

FROM LIFE TO TEXT AND FILM: PEDRO AMODÓVAR AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This work analyses Pedro Almodóvar's texts published in two books, *Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings* and *The Last Dream*, in which his playful engagement with autobiographical discourse is noticeable. Despite consistently stating his lack of interest in writing an autobiography or desiring others to do so, the published texts do not adhere to these generic determinations. However, a more detailed analysis reveals features akin to intimate texts bordering on diary entries, associative autobiography, letters, or essays. Building upon the theoretical assumptions of Philippe Lejeune and Gérard Genette regarding autobiographical prose, as well as the typology of life narrative models by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, it is evident that Almodóvar largely opts for a form of expression that does not conform to the criteria of a typical autobiography, but rather life narrative forms within its discourse. The aim is to ascertain whether he writes them with the purpose of narrating specific moments from his own past or supplementing information about his films.

Keywords: Pedro Almodóvar, autobiographical discourse, *Patty Diphusa*, *The Last Dream*

1. Introduction

Pedro Almodóvar's cinematic poetics encompasses over twenty feature films and several short films, subject to numerous discussions approaching the works from various perspectives within the realms of scientific and journalistic interest. Considerable attention has been devoted to interpreting the aesthetic value of his films in the context of Spanish culture and art, as well as postmodernism in general. The depicted characters striving for self-determination within established social paradigms have prompted inquiries into the (de)construction of their identities, which harbour complexity and often deviate from existing stereotypes. It is noticeable that in most of his films, Almodóvar is inclined towards "the concept of performativity, instability, and

ambiguity of identity” (Varga 187), significantly influencing their narratives. The discussion revolves around the reception and social engagement of Pedro Almodóvar’s films through the lens of art. It involves the analysis of thematic layers of the film narrative, intertextual and intermedial elements, highlighting him as a postmodernist artist who sets standards for the language of cinema. For the editors Epps and Kakoudaki, compilers of the anthology *All about Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema* (2009), Almodóvar is somewhat of a paradox because he is “celebrated and denigrated by critics as serious and superficial, political and apolitical, moral and immoral, feminist and misogynist, experimental and sentimental, universal and provincial” (Epps and Kakoudaki, 2009; 1). It is evident that Almodóvar has been pushing (and continues to do so) the boundaries of artistic expression, provoking the public to uncover meanings and delve into the profound layers of the presented narratives. In doing so, he has naturally garnered specific followers as well as critics.

As the author of all his original and adapted screenplays Almodóvar is aware that writing good screenplays does not necessarily equate to writing good novels. As he emphasizes, the latter requires many hours of solitude, skill in devising narrative plots, and “being a little ruthless with yourself” (2024, 155). However, he began his career as a Spanish writer and columnist during the heyday of the Spanish social and cultural scene (*movida*)¹. In the early 1980s, he published his first works, such as *Fuego en las entrañas* and the photo story *Todo tuya*. From an early age, he was dedicated to written expression, storytelling, and literature in general, and he produced an increasing number of “short stories, chronicles, comics, and ‘photo novels’”, leading Zurían to the conclusion that his arrival in Madrid marked “this passion for telling stories issued in an assortment of filmic texts and literary texts in which the budding director and writer began to create a style, a poetics, an aesthetics, and, perhaps most important of all, a unique public persona” (Zurían, 2009; 411). In other words, during those years, Almodóvar adeptly intertwines and blends two artistic expressions, with the narrative serving as a common element. His career takes the trajectory of a film director, where possessing writing skills helps in developing ideas for the creation of visual works.

This paper will discuss Pedro Almodóvar as an author through the analysis of his two published books, *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other*

¹ *La movida madrileña* marks the political and cultural transition in Spain after the death of Franco (in the 1970s and 1980s).

Writings and *The Last Dream*². In the introductory text to the book *The Last Dream*, Almodóvar emphasizes that, for him, everything is primarily a story, and not the differentiation based on genre (2024; 7). He guides readers, indicating that through his texts, he primarily aims to provide more information about himself as a filmmaker and writer, detailing everything he writes, films, and experiences. He notes that everything primarily resembles “a fragmentary autobiography, incomplete and a little cryptic” (ibid; 7), and this autobiographical fragmentation can be somewhat complemented by analysing his interviews and films.³

