

## PRODUCTION CONDITIONS AND BIOGRAPHY: The notion of humanization in the historical constitution of genre

CONDIÇÕES DE PRODUÇÃO E BIOGRAFIA: A noção de humanização na constituição histórica do gênero

CONDICIONES DE PRODUCCIÓN DE BIOGRAFÍA: La noción de humanización en la constitución histórica del género

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### ABSTRACT:

This article relates the notion of production conditions, as defined by the French Discourse Analysis, and the history of the constitution of biographical genres as linguistic materiality. The aim is to understand how the production conditions, by including the subject and circumstances, and producing images about the present and the past of characters, build a notion of humanization in each moment of history, considering the main biographical texts cited by historians of the genre. Thus, we seek to verify how, despite the transparency with which the word "humanization" has been used in studies in the area of Communication, this notion is the result of imaginary projections built by ideology and based on the discursive memory of biographical and journalistic genres.

**KEYWORDS:** Humanization; Production conditions; Discourse; Biographical genres.

### Introduction

Biographical narratives – comprising several genres, such as profiles, biographies, autobiographies, obituaries, memories and travel narratives – have in common the fact that they are centered on the life story of a protagonist, from which temporal or thematic selections are made. Due to this feature, these texts are usually understood as examples of humanization, since they constitute a distinct aesthetic from the more traditional texts in the press or historiographical reports. For this reason, while the traditional texts focus on facts, numbers and statistics, in which the characters are only illustrative, in biographical narratives it is the life story of the individual that brings such information.

This perspective of humanization, considered an alternative to the traditional discourse of the press or History, may induce, however, a supposed obviousness or

transparency of the term. Nonetheless, it does not correspond to what can be materialized by language, since the subject has mastery only over part of what he/she enunciates, being challenged by ideology, in the conditions of production in which he/she finds himself/herself, as authors like Michel Pêcheux and Michel Foucault explain.

Considering it, this work aims to reflect how the different production conditions have changed the notion of humanization in biographical narratives throughout the historical constitution of the genre. It is assumed that, as an effect of meaning, humanization is the result of ideological and historical relations. In order to achieve that goal, this analysis associates the theory of French Discourse Analysis (DA) with historiographic studies on biographies.

### **The biographical subject and the production conditions**

The notion of production condition – from DA – is central to the reflection on how the senses are produced in a given historical moment. It is a notion that expands the idea of context, considering both the subject and the circumstance,

So, the situation can be thought of in its strict and broad sense. Strictly speaking, it is the circumstances of the enunciation, the here and now in speech, the immediate context. In the broad sense, the situation comprises the broader socio-historical, ideological context. (...) In practical terms, we cannot dissociate one from the other, i.e., in every language situation these contexts work together.

Production conditions include discursive memory – as the set of formulations already made on a given subject and which determine the current way of speaking – being the basis of imaginary formations on what is said or, in the case of a biography, of whom one speaks. Thus, in the conflict between being an empirical individual in the world and becoming a person of their word (ORMANEZE, 2019), *made by* words and *composed by* someone else's word (the biographer); building a history of life is also the result of ideology, materialized by history. Relocating Marx's concept, the notion of ideology for DA is not just the expression of the ruling class, but the place and the means for this domination to take place.

Therefore, the biographical subject is the result of the production conditions and the memory of the biographical genre, of everything that has already been said and built on the genre and the ways of doing it throughout history, which today are constituted as pre-built. This notion was defined by Pêcheux, based on Paul Henry's proposition, "to

designate what refers to a previous construction, exterior, but always independent, as opposed to what is 'built' by the enunciation" (PÊCHEUX, [1975] 2010:89).

If there is something pre-built on the subject that deserves to be biographed, there is also something pre-built on what needs to be said about that person. At this point, I understand the intersection of ideology, history and the notion of humanization.

### **Brief history of biography since Antiquity**

The history of biographical genres shows these texts are part of a regime in which looking at the past of the biographical subjects means aiming for a present and a future characterized by the reproduction of existing models considered valid in the past.

Dosse (2015) considers that, from Antiquity to Modernity, biography is "in absolute respect for a tradition that is organized in Antiquity around historical values; then, with Christianization, it is the religious values that spread, taking exemplary lives as a model" (pg. 123). Thus, in the definition of who is the biographical subject, there is the notion of memorable, defined by Guimarães (2002). The return to a past is done by means of a selection, which constitutes each new act of writing, not only as a memory or remembrance, but as an action of language and a new temporalization. "Present and future that are marks of the event work for a past that makes them mean. In other words, this latency of the future – that, in the event, projects meaning – is meaningful because the event traces a past moment as something memorable" (GUIMARÃES, 2002:12).

The emergence of a biographical narrative, as an enunciative event, is not marked in time, but, creating a difference in its own order, it constitutes a temporality, which makes the past come out of indifference and becomes an emerging discourse in the present. Therefore, the past is not a point in time, it is a memory.

