

The Punctum in History: Representing the M(other)'s Death in Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*

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"The Punctum in History: Representing the M(other)'s Death in Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*"

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Abstract: This article aims to discuss how Handke's autobiographical narrative, *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* (1972), stages the writer's literary project through a neutral account of his mother's suicide. Telling the story of his mother, who witnessed the Second World War and the Nazi regime, Handke narrates the traumatic history of an Austrian town along with his own suffering. Concentrating on his attempt at a distanced language and his questioning of history as an objective fact, the article suggests that Handke's perception of death and mourning parallels his understanding of the acts of writing and reading. Drawing particularly on Barthes's concept of *punctum* and Lacan's concept of *tuché* and engaging in Handke's representation of personal and political sides of the history of a European town in an unusual period, the article speculates on the uncanny effect of reading, which effectively turns identification into transformation.

Hivren DEMIR ATAY

The Punctum in History: Representing the M(other)'s Death in Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*

A Sorrow Beyond Dreams (1972) is the Austrian writer Peter Handke's personal account of his mother's suicide. Handke starts writing his memories of his mother seven weeks after her funeral as a means of self-therapy. His attempt at a Freudian work of mourning through writing, however, is not limited to the account of a personal sorrow. Telling the story of his mother, who witnessed the Second World War and the Nazi regime, Handke narrates the traumatic history of an Austrian town along with his own suffering. Therefore, *A Sorrow* presents both Handke's perception of his mother's suicide and the disastrous effects of the Second World War on his mother. However, *A Sorrow* complicates psychological and historical representation of death leading us to reflect on the two important dimensions of Handke's literary project.

Firstly, Handke problematizes thematic representation in his works both by foregrounding language and blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. *A Sorrow*, as an autobiographical narrative, garners a unique place in this project since it embodies Handke's endeavor to transform his personal voice into an impersonal one. Therefore, Handke supplements his narrative with a neutral account of the events rather than contenting himself with a homogeneous line of storytelling: "I would not be extorting personal sympathy from my listener or reader, I would merely be telling him a rather fantastic story," he writes, describing his mother as "the mother" (8). When the mother becomes an "other" because of this neutralization, the text turns into a stage in which the transformative effect of literature is put into play. Handke's transformative literary project inescapably implicates his attempt at a work of mourning since coming to terms with the effects of the death of a close person one's mother's death also requires some distancing and neutralization. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of the work of mourning as the replacement of grief by a distanced look into past (245), one can suggest that Handke's literary project helps him perform the work of mourning while writing an autobiographical narrative. Nevertheless, as a natural part of any work of mourning, the objective view to past is not always easy to achieve. *A Sorrow* presents many examples of the difficulty and sometimes impossibility of such neutralization.

Secondly, Handke's literary project posits history as a problematic realm that incessantly produces questions. His approach to history, which is also related to his problematization of thematic representation, attributes a significant role to its narrative. The priority often ascribed to facts is reversed in Handke's works once again through his foregrounding of language itself. *A Sorrow*, as a narrative whose setting is an important period of European history, provides us with many examples of Handke's approach to history based not on facts but on perceptions. *A Sorrow* portrays history through photographic images that are viewed by characters, thereby extending the work of mourning to the victims and survivors of war. Writing about a period in which the Second World War and Nazism swept Europe, Handke also performs the work of mourning for the mass destruction and death of thousands. The process nevertheless proves to be similar to Handke's personal mourning for his mother since even the frozen images on photographs point to some moments that show the impossibility of an objective look to past.

Concentrating on these two dimensions of Handke's literary project, which are embodied in his attempt at a neutral account of his mother's suicide and his questioning of history as an objective fact, this article suggests that Handke's perception of death and mourning finds its reflection in his understanding of the acts of writing and reading. Since literature and mourning have an intimate connection because of the therapeutic and transformative effects of writing and reading, *A Sorrow* displays Handke's understanding of literature. This final point shows us how Handke's approach here is suggestive of the critical reflection on literary reading as shaped by Lacanian psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Although the article does not aim to elaborate all the connections between death and literature, which the contemporary critical theory has long been discussing, its arguments are inspired by the interrelations of Jacques Lacan's concept of *tuché* and Roland Barthes' concept of *punctum*. In *Camera Lucida*, which is a book both on mourning and photography, Barthes describes *punctum* as the unrepeatable effect of the moments that "prick" or "punctuate" the average effect of a photograph which he calls *studium*. *Punctum* is "what Lacan calls *Tuché*," he writes, "the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression" (4). Since, for Barthes, the identification with the other haunts one in such "real" moments, the article concludes that Handke's representation of both personal and political

sides of history of a usual town in an unusual period reveals the uncanny effect of reading which turns identification into transformation.