In line with that, the aim of this paper is to identify autobiographical elements in the above-mentioned books, and ascertain whether Almodóvar writes them with the purpose of narrating specific moments from his own past or supplementing information about his films. As he pointed out, some stories are a complement to his cinematographic work (2024, 8) and for readers they can use both – as intimate writings of a famous person and as insight into the director’s ideas. Building upon Lejeune’s premise that determining a typical autobiography requires the identity of three narrative instances – author, narrator, and character (the autobiographical pact) – and relying on Genette’s classification of narrators in autobiographical prose, the focus of this paper will be directed towards the position of Almodóvar’s texts within these frameworks. Although it is obvious that his texts do not represent typical autobiography, they represent life writing and life narrative forms (diary entries, associative autobiography, letters, or personal essay) which can be categorised or at least analysed (for instance, the autofiction in *The Patty Diphusa Stories*) in terms of autobiographical discourse. Furthermore, it is significant to see what extent their credibility and authenticity allow them to be categorized as autobiographical. The methodological-theoretical framework will also rely on the typology of autobiographical prose, so-called life narrative, by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who also proposed the components of autobiographical acts.

² For the purposes of this paper, the editions to be utilized are *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings*, Faber and Faber, London – Boston, 1993, translated by Kirk Anderson, *Patty Diphusa i drugi tekstovi*, Konzor, Zagreb, 2005, translated by Dunja Frankol, and *The Last Dream*, HarperVia (HarperCollins Publisher), London, 2024, translated by Frank Wynne.

³ Although not analysed as a corpus for the purposes of this work, it is important to note four texts by Almodóvar that he wrote for the renowned magazine *Sight & Sound* during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The subtitles of these texts, titled *Pedro Almodóvar’s Lockdown Diary*, directly indicate the form of autobiographical discourse.

2. Theoretical Background

Although autobiography as a term was coined in eighteenth century, self-referential writings were known many centuries earlier, such as “memoir”, “confessions” or “essays of myself” (Smith and Watson, 2010; 2). Linda Anderson wrote that autobiography, once recognised as distinct literary genre, became an “important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction” (2001, 1-2). She notes some scholars believed that autobiography is impossible to describe as a genre (such as James Olney) and some of them emphasized conditions and limits must be provided if autobiography intends to be a truth-telling form distinguishable from fiction (such as proposed by Lejeune and Gusdorf) (2001, 5). Furthermore, Smith and Watson make distinctions among self-referential modes designate them as life writing, life narrative or autobiography. Life writing implies a novelistic approach or an explicit self-reference to the writer and marks a general term that takes life as its subject. Life narrative is a narrower term that encompasses many self-referential writings and is a “set of evershifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present” Finally, autobiography marks a particular mode of life narrative which represents an individual and his life story (2001, 3). Such categorization shows the different forms of autobiographical discourse which have multiplied over the last century. Georg Misch and his seminal work *The History of Autobiography* are often emphasized in discussions about autobiography. He wrote about autobiography as a valuable discourse of understanding both the individual and the world. By writing about oneself, the author not only creates a literary work about their own life but initiates a process of self-discovery, instrumentalizing knowledge about themselves and the world around them.⁴

The -abovementioned Philippe Lejeune calls autobiographical narrative a retrospective prose of a real person “where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (1989, 4), establishing categories by which autobiography can be defined. It involves the use of language where narration takes a central place, the narrator’s perspective is retrospective, and thematically, it addresses

⁴ Smith and Watson analysed Misch’s arguments about autobiography in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001) and Predrag Finci wrote about the basic theses of Georg Misch in his essay *Autobiography and the Question of Identity*, *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 31 (2011) Issue 4 (707–718).

personal life, complemented by various social and political influences. Leading to the differentiation of autobiography from other forms (diary, memoirs, biography, self-portrait, personal novel, or essay), the confirmation of the identity of the three narrative instances (author – narrator – character) is necessary for the classification of autobiographical text. By fulfilling these conditions, there is an equality at the level of expression, whereby the category of character and narrator can be identified with the author, thus establishing an autobiographical agreement.⁵

In interpreting focalization (the point of view), Genette engages with narrative models of autobiography and autobiographical prose, primarily delineating a distinction between these two concepts, while also delineating the relationships between author, narrator and character. He establishes the following models: autobiography (the identity of the author, the narrator, and the character), biographical narration (the identity of author and the narrator, but not the character), homodiegetic fiction (where the author differs from the narrator and the character), heterodiegetic autobiography (the author and character are identical, but not the narrator), and heterodiegetic fiction (the author, narrator, and character are not identically related) (1991, 73). Organizing instances, Genette presents these five potential models, among which autobiography is determined by the interdependence (identity) of the author, the narrator, and the character.