In a biographical narrative, values, people, characteristics and events are taken back, putting them in a new relationship with the past, besides projecting a future, either to those who come into contact with these texts, or to their own memory about the biographical subject. Therefore, it is not only a matter of returning to the past in a chronological way, but somehow it also assigns meaning to it, and inserting the subject into a network of formulations.

The history of biography in the Western world, according to Dosse (2015) and Burke (1997), begins with excerpts from (re)memorable life stories that, in Ancient Greece, follow the development of Philosophy.

The creation of a life story becomes a way of particularizing an experience, gaining meaning when associated with a proper name. That is because, until texts by Isocrates (436-338 B.C.) and Xenophon (431-354 B.C.) appeared in the 4th century B.C.,

The context of the Greek city was not favorable to the development of the genre [biography], because in the funeral eulogies that would have been propitious to it, the speakers could not mention the proper names of soldiers killed in combat. Only the collective identity of citizens should be invoked. The conflicts narrated by Greek historians (...) are undoubtedly dotted by heroes whose value we can assess in the reports; but they do not cause curiosity just for that, appearing only as actors of a historical process that goes beyond them and constitutes the exclusive target of the historian. (DOSSE, 2015:124)

The fact of not naming the subject of whom one speaks does not put the individual in a condition of existence, of a name and a subject figuring as memory, placing, then, the historical fact as memorable, but not its actors. The proper name, as Guimarães (2002) explains, operates in the process of social identification, "People are not people in themselves. The meaning of the proper name constitutes them, to a certain extent. Meaning constitutes the world we live in. And it constitutes it while producing social identifications that are the foundation of the individual as a subject" (GUIMARÃES, 2002:41). The fact that there is a proper name links history and the individual, constituting this person as a subject, who has a story to be told. Without the proper name, there is no biographical subject, because there is no particularization, by language, of an individual from the empirical world.

In this sense, texts by Isocrates and Xenophon, being the first to cite proper names, according to historians such as Momigliano (1971), Loraux (1981) and Dosse (2015), also represent the emergence of the biographical subject. The relationship between proper and biographical names is not just a linguistic matter of naming someone, but a way of assigning meaning and identity to the subject and to the subject-reader.

Although they focus on characters rather than groups, the first biographical narratives bear similarities with the action of talking about public life rather than private life. It is illustrated by the fact that, in the texts written by Isocrates and Xenophon, the focus is on "reporting on the political life of their characters, *leaving their private lives in the shadows*" (DOSSE, 2015:124, author's emphasis). This way of making an excerpt from the past constitutes not only as an institution of the biographical genre, but as the way to choose what should be made memorable in the history of a Greek man, i.e., his public life.

As an experimentation of what would later be the biography, these texts are called in Greece as ecomium and produced as compliments to be recited at the time of burial. "Isocrates conceals the prince's setbacks<sup>1</sup> and the violent way in which he found death, in order not to cloud the image of his hero for posterity" (DOSSE, 2015:125). Xenophon's texts follow the same line, as they "seek to appreciate the qualities and glory of the missing king<sup>2</sup>" (MOMIGLIANO, 1971:76).

After that, throughout history, the biographical genres will constitute a pendulum movement, in which subjects and facts, public and private life alternate, back off and limit themselves, meaning not only the past, but the moment of their writing and the perspective they had of the future, from the production conditions.

Xenophon's incursion into the genre not only promotes the specification of the "memorable men" of his time – like Socrates and King Cyrus – but today he also places himself among the "memorable men" of Antiquity, especially when rescuing the past of the biographical genre. These early Greek biographers are so important that Xenophon texts, for example, are part of few reports – along with the Platonic dialogues – that tell who Socrates was (or would have been), because, even being one of the greatest names in Philosophy, he left no written records.

I would like to stress once again the importance of the proper name in the constitution of a biographical gesture when remembering Socrates. Mentioning him in the texts, associating actions with a proper name, gives him life and particularizes certain actions, such as the description of its sentence to death by poisoning. When it comes with a proper name, the fact moves from the general scope and is approached as memorable, not only for what happened, but for the individual who experienced the fact (or would have experienced it...).

In Antiquity, the focus on those whose life deserved a biography emerges from a production condition that suggests "preventing a man's past from being forgotten over time," as the historian Herodotus says (*apud* DOSSE, 2015:126). In this statement, there is "the past of a person," which demonstrates the relationship between biography and things that deserve to be known. This relationship is also marked by interdictions – as it occurs with names and, therefore, biographies banned or prevented by dictatorships –

<sup>1</sup> The passage refers to Evagoras (410-374 B.C.), King of Cyprus. The text focuses on the conflicts overcome and the achievements of the government, presenting the character as someone protected by God. It leaves aside any mention of defeats, including the fall of power.

<sup>2</sup> This is King Cyrus (424-401 B.C.), called "The Young," killed in battle at the age of 23. Xenophon's text was called *Ciropedia* or *The Education of Cyrus*.

and by silencing, which, according to Orlandi (1993), works as a policy of meaning that is defined "by the fact that, when saying something, we necessarily delete other possible and more undesirable meanings, in a given discursive situation" (pg. 73).