Handke is often cited for problematizing thematic representation and bringing forth the importance of language in fiction. From his early works such as *The Hornets* (1966) and *The Peddler* (1967) to his more canonical works such as *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* (1970) and *The Left-Handed Woman* (1977), Handke's literary production has included a reflection on literature itself. His works have become a stage for the performance of the complex relationship between word and meaning, reality and fiction, writer and character, politics and literature. Therefore, an autobiographical narrative as *A Sorrow* holds importance in this problematization as the text does not constitute an exception to Handke's keen attention to create an impersonal voice. The paradox in Halsall's emphasis that the German-speaking critics' positive reactions to *A Sorrow* for being "a turning away from the inwardness of their earlier works towards a new realism" (46) lies in the predictable subjectivity of an autobiographical narrative. However, Handke's basic goal is to expose the paradoxes in a given structure and presumed truth including the notion of genre itself. Hence, while *A Sorrow* presents a detached narrator who narrates his mother's suicide from an indifferent point of view and thus uses the devices of new realism, the text also discloses the impossibility of such detachment. This may be viewed as a performance of how the therapeutic meaning that Handke attributes to writing is not easy to attain. That is why the narrator's neutralization of his mother's death through an objective narrative brings into view some emotionally dense moments in which the narrator is more clearly identified with Handke.

A Sorrow opens with a sentence from a newspaper which informs the reader of a woman's death: "In the village of A. (G. township), a housewife, aged 51, committed suicide on Friday night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills" (5). The straightforward and lucid language of the report, which is embodied in the information that she died of "an overdose of sleeping pills," permeates into the whole text. Handke's questions about the distinction between authenticity and fiction manifest themselves in the portrayal of the woman whose suicide is reported in the "local news" (5). Embodying his project of combining life with writing or authenticity with fiction in *A Sorrow*, Handke leaves his reader in the position of undecidability about fact and fiction. As Chloe Paver underlines, "the novel makes no attempt to hide its own 'constructedness,' and the author discusses openly the way in which biographies inevitably construct lives, rather than reflecting them" (461). The construction of lives by biographies implicates both writing and reading as it blurs also the boundaries between the two.

When the text displays such a construction, one can see that Handke's reaction to the portrayal of authenticity and fiction as exclusive categories suggests his reaction to the strict distinction between writing and reading as well. The narrator's detachment from the events illustrates this ambiguity since he tries to posit himself as any subject whatsoever who could experience such suffering. Although he declares his motivation to start writing as coming to terms with his past, his attempt at an impersonal authorship amounts to his refusal of mastering his own experiences. Thus writing functions here as a process of reading which takes the reader into an uncanny world. Turning the familiar to the unfamiliar through a process of repressed subjectivity, the writer becomes estranged from the experiences that are being reported. Therefore, the narrator stands between thinking about the suicide that makes him insensible and feeling horror as a form of experience. The act of writing then takes the form of an automatic repetition due to the relation of trauma by a detached narrator. Only through an active form of horror can the narrator make this "incomprehensible" and "incommunicable" state more real and meaningful (Handke 6). While talking about his mother's suicide or exposing people's sympathy arouses uneasy feelings, writing functions as a work of mourning by distancing him from his experience of loss.

Freud's description of the work of mourning as a process in which the mourner's grief is replaced by an objective view of the past as recollections that do not promise any future can be traced in the text (245). Trying to describe his states of mind "as accurately as possible", the narrator "begin[s] to remember them as belonging to a concluded period of [his] life" (Handke 7). When the past falls behind him in the process of writing he is "alienated from [himself] and transformed into an object, a remembering and formulating machine" (7). He locates himself in a neutral position to the extent of calling himself an "outside investigator" and his mother's death an "exemplary case" (7).