In certain texts (albeit reluctantly), he observes specific deviations, which he labels as “awkward prothesis”, wherein the character is divided into two components – an “authentic personality and a fictional destiny” (1991, 76). He emphasizes that there are texts in which the author, through expression, confirms their identity with the character but disputes the actual occurrence of what is written. Thus, the sincerity of narration is brought into question as a crucial assumption of autobiography, which, in Genette’s case, implies that the equal sign in the triangle of the author – narrator – character relationship does not hold the same value across all connections. It is interesting to note his interpretations of these relationships in relation to the category of identity. When observed through the lens of the relationship between the author and the character, he emphasizes that they become equal on a “legal level”, where the author is accountable for the actions of the

⁵ Lejeune identifies four criteria that a text must fulfill to be considered autobiography: the form of language usage, theme, the author’s situation, and the narrator’s position. For more details, see: Lejeune, P. *The Autobiographical Pact*, in: *On Autobiography*, pg. 3 – 30.

character. The identity of the narrator and the character is equated on a linguistic level through the use of the first-person singular. Meanwhile, the alignment of the author and narrator largely signifies the gravity and truthfulness of the narrative, as their identity nullifies the role of the narrator and the necessity of their presence. In other words, these are “semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic relationships” among which the latter (author – narrator) delineates fiction from truthful narration (1991, 78).

At this point it is significant to notice appearances of the “producer of the autobiographical story” proposed by Smith and Watson who distinguish four models: the “real” or historical “I”, the narrating “I”, the narrated “I” and the ideological “I”. Each of them depends on a subject’s position in the autobiographical narrative encouraging readers to explore their occurrence. While the “real” or historical “I” refers to a historical person (the author, the signature on the cover page) located in a certain time and place, the narrating “I” and the narrated “I” refers to a narrator, but with their own particular position. The first one refers to the “I” who tells an autobiographical story, who tends to tell the story about himself, and the second one is the object “I”, a version of the narrating “I” based on memories. Lastly, the ideological “I” refers to the narrator’s historical and cultural notions at the time of writing, due to each of them being culturally situated and a product of a particular time (2001, 58-63). In conclusion, autobiography (and autobiographical writing) necessarily relies on the truthfulness of narration (an unequivocal confirmation that the author is a participant in the events) and the authenticity of the text (that what is written pertains to the author) to affirm its referential relationship to reality. The author alone possesses all the information, emotions, and thoughts that they perceive as significant elements of their personal development. In this case, the reader's reception becomes a relevant indicator of the author's persuasiveness in portraying their own life, especially when certain information about the author is already known beforehand.

Speaking about Almodóvar in the context of autobiography can prove to be a rather challenging task. The fact is that there is no book by him narrating his own life (unlike the numerous works that focus on his creative output). Elements depicting episodes from his life, experiences of growing up, influences on his involvement in filmmaking, internal feelings, thoughts on lived and experienced situations, personal details, and so on, can only be gleaned fragmentarily through interviews. As such, it is challenging to consider them as a form of autobiographical expression. Nevertheless, as the evolutionary progress of conceptual-thematic elements and visual style is noticeable in his film poetics,

achieving narrative and aesthetic coherence, his attitude towards biography and autobiography gradually takes on a reconciliatory tone over time.

The fundamental strategy through which Almodóvar constructs stories in the books *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings* and *The Last Dream* primarily revolves around skilfully intertwining fiction and reality, sometimes blurring the boundary between them. The representation of the real and literary worlds holds equal importance for him when expressing his own ideas about a character or an event. It is precisely this interweaving and playing with real, possible, and unreal elements that have defined his film poetics (as well as his narrative texts), establishing him as a film-maker who manages to convincingly persuade viewers (and readers) of the realism of the portrayed. His intention and key guidelines for the texts become evident in the introductory notes of both books. It is immediately apparent that Almodóvar has been grappling for decades with an internal struggle regarding his self-perception as a writer and storyteller. In writing about Patty, he mentions that he was never sure if he would even write the next instalment and implores readers not to be overly demanding in approaching the book (2005, 8-9). In the introduction to *The Last Dream* he recalls the beginnings of his artistic creation, describing himself as a writer who has always been clear about wanting to do it, being unsure only whether his texts had any value (2024; 8). This uncertainty about his own potential for shaping a story and the need to achieve a level of “self-criticism” in the writing process is particularly highlighted in the text “A Bad Novel”. Following this line, both introductory texts open up space for interpreting the autobiographical discourse that suggestively or authentically appears in almost all of Almodóvar's texts.

3. *The Patty Diphusa Stories*

Among the early texts of autobiographical discourse, it is worth highlighting the stories about the character Patty Diphusa. Genre-wise, they are challenging to classify, as their form oscillates between erotic sketches and shorter erotic novels (if considered as a whole). Almodóvar emphasizes his diversity in writing these stories and leaves it to the reader to decide whether to accept them as “fiction or non-fiction”. For Almodóvar, *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings* belongs to both genres. In the context of autobiographical discourse, the stories about Patty Diphusa do not fit into the standard framework of autobiography as a genre where identity among the author, narrator, and character can be found. The autobiographical agreement on a formal level is not realized. Patty is simultaneously the first-person

narrator and the main character, and through the narrative discourse, we learn about events in her life.