As Foucault ([1971] 2004) would say, it is not anyone who can say anything anywhere, it is not about anyone who can write either. The "past of a person" is, in fact, the past of those who are now considered "memorable people" and what, the one who writes the text, due to the production conditions and ideology, makes it count as a past. In Antiquity, the purpose of such texts was to mark those who should not be forgotten, choose what posterity should know and keep about certain individuals. In this sense, the title of one of Xenophon's most important works is emblematic: "Socrates' Memorable Sayings and Deeds."

As Foucault ([1972-1973] 2015) says, at this point there is a whole "biographical archive that is constituted," saying how individuals should be and how they should act. It is also worth remembering that, since that period, the writing of many biographies maintained a financial relationship between biographers and biographical subject, who often requested them. In many cases, having your life story told, recorded and, therefore, marked for posterity, went through a financial relationship in which the person, whose biography would be written, and wished to be memorable, paid for it. The funding relationship between these patrons of the biography and those of whom they wrote biographies has even caused the genre to be considered minor by many historians.

As a discursive event, the emergence of the biographical narrative does not fail to affect the imaginary formations about who the subject is, presenting itself, at each moment, as the materiality of the notion of humanization. In these early Greek biographical texts, biographers "did not explore the sources at Alexander the Great's home, for example, but the signs of heaven on the day of his birth." (VILAS BOAS, 2002:33). On the other hand, it offers clues about the principle of two features generally associated with the biographical subjects that, as a sense effect, guarantee their notoriety and relevance: the idea of fatalism and extraordinariness, by which these memorable people would be doomed to success and would, by some of their characteristics, be superior to the common order of most human beings.

Plutarch lived in Rome, in the first century of the Christian era. He was considered one of the greatest biographers of Antiquity and his works influenced authors and politicians centuries ahead, among them was Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), who considered him "his model and carried in his backpack, in all the voyages of his great

adventure, the volumes of *Parallel Lives*" (DOSSE, 2015:127). The book to which the author refers is a compendium of 51 biographies of Greek and Roman men, considered by Plutarch as "distinguished men."

Dosse (2015) also reminds us that historians, until the Renaissance, will see Plutarch's work as a must for the understanding of the classical period and a kind of cult to the memorable ones. The model discourse and the emphasis on moralizing aspects are clear when one notices the structure of the work: writing occurs in pairs, always comparing what would be, by ideological functioning, the merits and defects of a Greek and a Roman.

The production of these biographical discourses in Antiquity is not only marked by the approach to memorable people, but also by the pre-constructed things about these characters. There were few sources of information about these lives. Therefore, the reports were written based on speeches about the biographical subjects, in a double process of reaffirmation. At the same time that it is constituted from a memory, by materializing it in written text (to which few had access at the time), the biography is sacralized. In addition, there is an effect of truth to what once circulated orally, through the "mobile space of divisions, disjunctions, displacement, resumes and conflicts of regularization." (PÊCHEUX, [1983] 2010:56).

The way of saying, in the constitutive relation with the discursive memory, resumes the presence of the dominant discourses, what, from the position in which the biographer finds himself/herself, is now determinant of what the subject's history really is. This is seen, for example, in the analysis made by Dosse (2005:131) on Plutarch's work,

What Plutarch does is not so much the praise of this or that individual, but the glorification of a number of virtues embodied in the lives that matter. What he follows is not the evolution of the *hero's* character throughout existence, but the way in which virtues are tested in different contexts. (Author's emphasis)

What is perceived in this excerpt is the concern to build a moral model for a given generation, based on what is considered virtuous. Even though the passage implies that Plutarch's path is not the "evolution of character," the construction of this moral model, repeated in constant enunciations, creates the representation of a hero, to whom the different position-subjects and production conditions will make it mean different things at each moment. Thus, the hero of Antiquity is the intrepid king, the fearless soldier, the philosopher. In the Middle Ages, this hero is the saint and, in Modernity, the one responsible for the limits of nations. In the same way, this hero, in the biographical space



of contemporaneity, establishes himself between the moral-religious discourse, the economic success and the cult to the personalities that are part of the spectacle.

In order to establish himself as a true discourse, Suetonius (69-114 A.D.), another Roman biographer of Antiquity, sought in the historiographical methods the credibility of his speech. To be in truth, to tell the truth, as Foucault ([1971] 2001) would say. Suetonius seeks to "show he always wants to obtain authentic information from all possible sources, which brings him closer to historical research" (DOSSE, 2015:134). Nevertheless, there is still a concern with a writing model "that keeps the reader in constant attention and is a source of identity projection" (DOSSE, 2015:134). Thus, we notice the overlapping of the biographical narrative with History and Literature was determined from production conditions that not only projected a model of human being, but also considered discourses of truth at that given moment.

