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Khalilollah par Khalilollah:
**On *Memoirs of Khalilollah Khalili*
as an Autobiographical Text**

Abstract The subject of this research is the *Memoirs* of Khalilollah Khalili with particular reference to the subjectivity and identity of the autobiographical self. The text is divided into nine parts discussing the following issues: (1) Khalilollah Khalili; (2) title; (3) language—its form and style; (4) subject matter; (5) heterogeneity of genres; (6) authenticity and inauthenticity of the memoirs; (7) audience; (8) eventual inspiration; (9) the self; and (10) conclusions.

Keywords Afghanistan, autobiography, Khalilollah Khalili, literature, the self

But are we so certain that autobiography depends on
reference, as a photograph depends on its subject or
a (realistic) picture on its model?
(de Man 1979: 920)

Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par
un personnage de roman.
(Barthes 2002: 577)

No one has ever seen the self. It has no visible shape,
nor does it occupy measurable space. It is an abstraction,
like other abstractions equally elusive: the individual,
the mind, the society. Yet it has a history of its own
which informs and draws upon the larger history
of our last two centuries, a time in which the idea
of the self became a great energizing force in politics and culture.
(Howe 1991: 56)

1 Introduction

This article contains some loose comments on the autobiography *sensu largo* that I made while reading *Memoirs of Khalilullah Khalili* (hereafter: *Memoirs*) by the Afghan poet Khalilullah Khalili.¹ As a conceptual framework in which I place these comments, I use texts by Lejeune, especially his *Autobiographical Pact* (1975), and by de Man, primarily his *Autobiography as De-facement* (1986). Nonetheless, I do not treat them as the only methodological basis, but as a starting point for my own reflections on the multidimensionality of the text I am interested in as it escapes simple descriptions or unambiguous evaluations. Such an approach explains some references to the works of other scholars working on similar topics, including a small but inspiring book by Anderson simply entitled *Autobiography* (2001), in which the British researcher emphasises the fact that: '[f]or these critics [Lejeune, Weintraub—MMPK], autobiographies are seen as providing proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read ad forms of direct access to themselves' (Anderson 2001: 3).

The task I have set myself here is twofold—both descriptive and analytical.

Firstly, I focus on a work which, due to its genre hybridity, thematic heterogeneity or the complex issue of authorship, escapes simple descriptions and clear evaluations. It is impossible to avoid an attempt to systematise its classification, so it is worth explaining beforehand that it tends more towards (*quasi*-)journals or (*pseudo*-)diaries than (*auto*)biography *sensu stricto*. The distinction between autobiography, journal or diary that I am using here is borrowed from *Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Shaw (1972), and from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Baldick (1990).

Secondly, I am interested in the very process of constructing the autobiographical self that exists in *Memoirs*. The basic questions that arise while reading them concern their performative character. Who constructs and/or expresses the autobiographical alter ego of self? Is it the author himself or maybe a third person? I refer to this problem in the title, which is a travesty of the title of the autobiography *Roland Barthes par Roland*

¹ The text was originally prepared as a speech to be delivered during the open seminar *Literatura dokumentu osobistego w perspektywie międzykulturowej* [*The (auto)biographical literature in an intercultural perspective*] organised at the University of Warsaw by the Faculty of Oriental Studies and the Institute of Polish Culture between 18th and 19th November 2019.

Barthes (1975) because, as the authors of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* notice:

While the disembodied, abstract author of the network of signs does indeed become an embodied and particular author, the body and bibliography are both seen as historical, and both are structured like text. [...] *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* [*Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*—MMPK] does not create a person respectively but gives an alphabetically arranged mosaic of the preoccupations of someone who is just like a character in a novel. (Leitch et al. 2001: 1460)

Preceding the facts to which I relate in section 9, throughout the text I use the term ‘(the) self’, following *The Self in Literature* by I. Howe (1991), when referring to the author/autobiographer made present in *Memoirs*.

Memoirs represent the literary tradition in which the autobiographical self is born relatively late and under external influence. For the Afghan literary tradition, like the Islamic tradition as a whole, in pre-industrial times did not encourage writers to focus on the individual—Dale believes that the vector of collective thinking was set to: ‘[d]iscourage evocations or depictions of idiosyncratic personalities in favour of representations of impersonal stereotypes’ (Dale 1990: 37). According to von Grunebaum, social relations and attitudes, religious values, and literary conventions typical of Islamic society in the pre-industrial period or, considering the phenomenon in the spirit of E. Said, in the (pre-)colonial one, favoured the collectiveness of the individual over their individuality. This in turn resulted in autobiographical descriptions using templates aimed at depersonalising the literary subject (von Grunebaum 1953: 221–257, 258–293).² The breakthrough in the approach to the formal side of autobiography and the breakthrough in the hitherto relations between the individual and the work of art came only with the opening of Islamic literatures to the European one through translations, which took place in the 19th century (Anushe 1376/1997–1998: II 544).