According to Lejeune's interpretation, such a form of statement is considered autodiegetic narration, emphasizing that within this definition, it is advisable to distinguish the category of voice and the category of identity, as there is always a possibility of an exception that demonstrates the feasibility of writing an autobiography in a different manner (1989, 5-6). Such qualification will prove beneficial in the analysis of Almodóvar's implicit presence in the texts of Patty Diphusa. From the perspective of the fictional character, one can discern Patty's inclination to portray her life and speak about herself. Her narrative function, in fact, is to depict the ambiance of Madrid's *movida* as an icon of that era (here, the 1980s). Almodóvar brought her to life through columns published in the magazine *La Luna*, thereby turning her into a cultural symbol of an era significant for the development of Spanish democracy and the modernization of society.

It is noteworthy to observe two distinct discourses in her stories – one pertains to the *movida* era when, through Patty, Almodóvar crafts controversial texts brimming with profanity, sexual connotations, humour, irony, and pleasures – while the other encompasses texts from the mid-1990s, characterized by a calmer, more composed, and decidedly serious tone. In the final episode of Patty's life, Almodóvar tells her that ten years ago, she was the “embodiment of the Crazy Eighties, and today she is a symbol of the Deep Depression of the Nineties”, indicating changes in her life and, indirectly, the evolution of Almodóvar's cinematic poetics. This evolution shifts from depicting the wild and vibrant Madrid (films like *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* and *Labyrinth of Passion*) to a more serious thematic exploration (violence, identity issues, inequality, and so on) and questioning crucial life matters (*The Law of Desire*, *High Heels*, *Kika*). Through his final text titled “Me and My Clone in a Night Full of Unpredictability”, Almodóvar playfully toys with the delineation between fiction and reality, reaching a culmination in their relationship and interconnectedness. It has been argued that Patty's first-person narration and the absence of equality among all three narrative instances exclude the existence of a typical autobiography. However, the author here plays with the category of identity, hinting at a similarity between himself and Patty. Lejeune discusses the novelistic pact (where the author and character do not share the same name, and the text is fictional), which excludes the possibility of autobiographical determination but does not exclude the presence of autobiographical indicators that may prompt readers to seek similarities between the author and the fictional character (1989,

15-16). Smith and Watson suggest autofiction as a mode of autobiographical discourse that contains fictional narrative and the first-person mode. However, autofiction uses technique for pointing out some “deliberate” and “often ironic interplay” between fiction and fact (2001, 186). Even when the reader is aware that Patty's story is fiction, what can be identified as real is Almodóvar's implicit engagement, through Patty's character, in expressing his views on life, society, Spanish culture, and so on. If Patty states that Almodóvar is her clone, and the fact is that he is her creator as an author, it is evident that the occurrence of identity is problematized, positioning the text in an ambiguous space.

The connection between them is established at the level of naming, as Patty Diphusa becomes Almodóvar's pseudonym, and at the level of identity, through which he projects everything he thinks and feels onto her. In introduction he states that Patty was “a faithful reflection” of his feelings and that “she soon became saturated with so much superficiality, and with herself.” (2005, 7). In the use of pseudonyms, Lejeune distinguishes between a pseudonym as an author's name and as the name of a fictional character “because this person himself is designated as fictitious by the simple fact that he is incapable of being the *author* of the *book*” (1989, 12). From this, it follows that Patty, under no circumstances, certifies Almodóvar's autobiography at the level of expression, especially because, according to Lejeune, a reader can doubt it even if the author chooses not to confirm his identity with the character. However, Almodóvar has never contested his identification with Patty. Almost forty years later, with the publication of *The Last Dream*, he recalls her as an extraordinary character in every sense, from which a new character (“I”) emerged in the stories (“In this new century, I became darker, more serious, and melancholic, less confident, increasingly insecure and frightened.”), realizing that he is a complete opposite of Patty, even though it is the same person (2024; 9). From such interpretations by the author, far from the characteristics of a typical autobiography, an implicit autobiographical foundation can be discerned, making Patty Diphusa an integral part of his autobiographical discourse. This presence is not reflected in Patty's narrative statements, depicted events, and relationships with other characters. Instead, it manifests on an emotional and cognitive level, through which Almodóvar reveals something about himself.