There is also a clear relationship between political power and biographical narrative. This is revealed, for example, in Suetonius's writing, when he starts to blow the whistle on some people who until then were untouchable. An example is how he writes about Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.), to whom he dedicates pages to talk about what would be considered sexual aberrations and cruelties. It leads us to believe he "writes about the past of Rome with the intention of clarifying and supporting the political game (...) of his time, in which he himself participates as an actor" (DOSSE, 2015:135). Suetonius, besides being a biographer, was also a general who led battles over territories.

### **Religion as a condition of production in the Middle Ages**

The relationship between biographical discourse and power is even more evident in the Middle Ages, when the so-called "hagiographies," narratives about the lives of saints, emerge and thrive. As Almeida (2000) points out, in texts like it – which directly affect the formation of Christian-Catholic ideology – "the extraordinary and the miraculous are narrated under the pretext of a purpose, whose meanings are given in advance to the reader. (...) The narrated episode reaches, besides the purpose of establishing a norm of faith and practice, the (in)formative purpose." (ALMEIDA, 2000:27).

In this movement, the emergence of another pole that holds the truth is perceived: religion. A hagiographer was not expected to reveal the truth about the characters by the credibility of their sources or their historiographic commitment, but by verifiable and plausible elements by faith, an element that attributed verisimilitude to any miraculous report,



By avoiding a contextual approach, which will often allow the reader to perceive the event in the saint's life was something commonplace at the time, the author more easily grants certain remarkableness to the life of the character of whom he writes. (ORMANEZE, 2015:45)

Again, there is a concern about what can serve as a model, introducing the relationship between biographical narrative and identification. As Almeida (2000) explains, the so-called "subject-reader" of hagiographic narratives, when assuming the position of a so-called "subject-faithful," seeks a specular relationship between his/her life and the path reported about the saint. There is even, in the case of converted one, the possibility of an identification with what is not yet, but it may come to be, since many hagiographic narratives focus on demonstrating the conversion and the change from a life considered profane to another one, considered as holy. Reading these narratives "is to assume the subject-faithful position and, at the same time, aspire to the rise to the subject-holy position" (ALMEIDA, 2000:109).

As part of these reports, he dedicated himself to narrate the miracles performed by the saint after his/her death; signs were presented that, in that context of faith, they constituted themselves as evidence that someone was "in truth." This medieval view of the biography genre remained intact, as a practice and as a memory, for centuries, even after the Renaissance, when many of the previous values were rethought and refuted.

Clifford (1962:10), when making a historical review of biographies in England, says biographers, even when they did not deal with the life of a saint, until the end of the 18th century, they had the clear purpose of building up the image of a character, according to Christian ethics, "By describing a truly holy person, their works would succeed or fail to the extent that they taught Christian virtue and make the vacillating faith stronger. If, in the past, the power of the Church was determinant in social relations and, together with political power, it is constituted as an ideological apparatus (ALTHUSSER, 1990); hagiography/biography constitutes itself as a rhetorical weapon, capable of strengthening such power, by offering model and instructional speeches on how to live.

In the same way parameters were set for hagiographic writing, it became inconceivable to write an autobiography in the medieval period. "Self-writing is *almost always* repudiated, because holiness presupposes humility, the disappearance of the ego to make room for the other or others, who take over the figure of the saint after his/her death" (DOSSE, 2015:139, author's emphasis).

This author's quote considers a failure in this determination to assume the "disappearance of the ego." The "almost always" to which he refers opens us to think of constructions like *Confessions of St. Teresa*, an autobiography in which the encounter of a woman (Teresa d'Ávila) with God is described and which was later transformed into a canonical text. A person is only holy when he/she is described by somebody else or when his/her autobiographical account is able to relate the encounter of the human with the divine. In this case, this report is inscribed in the set of texts delimited as possible and accepted by the Catholic Church.

Thus, using the set of imaginary formations that define the places "A and B attribute to each other, the image they make of their own place and the place of the other" (PÊCHEUX, [1969] 1990:82), we notice "hagiography presupposes, on the one hand, a community of believers to which the author addresses and, on the other hand, a hierarchical relationship" (DOSSE, 2015:140).

Hagiographic discourse circulates throughout the Middle Ages, but that is not all. Even today, narratives about the lives of saints have social penetration and are part of the imaginary and discourses on morality. Ultimately, the most widely read and translated text in the world, from which power relations have been established that not only set up, but also pervade the entire Christian era, is also made up of biographical features: the Bible. It occurs especially in the section dedicated to the life of Jesus Christ, which is endowed with numerous biographical references, allegories and historical devices. Here, it is necessary to think about what has been classified as memorable in the life of Christ, being considered official, while so many other texts have been excluded from canonical references, relegated to the category of apocrypha.

