

49 Serge Doubrovsky: *Le Livre Brisé* (1989) [*The Broken Book*]

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Julien Serge Doubrovsky (1928–2017), writer and professor of French Literature at New York University (1966–2010), is widely known for his original autobiographical writing named ‘autofiction’. More precisely, he is famous in the global world of literature as the creator of the term which became a great success and which today is generally used, in domains such as theatre, painting, and film, too (Grell 2014, 81–93). Even if a similar writing practice had existed before – Doubrovsky (2010, 387) himself refers to Colette, Céline, Genet and Breton – he invented the word for his own hybrid texts and created a specific model of writing. Unfortunately, Doubrovsky’s significant oeuvre in French is not translated and maybe not even be “exportable” (according to the author, “un type d’écriture intraduisible” [‘a type of non-translatable writing’] [Jones 2009, 11]), so it is much less known as is his neologism. In 1977 he created this new textual concept using the apparently oxymoronic compound ‘autofiction’, and thanks to him, the newly coined word entered the French dictionary (Le Robert, Larousse). Doubrovsky used it to label his literary texts which he specifically subheaded as ‘novels’, although they contain his unfiltered life. He witnessed death and traumatic events which became the substance of his books. Furthermore, he described his identity as complex and deeply fissured (Jones 2009, 16); being a Jew, he was a victim of persecution, but never religious, he lived in between two continents, languages, and professions, and often felt divided between his family and female companions. Over the course of time, he published nine books dedicated to “les étapes et les facettes de mon existence” [‘the stages and the facets of my existence’] (2011, 124) that are his autofictions we can refer to as his written life: *La Dispersion* [‘The Dispersion’] (1969), *Fils* [‘Son’/‘Threads’] (1977), *Un amour de soi* [‘The Self in Love’] (1982), *La vie l’instant* [‘The Life the Instant’] (1985), *Le Livre brisé* [‘The Broken Book’] (1989), *L’Après-vivre* [‘The Afterlife’] (1994), *Laissé pour conte* [‘Left as Tale’, the title alludes to “laissé-pour-compte”, which means ‘the left over’] (1999), *Le Monstre* [‘The Monster’] (2014 [original typescript of *Fils*]), and *Un homme de passage* [‘A Man in Transit’] (2011) concludes his literary activity. Although Doubrovsky also was an academic researcher and author of renowned literary studies about French theatre (*Corneille et la dialectique du héros* [‘Corneille and the Dialectics of the Hero’] [1963]) and literary theory (*Pourquoi la nouvelle critique* [‘What New Criticism For’] [1966]), it was neither his intention to found a ‘new genre’ called ‘autofiction’, as assumed leading critics of autobiography, nor to become a theoretical innovator. On the contrary, Doubrovsky (2010, 384) claims that the openness of his term allows various authors to relate to autofiction and to develop their own approaches (for a descriptive summary of the most known theoretical positions, see Gasparini 2008).

The term came up for the first time as “AUTO-FICTION” in the typescript of *Fils* (published under the title *Le Monstre* [Doubrovsky 2014, 1637]) when Doubrovsky