This position mirrors Handke's writing project, which is further highlighted in a sentence in parentheses which asks the reader to view the story of the mother as a generalization "in explicit disregard of [his] mother as a possibly unique protagonist" (31). The narrator nevertheless adds that such an abstraction may result in a "literary ritual in which an individual life ceases to be anything more than a pretext" (32). The narrator's avoidance both from creating a unique protagonist and utilizing one's life as a pretext leads him to reflect on the power of language in his search for an equilibrium which is not easy to achieve:

Ordinarily, I start with myself and my own headaches; in the course of my writing, I detach myself from them more and more, and then in the end I ship myself and my headaches off to market as a commodity – but in this case, since I am only a *writer* and can't take the role of the *person written about*, such detachment is impossible. I can only move myself into the distance; my mother can never become for me, as I can for myself, a winged art object flying serenely through the air. She refuses to be isolated and remains unfathomable; my sentences crash in darkness and lie scattered on the paper. (33)

The mother's resistance to be represented as an "other" ironically implies the possibility of encountering the other in reading.

The relationship between reading and this uncanny image of mother as someone intimate and far, familiar and unfamiliar can be understood through Franz Kafka's description of some books as "a key to unfamiliar rooms in one's own castle" (10). Considering that these are the books which attract Kafka more than others, one can assume that he views reading as an uneasy journey to "other" worlds. From the comfort of one's castle to the unpredictable worlds, Kafka looks for passion and patience in reading. He writes in a letter to Oskar Pollak that a book should leave a shattering effect on the reader. According to him, we should read "the kind of books that wound and stab us." Then he maintains, "we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us" (16). By equating reading with suffering, Kafka points to a reading effect that can be experienced in a unique encounter since the source of pain here is the death of a special person.

At the same time, the nature of this encounter is similar to what Lacan calls "missed encounter" in which "the reality can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly" (58). The traumatic repetition of reality alludes to a prolonged compulsion or suffering while the unrepeatability of experience renders it a missed encounter. Kafka's understanding of reading as mourning highlights the effects that make an escape from identification impossible by "pricking" or "punctuating" the average effect of representation. It is a point or a moment of smile, laugh, look, smell that haunts or captivates the subjects of mourning and reading. These subjects try to distance themselves from their past as well as from a possible identification with the lost beloveds or the writers, narrators and characters of a literary work. Handke's *A Sorrow* reflects this ambivalence by dramatizing both the transformative effects of mourning and literature and the moments of intense emotions and identifications.

The transformative effect is dramatized in the text not only through the writer's depersonalization of his story and avoidance of the reader's sympathy, but also through the portrayal of the mother, who adores Hitler, as a reader in search of identification. In contrast to Handke's imagined reader, "to her, every book was an account of her own life" (48). Yet the boundaries between these two kinds of reading become indistinct in the moments of "real encounters" when detachment proves to be impossible for Handke. He captures the details of his mother's story in his dreams to the extent that he experiences them as "doubles," becoming "identical with them" (34). The ghostly effect of trauma stems from the *punctum*, or "the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression" (Barthes 4). In such "real" moments identification with the other haunts one. As Jacques Derrida suggests in *The Work of Mourning*, "Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same, the *punctum* in the *studium*, the completely other, dead, living in me" (42). Kafka's description of a good book amounts to his desire to experience such an encounter. This expectation includes an idea of difference since self-forgetting, or "suicide," in Kafka's expression, is an effect of this experience. In the forests to which readers are banished, the uncanny effect of reading surrounds them. While the *punctum* arouses an effect of identification, its ghostly nature in the form of "the other living in me" does not serve recognition and confirmation of one's ego. On the contrary, it creates ghosts that haunt and punctuate stable identities.