As a factory of memorable people and heroes, the history of the genre goes through the end of the Middle Ages, giving rise to the so-called "chivalrous biography," which "celebrates as heroes the knights whose social enterprise begins to challenge the primacy of clerics and, often, to contest it" (DOSSE, 2015:152). At a time of great oral tradition, many of these texts will be based less on statements or documents and more on what was socially known about certain characters,

Unlike the saint in hagiography, the individual here is not the bearer of the divine voice, but his epic breath owes much to the attention of God, who at all times is his protector and his armor, allowing him to overcome obstacles along the way. For the biographer, the knight is an elect of God whose path is all marked out by painful trials. He must face intrigue and betrayal, having countless physical and psychic wounds. (DOSSE, 2015:153)

At this time, the influences of a feeling of individualism, one of the central features of the Renaissance, begin to appear, which, among other characteristics, makes the cult of the "great people" of Antiquity to be reborn, but it also carries out a movement in what constitutes itself as a "hero."

### **The cult of great people: biography in the revolutionary period**

A good example of the resumption of the construction of the national hero and individualism through biography is in the work of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), who wrote a biography of the Duke of Lucca, Castruccio Castracani (1281-1328). This short text, about 20 pages long, was often republished in the same volume and following *The Prince* (1513). If the Italian writer's masterpiece is a treatise on the maintenance of political power by the monarchs, the biography he wrote of Castracani aims to "distinguish between the good and the bad Prince, showing that undeniable moral qualities can acquire negative value when they are poorly assimilated. (...) Factual truth matters little, dissipating before the demands of demonstrating the values to be promoted" (DOSSE, 2015:157).

In the same direction of the production of evaluative senses about the subject, in France, King Louis XIV (1638-1715) has a historiographer capable of spreading the works of the reign. More than a chronicler of the time, "the monarch's life projects multiply to the extent that he alone embodies state power." (DOSSE, 2015:158). In the endeavor to personalize and be himself the power, the biography is one of the artifices used by the monarch to give meaning to the authoritarianism that marked his reign, one of the longest in European history, lasting 72 years.

Paul Pellisson (1624-1693) became the king's official biographer, giving rise to *Histoire of Louis XIV* (1676). Martin (1981) narrates Pellisson's negotiation with the king: the proposal was to convince the monarch that the biographer was necessary and that the record of his life story would succeed in overcoming the ephemerality of time, "For greater credibility, it is not the case of giving him [the king] magnificent epithets and praise, which, by the way, he deserves; rather, it is convenient to pluck these compliments and epithets out of the reader's mouth, by exposing the facts themselves" (*apud* MARTIN, 1981:50).

As a discourse, the biographical report is subject to the instances of constitution, formulation and circulation. In its constitution, not only the author's position, but also the imaginary formations and the effects of what is pre-built – in the memory about a certain subject –, and the features that place him in the category of "memorable person"

come into play. The formulation includes ideological determination, which challenges the subject-author, promoting the selection, partially conscious, of what should be said. In the circulation is the ability, as a discourse, to appear as memory and to produce senses in the speakers.

From this perspective, there is the questioning of the places occupied by the king, his subjects and the biographer, who, in this case, acts as a mediator between these images, since he not only writes from them, but, in his writing process, seeks to reinforce or adapt them to monarchical-authoritarian interests.

This is the logic of the places where someone is and, from it, the characters to be biographed emerge. As a way of reinforcing the national identity, in 1789 illuminists and revolutionaries also found their biographical subject, although with a difference in what appears as the sustaining ballast of these sayings about the past, "Great people come first and heroes come last. I call great people those who have overcome themselves in what is useful and pleasant. Provincial looters are just heroes" (VOLTAIRE *apud* FABRE, 1999:239-240).

As a pole of power, Napoleon Bonaparte, when he took over the post-coup government of 1799, "soon understood the need to create his own icon (...). He takes so much care of his own representations and deeds so much it that, if necessary, he invents them" (DOSSE, 2015:163). At the time, biographical narratives were common, demonstrating that "the great person is the one who can match his/her personal determination with the collective will of a time" (pg. 169). Therefore, we notice that when making the story, the biographical report, being consulted, (re)read and taken as reference, makes it possible to keep certain discourses and place others (not only from some characters' point of view, but also according to some positions, postures and facts) in a position of silence. Thus, the memorable takes the stand of what emerges from the past to, among so many others, take the shape of the present.

In the 18th century, the "consolidation of Capitalism and the bourgeois order, contemporary subjectivity begins to assert itself" (ARFUCH, 2010:28). It was very important in the constitution of biographical genres, "through various forms of autographic writing" (ARFUCH, 2010:28), such as confessions, autobiographies, intimate diaries, memories and correspondences.

From the chronological point of view, it was only at the end of the 18th century that the history of biography took another turn as content, although the link to power relations was kept.

In 1791, James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* was published. This book continues to be relaunched and deserves the attention of literary critics. The biographical subject is one of the most important literary critics of the time, having also worked as a journalist in England. From the content point of view, in the biography written by Boswell, the differences lie in the resumption of historiographic discourse as a domain of truth.

According to Vilas Boas (2002), among the innovations, there is the fact that the biographer, in a kind of metapoetic of the biography, produces reflections on how to narrate a life, expose the reader to the obstacles of the investigation and include letters, documents, talks and interviews with Johnson. This is an attempt to make the biography demonstrate its value as a historical report, including in the text the source of information. Such values coincide with the truth effect that Journalism begins to produce in the same period.