alludes to his position behind the wheel of his car intuitively interweaving the terms ‘automobile’ and ‘fiction’ in a paronomasia. He used it as well on the cover of *Fils* in order to proclaim the hybridity of his text called a “[f]iction, d’événements et de faits strictement reels” [‘fiction made up of strictly true events and facts’]. Here, for the first time, he defined autofiction as being fundamentally anchored in his personal experience and autobiographical facts, which are not fictionalized at all by the author. Unlike the paradigm of autobiography designed by critics such as Misch with reference to Goethe’s *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811–1833) [*From My Own Life: Poetry and Truth* (1848)], autofiction is neither based on the idea of a developing identity nor the internal logic of a life (“la logique interne d’une vie” [Dobrovsky 2010, 392]). Either fiction is considered here a helpful resource to relate historical and subjective truth. On the contrary, Dobrovsky emphasizes the fictional character of his texts to reveal the fissures and fractures of his real life, which (re)appear while writing about his authentic experience: “[...] [L]e vécu se raconte *en se vivant* sous forme d’un courant de conscience naturellement impossible à transcrire dans le flux de vécu-écrit se déroulant page après page. Il s’agit bien évidemment d’une *fiction*” [‘the real-life is told *while living it* in the form of a stream of consciousness, of course impossible to transcribe in the flux of the real-life-writing proceeding page after page. It’s to do obviously with a *fiction*’] (Dobrovsky 2010, 387, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, the writer insists on the fact that the character of language as a symbolic system does not necessarily reveal the self, but can make it unfamiliar. Autofiction in the sense of the Dobrovskian writing is grounded in the philosophical view that language does not represent but constitute subjectivity and constantly affects the subject’s position instead of being dominated as medium by a sovereign self.

This form of autofictional writing does not emerge from a theoretical point of view but was inspired by Dobrovsky’s personal psychoanalytical experiences starting in the United States after the death of his mother in the 1960s and is informed by his own academic insights in the concepts of Freud and Lacan as leading theorists of the (structure of the) unconscious. As the writer pointed out in *Fils*, his key work concerning the elaboration of autofictional techniques, he started to translate parts of his analysis from English into French and integrated both sides of the ‘talking cure’ into his text, that of the analyzed and the analyst (Dobrovsky 1980). Since then a direct and merciless introspection became a core element of Dobrovsky’s autobiographical writing, far from producing *a* or *the* history of his life. Instead of following the idea of a subject in constant evolution – central to the autobiography considered as literary genre (Finck 1995, 285) – he faces his own irreconcilable traumas, the ruptures of the self, and he confronts the people next to him with the consequences of his inquiry as well. Down to his last book, Dobrovsky withstands to produce a coherent text out of his life which he describes as “passablement tordue, tirillée entre le fils-le mari-le père-l’amant-le professeur-l’écrivain. Tensions et pulsions le plus souvent contradictoires” [‘passably twisted, torn between the son-the husband-the father-the lover-the professor-the writer. Tensions and impulses in most cases contradictory’] (2011,

494). He also insists on his identity as “un Franco-Américain” [‘a Franco-American’] (2011, 124) and calls himself a “juif non-juif” [‘non-Jewish Jew’] (1989, 356).

Serge Doubrovsky, to resume his vita, was born into a Jewish family in Paris, his father Israël Doubrovsky was Ashkenazim and a tailor coming from the Russian ghetto Chernigov, and his mother, Marie-Renée Weitzmann, was Alsatian. In 1943, during the Nazi period, the family moved out of town and only survived thanks to a courageous gendarme of the village who warned them about an upcoming raid of Jews. Therefore, they could leave Vésinet and hide for 9 months in the house of ‘Aryan’ relatives from the side of his uncle at Villiers. This first traumatic encounter with death and mortal fear, when Doubrovsky was only sixteen years old (narrated in *La Dispersion*), left its mark on his writing and turned it, from the beginning on, into a form of survival (Saveau 2011). Other experiences with death were about to follow, such as the death of his mother (with *Fils* he came to term with this event), the presumed suicide of his second wife Ilse (narrated in *Le Livre brisé*) and the suicide of his later common-law wife called “Elle” (narrated in *Laissé pour conte*). In his writing, Doubrovsky confronts all these traumas; he explores their traces in the past and turns to their hidden facets in the present, too. Thus, he concludes, his daily writing is related to survival and becomes a form of living: “Mon roman, c’est ma vie. Ça marche dans les deux sens: ma vie est le support de mon roman, mon roman est le soutien de ma vie. Comment est-ce que j’arriverai à vivre, si je ne racontais pas ma vie? [...] Chaque matin, séance de réanimation [‘My novel, this is my life. It works in both directions: my life is the support of my novel, my novel is the pillar of my life. How could I ever succeed living without telling my life? (...) Every morning, session of resuscitation’] (1989, 326). Therefore, the existential dimension is constitutive for his concept of autofiction, and the writer reflected it especially in *Le Livre brisé* by reference to Jean-Paul Sartre, one of his favorite authors who became his paternal and tutelary figure, besides Freud and Proust (called “ses dieux tutélaires” [‘his tutelary gods’] [2011, 334]).