4. The Other Writings

The second part of the *Patty Diphusa* book pertains to other writings published during the 1980s in Spanish magazines and newspapers such as *El País*, *Diario 16*, and others. These texts exhibit thematic heterogeneity. Given that we are dealing with narrative statements bordering between diary entries, associative autobiography, or letters as a potential narrative technique marked by autobiographical discourse, determining a common autobiographical form to categorize them is challenging. Nevertheless, their characteristic in terms of autobiographical discourse is authentic and credible, as the majority⁶ feature a first-person narrator directly pointing to the author, thereby certifying the identity with the narrator (Genette calls it 'factual narrative'). On a formal level, the "real" or historical "I" is confirmed, but Almodóvar also mixes the narrative "I" and the narrated "I", as Smith and Watson stated, where the narrated "I" is especially evident when the narrative unfolds at the level of recollection, encompassing a broad range of events from early childhood and youth to the period of Almodóvar's affirmation as a film director decades later. Almodóvar does not adhere to chronology, nor attempt to establish it. Occasionally, references to the time of the events emerge, but at the level of expression, he unquestionably affirms his identity and what he is discussing.

Among the texts employing fragmented autobiographical narrative strategies, touching upon events, individuals, and personal experiences, notable examples include "Without Love, Life Just Isn't Life", "Scarlett O'Hara, a Perfect Manchega", "Coming to Madrid", "Styles and Customs in the Nineties", "Self-Interview (1984)", "Map", "Promotion", and "Echoes and Corners". Within the autobiographical discourse, they could be organized based on roughly shared characteristics. At the level of diary entries, texts like "Without Love, Life Just Isn't Life" and "Self-Interview (1984)" could be included. Regarding associative autobiography, texts such as "Scarlett O'Hara, a Perfect Manchega", "Coming to Madrid", "Map", "Promotion", and "Echoes and Corners" could be categorized as such. The text "Advice on How to Become an Internationally Famous Filmmaker" could be mostly recognized as a letter form, but displaying typological distinctions. Given the absence of chronology and uniformity at the level of form, within the context of autobiographical prose, it is not possible to characterize these texts as

⁶ The collection also features texts such as "A Good Start", "The Birth of DADA" (1978), and "Scrotum in the Wind", in which significant references for autobiographical discourse do not appear.

typical diary entries. Lejeune noticed that the diary often deals with the “struggle against time” and it’s “actually based on a prior yielding to time (which is atomized, exploded, reduced to moments)” (2009a, 170). For him, the date is essential to defining the diary as “a series of dated traces” (2009b, 179). If an author decides to write a diary, it is necessary to present real events with the minimized temporal gap between events and writing. Additionally, the narrator’s position should be marked by the retrospective nature of the narrative text (Lejeune, 1989). Such qualifications may not apply to texts like “Without Love, There Is No Life” and “Self-Interview (1984)” as they, due to their writing about immediate events and minimal temporal distance, resemble instead disconnected, fragmented diary entries.

“Without Love, Life Just Isn’t Life” was published in 1987, and in it, Almodóvar references the recently released film *The Law of Desire*. On the other hand, “Self-Interview (1984)” was published in 1984, following the release of the film *Dark Habits*. The diary-like elements present in these texts primarily relate to the positioning of the subject, the choice of topics, and the expression (Sablić Tomić, 2002; 96). Almodóvar adopts the position of an affirmed subject as, at the time of writing, he is already socially recognized and well-known. He cites events that serve as the reason for writing, such as film premieres, minimizing the temporal gap. The choice of narrative discourse approaches the intimate and the public. In “Without Love, Life Just Isn’t Life”, he discusses the experience of filming, delving into his conceptual and thematic world, the actors and their performances as immediate events he experienced. However, he does not shy away from the initial recollections of the period of dictatorship and the restrictions on freedom of speech in Spain (remembering, reflecting), introducing a socio-political dimension into the text nor does he miss the opportunity to express a viewpoint on the human need for love. This also represents his philosophical dimension. The narrator’s position in one part of the text shifts from “I” to “We” when Almodóvar identifies himself with the citizens of Madrid, expressing the assertion that all of them experience unhappy, unwanted, and unrequited loves. Although this involves a generalization at a subjective level that seems more like a need to find meaning in what may be happening in his intimate life, rather than a statement that could be factually substantiated, by addressing the readers, he manages to achieve a certain level of credibility and intimacy that is highly relevant for readers of these diary entries.

