 11–28.
- Roediger HL, Wertsch JV 2008. Creating a new discipline of memory studies. *Memory Studies* (1): 9–22.
- Roudiez, S. Leon 1984. Introduction. In: Kristeva, Julia 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Trans. Waller Margaret). New York: Columbia University Press, 1–10.
- Roy, Pascal 2016[1960]. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. London: Routledge, Kegan Paul.
- Royal, Ségolène 2018. *Ce que je peux enfin vous dire*. [What I can finally tell you]. Paris: Fayard.
- Schmitt, Arnaud 2010. *Je réel/Je fictive. Au-delà d'une confusion postmoderne*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Schmitt, Arnaud 2017. *The Phenomenology of Autobiography: Making it Real*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Seidensticker, Edward 1999. Autobiography. *Biography*, 22(1): 46–56.
- Smith, Sidonie; Watson, Julia 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Spicer, Jakki 2005. The author is dead. Long live the author: Autography and the fantasy of the individual. *Criticism*, 47(3): 387–403.
- Strasser, Anne 2011. De l'autobiographie à sa réception : quand les lecteurs prennent la plume. *Littérature*, 2(2): 83–99.

- Tamm, Marek 2015. Semiotic theory of cultural memory: In the company of Juri Lotman. In: Kattago, Siobhan (ed.). *The Ashgate research companion to memory studies*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing: 127–141.
- Torop, Peeter 2019. Book as/in Culture. In: Kroó, Katalin (Ed.). *The Book Phenomenon in Cultural Space* [A könyvejelenség a kulturális térben]. Budapest, Tartu: Eötvös Loránd University, University of Tartu, 18–32.
- Tlustý, Jan 2014. On unreliability of memories: J.M. Coetzee's autofictional trilogy. In: Kucala, Bozena; Kusek, Robert. *Travelling Texts: J. M. Coetzee and Other Writers*. [s.l.]: Peter Lang Publishing, 225–237.
- Tulving, Endel 2007. Are there 256 different kinds of memory? In: J. S. Nairne (ed.), *The Foundations of Remembering: Essays in Honor of Henry L. Roediger*, III. New York: Psychology Press, 39–52.
- Verneuil, Henri 1985. *Mayrig*. Paris: Robert Laffont.
- 1987. *Mayrig*. Paris: Le Livre de Poche.
  - 2006. *Mayrig* (Trans. Bayizian Antreassian, Elise). New York: St. Vartan Press.
- Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina 2019. Introduction: Autobiography/autofiction across disciplines. In: Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina (Ed.). *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, (vol.1). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1–8.
- Williams, Hellen; Conway, Martin; Cohen, Gillian 2008. Autobiographical memory. In: Cohen, Gillian; Conway, Martin (eds.), *Memory in the Real World* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). New York: Psychology Press, 21–90.
- Zipfel, Frank 2010 [2005]. Autofiction. In: Herman, David; Jahn, Manfred; Ryan, Marie, Laure (Eds.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London, New York: Routledge, 36–37.

#### Films

- George, Terry 2016. *The Promise*. United States.
- Verneuil, Henri 1991. *Mayrig* [*Mother*]. France.
- Verneuil, Henri 1992. *588 rue Paradis*. France.