In 1945, after the Liberation, Doubrovsky achieved himself a form of ‘victory’ against the German Nazi regime, having reduced him and the Jews for years to human beings not worth living: he won the first prize of philosophy at high school level and two years later, he entered the elite university *École normale supérieure*, where his academic career began. This important success also functioned as a delayed recompense for the fact that he had not fought physically: “C’EST MA REVANCHE SUR LES BOCHES, SUR LES COLLABOCHES, oui pour moi c’est MA VICTOIRE, vrai, j’aurais aimé triompher pas avec des mots, avec des balles, être dans la vraie Résistance [...]” [‘IT IS MY REVENGE ON THE GERMANS, ON THE BOCHES, THE COLLABOCHES, yes for me it is MY VICTORY, the real, I would have liked to triumph not with words, with bullets, being in the real Résistance’] (2011, 118). But Serge Doubrovsky could not follow his way without setbacks. After his father’s death from tuberculosis and because of serious health reasons (Doubrovsky was convalescent of tuberculosis for several years) he could not continue with philosophy after his Bachelor’s degree (‘licence’). Instead, he decided to prepare the *agrégation* in English (1949). After a

stay in Dublin (1949–1951), he moved to the United States in 1955, where he started a career teaching French and French literature at renowned private universities such as Harvard (1955–1957) or Brandeis University (1957–1961) and Smith College (1961–1966). He submitted his doctoral thesis (Doubrovsky 1963) and was called at the New York University in 1966, where he spent more than 40 years as professor of French literature and theory. For decades, he regularly organized his courses in the move between New York and the New York University Paris. Alongside with his academic activities he began to write autofictional books which he considers to be his main legacy, even a kind of grave in which his person is laying: “Je me transformerai en livre. Ce sera ma vraie tombe, mon mausolée” [‘I will transform myself in a book. This will be my grave, my mausoleum’] (2011, 500). In 2006, Serge Doubrovsky came back to settle down again in Paris for good, where he died the 23rd of March 2017.

The author was awarded several prizes for his outstanding literary and academic oeuvre, among others the ‘Prix Médicis’ (for *Le Livre brisé* [1989]), the ‘Prix de l’écrit intime’ (for *Laissé pour conte* [1999]), the ‘Grand prix de littérature de la Société des gens de lettres’ (for his complete works [2011]), he was promoted ‘Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres’ (2000) and ‘Chevalier des Palmes académiques’, and in 2012 he received the Medal of Honor of the Center for French Civilization and Culture (New York University).

Historical Origins and Specific Aspects

Le Livre brisé was published in 1989 (excerpts translated into English in Doubrovsky 1993b) and represents Doubrovsky’s fifth book of life-writing. As such, it is an integral part of his autofictional production and concludes for the first time – overtly and consequently – an autobiographical contract (which even became the subject of discussion inside the book, see below): here, the self is for the first time completely named after the author’s first and last name, used both in combination and separately. Some critics consider *Le Livre brisé* the most important text of Doubrovsky, his unique masterpiece in which all facets and consequences of autofiction came to a height. While the author himself had used the term ‘monster’ to characterize his earlier text *Fils*, the publisher Grasset promoted ‘The Broken Book’ as “livre-monstre” [‘monster-book’ (see the banderole)], and some critics picked up this marketing strategy in order to condemn the author. Unwittingly, the book announced a tragedy, namely the death of Doubrovsky’s second wife Ilse, who coproduced the married-couple story by her amendments inserted by the narrator. Thus, instead of getting closer to the truth, the dialogic text involuntarily reveals the insurmountable conflict and turns into an experience at the limit. In an unprecedented way, *Le Livre brisé* stages the tragic consequences of a writing concerned with the autobiographer’s life of the immediate present