Since writing and reading are not exclusive categories in Handke's fiction, his "outside investigation" often includes exploration of both reading and writing. As Paver underlines, Handke expects "a reading that does not insist on identifying [him] with the son in the text but recognizes that in the process of writing, the person of Handke has been dispersed between the figures of mother and son" (461). While Handke expects his reader's undecidability between authenticity and fiction, he often questions to what extent his narration can give the sense of undecidability to the reader. Becoming the reader of the text, Handke exposes this uncanny effect:

"At best, I am able to capture my mother's story for brief moments in dreams, because then her feelings become so palpable that I experience them as doubles and am identical with them; but these are precisely the moments I have already mentioned, in which extreme need to communicate coincides with extreme speechlessness. That is why I affect the usual biographical pattern and write: 'At that time . . . later,' 'Because

. . . although, 'was . . . became. . . became nothing,' hoping in this way to dominate the horror. That, perhaps, is the comical part of my story." (34)

When the mother gets sick and starts hallucinating, her body and face remind the narrator of an "animal misery." What follows is a revival of a full awareness of his mother. "Now she imposed herself on me," he says, "and her condition was so palpable that at some moments it became a part of me" (56).

When detachment proves to be impossible and empathy inescapable, the narrator begins to read his mother's body and face. After all his attempts to impersonalize himself, he ends up with remembrance that dominates everything. His identity as the son of his mother and the author of an autobiography is almost neutralized this time through photographic representation which concretizes the traumatic repetitions of remembrance. An example of Handke's use of repetition as an aesthetic device is his appeals to photographic representation while problematizing authenticity. Maria Luisa Roli, in her discussion on Handke's novel, *Repetition*, suggests that repetition in Handke's work functions to mythologize elements of personal life. Roli focuses on the images that mythicize the narrative, which according to her, can be considered an "epic project" that constitutes an alternative to the family narratives of bourgeois novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Paraphrasing Karl Wagner, she suggests that "In the novel, the marks of history can be read and recognized in the landscape as archeological reports. They are peculiar ground structures like the empty cow paths [. . .], or other symbols like the blind windows. Those signs become the characteristic traits of a view that reveals its past, its history; that of the Austrian empire in its less conspicuous and more genuine shapes" (161). Likewise, in *A Sorrow*, the history of an Austrian town along with the narrator's personal history is represented through some photographic images that freeze a moment in the past as if it is a far epic past. Since the photographs are described by the narrator, and the readers do not see any of them, the images present a history in which the *studium* and the *punctum* are created by language. If "reality reproduces itself by repeating itself endlessly," it is not a lost past or a lost beloved that is reproduced, but this unsettling effect called the *punctum*.

Therefore, pursuing his technique of detachment, the narrator goes on to give an objective account of the mother with the help of photographs. He expresses his sympathy for the compelling circumstances of his mother who was born in a "deadly" town (12). As he notes, the town, which has been affected by economic inflation and depression as well as the loss of many people, did not promise a good future to a young woman who was going to be "Tired / Exhausted / Sick / Dying / [and] Dead" since these were "the basic stations of women in the town" (12). After describing his mother as "high spirited," he portrays her physical features as they look in photographs: "She propped her hands on her hips or put her arm over her younger brother's shoulder. She was always laughing and seemed incapable of doing anything else" (13). The abrupt transitions from the emotional to the photographic or from the subjective to the objective accounts and vice versa are accompanied by the narrator's appearance both as an insider and an outsider in the events. While his attempt to present an objective account stems from his desire to stage the inseparability of fiction and authenticity, the inescapable moments of subjectivity mark the *punctum* in the photographs. In fact, commenting on his mother's expression in photographs, the narrator says: "The fiction that photographs can 'tell us' anything – but isn't all formulation, even of things that have really happened, more or less a fiction? *Less*, if we content ourselves with a mere record of events; *more*, if we try to formulate in depth? And the more fiction we put into a narrative, the more likely it is to interest others, because people identify more readily with formulations than with recorded facts" (18). What follows is that the mother's dead body, which he pictures in details, is photographed and buried through a ritual that depersonalizes her: "Only her name had to be inserted in the religious formulas. 'Our beloved sister...'" (70).

The relationship between neutral narrative and history becomes clear when the narrator portrays his mother's change in the postwar period. She becomes a "type," according to her son in order to "change from a prewar type to postwar type, from a country bumpkin to a city person, adequately described in the words: TALL, SLIM, DARK-HAIRED" (28–9). The narrator aims to illustrate here how she freed from her history by becoming a type and thus seeing herself through the eyes of a person imitating "bourgeois system of emotional relations" (29). In this system, typologies guide the life by giving people "objective feeling[s]" about themselves. People become "somebody," ceasing to worry about their "origins" (29).