2 Khalilollah Khalili

Khalilollah Khalili (Kabul 1907 – Islamabad 1987; hereafter: Khalilollah) was an Afghan, Pashtun by birth, Dari-speaking poet, novelist, academic teacher, government official and diplomat. As a poet, he observed the

² G.E. Von Grunebaum’s theses should be confronted with research on women’s pilgrimage journals currently conducted by P. Bachtin, especially with his *Women’s Writing in Action: On Female-authored Hajj Narratives in Qajar Iran* (2020).

classical Khorasani style,³ and was a merited follower of 11th-century Persian poet Abolhasan Ali ebn-e Juluq Farrokhi Sistani, who is considered as one of the chief representatives of this literary school. Nevertheless, many critics also find some features of the Iraqi style⁴ in his work. The 1980s are considered to be the most important period in his artistic life, when he fought with the pen for Afghanistan's independence and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, publishing, *inter alia*, a collection of poems entitled *Ashka-vo khunha* [*Tears and Drops of Blood*] in 1985. The poems he composed at that time belong to the broader strand of the Afghan literature of resistance (Dari *adabiyat-e moqavemat*):

In Pakistan, I met leaders of the freedom fighters. My efforts were three-dimensional: 1. To campaign through my pen for the continuation of the Jihad, 2. To bring unity of thought among the mujahideen (freedom fighters), and 3. To unify the mujahideen on the war front. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 14)

Contrary to his poetry, his prose works are of a much lower level. Although his novels are characterised by a rich and vivid language, they lack well-tailored characters or narrative structures.⁵

Khalilollah's turbulent life mirrors the complex history of the 20th-century Afghanistan. He was born into a respected family of Mohammad-Hoseyn Khan who, being in charge of the finance and taxation of the kingdom, served as the *mostofiyo-l-mamalek* ('chancellor of the realm') of Habibollah Khan (1901–1919). In 1919, shortly after the assassination of the king, Mohammad-Hoseyn Khan, being accused of representing *ancien régime*, was haltered on the order of Amanullah Khan (1919–1929). The father's execution was followed by the confiscation of family's all property. For several years, Khalilollah became the sole breadwinner of the younger siblings. When Habibollah II *vel* Bachche-ye Saqa' (1929) overthrew Amanullah Khan in January 1929, Khalilollah joined the self-proclaimed Tajik ruler, and after his fall in December 1929 he had to seek refuge out-

³ The Khorasani style (Dari *sabk-e khorasani*) was the first period of Persian poetry (9th–12th c.). It was characterised by, *inter alia*, archaic linguistic features and limited use of Arabic loanwords as well as concrete images and metaphors. It was reintroduced during the literary revival (Dari *bazgash*t) period (18th–20th c.) (Anushe 1376/1997–1998: II 792–793).

⁴ The Iraqi style (Dari *sabk-e eraqi*) was the second period of Persian poetry (12th–15th c.). It was characterised by, *inter alia*, greater number of Arabic loanwords as well as more elaborate metaphors and turn towards spiritualism (Anushe 1376/1997–1998: II 794–795).

⁵ More on Khalilollah see, e.g. Ahmadi (2008: 119–120), Bečka (1989), Dvorjankov (1960: 297, 300, 342), Farzad (1377/1998–1999), Gerasimova and Girs (1963: 171–174), Hadi (1365), Hoseynzad (1385), Klimburg (1966: 211) and Mashayekh Feriduni (1366/1987–1988).

side the country, in the Soviet Union. He returned to the country after the amnesty was announced by Mohammad Nader Khan (1929–1933). Soon he also began to slowly build his position as a poet and a government official, although it was neither easy nor quick since in 1944, he was firstly imprisoned and later exiled to Kandahar because of the Safi tribal revolt—Khalilollah belonged to this Pashtun tribe inhabiting western Afghanistan.

Thorough education, which he received as a child, especially in the field of classical Persian literature, made him interested in composing poetry and in becoming an academic teacher. Over time he also began his career as a government official, *inter alia*, an ambassador to Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The turning point in his life was 1978 when the left-wing military *coup d'état* supported by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, called officially the April Revolution (*Dari enqelab-e saur*), took place. That time he served as an ambassador to one of the Middle East countries. In the circumstances he decided not to return to Afghanistan, but rather to go into exile, *inter alia*, to the United States. Towards the end of his life, he settled in Pakistan, where he supported the *émigré* and anti-communist circles. He died there in 1987 and was buried in Peshawar but his remains were reburied in Kabul in 2013.

As above-mentioned, Khalilollah's life reflects the twisted path of Afghan history in the 20th century, a path marked by the struggle to regain full independence from Great Britain in 1919 (The Third Anglo-Afghan War), attempts to modernise the tradition-based multi-ethnic Afghan society (Amanollah Khan's reforms), struggles against dirigiste changes (the 1923 Alizay rebellion, the 1924 Mangal uprising), growing Pashtun nationalism, attempts to build a supra-ethnic society, attempts to build a parliamentary system (the 1964 constitution), painful experiences of the socialist period (1980s). Many of these threads appear in his extensive autobiographical analysed here. Khalilollah was, after all, the living history of Afghanistan:

His memoirs are a living history of Afghanistan. He was an eyewitness to the rule of five of its kings and its first president. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 11)

3 Title

Khalilollah's memoirs had been originally published in Persian under the title *Yaddashtha-ye ostad Khalilollah Khalili* (Qavi-Kushan 1390/2011–2012), and later translated into English as *Memoirs of Khalilullah Khalili* (Nasiri and Khalili 2013).⁶

⁶ All quotations to be found in the article coming from this English edition.

The editors, i.e. Khalilollah's daughter (Khalili) and his son-in-law (Nasiri), decided to translate the Persian noun *yaddashtha* (sg. *yaddasht*) into English as 'memoirs' which should be regarded as a proper solution although not so precise. The dictionary definition of *yaddasht[ha]* includes such meanings as: (1) 'note, memo, record'; (2) 'annotation, remark'; (3) 'brief comment'; (4) 'remark made in the margin'; (5) 'memorandum' (Anvari 1383/2004–2005: II 2648; Aryanpur Kashani 1382/2003: 1427).⁷ As one can conclude, the semantics of the lexeme *yaddasht[ha]* is modelled by its derivational basis, i.e. the noun *yad* 'memory, recollection, remembrance' (Anvari 1383/2004–2005: II 2647–2648; Aryanpur Kashani 1382/2003: 1426), which determines the shape and direction of the relation between the subject (here: the author) and the object (here: the author's life). Hence *yaddashtha* (always in plural) are rather commentaries on the contents that constitute a life *per se*. In this regard, *Yaddashtha-ye ostad-e Khalilollah Xalili/Memoirs of Khalilullah Khalili* take the form not so much of remarks made in the fictional perspective of a voice from beyond the grave, as de Man (1986: 315) would put it, but of comments on what has already passed, made while living. These are characterised by a considerable temporal distance from the evoked events, which take the form of reworked testimonies of past people, places and events. In this way, the gap between action time and narrative time is highlighted.