### **Biographical subject in Modernity: other powers**

The historical path presented so far shows a relationship established between the biographical work placed on the threshold of History and Literature. For this reason, in many situations, historians considered biography to be an inferior genre, as it was not limited to disciplinary domains, which would guarantee proof of truth. From the 18th and 19th centuries on, with the rise of the modern press, biography found another field to confront or align with: Journalism.

The 18th century in Europe coincides with the emergence of newspapers and magazines, which, in addition to exposing opinions, present reports on facts. The so-called biographical news, used to precede literary criticism in the incipient segments and cultural periodicals, appears in these periodicals. These short texts presented biographical data about the author of the books reviewed, in order to show the reader to whom they referred and what their features were as human beings (DOSSE, 2015). In any case, it is a kind of legitimation discourse, allowing the writer to be included in the realms of truth, according to characteristics valued in the position in which the newspaper and the readers were placed. At the same time, in France, a historian named Jules Michelet (1798-1874) collected, for *Le Peuple* magazine, reports from people from all over the country.

The popularization of press vehicles, requiring daily production, immediate consumption and the beginning of the insertion of industrial practices in journalistic production, from the 19th century on, led to an increase in the publication of life stories

in the gazettes, especially the most popular publications, which saw in these genres a way to attract readers curious about the way of life of the bourgeoisie and people considered distinguished.

However, this process has given rise to a certain discredit of the biographical text among historians. Dosse (2015) recalls that "the 19th century, the century of History, was not conducive to the full development of erudite biographies. An inferior and despised genre, biographical writing is left to amateurs" (pg. 195). On the other hand, school discourse starts to adopt biography as one of the ways of teaching. The aim was to strengthen the nationalist discourse through the cult of people elevated to the category of heroes.

During this period, in the United States, the so-called short biographies (WEINBERG, 1992), a predecessor of the genre known today with a profile, began to be published in the periodic press. This fact and the immediate production of Journalism have caused historians – increasingly concerned with the discourse of truth and the validation of their information – to move away from the genre. As an example, in France, *Revue Historique*, the reference organ of historians at the time, dedicates only 8.6% of its content to biographies (DOSSE, 2015). These factors made the biography become "the place of refuge for the story, of the purely anecdotal tale, with no other ambition than to enchant and distract" (DOSSE, 2015:181).

It is also noticed that the disciplinary bias, according to the Foucaultian concept, will mark intellectual production in the 20th century, i.e., both Journalism and History and, therefore, doing biography, set themselves in search of conditions to enter in the field of truth. At the same time that History is moving away from making biographies in this period, Journalism is approaching it, proposing that its methods would guarantee the truth, as capable of registering and reporting reality in an objective way.

In the United States, country that inspired the Brazilian press in terms of configuration in the 20th century, the practice of publishing texts about people, famous or not, began in the early 19th century, when American Journalism discovered the interest of readers in one of the sub-genres of biography, the obituary, a kind of descendant of the Greek commendation.

The success of the obituaries, the growth of individualism and the need for industrial and daily production by the press, forcing it to make new and constant selections from reality, caused the biographical narratives to be often published by newspapers and magazines, mainly in the format of profiles. One of the first names

remembered as authors of these narratives in the United States is journalist Joseph Mitchell (1908-1906), hired to work for *The New Yorker* magazine in 1934.

Mitchell implanted a new type of individual as a character: not only the "distinguished ones" and the "great one" of the already consolidated biographical narratives, but the unusual unknown human being, capable of producing humanization and identification through the truth effect of Journalism and by realistic literary writing. Here, humanization refers to another effect of meaning: not the model or formative discourse, but that on everyday life and the facts experienced in ordinary life by most people.

The two profiles written by Mitchell most remembered and mentioned today are those that, after deserving space in the magazine, gained another materiality, the book, and continue to be republished: they are two profiles, originally from 1942 and 1964, of Joe Gould, a New York bohemian, concerned with writing the history of humanity. A similar fact occurs with another profile writer, Lincoln Barnett (1909-1979), who worked for *Life* magazine between 1937 and 1946. The journalist's most widespread text is *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (1948), in which he draws a profile of the scientist, right after the atomic bomb, dropped in August 1945 by the United States on Hiroshima, Japan, during World War II.

These facts make us reflect on two aspects: first, the ephemeral character of Journalism causes these texts to be lost in the same proportion as the periodicity of the vehicles in which they were published. Moreover, there is the fact that the instances of power are able to determine who is "in" and who will be "part of" history, having the narrative of their life constantly reconsulted and even retold. In order to obtain visibility of the biographical archive, it is also necessary to find yourself in the place where certain aspects of the past can be (re)circulated. The production of a biography, no matter how much it may be placed as a purpose to eternalize a subject, will only have such an effect if the practices of reading and accessing to the archive include it in the plan of recollections.