The “Self-interview” is an unconventional text of self-reflection written in the form of a dialogue with his own self. The title itself alludes

to an autobiographical discourse, through which Almodóvar introduces himself to his readers, stating that if someone has to write about him, it is best that he does it himself. At the level of content, there is a rapid shift between topics because, much like typical interviews, the interviewer aims to learn as much as possible about his interlocutor. He comments on life in Madrid, talks about the filmmaking process, and discusses upcoming projects. Following that, he expresses his desire to create a biography of Bette Davis, reflects on death, discusses the recently released film *Dark Habits*, and reflects on success. Through the alternation of questions and answers, the narrator's position is uneven, yet this is just one of the models through which Almodóvar projects reflections about himself. In such a conversation, Almodóvar directs himself toward the free expression of his own reflections and identification within what was then Spanish society. Analysing the narrative model, according to Smith and Watson, it could be identified as the ideological "I", due to Almodóvar's reflections on his personhood and identity. Although seeking answers related to his own existence and philosophizing about death, Almodóvar does not shy away from irony and sarcasm, to which both those he discusses and he himself are equally exposed. This is one of the strategies in writing diary entries through which the content becomes interesting, and the reader is offered the opportunity to learn something about the author through ironic expressions.

There is a slightly larger number of texts in which elements of associative autobiography can be recognized as a form of storytelling about one's own life based on recollections. Such narration is retrospective (mixing the narrative "I" and the narrated "I"), does not follow chronology, and includes associations that shape the narrative sequence (Sablić Tomić, 2008; 63). As noted above, Smith and Watson distinguish a form of life narrative as a "nonfictional mode" pointing out the parts of "a constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity: memory, experience, identity, embodiment, agency" (2001, 15). Almodóvar writes his texts based on his memories of his childhood and filming, and through his experiences gives the readers interpretations of the past events. The autodiegetic narration is confirmed by the identity of the author, narrator, and character (called the "real" or historical "I" by Smith and Watson). However, the texts are written fragmentarily and lack a solid structure that could assert Almodóvar's intention to write a comprehensive autobiography.

In the text "Scarlett O'Hara, A Perfect Mancheaga", Almodóvar reminisces about his childhood and the first time he watched the movie *Gone with the Wind*, which had a significant impact on him as a

filmmaker. In “Coming to Madrid”, he reflects on his youthful desire to leave his village and move to Madrid. He contemplates his memories of that decision, which would forever change his life and be one he has never regretted. This is a text in which, due to its narrative components and chronology, elements that could fit into a typical Almodóvar autobiography are perhaps most discernible. The text “The Map” brings him back to his childhood, where he recalls his poor religious upbringing and the influence of the clergy on shaping his beliefs, which he vehemently resisted. In the text “Promotion”, Almodóvar recalls the films he released until *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* in 1988. The retrospective was prompted by the commercial success of the film, which opened doors to his international career, but also stirred feelings of saturation and emptiness within him. Finally, “Echoes and Corners” contains multiple motifs (associations) that shape the narrative sequence, including the influence of film characters on his own life, the search for a personal item, and encounters with unfamiliar individuals. In a form that refers to a life narrative similar to a *Bildungsroman*, in these writings Almodóvar represents his own “social formation” as a young man and describes his escape from a repressive schooling to an urban life where, as Smith and Watson noted, usually new encounters “lead the protagonist to reevaluate assumptions” (2010, 63). The common thread is Almodóvar’s reflection on his own identity. In general, the narrative strategy in these texts does not establish a causal relationship among events. Instead, their coherence is based on the connection between the narrator/author and symbolic themes that hold the author’s retrospective evaluation of their own past and the search for identity. The autobiographical foundation is thus confirmed and clearly indicates Almodóvar’s intention to portray the evolution of his own views and personality over time.

The last text is “Advice on How to Become an Internationally Famous Filmmaker”, where Almodóvar begins with a retrospective narrative about situations in which his words influenced the fate of people around him. This inspired him to write a guide for all those who, like him, dream of becoming globally renowned film directors. Once more, autodiegetic narration is initially confirmed, but it quickly changes, and the storytelling continues through a form that closely resembles a letter. The text is divided into four individually titled sections (*The Vocation*, *The City*, *It’s just not right!*, and *Loneliness at the top*), and the dating is not recorded, although it is known that the texts were published in 1985. Within the autobiographical discourse, Smith and Watson described the letter as a model of life narrative which serves the epistolary subject to express the inner feelings. For a letter, the

characteristic features include recounting and describing the emotions of the discourse subject, and its essential element is the connection between the sender and the recipient (the addressee). Other formal characteristics involve information about the time of writing the letter (dating), addressing the recipient, a farewell at the end of the letter, and the sender's signature. Considering all these characteristics, it is noticeable that through his narrative expression, Almodóvar self-referentially reflects on his life journey from when he arrived in Madrid as a young man from the provinces to becoming a famous director. Despite the irony and caricatured situations that can happen to anyone embarking on such a path, it is easy to identify parts that are connected to truthful details about him (the shift from province to city, the humble beginnings of his film career, his membership in the *movida*, the search for his own film poetics, the reception of films, and so on). The name of the addressee is missing, but he points out that the advice is intended for all those who want to become world-famous film directors overnight. In that case, the recipient should be every reader who will recognize the authenticity and truthfulness of the statements in the text to establish trust in the subject, which also leads to confirming the autobiographical basis. The letter's form at the end of the last text is validated by the farewell ("I'm sending you a cinematic kiss. Adiós.") without specifying a signature, but the confirmed identity of the author and the mention of the "old Almodóvar" are sufficient indicators of the autobiographical discourse.