Translating the title as 'journal(s)' would be a far-reaching simplification, especially since one of the coherent features of a journal is chronology, present at least in the elementary dating of individual entries. There is no such thing in *Memoirs* and the chronology can be partly reconstructed only thanks to an a priori knowledge of the biography of self.

4 Language

As the editors assure us that the language of *Memoirs* reflects that of Khalilollah: '[w]e have published these memoirs as told by the Ustad keeping intact the authenticity of his words and whatever the poet said about the ups and downs in his life' (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 4), or '[o]ur goal is to honour the integrity of his words, keep his thoughts intact, and preserve his stories and voice for future generations' (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 11).

⁷ The term *yaddasht-e ruzane* '(daily) notes' means 'a journal'. 'Diary writing', on the other hand, is *khatere-nevisi*, i.e. verbatim 'writing down memories', where *khatere* means a 'memoir'. 'A diary' is *daftar-e khaterat*, i.e. 'a notebook of memoirs', or *sharh-e hal*, whereby *sharh-e hal* is also 'a biography' or 'a resume'. In Persian there is also no uniform term for autobiography, which is called *khodzendeginame*, *khishname*, *sargozasht-e khod* or *hasb-e hal*.

Simultaneously, they emphasise that their edition is not a literal translation of Khalilollah's reminiscence:

The English translation is not verbatim. We have kept the content and the spirit of what Ustad Khalili wanted to convey, intact. (Nasiri, Kahlili 2013: 12)

Unfortunately, the English translation does not allow us to discuss any phonetic traces of the spoken language eventually present in *Memoirs*, which is a pity because it would have given the work a clearer shade of naturalness. Nevertheless, *Memoirs* are clearly realistic in character. On the stylistic level, their matter-of-factness is only rarely adorned with ellipses, hyperboles or metaphors. One cannot say that their language is banal, although one cannot help noticing at the same time certain roughness or dryness resulting from unexpressed need to share all the self's knowledge even if it means overloading with dates, facts, names or other relevant information:

The school had four grades, 120 students and five teachers. My brother, Najibullah, and I were promoted from first grade to fourth grade. I remember very well that in math, literature, and writing I surpassed the teacher. On days when the teacher was absent, I would teach the second and third grades. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 31)

or:

We were together with Fazal Ahmad Khan, the Minister of Justice, and head of the delegation, Osman Khan Amir, Abdul Rahman Khan Popal, Qasim Sharifi, myself, and a couple of others. We were stuck in the Moqor Hotel for seven days because of bad weather. The nights were very unpleasant. Our clothes were in the cars that were following us and were left behind because of the snow. Unfortunately, I was used to smoking, and my cartons of cigarettes were in the cars behind us. We could not find cigarettes in Moqor. That left us with our only alternative, smoking tobacco the social way, through a hookah or water pipe that is shared by several smokers. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 165)

Such roughness or dryness is, however, interspersed with a personal perspective that lessens its presence:

I cannot forget the moment I observed a mother whose only son's leg was amputated. The doctor advised him to wait until he could be fitted with an

artificial limb. Her son wanted to go back to the front, however, to fight the infidel Soviet invaders. Neither I, nor the doctor, could convince him not to go. The youth took leave with his mother's blessing and returned to the front where bravery, guns, and death were waiting to welcome him. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 13).

This can be best seen by juxtaposing *Memoirs* with Khalilollah's pseudo-biographical novel *Ayyar-i az Khorasan. Amir-e Habibollah – khadem-e din-e rasul Allah [A Vagabond from Khorasan. Emir Habibollah—Servant of the Religion of Messenger of God]*.⁸ The language of the novel is full of various stylistic devices which not only allow the reader to establish a closer relationship with the main character, but also reflect the author's personal attitude towards his protagonist. The language of the *Memoirs*, meanwhile, is characterised by factuality, informativeness and a well-disguised objectivity.

Several factors influenced the linguistic and stylistic form of *Memoirs*. First of all, the fact that the material was originally composed in two languages—Persian and English. Khalilollah prepared his parts in Persian, while his son-in-law, Nasiri wrote his own comments, short notes and questions in English.⁹ These comments, short notes and questions in English were later translated into Persian by his wife, Khalili, and only then submitted to Khalilollah who delivered some answers. It remains unclear whether Nasiri's English comments and short notes have been incorporated into the English translation of *Memoirs*, or not. As one can see, translation-and-retranslation occupies a crucial position in the crea-

⁸ *Ayyar-i az Khorasan* tells the story of Habibollah Kalakini (?–1929), a poor man who took various jobs over the years and who led the popular revolt against Amanollah Khan (1919–1929) and ruled between January and December 1929 as the self-proclaimed king. It was no coincidence that Khalilollah undertook this topic. Habibollah Kalakini the protagonist was well known to him because, as the author claimed, he was a gardener in the house belonging to the author's father. Moreover, after taking power by Habibollah Kalakini in 1929, the author became his close associate. *Ayyar-i az Khorasan* therefore contains a number of biographical and autobiographical threads, and as such complements some pieces of information contained in *Memoirs*. (And *vice versa*, these pieces of information contained in *Memoirs* allow for a deeper interpretation of the novel). See Kłagisz (2018) and Parvanta (1999).