and with a symbolic system which is not controllable. It is an uncontested truth that this text was also the most successful and yet the most controversial and mediatized of Serge Doubrovsky's books. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the critical reflection on autofiction greatly intensified in the aftermath of the publication of 'The Broken Book' in August 1989 and developed a more international presence. Nominated for the 'Prix Goncourt' (and the 'Goncourt des Lycéens' in 1989), Doubrovsky finally was awarded the famous French literary distinction 'Prix Médicis'. However, most critics in the feuilleton scandalized Doubrovsky as a person and reduced his opus to the question of his ethical or even juridical responsibility, emphasizing his immoral character (see Genon and Molkou 2010 who assessed 26 reviews). They all seemed to misjudge the attitude of the author-narrator, who displays himself the symbolic violence of his text and did not hesitate to underline the dolorous ambiguity of his project. On the pages of his text, he accuses himself and exhibits the conflict between decency and commitment to truth. Nevertheless, the moralizing attacks in public at that time came to a height with the direct criminalization of the author Doubrovsky by the mass media. On the literary program *Apostrophes* (broadcasted on 13 October 1989), the famous French anchorman Bernard Pivot denounced him personally on television to be a murderer celebrating a kind of "simulated trial" or inquisition (Genon and Molkou 2010, 22). Doubrovsky later recapitulated this difficult moment in his book *L'Après-vivre*: "D'entrée de jeu, au passage, je suis accusé d'être un assassin. Virtuel, en puissance, *peut-être*. Mais quand même. Devant un auditoire immense, des juges par millions. Je ne parais pas à une émission, je comparais au tribunal. Pivot, Zola. J'accuse. Le coup. Dur, atroce" ['Straight off, in passing, I am accused to be a murderer. Virtually, potentially, *maybe*. Nevertheless. In front of that immense audience, of millions of judges. I did not appear on a television program, it was a criminal court. Pivot, Zola. I accuse. The attack. Hard, atrocious'] (1994, 300, emphasis in the original). Even Doubrovsky's cousin, the writer Marc Weitzmann, interfered in the debate and reproached him inappropriate physical and symbolical violence against his wife (see Weitzmann's novel *Chaos* [1997]), a critique which seems to disregard the character of this text firmly oriented to reveal the self and to push oneself to the limit. At no time, Doubrovsky denied his responsibility – on the contrary, he exposed his inner conflict in an unprecedented way and unquestioningly acknowledged his own charge. Furthermore, in his case, "[wird] Schreiben zur Buße [...]. Der Autor stiftet den Leser dazu an, Serge Doubrovsky als Henker seiner Frau und damit als Autor zu verurteilen" ['Writing turns into repentance. The author incites the reader to condemn Serge Doubrovsky as executioner of his wife and consequently as author'] (Keller 2001, 203). The problem he explicitly revealed is that, while writing, he remained – in a way which reminds those fond of Greek mythology of the main characteristic trait of Oedipus – unaware of the true state of things, in his case the marital disruption. At the end, 'Serge' admitted that he would have changed everything, if only he could have altered the facts. Concerning his book, the author states later on in his essay *Textes en main* ['Close reading']:

J'ai écrit mon autofiction jusqu'à être totalement dépossédé de mon entreprise. À un premier niveau, par l'irruption brutale, assassine du réel dans les jeux de la fiction. À un second niveau, plus subtil et retors, parce que ces jeux disaient vrai, sans que j'en aie conscience.