In Europe, the multiplicity of movements and theoretical-philosophical tendencies emerging in Modernity caused, in Dosse's (2015) view, other movements in relation to biographical narratives, ranging from denial to adaptation to other fields, such as Philosophy and Psychoanalysis.

Once again, it highlights the game of imaginary formations and production conditions to produce subjects of speech. Marxism, for example, by highlighting class



struggle, does not reserve a significant place for logic and individualizing narratives. Marxist-inspired literary critic, George Lukács, dedicated a chapter to the biographical genre in his 1947 work "The historical novel". He thus produced a kind of aporia for biographical genres, as he considered these narratives unable to "show the great objective social relations and their reflexes in science and art," since literature must, "on the contrary, rigorously precept the need to describe the great objective relations" (LUKÁCS, [1947] 1977:349).

What Dosse (2015) classifies as intellectual biography, from aporetic criticism to biographical narrative, has a voice in several philosophical groups, "the person of ideas lets himself be read by their publications, not by their daily life" (DOSSE, 2015:361). The most expressive case is Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who published instructions contrary to the writing of his biography, saying that it was useless to inform which data about life should be taken into account. According to him, if there was any biographical work, it should "insist on the fact that I have always asked them not to occupy themselves in my life, only in my work." (*apud* DOSSE, 2015:361).

French historian Jean Maitron sees biographical narrative from another perspective, as a possibility of resistance. In 1955, he had the idea of launching a dictionary, which would give rise to a series, called *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français*, with 43 volumes launched from 1966 to 1994. There are about 110,000 biographical notes, with life stories, since the French Revolution. Historian Claude Pannetier, who took over the organization of the volumes after Maitron's death in 1987, states the dictionary is made up of "important, scientifically stabilized biographies and shorter notes, which keep the memory of a name." (PANNETIER, 1998:169). Once again, there is a way of reaffirming and projecting the idea of biography as a portrait, a relationship that proposes itself as transparent between life and the narrative.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014) are outstanding in defining other paths for biographical writing, each adapting it to the field of their theories. Dosse (2015) recalls Freud and his colleagues dedicated some debate sessions to the study of biographical narratives. The Father of Psychoanalysis has also devoted himself, from historical accounts, to writing a version of the life story of the biblical character Moses. Freud finds himself fascinated by history, looking for explanations for anti-Semitism during World War II (FREUD, [1939] 1975).

Temporality emerges as a focus, showing that facts do not depend on a chronological succession, which opposes past and present, but are linked by coexistence. Before that, in 1933, Freud, in partnership with U.S. Ambassador, William Bullit (1891-1967), also used the narrative about the life of President Thomas Wilson, to address and apply the analytical categories under development at the time. The work is now even considered one of the introductory forms to Freudian thought (SOCHA, 2018). Freud's relationship with biographical writing came to light recently, when unpublished manuscripts were found which – as it is speculated – belong to the original version of the work on Wilson, whose publication was only authorized by his widow with suppressions. Even with the withdrawal of passages, Freud and Bullit had to wait for the woman's death, in 1965, to publish the book, mainly by mentioning topics related to sexual matters, such as homosexuality.

Sartre, on the other hand, uses the biography to spread the existentialist principles. "Sartre therefore values the reflective part of the return to meaning by the person who thinks about themselves." (DOSSE, 2015:231). Thus, the French philosopher published biographies of writers such as Charles Baudelaire (1947) and Jean Genet (1952). In addition, he left three volumes unfinished about Gustave Flaubert's life. In an attempt to talk about lives, Sartre exposed the philosophical perspective, "each event gives us back the reflection of that unbreakable totality that the subject went from the first day to the last one." (SARTRE [1947], 2000:223).

In the bulge of the New History movement, Le Goff also proposed a biographical writing, producing a narrative about the life of St. Louis (1214-1270), published in a book in 1996, and considered the "return of French historiography to biography." (SANTOS, 2001). However, the objectives are less centered on the biographical subject. "The biography only attracts me when I can (...) gather documents about the character capable of clarifying something about a society, a civilization, an era." (LE GOFF, 2003:133).

### **The 20th century press and the Brazilian biographical narrative**

Now considering Brazil and the production conditions that make biographical narrative emerge, people like Joel Silveira (1918-2007), one of the main reporters in the history of Brazilian Journalism, have also dedicated themselves to write biographical narratives, notably in magazines such as *Dom Casmurro*, *Diretrizes* and *O Cruzeiro*, from the 1930s to the 1960s. Silveira produced texts about well-known people, such as Getúlio Vargas (1882-1954) and Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953), and also anonymous people,

although the latter were excluded from a gathering done about the journalist's work, in recent anthologies published in book format.

The biographical space in the Brazilian press was, like all journalistic genres, quite influenced by Journalism in the United States. Thus, it is essential to resume the importance of American names that characterized the production of profiles from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe, names associated with the *New Journalism* movement.