⁹ As Nasiri explains himself in the *Introduction*: '[h]aving grown up in India, my educational career was entirely in English [...]. I moved to Afghanistan in 1972, where I began to improve my Persian. While there, I was a young journalist working as a member of the editorial board of the Kabul Times, the only English language daily newspaper of Afghanistan [...]. We began recording Ustad Khalili's memoirs one evening in May 1983. While my initial notes on Khalili's memoirs were in Persian, I soon switched to English, a language with which I was professionally fluent' (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 10).

tive process (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 4, 9–11). The question of translating *Memoirs* into English is even more interesting as the fourth voice, that of the proof-reader of the translation prepared by the editors, appears as well (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 2).

5 Subject matter

The thematic diversity of *Memories* is impressive. They cover personal, cultural as well as social or political issues; surprisingly, the proportion of topics related to literature and literary criticism is rather limited:

We reached Kabul in the evening. I prayed at the Shah-e-do-shamshera mosque and prayed to the soul of my mother on her grave, which is at Shat-e-do-shamshera. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 111)

I, along with many other poets in Afghanistan, was asked to write a poem or ode for the occasion of welcoming Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani's remains home. The poem would be read at the tomb. As God is my witness, if I had known that my teacher and mentor Hazrat, Poet Laureate, Betab was also participating, or if I had any inkling people would compare my poetry to his, or consider my poetry better than his, I would not have written the ode. Or, if I had written it, I would have given it a different style. I should have asked for his blessing before writing it. Unfortunately, this didn't happen, and I wrote my poem. [...] As soon as Hazrat Ustad Saljoqi saw my poem, which I had written in the stanza style (in poetry, a stanza is a unit within a large poem), he took my poem to his Highness Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan and said, "Wah Wah" (an Afghan expression of praise, similar to "Bravo!"). After reading it, Naim Khan responded, "Poetry cannot be better than this! This is beautiful! Khalili's poem should definitely be read, and the title of Ustad should also be bestowed on him." The Sardar continued, "I wish this had occurred a few days before this, so that the Poet Laureate title could have been bestowed on him, too." When I learned what was said, I abhorred the idea. I did not want to be Poet Laureated. I, to this day, do not like that. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 248)

or:

[...] the government was busy providing three sets of dress clothes to the civil servants to appear as a progressive nation. Well, this may have been the trend in some other eastern countries also. I have called it "showing off," and I have incorporated this in my poem, which I titled after the one who picks thorns from a field, *Naalai Kharak* (Cries of a Thorn Picker).

If reader hear my poem, they will see why, in the middle of all this government pomp and glamour, I wrote an ode at that time. Even though I was a Director of a Department in the Prime Ministry, a high-ranking official, and I owned a few acres of land in the north, I was still affected by this disparity. One day a friend of mine invited us for dinner. One of my sons, Nejatullah, was with me. It was a winter evening, and I cannot forget it, Nejat wore a coat. The host offered to hang it up, but my son resisted. The house was warm. The more the host insisted, the more my son clung to his clothes, signalling he did not want to take the coat off. Finally, his mother told the host to leave him with the coat. After the dinner, on our way back home, I asked him, “Why didn’t you take off your coat?” He answered, “Dad, every day you are either at the Court or in your office. You never see this. Under this coat, my shirt and my clothes are ripped in several places. I did not want to reveal this for my friends to see in their house, so I did not want to take off my coat. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 225).

The multitude of issues raised by the self makes it impossible to decide whether they are superimposed on the basis of *Memoirs*, i.e. the personality of the self, or whether they themselves constitute the core of the narrative, around which it is wrapped. An even greater problem is generated by the weak presence of the personal dimension of the self in their content. The reader only occasionally enters the sphere of the intimacy of the self, which in such situations never *de facto* goes beyond generalities—if, as Beaujour writes, autobiography is an attempt to find the order of life, then *Memoirs* do not fulfil this role at all (Beaujour 1979: 317).

Two strictly political dedications testify to the fact that we are dealing with accounts of the world outside the self rather than inside ‘[t]o all those who languished under the oppressive rule of former Afghan leaders’ (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 1), and ‘[t]o the brave nation of Afghanistan’ (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 1), given as a motto. A trace of the more personal nature of *Memoirs*, on the other hand, is the opening sentence: ‘[t]his is for you, my sweet Marie’ (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 13), directing the whole story towards his daughter.

There is no ending in *Memoirs*. The reader is warned of this already in the *Introduction* (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 12), and can also deduce it from the reading and the editors’ comment ‘[t]he *Memoirs* end here abruptly’ (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 480). The time caesura marking the end of *Memoirs* is the visit Khalilollah made to Iran in the 1960s (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 479–480). His unexpected departure for Pakistan and sudden death caused the subject and object of his *Memoirs* to fall silent forever, without completing the entire project. Such an open narrative without an ending leaves the reader with a difficult feeling of disappointment. I mention this because, as Galant

says, in reading a personal document it is not only the author who matters, but also the reader who through reading allows themselves to be entangled in the content of the narrative he/she interprets (Galant 2010: 196).