[I have written my autofiction until I became totally expropriated of my own enterprise. At the first level, by the brutal and murderous irruption of the real in the games of fiction. At a second level, more subtle and devious, because these games told the truth, without me being aware of it'.] (Dobrovsky 1993, 217)

That the narrator of *Le Livre brisé* was not able to stop the current tragedy because he could not recognize the signs and the course of life was not accessible to him, this is part of the depressing insight Dobrovsky's autofiction constantly reveals. *Le Livre brisé* then represents a negative highlight staging both the deep ambiguity and the painful consequence of an unbounded autobiographical quest related to the unconscious areas of a couple's life. Simultaneously having been the protagonist, the co-author, and the reader of this bifocal book, Ilse Romero-Dobrovsky's sudden death is not only intertwined with the book, but gives it an unforeseeable structure.

Content Summary

In a paragraph of *Un homme de passage*, Dobrovsky summarized the essence of his most famous and afflicted book in one striking sentence: "*Le Livre brisé*, c'est la destruction mutuelle d'un homme écrivain et d'une femme qui veut qu'il écrive sur elle. Livre suicide, femme-kamikaze" [*The Broken Book* is the mutual destruction of a man who is a writer and a woman who wants that he writes about her. Suicide book, kamikaze woman'] (2011, 493). Consequently, the text is unique for various reasons: firstly, because its writing involves a couple and a quasi-dialogic telling of their own history. Secondly, because of its intrepid transgression of all limits in order to push forward an authentic search for truth that inevitably ends up with death. Thirdly, because the book turned, from its very beginning on, into a meta-text – concerned mainly with Sartre and the autobiographical genre (see below) – which comments on its constitution and the conditions in the process of revealing the naked truth concerning the drawbacks of a couple's life in an uncompromisingly detailed way.

The book is divided into two parts, "Absences" ['Absences'] and "Disparition" ['Disappearance'], whereby the caesura after three quarters of the text marks the breaking of the book in two pieces: the moment of Ilse's death. Thus, the thirteen chapters that constitute Part One are written in her co-presence. Refusing any chronological order (except for the moment after Ilse's death manifest in Part Two), the text includes different levels of time that merge seamlessly, being solely organized by the consciousness of the narrator. Furthermore, Dobrovsky practices a so-called 'phonetic' (or 'consonantal') writing based on puns and paronomasia, alliterations and assonances, seizing the real by a poetic use of language. Thus, the structure of the

narration itself is foregrounded by association: “Spontanes, assoziatives Schreiben, Vernachlässigung der Syntax, des Stils und der Interpunktion, inhaltliche und strukturelle Inkohärenz sind Kennzeichen der Autofiktion, die sich mithin auch als *writing cure* bezeichnen ließe” [“Spontaneous, associative writing, disregard of the syntax, the style and the punctuation, contentual and structural incoherence, all this are characteristics of autofiction which might be called *writing cure* as a result’] (Weiser 2008, 48). The writer calls himself an “écrivain à processus” [‘a writer of processus’]: “Mais les mots avec lesquels ce récit est écrit surgissent d’eux-mêmes, ils s’appellent les uns les autres par consonance, ils prolifèrent selon les hasards, les rencontres, les chocs, ils inventent même à mesure leur propre syntaxe, déconstruisant au besoin la syntaxe traditionnelle” [“But the words with which this story is written erupt from within themselves, they call each other by consonance, they flourish by accident, by encounters, by shocks, they even invent their own syntactic rules, deconstructing the traditional syntax if necessary’] (Doubrovsky 1989, 389). Furthermore, in order to underline the quality of the stream of consciousness against any logical order of the narrated, he mostly writes without using punctuation. The time of the writing process is constantly being evoked – however, not in a linear manner – and starts 8 May 1985, just to end about half a year after Ilse’s death in May, 1988. A second time level is formed by the present including the daily life of the couple announcing the tragedy imperceptibly. Another period of time referred to in the text are memories: the past shared by ‘Ilse’ and ‘Serge’ – their history as couple comprising about a decade – and the narrator’s memories stretching all the way back to his survival of Nazism. Thus, Part One of the book begins with an emblematic scene in which the narrator watching a television broadcast on the eve of the fortieth anniversary of the Liberation (8 May 1985) is confronted with his mental blanks concerning historical or private landmarks of his life, such as Liberation Day in 1945 or his first sexual encounters. After having read these chapters, his wife Ilse criticizes his narcissistic attitude and proposes to write a book about the couple instead. Thus, the dialogue with ‘Ilse’ takes center stage – although ever written by the narrator – and the third chapter is titled “Roman conjugal” [‘marriage novel’]. From this moment on, the couple concludes an autobiographical pact controlled by ‘Ilse’, as the narrator states with relieve: “Au moins, il y aura une censure. Elle m’indiquera ma limite. Ainsi je ne dépasserai pas les bornes” [‘At least, there will be a censorship. She will indicate me my limit. Thus, I will not transgress borders’] (Doubrovsky 1989, 61). The narrator pushes forward the project to reveal the past and the present of the couple following the idea of confronting the deep conflicts and conciliating with his wife: “Je rêvais, au long du récit de nos tribulations, une fin joyeuse” [‘I dreamed, throughout the account of our tribulations, of a happy end’] (1989, 317). The story of this book can be briefly summarized: a university professor of almost 50 years starts a sexual relation with one of his students, half as old as himself, while they are both still entangled in divorce proceedings. ‘Serge’ has been living with a companion who for a long time has been desiring to become his wife. He eventually agrees to file for divorce, but his decision comes too late – ‘Rachel’

