THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY IN ARABIC LITERARY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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In recent years a current of autobiographical novels has flourished in Arabic literature. An increasing number of prose writers, including a well-known poet Maḥmūd Darwīš who published his memoirs, put down their memories giving them an interesting artistic form. Memoirs have already been published by Egyptian prose writers such as Laṭīfa Zayyāt and Raʿūf Muṣʿād, Iraqi writers, including ʿAbd al-Qādir Ḑamnābī and ʿAliyya Māmdūḥ or Lebanese writers such as Ḥālid Ziyāda; the secrets of childhood were revealed by such an outstanding author as Jordan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf.

The memoirs of those and other authors are becoming well known also outside the Arab world due to the translations of Arabic autobiographies published since 1994 in the series Mémoires de la Méditerranée.

The literary autobiography which borders on fiction and reality, the novel and the form of a diary has been gaining increasing popularity in the world; the phenomenon of such mixing of genres seems to be a kind of novelty and it is characteristic of the literature of our time.

"[...] I do not consider it a shortcoming if something is closer to a report or an advantage if something is a pure novel. Nowadays, genres get mixed up, which is inevitable", wrote the late Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert.

1 Maḥmūd Darwīš, slaught li l-nisyān; Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, Ḥamlat taftīš; awrāq šaḥṣiyya; Raʿūf Muṣʿād, Baydat al-naʿāma; ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḡamnābī, Ṭarḥiyat al-Ḡamnābī; ʿAliyya Māmdūḥ, Ḥābbat naftalīn; Ḥālid Ziyāda, Yawm al-ḫamṣa; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, Ṣirat al-madīna.

2 Płynie się zawsze do źródła, pod prąd, z prądem płynie umiecie (One should always run up rivers, against the stream, only rubish go downstream)—an interview of Adam Michnik with Zbigniew Herbert, Gazeta Wyborcza no. 179/2774, 1-2 August, 1998, p. 19.
This is the current the Arabic prose writers join with their fiction memoirs, which enrich the contemporary literature of the region. Recently, a Swedish researcher Tetz Rooke has also published an interesting work in this field: *In my Childhood. A Study of Arabic Autobiography* (Stockholm University, 1977) in which he characterizes this literary form; he specially emphasizes that the autobiography is a story marked by subjectivism and evolving in the form of a retrospection. Obviously, the authors fill in this schema with their own ideas and each of them writes in his own unique way. Arabic prose writers retain their “privacy” and they do not identify themselves entirely with the characters of their books; Rašīd al-Ḍaʿīf or Ḥamza Bogary clearly emphasize the differences between the author and the protagonist. Being aware of all the upheavals which occur in the Arab world, we can assume that the memoirs of its writers are not an easy reading. What is, however, the essence of the problems and misfortunes? The memoirs of Arabic writers show how difficult may be the fortunes of an individual in the contemporary world and how intricate are their relationships with other persons, especially with their own community. This will be the problem I would like to discuss in greater detail especially on the examples of the novels by Wāṣīnī al-ʿAraḡ (Algeria), Liānā Badr (Palestine), Ḥamza Bogary (Saudi Arabia), Rašīd al-Ḍaʿīf (Lebanon), Māḥmūd Darwīsh (Palestine), Edward al-Ḥarrāṭ (Egypt), ‘Alīyya Māmdūḥ (Iraq), and Muʾnis al-Razzāz (Jordan). As we see, the authors come from different countries and what seems to be interesting is the fact that they are persons of different religions. There are three different religious milieus: Muslim, which is shown in the majority of the books, Christian Coptic in Edward Ḥarrāṭ’s memoirs, and Christian Maronite in Rašīd al-Ḍaʿīf’s novel.

**Patriarchal family**

Since the time of Freud, childhood has been believed to fundamentally shape the later life and relationships of an adult with the

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