6 Heterogeneity of genres

Memoirs took the intriguing form of a hybrid which combines various forms of expression—from sparse personal exemplifications on family subjects to dominant *quasi*-scientific lectures on socio-political issues; from a *quasi*-journal devoid of dates (and places), through a loose diary, to a text which tends towards an autobiographical document; from modest confessions of a lyrical subject, through a strong journalistic discourse, to residual philosophical notes:

I asked Nazir Hakim to ask Hashim Khan where I should stay in the night, because my brothers were in prison and I didn't have a house in Kabul. Nazir Hakim brought the message, "Wala Hazrat (His Highness) says, 'Go wherever you want to. If you stay in the Arg, the enemies of the government will say you have been imprisoned.'" (Naziri, Khalili 2013: 112)

Let mi tell you a story about my father's car. After Amir Habibullah Khan, and his sons, the Regent, Amanullah Khan and Inayatullah Khan, I think they had a total of eight to ten cars in the Royal Family. The first person outside of the Royal Family to have a car was my father around 1918. This has been documented in the book based on the notes and letters of A.C. Jewett. The amir had pressed my father to buy a car, and he did. It was a small Fiat convertible with a canvas top. It could not seat more than four or five people. The car horn was like a small balloon outside of the driver's side, which had to be pressed to honk and warn people. [...] My father was very happy to ride in his car" (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 360–361)

During this time the issue of Pashtunistan (Pakhtoonistan) rose to prominence. (Pashtunistan is an historical area populated by indigenous people reaching back to the first millennium. Since it was divided between British India and Afghanistan in 1893—Amir Abdur Rahman Khan—it has been a place of contention). Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan and Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan, who had recently risen to power, (Daoud Khan became Prime Minister 1953–1963 and later first President of Afghanistan, 1973–1978) were not very happy that their uncle, Shah Mahmud Khan, was Prime Minister. In their opinion, Sardar Mohammad Hashim Khan was the rightful Prime Minister. They considered themselves, and no one else, to be heirs of Hashim Khan's legacy. They also held the view that the de-

scendants of Mohammad Yosuf Khan should rule Afghanistan in a bifurcation of power. The sons of one mother, Mohammad Nadir Khan, Shah Wali Khan, and Shah Mahmud Khan, should be content with the rulers of the crown. Thus Mohammad Zahir Shah, the son of Mohammad Nadir Shah, became the king after the death of his father (1933). The owners of the crown and the son of the other wife, who were the sons of Mohammad Aziz Khan, should take executive power of the country. In their thinking, the Prime Ministry should be inherited. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 399)

or:

The next day we went to the funeral of Sardar Hashim Khan. His body was placed in a coffin in front of Dilkusha Palace in Kabul for viewing by mourners. They used chunam (an Indian plaster made from shell-lime and sand), then marked white lines in front of it for the hight VIPs to stand, with others standing in line behind them. The first line was marked for cabinet ministers the second line or row was for foreign ambassadors from Islamic countries. The third row was for the parliamentarians, and the fourth was for intellectuals and scholars. The fifth and final row was for family, friends, and other close to Hashim Khan. All this was written down. I did not find a place for myself among the kings' advisors, so I stood to the side, in a corner. Abdul Malik Khan, the new Minister of Finance for Daoud Khan, handled most of the arrangements. He was a very active, sincere, and organized man. He approached me, unaware I had been appointed as an adviser to the king. The announcement had not yet been published in the newspaper. He wasn't very friendly to me. He said, "You're also here? Why don't you go and stand in the area marked for general public?" I replied, "I wish I had been allowed to stand with the general public. However, I am here on duty." The Chief Secretary of the King interjected, "Yes, he's the new Media Adviser to the King [...]. Funeral prayers were offered, and the funeral took place at Eid Gah (the congregational mosque). Sardar Hashim Khan was laid to rest near his brothers and his uncles and was left there to answer the Almighty." (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 473–474).

This genre hybridity places *Memoirs* on the borderline between a personal document and other literary genres such as report, and to a much lesser extent essay or column.

The fact *Memoirs* have the subtitle *A Conversation with His Daughter, Marie* may direct the reader's first associations towards works such as *Mój wiek: Pamiętnik mówiony [My Century: A Spoken Diary]*, which is a record of extensive conversations with the Polish poet, writer and art theoretician, Wat (1900–1967), conducted by the Polish poet, prose writer, trans-

lator and diplomat, Czesław Miłosz, in 1965 (Wat 1990). In fact, *Memoirs* can hardly be called an extended interview *par excellence*, i.e. a genre bordering on journalism and non-fiction. There is no clearly distinguishable, independent second interlocutor because Khalili remains a mute listener—one might even get the impression that she and the reader merge into one, even though phrases addressed to her scattered throughout the text constitute intratextual clasps binding it together:

Yes, my daughter Marie, you have again insisted I continue to write the story of my life. This is not an easy thing to do. A new life is needed to repeat all these stories, incidents, happenings, and anecdotes. (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 252)

or:

Marie, I'm talking to you. You are here again on this rainy day, and you are unnerving my by forcing me to continue. Where were we when we stopped yesterday? (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 288)

The whole thing is rather like an extensive monologue or soliloquy-oriented autobiography (a crucial features amplified by such expressions as: '[l]et me tell you [...]' [Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 360], '[l]et me talk about [...]' [Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 210], or: '[l]et me tell this story too. It is worth listening to [...]' [Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 357]), if we were to accept that the *Memoirs* are some form of autobiography, in which the narration led by the self results from the way in which the ghost writers, i.e. the editors, have worked out their sources. It seems that Khalilollah prepared his material in the form of mini-recordings but, apparently, was not interested in any correction of facts: '[h]e never listened to the tape recordings and as a result, never had the opportunity to tie together disparate stories or correct apparent conflicts regarding dates' (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 11). Finally, one cannot help the impression that the questions and editorial comments were removed during the final editing. Their preservation would have allowed a better understanding of the final character of *Memoirs*. It would also be a living testimony to the entire creative process.

Memoirs are also reminiscent of an extensive narrative divided, for practical reasons, into smaller compositional units sewn together at the intratextual level with braces scattered throughout, e.g. in the form of above-quoted phrases addressed to the daughter. Such braces may also be places, characters or references to earlier paragraphs and signals of future themes. These brackets, in their character, are traces of the originally oral character of *Memoirs*, created largely as a tape recording.