changed her mind and leaves him to get a new job out of New York. In this very difficult moment, he starts a new relation with 'Ilse', the student, and proposes, for his part, to get married soon. The young woman doubts that the decision is reasonable after such a short period of time. However, the future husband insists on underlining that economic purposes might be a reasonable factor. Eventually they get married and agree not to have children, but differences come up soon and do not cease to exist. 'Ilse' wants to have a child, but he refuses, as he already is the father of two daughters, and forces her to abort the unborn child. When she gets pregnant another time, she loses the baby well advanced in pregnancy, left alone at the hospital. Little by little, 'Ilse' starts to drink, she becomes an alcoholic and attempts suicide several times, which triggers new crisis of the couple. The situation ends up in obscene battles of words and awful physical confrontations when the desperate husband beats her – such terrible intimate scenes usually remain tabooed and do not become part of an autobiography. As the narrator thinks to rely on the couple's contract to tell the truth and writes the key chapter of the 'Broken Book' titled "Beuveries" ['Benders'] in which he goes even further revealing atrocious marital scenes. In order to receive 'Ilse's' point of view, he sends the chapter to her. This could have had a destructive impact on Ilse, who is alone in Paris waiting for her visa to return to the United States. Instead of joining her husband, she is found dead on 25 November 1987, in the Parisian apartment, she consumed vodka and pills. The narrator is forced to raise the question whether his destructive chapter may have driven her to commit suicide, thus violently wrenching apart their joint book. Then, he figures out that he had ignored that 'Ilse's' and the couple's tragedy has long been inscribed unnoticed in his text. This means that Doubrovsky's book stages in a singular way the subject's loss of control over the symbolic processing of the unconscious and over writing. Like no other autobiographer before, Doubrovsky stages here, taking himself as an example, the tragic real-life consequences of an uncompromising writing about the own existence:

Un livre comme une vie se brise. Ma vie, mon livre sont cassés net. Ilse est morte brusquement. Je suis soudain frappé au cœur. Ma femme de chair, mon personnage de roman, mon inspiratrice d'existence et d'écriture m'a quitté. [...] Au dernier chapitre de notre livre. Un livre que nous avons fait à deux comme un enfant.