The narrator's definition of typologies as a way of disengagement from "origins" evokes questions with regard to Handke's controversial relationship with history. While his attempt at a disengaged writing in *A Sorrow* suggests an indifference to writer's origins, particularly through his "otherizing" of the mother, the emphatic problematization of the issue may also be read as a psychological struggle for erasing concerns about the familial, historical and literary origins. Handke's writings on the Yugoslavian war, which, for many, reflect an interest based on his Slovenian heritage, render his status even more

controversial, considering the indistinct borders between fact and fiction in his work. Jameson Bell, who foregrounds Handke's criticism in his experimental works, suggests that "he wanted his readers to know that in writing, he was questioning vicariously through his characters the various perceptual habits he developed over the years. Criticism of Handke's texts became criticism of personal thought" (47). Although Bell's suggestion does not cover Handke's controversial papers, Scott Abbott, who particularly analyzes his writings on Yugoslavia, portrays a similar Handke, who, by being critical of his personal thought, stages an alternative—dialectical—representation.

Abbott traces Handke's argument for a Yugoslav state composed of diverse populations and free from the nationalist wars between Serbians, Croats and Bosnians. He provides examples of how Handke preferred a state which is a "Volk yet having no nation" (361). Handke expresses his feelings of being at home in Slovenia due to the country's lack of destructive nationalism which he claims to lie in the historical condition. As Abbott paraphrases, "Because Slovenia was part of the larger nation of Yugoslavia, as Slovenia it was absent from history. But because it was Slovenia, because Croatia was Croatia, and the same for Montenegro and Serbia and the other states making up Yugoslavia, the country as a whole had a balanced unity productively different from the destructive nationalism Handke saw in his own nation of Austria" (362). According to Abbott, Handke is concerned about the exclusive nature of language that may exert the same worldview. Any difference and otherness may be sacrificed for the same in such a nation while "the multi-ethnic state had produced people who know how to live as foreigners in their own country" (362). Believing that Slovenia's independence brought about the loss of the space in which foreignness was not different from being a native, Handke describes his writing as an attempt to create an alternative representation of a country which was shaped to a large extent by the discourses of the politicians and the journalists (363).

Abbott observes that Handke's claim to create a self-reflexive work with its inquiring tone aims to find a peaceful voice through a "dialectical rhetoric" (364). Thus, even though Handke views the bias of European culture against Serbia as the real reason of the war, his dialectical thinking in his writing reveals his self-questioning rhetoric and brings forth the complexity of the issues (365–6). According to Abbott, in his essays on Yugoslavia, Handke practices an essay form with the characteristics described by Adorno as a form that disrupts the doctrines and it is these dialectical movements between fragments and unity in Handke's essays that pave the way for the danger of reading Handke one-dimensionally or unfairly (367–70). Consequently, Abbott maintains, the critics' claim that Handke is denying the massacre in Srebrenica, for instance, might mean their ignorance of the dialectical contexts of his statements: "Alternately, perhaps, they mistrust his complicated sense for justice, they suppose his questions and denials are simply camouflage for an unbridled polemic, they feel that while claiming the opposite, Handke's images are as inflexible as their own, that his history is as rigid as theirs" (370). Although Abbott acknowledges that these critics may infer Handke's denial of massacres from his essays, he emphasizes their dialectical reasoning which is incongruous with the one-sided rhetoric of the critics. His endeavor to avoid such a one-sided rhetoric and read Handke's essays within their dialectical contexts leads Abbott to conclude that if a question is raised whether Handke is a nationalist, "who would vilify Croats, Slovenians, Bosnians, or Kosovars, who would stir up hatred, welcome war, and condone genocide," the answer is clear: "Handke has spent a lifetime attacking the kinds of ideological absolutisms that produce nationalism, hate, and war" (382).