7 Authenticity and inauthenticity

As can be seen from the *Introduction*, Khalilollah never kept a diary nor journal in which he wrote down and/or commented on the more important dates and events of his life. Apparently, he never felt need for documenting his life: '[w]ell, but I have not written any of it down!' (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 10). *Memoirs* thus evoke past, reworked events unearthed from various layers of personal memory. On the one hand, we have to face Lejeune's unwritten autobiographical pact between the self and the reader that the content of the work remains in harmony with reality. On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the phenomenon of mythologising the past present in diaries or reminiscence.

The latter problem is especially interesting because *Memoirs* also intertwine closely with Connerton's problem of remembering elaborated in his *How Societies Remember* (1989). Khalilollah, as a witness to his times, is eager to give us their testimony—he plays here the role of the author the witness more than the autobiographer the protagonist. In this sense, one of the main objectives of the editors was to show the testimony of the self and to make readers secondary witnesses to Khalilollah's life and activities—writing 'secondary witnesses', I refer to the acceptance by those who listen, here: read, i.e. readers' of *Memoirs*, stories and recognise their truth embodied in the witness, i.e. Khalilollah, granting his accounts the status of a testimony. This feature dominates the entire work as we are not reading the memoirs of Khalilollah the private person but Khalilollah the public figure, poet, writer, lecturer, and finally government official.

8 Audience

From the very beginning, *Memoirs* were written with a wide audience in mind: '[a]s we listened to his stories and his memoirs, it became clear to Marie and I we need to record this oral history for posterity' (Nasiri, Khalili 2013: 10). They are not, therefore, an example of writing which is created in the 'self ↔ self' relation, as here the 'self ↔ you' one, where 'you' is the equivalent of the addressee, becomes clearer. This broad audience includes contemporary and future generations, who need not be characterised by extensive Afghanological knowledge (That explains the *Glossary*, i.e. a list of terms such as *hadis*, *hakim* or *hamam* attached at the end of the book [Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 509–511]). Several cultural facts are continually translated on an ongoing basis by the self itself. At the request of the subject, they were not published until twenty years after his death (Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 4). First in Persian, then in English.

9 Eventual inspiration

It is difficult to know whether, and if so, which of the classical Muslim texts could be used by the self to construct their own *Memoirs*. At first sight, such a candidate could be the most famous autobiography of the Indo-Muslim world, the *Baburname* [*History of Babur*] by Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur (1483–1530), which was a unique work already at the time of its composition. Stylistically different from earlier autobiographies, full of the author's individualism, stylistically attractive and thematically rich, it has become a model worth following. Babur not only shares with his audience information about his own life, but also substantively discusses issues such as history, politics and culture. His *Baburname* is therefore not an autobiography *par excellence*, but a deeper reflection on fate, written by a mature, educated and knowledgeable autobiographer who is not afraid to take a critical look at what is behind him. What *Baburname* and *Memoirs* have in common is the fact that both authors wrote their memoirs as exiles—Babur had to flee his hometown in Ferghana as a young boy, Khalilollah was prevented from returning to the country from a diplomatic post after the 1978 military *coup d'état*. Nevertheless, a few formal features, including the complicated question of the (co)authorship of *Memoirs*, make it difficult to postulate a genetic link between the two texts.

10 The self

In their printed English version, *Memoirs* comprise over four hundred pages divided into four broad chapters (called: sections), each comprising dozens of subchapters, supplemented with two appendixes, twenty six photographs, glossary of Dari lexemes to be found in the text, and the index. This division into shorter subchapters reflects the general character of *yaddashtha* understood as comments in the margins, remarks to or observations on a subject. The individual chapters cover material arranged fairly chronologically, although different themes can, and very often do, recur in different places in *Memoirs*. The adjacent parts do not always have common themes. This partial amorphousness of *Memoirs* is a consequence of the oral character of the evocations of the self and the fact that they present material elaborated only after the death of the self.

The analysis of the autobiographical self must begin by separating the two agents which I conventionally call the self the author and the self the narrator.

The self the author is collective in nature. Not one, but at least three people were involved in the creation of *Memoirs* and, significantly, it was

not Khalilollah who came up with the idea of compiling them. The *spiritus movens* of the whole project (this term appears in the *Introduction* [Nasiri and Khalili 2013: 12]) conducted in the United States are the daughter, Khalili, and his son-in-law, Nasiri. For three years, between 1983 and 1986, they recorded Khalilollah's stories and transcribed them from tape recordings in order to supplement the transcript with his other notes, comments and previously heard stories. The draft text thus prepared was to be reviewed and corrected by Khalilollah himself. Due to his departure for Pakistan in 1986 and his death less than a year later, this did not happen. *Memoirs*, which are now in the hands of readers, therefore take the form of a collage of what he managed to record, write down or tell his loved ones while in America with the comments of those who were asked to help edit them. The collage character of *Memoirs* refers both to their content and to the techniques used in expressing the self the author.