## ANNEXES

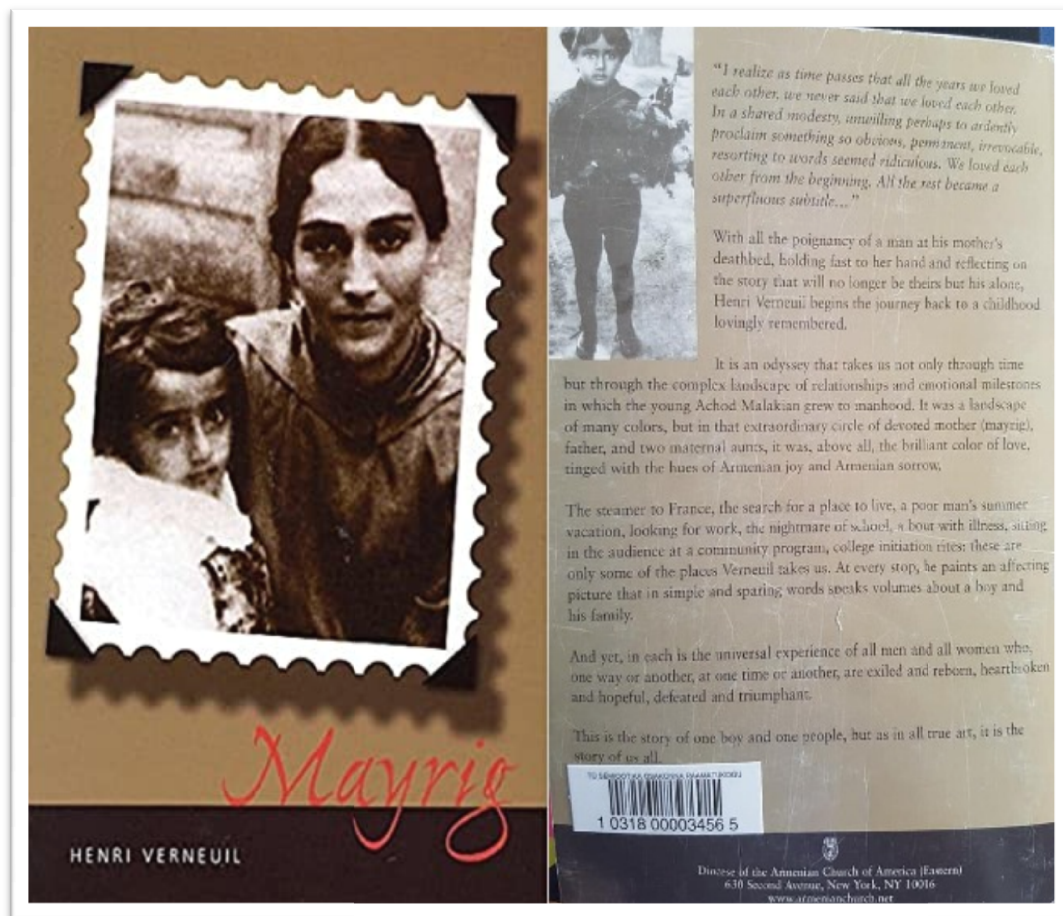


Figure 1. The cover of the English translation of *Mayrig* (2006).

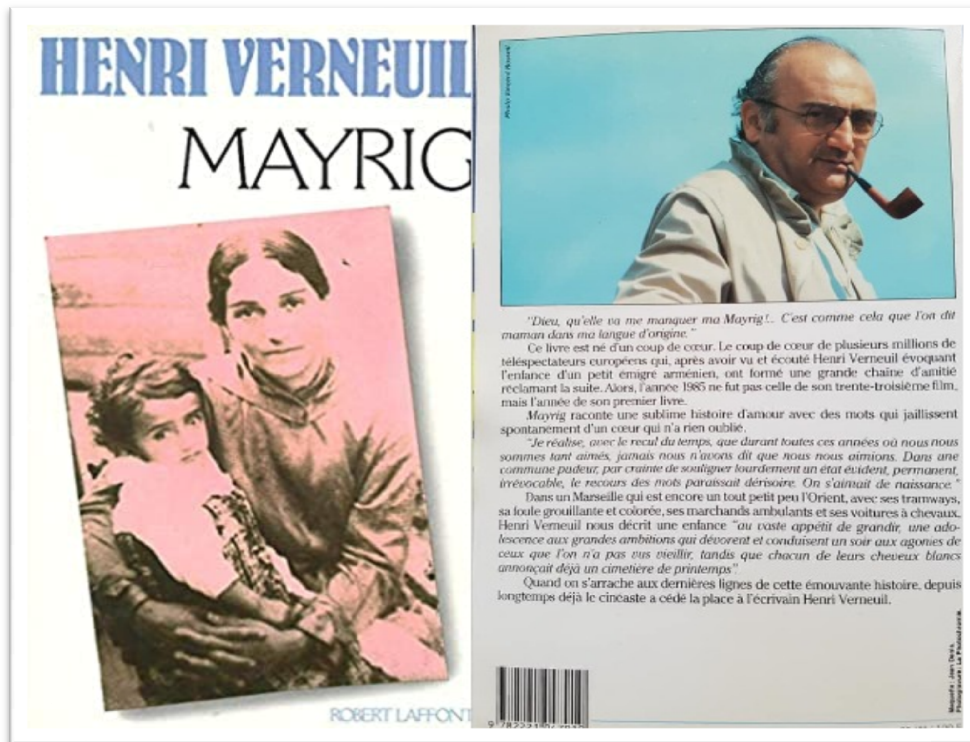


Figure 2. The cover of *Mayrig* (1985) by Robert Laffont.