Talese and Wolfe, among others, have worked in magazines such as *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*, in which they have also dedicated themselves to writing profiles. At that time, such journalists influenced the style of the texts produced in Brazilian magazines and newspapers, especially the magazine *Realidade*, published from 1966 to 1976, and during the early years of *Jornal da Tarde*, founded in 1966 and extinct in 2012.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the space dedicated to profiles in the press and the appreciation of biographical narratives, especially in books, contributed to make the genre well-known. Among the facts that prove this recognition is the journalist Robert Caro receiving the Pulitzer Prize, the main one for Communication in the United States. Until 1975, in the biography category, this award had only granted the title to historians,

The release of *The Power broker: Robert Moses and the fall of New York* (1975) (...) generated enthusiastic comments in the American media. His first work in biography was acclaimed as the one that best expressed the historian's connection with the artist. (...) Caro used literary resources to support the chronology of the urbanist's life as he lived it. Based on unpublished documents and with a compelling narrative, he portrayed the time as much as Moses himself. (VILAS BOAS, 2002:24)

Until that period, authors working with biographies in book format were generally experts in some area. They decided to write about someone who had contributed to the field of knowledge, of which both, biographer and biographical subject, were part. According to Oates (1990), biographers from that period were more interested in offering a new interpretation about their specialty. Thus, the concern was generally less with life and more with the work. "For these authors, the biography basically serves as an exhibition of their own erudition. The result is a poor biography, which may not even be a good story or a good review." (OATES, 1990:12).

Currently, both in Brazil and in the rest of the Western world, most biographers come from Journalism (VILAS BOAS, 2008). They are usually the most experienced reporters who, if they are in the newsrooms, work as special reporters, or they are those

who, after working for years in newspapers, are now dedicating themselves only to produce books, biographies and opinion texts.

### Thinking about the biographical genre as a place of (dis)encounters

The story of a biographical subject is always poorly told. However, it is not about the inability of the one who writes it, nor is it related to the materials and resources to which he/she had access. This incompleteness of the biographical narrative is derived, on the one hand, from the multiplicity to which every subject places himself and, on the other hand, from the gap between the object or individual and the word, i.e., its sign. To be subject is to be multiple, to transmute you always into another one, and that is the act of language to which one submits oneself in writing.

The biographical narrative is related to an effect of completeness and closure. To narrate a life is to give life to a narrative. As such, it will produce meanings that it is the subject's history, the more it manages to produce effects that the entire life is told and the less it is subject twists and turns or contestations, either by the later discovery of historical facts, by the lack of proof of what is told or the registration of a biographer and the reader in different ideological positions. Thus, a biography is placed as a point for articulating a writing "of" history only if it is considered as a meaning / reframing of the past, in an endless movement of meanings between the lives of the biographical subject, the biographer and the readers.

Writing is questioned as always autobiographical, materializing meanings from a subject-author to a subject-interlocutor. Thus, the identification that enables the idea of humanization becomes more an evidence of subjects who write and read in the same ideological position, producing senses from memory.

In general terms, the biographical narrative, as genre and hybrid subgenres, mobilizing narrative and investigative techniques from different fields, is included, beyond the constitutive power relations of discourse, in the principle of discipline, as defined by Foucault ([1970] 2004), i.e., as one of the internal processes that organize the sayings, order and dictate their circulation.

In each moment of history, according to the production conditions, the biographical narrative delimits a possible field of truth, as well as the methods, the propositions considered true, the rules that define it and make it acceptable within a given field, as a space of truth and ways to humanize a story.

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**RESUMO:**

Este artigo relaciona a noção de condições de produção, conforme definida pela Análise de Discurso Francesa, e a história da constituição dos gêneros biográficos como materialidade linguística. O objetivo é compreender de que maneira as condições de produção, ao comportarem o sujeito e as circunstâncias, produzindo imagens sobre o presente e o passado de personagens, constroem uma noção de humanização em cada momento da história, considerando os principais textos biográficos citados pelos historiadores do gênero. Assim, busca-se verificar como, apesar da transparência com que a palavra "humanização" tem sido usada em estudos da área de Comunicação, essa noção é fruto de projeções imaginárias construídas pela ideologia e sedimentadas na memória discursiva dos gêneros biográficos e jornalísticos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Humanização; Condições de produção; Discurso; Gêneros biográficos.

**RESUMEN:**

Este artículo relaciona la noción de condiciones de producción, según definida por el Análisis de Discurso Francés, y la historia de la constitución de los géneros biográficos como materialidad lingüística. El objetivo es comprender de qué modo las condiciones de producción, al comportar al sujeto y las circunstancias, produciendo imágenes sobre el presente y el pasado de personajes, construyen una noción de humanización en cada momento de la historia, considerando los principales textos biográficos citados por historiadores del género. De este modo, se busca verificar cómo, a pesar de la transparencia con que la palabra «humanización» ha venido siendo utilizada en estudios del área de Comunicación, esa noción es fruto de proyecciones imaginarias construidas por la ideología y sedimentadas en la memoria discursiva de los géneros biográficos y periodísticos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Humanización; Condiciones de producción; Discurso; Géneros biográficos.