Abbott's defensive critical approach to Handke is open to many debates, but within the context of *A Sorrow*, his underlying reference to Handke's enactment of the complexity of human beings is crucial. In fact, the destructive urges of human beings and their enchantment by some historical developments that they cannot fully understand, is represented in the personality of the mother in *A Sorrow*. Before her becoming a "type" who is free from history, she was engaged in history due to its enchanting effects that surround her in a town. While she had to live without a room of her own in her childhood and youth, she was now thirsty for learning to the extent of "begging" her grandfather to let her learn something (14). She could realize this "unthinkable" desire only when she started to learn cooking at fifteen, because according to her grandfather "there wasn't much to be learned about cooking" (14). Her closed and narrow world earns a "festive mood" only through war and after the plebiscite that results in "Yes to Germany": "For once, everything that was strange and incomprehensible in the world took on meaning and became part of a larger context; even disagreeable, mechanical work was festive and meaningful" (16). It was a "new" and "free" life for her as many people started to act together (6). Although she did not have any interest in politics, basically because it was not a "carnival," not a "dance," (17) she was now proud to be part of a movement in which "the rhythm became an existential ritual" (16). Her world was determined to a large extent by this kind of rhythm. Her first love was a German party member who she always imagined as an "irreplaceable object" (20). He was the father of the

narrator, but he could see him only after graduating from the Gymnasium as his mother married a German army sergeant shortly before he was born. This fact, which shows that the loved one can be replaced, is also accompanied by the reality of war. In fact, the war that enabled the mother's contact with the other world turned to be a frightful element. It was this horrifying atmosphere which resulted in her leaving of her husband in Berlin and squeezing her child: "The days were haunted, and once again the outside world, which years of daily contact had wrested from the nightmares of childhood and made familiar, became an impalpable ghost" (22).

The massive destruction and the impossibility of escape from witnessing death, together with the ensuing recoveries and traumas, necessarily determine the rhythm that marks the mother's life. In fact, together with her childhood and youth in which she had no autonomy either, the portrayal of her life presents us with a woman whose roles and functions are predetermined. However, as Halsall points out, Handke's realism garners its unique sound through the strategies of defamiliarization thus making the representation of history and everyday life a congruous part of his writing project which enunciates a dislike for "engaged" writing (65). Therefore, in *A Sorrow* the author "wants to depict his mother as an individual whose life is a potential poetic subject, and thus maintain the autonomy of the work of literature" (68). Life and death of mother as an "aesthetic" subject nevertheless requires an "ethical" questioning of the narrator's writing (68).

Regarding the ethical dimension of writing, Halsall starts his discussion with Handke's implication of the emancipatory function of fascism in the specific context of his mother. Given his mother's appropriating attitude towards her individuality and freedom following the fascist period of her town, Handke emphasizes the role of this period in his mother's awakening of her individual values (68). The crux of the issue lies in the fact that Handke is concerned more with the individual history than with the determining circumstances. This is not "a denial of history," according to Halsall, but "an assertion of individual autonomy despite overwhelming historical circumstances" (69). The individual autonomy of the mother aims at opening a place for the mother or a presence that needs to be captured by writing. While Handke's text proves to be a failure in capturing such a presence, Halsall points out how this failure is intrinsic to Handke's understanding of writing: "The failure of the act of writing, when thus viewed from a deconstructionist or post-structuralist perspective, confirms that for Handke 'the important point is not what is written *about* but what is produced by the *act* of writing'" (74). That is also to suggest that the reality of such an autobiographical narrative is not what primarily interests the reader.

Consequently, Handke's literary project, which aims to problematize authenticity and origins, is dramatized in *A Sorrow* through a reflection on death, suffering, mourning, history, writing and reading. The narrator's desire to detach himself from the story he tells marks the fundamental characteristic of the text. Although this detachment appears to function as the work of mourning, the necessary distance from the lost object, as Freud describes it, cannot be completely achieved because of the impossible moments in which the images of the mother inescapably haunt the narrator. Drawing on Barthes's, Lacan's, and Derrida's writings as well as Kafka's evaluation of good books, one can suggest that *A Sorrow* presents moments in which the effect of representation goes beyond an average effect and begins to punctuate it. In this case, the only way for reality to be reproduced becomes endless repetition. Thus the writer cannot reproduce the reality, may it be his mother, family, or history, but can only present the readers some traces that he himself pursues together with them.

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