The self the narrator is Khalilollah himself—first and foremost a poet, to a lesser extent a writer, researcher and historian of Persian literature, academic teacher and government official, and finally, ambassador for many years to Saudi Arabia or Iraq. It is this public dimension of his personality that dominates the following pages of *Memoirs*. It is interesting to note the title *ostad* 'master, teacher', often used by others when speaking of Khalilollah, which emphasises the recognition of him as an artist. It turns out that he was awarded this title not for his life's achievements, but as a reward for composing a poem read during the official funeral ceremony of the 19th-century Muslim thinker Seyyed Jamaloddin al-Afqani (1838–1897), whose remains were brought to Kabul from Istanbul in 1944. Khalilollah was thirty-seven at the time and was teaching at Kabul University, which may suggest that the title *ostad* referred more to his professional function—*ostad* also means 'academic teacher'. As said in section 1 his poetry falls within the framework of the Khorasani style, the most important of all classical literary styles in classical Persian literature, although he very familiar with modern poetry (Dari še'r-e nou) that drew on the formal achievements of European or American ones. The themes he discussed in his works revolved around, *inter alia*, people, their relationship to nature, God and transience. Researchers agree that the peak period of his work was in the 1980s, when, as a Sartre-esque committed writer he fought by word and deed for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

In the case of *Memoirs*, the correlation between the two agents—the self the author (or rather the selves the authors) and the self the narrator—remains crucial. The question arises as to how much of the autobiographical self can be traced back to the real Khalilollah, and to what extent his autobiographical self is a projection of those who undertook the task of finally

editing *Memoirs* after the speaker's death. Admittedly, the editors make it clear that their aim was to limit any traces of their own interference with the material left by Khalilollah, but it cannot be overlooked that the final form of *Memoirs* was left without final verification.

The ways in which the self constructs and/or expresses its autobiographical personality is the most interesting aspect of *Memoirs* as, given the disjunction between the self the author and the self the narrator, it would be more appropriate to consider the ways in which its autobiographical personality is made present by ghost authors. The genre hybridity of *Memoirs* and the very process of their creation play an important role in the whole process, highlighting the multidimensionality of the self in an (un)intentional way. The self appears as a passive witness and active participant of various social or political events; as their internal narrator and external commentator; as their perpetrator and reviewer; as their object and subject. This transcends the two-fold narrative, in which the self not only reports what has happened, but also determines its own relation to what has taken place. The reader has the opportunity not only to get to know the self, but also, through the self, to look at events in such a way as to better or wider understand the attitudes and views typical of the self—such an attitude also makes it possible to reconstruct reality as the self saw it, even if the self tries to give it the most objective form possible. It is impossible to overlook the fact that own acts of the self the subject do not become the matter of their deeper reflection, this reflection can only be created by the reader himself/herself, entangled through reading in the content of the narrative they interpret. *Memoirs* as an utterance are therefore directed outside, beyond the self, to the reality that is the object of description or utterance—if we referred to the dictionary of Afghan culture, we would say that the vector of narration is directed towards *zaher* (what is outside the individual), and not *baten* (what is inside the individual). The above-mentioned 'outward' vector of narration results from the adopted form of *Memoirs*, which describe not so much the life of the self against a broader socio-political background, but various socio-political issues against the background of the self's life. It is also reflected in the construction of the self's personality.

The fact that the voice of the self, which reaches us, was filtered through notes, comments and recordings made by the ghost authors supports the argument that its personality was constructed anew rather than de-constructed/re-constructed. For one cannot rid oneself of the impression that the relationship between the real and the autobiographical self is more complicated than a simple one-to-one translation. This can be seen very clearly in the passages concerning the already mentioned Habibollah Kalakani *vel* Bachche-ye Saqa'. *Memoirs* reveal that this was a person close to

Khalilollah. So close, in fact, that Khalilollah accepted offer of a job in the state administration built by the self-proclaimed Tajik king. The decision proved to be a fateful one, because after the fall of Habibollah Kalakani in December 1929, Khalilollah was forced to flee the country for some time. Scattered in several places in *Memoirs*, mentions of Habibollah Kalakani intertwine like no other with Lejeune's autobiographical pact. We give credence to Khalilollah's words because we have no reason not to trust him. What would be his purpose in claiming that Habibollah Kalakani was a gardener in his father's house, when this was not in fact the case? We accept this as true, although virtually nothing is known about Habibollah's father—even his name remains in dispute. The only thing that is certain is that he worked as a water carrier (Dari *saqa*'), i.e. one of the lowest paid and least respected professions. Nor are our doubts aroused by the descriptions of what happened in Kabul in 1929 under Habibollah Kalakani's rule, although other historical sources, such as the memoirs of Fayz Mohammad Kateb (1863–1931) entitled *Tazkirato-l-enqelab* [*Accounts on the Revolution*], urge us to be cautious (McChesney 1999). In fact, from reading both texts, emerge two contradictory images of the same figure—Habibollah Kalakani. Can we say that one of them is not telling the truth when writing about the self-proclaimed king? Khalilullah describes events in retrospect, while Fayz Mohammad Kateb provides us with a journal written *au jour le jour*. Is Khalilullah succumbing to the mythologisation of the memoir writing typical of the past? Or, are we dealing here with the projection of personal, though hidden, sympathies and prejudices towards the individual actors of the events of that time? This personal dimension appears here as very intriguing as it is made present by the reader himself/herself. Again, I have to refer to what I wrote above, that what matters in reading a personal document is not only the self, but also the reader, who allows himself/herself to be entangled, through reading, in the content of the narrative they interpret.

Although the self is both a witness and the main protagonist of *Memoirs*, it does not often focus its attention on its own inner life—parents, childhood, one's own family appear in various places, but they do not become the subject of consideration, perhaps because the self only partially realises its own reflections? Filtered through the performative action of ghost authors, they become absent, and so must be made present by the reader. This element of intimacy scattered throughout *Memoirs*, resulting from the principle of limited retrospectivity applied by the self, is not given to the reader in a direct way. It is rather superimposed on the text, which is why it can be noticed only after a longer reading—and again the motif of the reader entangled in the narrative. However, we cannot deny *Memoirs* that they are in their essence a record of reflections of the self which might be

described as narcissistic. For one can sense in them traces of individualism based on an extensive interest in the experience of the individual. The self does not retreat into the shadows, although its seemingly innate or even false modesty orders it to constantly diminish its position. Despite these efforts, one might be tempted to say that the image of the autobiographical self built in *Memoirs* takes on a rather apologetic form.