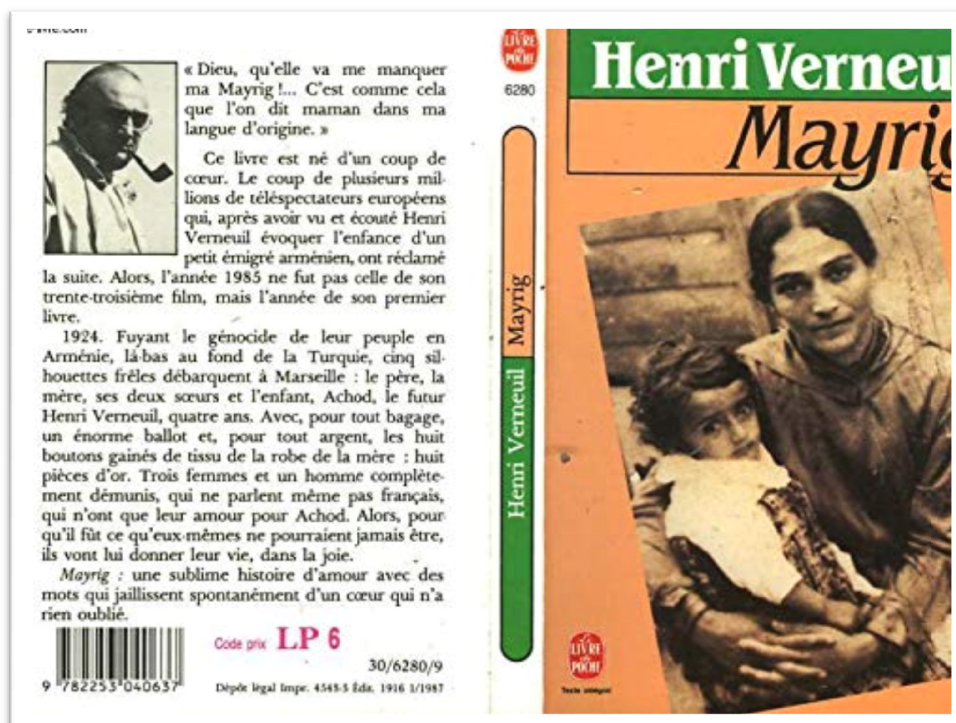


Figure 3. The cover of *Mayrig* (1987) by Le Livre de Poche.

## KOKKUVÕTE

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk oli uurida semiootilisest vaatepunktist autori-lugeja suhtlust autobiograafias. “Mayrig” (1985) on tunnustatud Prantsuse armeenia filmitegija Henri Verneuil’i autobiograafia, mis oli lugejate seas väga edukas. Ühe armeenia sisserändajate perekonna (malaklase) keerulise loo kaudu jutustas Verneuil loo kogu Prantsusmaa armeenia kogukonnast, nende traumaatilisest minevikust ja armeenlaste genotsiidist.

Magistritööl oli kaks eesmärki: esiteks näidata, kuidas autobiograafia on vahend traumaatiliste mälestuste edastamiseks. Teiseks, analüüsida sellest lähtuvalt Verneuil’i autobiograafiat “Mayrig”.

Magistritöö koosneb kahest peatükist. Esimeses peatükis uuritakse mälu-uuringute kontekstis erinevaid mälutüüpe ja nende edastamist. Peatükis käsitletakse ka autobiograafiat ja selle žanrilist eripära. Analüüsi tulemuseks on tõdemus, et autobiograafia võib lisaks isiklikele mälestustele peegeldada terve kogukonna kollektiivset mälu. Seega on Verneuil’i “Mayrig” 20. sajandi alguse Marseille armeenia kogukonna mikroajalugu.

Teises peatükis käsitletakse “Mayrigi” kui teksti. Analüüsi keskmes on “Mayrigi” kaks aspekti: arhitektooniline ja narratiivne. Arhitektoonilisest seisukohast on keskmes autobiograafia kui trükitud raamatu paratekstilised elemendid, mis on olulised autobiograafilise sõnumi paremaks mõistmiseks, kuna juba raamatu kaas häälestab lugejat teatud dialoogile autoriga. Lisaks on oluline, et autobiograafilise raamatu kaas kui semiootiliselt kontseptuaalne tutvustus esindab nii kirjastust kui autobiograafia autorit.

“Mayrigi” narratiivse aspekti analüüsimiseks on kasutatud mitut mõistet mõistevälja: alates Genette’i narratiivsetest funktsioonidest, Bahtini dialoogist kuni Lotmani tõlkekäsitluseni. Analüüs näitas, et Verneuili näidislugeja oli prantslane. Seda peegeldab asjaolu, et Verneuil kasutas oma mälestuste edastamiseks oma tulevastele lugejatele kultuurilist dialoogi ja kultuuritõlget. Kultuuritõlkelise aspekti olulisus raamatus muudab antud autobiograafia korraga isiklikuks, kogukonnalikuks ja universaalseks, mis omakorda aitab lugejal paremini mõista mälestuste nostalgilisuse ja traumaatilisuse täiendussuhet.

**Non-exclusive license to reproduce thesis and make thesis public**

I Mkrtich Mkrtchyan ,  
(*author's name*)

1. I herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright,

**Communicating memories through autobiography: A semiotic analysis of *Mayrig* by Henri Verneuil**

(*title of thesis*)

supervised by Peeter Torop and Merit Rickberg.  
(*supervisors' name*)

2. I grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the work specified in p. 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives, under the Creative Commons license CC BY NC ND 3.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright.

3. I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in p. 1 and 2.

4. I certify that granting the non-exclusive license does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

**Mkrtich Mkrtchyan**

author's name

**17/05/2021**

dd/mm/yyyy