[‘A book and a life break. My life, my book are directly broken through. Ilse has died abruptly. I am suddenly struck to the heart. My human wife, my literary figure, initiator of my existence and writing, left me. (...) In the last chapter of our book. A book that we have created the two of us together, like a child.’] (Doubrovsky 1989, 311)

Analysis: Autobiographical Writing Beyond Autobiography and Fiction

It is no coincidence that many critics scandalized Doubrovsky's 'Broken Book' and that 'autofiction' became the controversial concept it remains until today. It has to do with its profoundly autobiographical dimension (finally recognized, also in its ethical dimension, by Lejeune, who for a long time discredited 'autofiction' because of its allegedly 'novelistic' nature) and the obligation to tell the truth as its core element, far from the idea of fiction as being characterized by invention and imagination. It rather is the autofictional text which underlines the process of transformation of the real into the symbolic: while an autobiographer in classical terms relied on poetic language to make the course of his life transparent or to succeed, at least, to its occult sense, the writer of autofiction is confronted with his/her own subject which is, following Lacan, decentered by the structure of language: "[...] c'est en tant qu'il est engagé dans un jeu de symboles, dans un monde symbolique, que l'homme est un sujet décentré" ['it is insofar that he is caught up in a play of symbols, a symbolic world, that man is a decentered subject'] (Lacan 1973, 63). Strictly speaking, the writer of autofiction is very honest when he is taking constantly into account the present and the dispersive prism of the writing act (Gronemann 2002, 79). Thus, meaning always remains prophecy: "Dire la vérité sur sa vie vraie, la quotidienne, la réelle... Difficile, peut-être impossible. [...] On peut tout dire, du moment que c'est passé. Le présent, voilà le problème, parce qu'il engage l'avenir" ['To tell the truth about one's true life, the daily, the real... Difficult, maybe impossible. (...) You reveal everything, in the moment when it is over. The present, and that is the problem, commits itself to the future'] (Doubrovsky 1989, 50). The writer is not giving sense to his words; on the contrary, the occult meaning of his own words is only revealed in their tragic dimension by a real incident, 'Ilse's' demise. Thus, the decline of the marriage described in *Le Livre brisé* reveals a tragic irony, as the critic Darrieussecq (2010, 52) emphasizes: "quand la tragédie s'annonce par les propres mots du héros aveugle" ['if the tragedy is announced by the own words of the blind hero']. Unlike Oedipus, the narrator in Doubrovsky's text is not only in dialogue with his wife 'Ilse', but he is constantly aware of the link between fate and writing, thus creating a metatext which becomes the most important part of this literary oeuvre. The book turns out to be the flesh of Ilse, but it is intellectually guided by her husband-narrator. He stages himself as a mental son of non other than Jean-Paul Sartre, whose books – especially the novel *La Nausée* (1938) [*Nausea* (1949)] and the autobiography of a childhood *Les mots* (1964) [*The Words* (1964)] – become essential intertextual references and the discursive compass of *Le Livre brisé*, after having shared its author's life in a mental symbiosis for twelve years: "Sartre, pour moi, n'est pas n'importe quel écrivain. C'est moi, c'est ma vie. Il me vise au cœur, il me concerne en mon centre" ['For me, Sartre is not just any writer. He is me, he is my life. He knows all of me, he affects me in my very center'] (Dou-