When talking about the intimacy of *Memoirs* and the extent to which the personal element is involved in the construction and/or expression of the self, it is necessary to refer to what I have said before, namely that the subjectivity of description is minimised in many places. This is the case, for example, in childhood, when Khalilollah's father, for not entirely clear reasons, was arrested and executed on the order of Amanollah Khan, and all his property confiscated for the benefit of the state. It would seem that in the memories of the eleven-year-old Khalilollah, who overnight became the sole caretaker of his younger siblings, was exiled to the countryside, deprived of his livelihood, some images of deep resentment or even disgust towards his oppressor are preserved. Meanwhile, the passages in which he talks about his father and his *de facto* undeserved death, which he spends over a dozen pages on, are virtually devoid of any emotional element. One might even get the impression that we are not dealing here with memoirs, but with an academic lecture on the fate of an individual in confrontation with authority. Amanollah Khan in Khalilollah's memoirs is neither bad nor good, he remains a neutral figure. The statements about his reforms that led to his eventual downfall are more reminiscent of texts extracted from a school textbook than from a personal document. What could justify this misleadingly neutral attitude? Is it the result of working through the trauma of losing his father? A reworking that took place before the self started recording memories? There are two possible answers to this question—either the self tones down its story because it views it in a mirror of the past, or its form results from the style of expression adopted at the beginning of the project, in which the emotional factor was greatly reduced.

It is impossible to analyse this issue without looking more broadly at how he approached the question of life and death in his work. In one of his quatrains (*Dari roba'i*) he wrote:

We are actors and spectators in the theatre of life,
Perplexed by our own affairs and those of the world.
We are puppets in the hands of time,
We dance as others play us. (Khalilollah 1981: 36)¹⁰

¹⁰ The English and Arabic translation can be found on page 36 and the original in Dari on page 37.

Thus he clearly refers to the work of the master of this genre—Omar Khayyam (11th/12th):

We are puppets, the sky is a juggler,
And that's real, not just figuratively;
We'll jump here for a while, on this board
and then return one by one to the box of non-being.¹¹

In the other, one cannot forget the clear trace of the activity of the editors, who stitched together different texts and different sources.

The complexity of this problem can be better seen when we look at it from a further perspective. By contrasting the information collected in *Memoirs* with the content of the aforementioned novel *Ayyar-i az Khorasan*, we can see the personal relationship of the self to Amanollah Khan. But what if the reader has not read the novel?

Even more interesting is the story of his father against the background of his memories of his mother, who died when Khalilollah was a few years old. These are much more vivid, emotional and personal, though not intimate. His attachment to his mother is best expressed in a poem dedicated to her, which is included in *Memoirs*. In fact, it is one of the few passages in which the self quotes its own work searching for reflections on its own work in *Memoirs*, for any evaluation of its own output, for a confrontation with the artist's personality, is to no avail.

In a similar tone to the recollections of his mother are the reminiscences related to his arrest, which took place in the 1940s. In response to the rebellion of a part of the Safi tribe, the government decided to apply collective responsibility. Khalilollah, who had taken no part in the protests, ended up in prison for several months and then in exile in Kandahar for a few years. The passages in which he recounts his arrest and imprisonment are extremely personal. The most intimate is the passage in which he recalls a failed suicide attempt. As he explains, terrified that his wife and children might also have been sent to prison, he fell into a deep depression. The confrontation of his thoughts at the time with his later reflections, the emotionality confronted with a calm, not to say cool, assessment of his own behaviour, is engaging. This is one of the few places where the self not only recalls facts from memory, but also attempts to reconstruct the emotions accompanying them. More often we are dealing with superimposing a later emotional perspective on earlier events, which must have its source in the form of writing adopted at the beginning. After

¹¹ Own translation based on the Polish version of the quatrain found in Dulęba (1977: 108).

all, the self is persuaded by his daughter to try not so much to summarise his own life, but rather to recount it as a fully public person. Hence the individual pages are dominated by the self of a lecturer or civil servant, rather than a son or father.

The temporal distance or the complex question of authorship make it complicated to trace changes in the inner life and personality of the self. This feature alone distinguishes his *Memoirs* from Babur's diaries, which may even serve as a model for an individualised personal document. If Babur recalls his youth, he does so through the eyes of his young self. The self looks at its youth through the eyes of an old man. It is surprising that the self subdues his emotions and uses a rather limited vocabulary when commenting on its own reflections, although one cannot deny them a certain note of reverie. The self appears here rather like a stoic who tries to achieve happiness through inner discipline, conscientiousness or drawing a line between emotions and external events. Perhaps this shape of the autobiographical the self is influenced precisely by the distance separating the time of action from the time of narration, which only reinforces the working through of emotions. The a posteriori knowledge of the effects affects the form in which they are framed.

11 Conclusions

The motto of this text is de Man's question about the relations between autobiography and the self. Are they the same as the relations between a photograph and its subject or an image and its model? As *Memoirs* show, this is highly debatable. The alter ego of the self present in them does not enter into a simple relation with the self. On the contrary, filtered by the unconscious(?) personalities of the ghost authors, it becomes present in the content not as the real self, but as its Baudrillard-esque simulacrum. The reader, who becomes involved in the interpretation of the narrative, plays a significant role in making it present. Therefore, one might be tempted to say that the alter ego of the self, the autobiographical personality of the self takes such a form that can be produced by the receiver of *Memories* thanks to the data provided by the self. In this sense, the autobiographical self ceases to be a mere alter ego of the real self and shifts towards Barthes' *un personnage de roman*.

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