brovsky 1989, 86). Miguet-Ollagnier (1992, 143) demonstrates that the paternal image of Sartre is bound in a double structure of ascension/descending: “la saveur Sartre” [‘the taste of Sartre’] is raised to fade out soon giving fully birth to the ‘son’ in his capacity as writer. This one, “le héros-narrateur-scripteur” [‘the hero-narrator-scrip-tor’] (Miguet-Ollagnier 1992, 152), establishes many parallels in life and writing with Jean-Paul Sartre: ‘Ilse’ was a student in his course about Sartre and wrote her academic essay about this author, who became at once a source of inspiration for the couple. Similar to the relation between Sartre and Castor (Simone de Beauvoir), ‘Ilse’ turned into a critical reader of ‘Serge’s’ chapters, among them a comparison of Sartre’s (or ‘Poulou’s’, as he was called) childhood exposed as portrait of a “enfant névrosé” [‘neurotic child’] (Miguet-Ollagnier 1992, 149) in *Les mots* and his own history as an ailing child. Finally, the narrator, as theorist and admirer of Sartre, refers to his own lectures and interpretations of this writer and describes his intriguing personal meetings with his “*père spirituel*” [‘spiritual father’] (Doubrovsky 1989, 96). But the most striking theme inscribed in *Le Livre brisé* – apart from the feeling of nausea associated with self-loathing and loss of control – probably is the model of sterility and childless marriage consciously practiced by Sartre-Beauvoir as equal parts. In the case of Doubrovsky and his wife, the original agreement was terminated and the question of parenthood – as the text reveals based on profound inner conflicts – divided the couple and led to death. The narrator wants to create books against ‘Ilse’s’ will to have her own family, and she is the one who finally has to pay for the birth of *Le Livre brisé* by sacrificing her own flesh. Nonetheless, as Miguet-Ollagnier states, Doubrovsky exceeds his spiritual father when he decided to publish the book, in particular the Second Part “Disappearance”, in order to expropriate himself having “la grandeur de travailler lui-même à sa désappropriation” [‘the magnanimity to work himself for his expropriation’] (Doubrovsky 1989, 157). One might even claim that the author stages the failure of any autobiographical self-representation by constantly employing the rhetoric of collapse, as is already indicated by the title.

Thus, the narrator states a major difference to Sartre concerning the idea of autobiographical writing: while he shares the existential dimension of Sartrean writing, he remains sceptical about his political faith and the idea of consciousness defended by Sartre, who openly rejected the Freudian concept of the unconscious (Doubrovsky 1989, 88, 95). For Doubrovsky, informed and inspired by Freud and Lacan, the subject rather seems to be a fissured and occult entity that finally lacks access to its own self. For this reason, namely to call into question the classical foundations of autobiographical representation as basis for the genre, autofiction came into being. First of all, the idea of life as fulfillment of the subject’s identity and development as a teleological process which is represented by coherence, retrospectivity, and the chronology of the text is questioned. Secondly, the idea of language as a simple medium, able to translate an external or psychic reality into a text, is demystified. In *Le Livre brisé* as in other autofictional texts, the autobiographical pact in the sense of Lejeune – even if it is intended – cannot be realized because of the specific nature of subjectivity and

language. Paradoxically, the contract of truth concluded by ‘Ilse’ and ‘Serge’, which failed under tragic circumstances (see Keller 2001), makes the reader aware of the specific character, possibilities and limits of contemporary autobiographical inquiries. Autofictions such as *Le Livre brisé* constantly refer to autobiography – an important meta-autobiographical intertext is also to be detected in the book – in order to situate the autobiographical character of the project, even though the personal truth is out of reach. Doubrovsky dedicated the book to ‘Ilse’: ‘Pour Ilse. Par Ilse. Son livre’ [‘For Ilse. By Ilse. Her book’], recognizing the intertwining of life and writing:

[...] le vécu se raconte en se vivant sous forme d’un courant de conscience naturellement impossible à transcrire dans le flux de vécu-écrit se déroulant page après page. Il s’agit bien évidemment d’une fiction. Cette fiction est confirmée par l’écriture elle-même qui s’invente comme mimésis, où l’abolition de toute syntaxe remplace, par des fragments de phrases, trouées de blancs, l’ordre de la narration autobiographique.

[‘the real-life is told while living it in the form of a stream of consciousness, of course impossible to transcribe in the flux of the real-life-writing proceeding page after page. It’s to do obviously with a fiction. This fiction is confirmed by the process of writing, which invents itself as mimesis where the abolition of any kind of syntax replaces – by fragments of sentences, perforated by blank spaces – the narrative order of the autobiography.’] (Doubrovsky 2010, 387)

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