5. *The Last Dream*

The collection of stories *The Last Dream* initially appears to be Almodóvar's autobiographical endeavour. However, it is essential to emphasize that, looking at it as a whole, this is not a typical autobiography in a narrow sense. Moreover, most of the stories in this collection are fictional. In the introductory part, Almodóvar mentions that he has compiled 12 stories he wrote between the 1970s and the early 2000s. The period of their creation is quite extensive, and with the help of his collaborators, he decided to publish them. Among all the stories, he emphasizes that only four are autobiographical, categorizing them genre-wise as parts of a diary (specifically "The Last Dream", "Adiós, Volcano", "Memory of an Empty Day", and "Bad Novel"). He emphasizes that the remaining eight stories⁷ are also closely related to

⁷ The list of the remaining stories includes: "The Visit", "Too Many Gender Swaps", "The Mirror Ceremony", "Joanna, The Beautiful Madwoman", "The Life

his life and profession (“These stories are a complement to my cinematographic works: sometimes they served as an immediate reflection of the moment I was experiencing, and either became films many years later...”), referring to all the texts as “initiation”, which served as a “desire to escape boredom” (2024; 8).

It is significant to note that when Almodóvar talks about the autobiographical characteristics of his texts, he reveals the intertwining of the written with what is portrayed in his films. For those more familiar with his work, such a statement can be highly relevant, prompting the question of whether Almodóvar is addressing what Lejeune calls an “autobiographical space”. If one reads Almodóvar’s texts as fragmented and incomplete parts of autobiography (as he himself emphasizes), and films represent fiction into which layers of personal nature are inscribed, then they should not be ignored as documents affirming the autobiographical space in which all his works can be analysed. In other words, the absence of a complete autobiography by Almodóvar can be compensated for by consolidating everything he has written, spoken, or filmed to date – this would be a rather rich autobiographical record.

The introduction itself contains valuable information about the author, adding to the authenticity and truthfulness through autodiegetic narration. It is designed as a space where Almodóvar reveals certain details from his own life (his relationship with films, his arrival in Madrid, his mother's death, and his own identity formation), serving as valuable guidelines for reading the published autobiographical texts. Nostalgically recalling the places, people, and times when he wrote stories “in the courtyard of the family home”, he admits that he didn’t revise or change them, wanting to “remember himself” and “seeing how much he has changed” – his life and everything that surrounded him (2024; 8). While informative and directive, the introduction is simultaneously an intimate text through which Almodóvar, in the words of Helena Sablić Tomić, strives to unfold his self and preserve his own identity (2008, 23). He significantly emphasizes three key places that shaped him as a person: the courtyard of La Mancha where he spent time with his mother and the women from the village, Madrid during the *movida* era, and the Salesian school, which he recalls as a place of distressing religious upbringing. By inscribing these spaces into his identity code, Almodóvar gains a sense of self and recognizes their power in shaping an identity that, despite everything, retains enough freedom for self-realization.

and Death of Miguel”, “Confessions of a Sex Symbol”, “Bitter Christmas”, and “Redemption”.

It has been mentioned that in the published collection *The Last Dream* Almodóvar's autobiographical act is only recognizable in four stories. All of them, in their discourse, unveil his intimate world and reflections on the social environment and himself. The identity of the author, narrator, and character is confirmed by the autodiegetic position that certifies Almodóvar's fragmented writing about his own life. As Genette said, an equality of these three instances provides an autobiography. What points again to the problem of the typology of his autobiographical discourse is the inconsistency and deviation in meeting the genre criteria. Specifically, three texts ("The Last Dream", "Adíos, Volcano", "Memory of an Empty Day") according to certain characteristics, would belong to the form of diary entries. It involves a discourse that does not fulfill the basic features of a diary as a model of autobiographical prose (incoherence, chronological sequence of described events, and the frequency of recording events), but within certain limits, it comes closest to it.⁸ First and foremost, Almodóvar retrospectively narrates about immediate events that prompted his writing (his mother's death in "The Last Dream", the death of his friend and artistic muse Chavela Vargas in "Adíos, Volcano", and loneliness during Easter in the text "Memory of an Empty Day"), fulfilling the criterion of the simultaneity of events and writing. Smith and Watson state such kind of life narrative as filiation narrative which provides author's memories of a "relationship to a parent, sibling, or child, someone with whom one has had a longstanding affiliation" (Smith and Watson, 2010; 270). In that way, it is easy to notice he dedicates his texts to the most significant women in his life – a mother Francisca and a friend Chavela. However, he does not explicitly mention the dates of writing, but the time category is not entirely neglected, as it is possible to determine that information from verifiable and credible sources. For example, in "The Last Dream", he begins the narration:

When I step out into the street on Saturday, I discover that it is a bright, sunny day. It is the first day with sunshine and without my mother. I cry behind my glasses. I will do so many times throughout the day. Having not slept the night before, I wander the streets like an orphan until I find the taxi to take me to the South Mortuary. (Almodóvar, 2024; 77)

⁸ In the story "Memory of an Empty Day", he refers to the fact that he is trying to keep a diary about the moment he is living. In this way, he genre-determines his texts, even though it's not exactly a diary but rather diary-like entries that do not form a coherent whole of diary discourse.

Furthermore, in “Memory of an Empty Day”, he mentions the following:

Maundy Thursday. Bright sunshine streaming through the window, but I can't think what to do with the day that stretches out before me. (...) I haven't turned the TV on all day, but through the windows comes the sound of drums from the religious processions (...) I can also hear Russian bombs devastating Ukrainian cities. (ibid; 146-154)

In “Adíos, Volcano”, the temporal category is revealed with the following words:

After twenty years spent searching for her in all her usual haunts, and having finally found her in the tiny backstage dressing room of the Sala Caracol in Madrid, I have spent another twenty years saying goodbye to her, culminating in this extended farewell, beneath the blistering August sun in Madrid. (ibid; 128)

From these and other pieces of information documented in the texts, and after verifying them with reliable data, the dates of writing can be precisely determined (“The Last Dream” – September 11, 1999, “Adíos, Volcano” – between August 5 and 31, 2012, and “Memory of an Empty Day” – April 14, 2022). However, in the narrative statement of the story “The Last Dream”, there is a moment that may raise doubts about the legitimacy of the time category. As observed, Almodóvar begins the story by stating that it is Saturday today and that his mother passed away yesterday. However, in the continuation, he writes the following: “She also requested a full requiem mass, not just a funeral service. We respected her wishes and the whole town (Calzada de Calatrava) flocked to ‘give us the nod,’ its term for offering condolences” (ibid; 79). Such a statement contradicts the initial one because it implies a longer time gap from the day of the mother's death, suggesting that the burial has already taken place. As Lejeune argues, there is nothing wrong in putting some discontinuity in diary writings due to life also needs renewal and the fact that a “diary's discontinuity may be quite relative” (2009b, 183). The inconsistency in statements could challenge the fact that the entry was made on September 11, 1999 (mother passed away on September 10, 1999), but it may also suggest the possibility that Almodóvar wrote it in parts over several days following his mother's death. Regardless, each entry represents a separate moment in the author's memory and uniquely corresponds to his present. Through these temporal leaps, it seems like Almodóvar is attempting to avoid a

chronological continuity based on a logical sequence. It is not known why Almodóvar avoids recording exact dates. The answer may lie in his aversion to writing any form of autobiography, including a typical diary, but rather present it as a stories without formal characteristics of the genre. Nevertheless, he has somewhat met the criteria of documentation by writing about his intimate experiences, mentioning true events in his life and making his entries truthful and authentic.

In his theoretical assumptions for defining the diary as a model of autobiographical prose, Philippe Lejeune emphasizes that it is a discontinuous and allusive form, and it is not constructed as a typical story with a beginning and the end (Lejeune, 2009a). The starting point of all three texts are certain events that trigger Almodóvar's narrative act. His reflections on his mother's and Chavela's death, as well as the loneliness and emptiness of a particular day, inspire him to recall events from the immediate, closer, or more distant past and connect them with his current lived experience, selected facts. In this way, he created a diary-like discourse as a space in which he had the opportunity to identify his own existence and communicate with himself. The thematic level encompasses private experiences related to family, friends, childhood memories, his mother and contemplations on emotional states such as pain, anxiety, and loneliness. Everything indicates that in these texts, Almodóvar still somewhat respects the characteristics of diary discourse, which can be identified even at the micro-level of these fragmented autobiographical entries. He is aware of this and does not shy away from the intention to share them with readers. It remains an open question whether he will ever do it completely.

In the entry "Memory of an Empty Day", there is a detail that does not narrate a personal event but is an important reference in the context of the author recognizing his own attitudes and opinions. This is about the autobiography *Le Parfum des fleurs la nuit* by Leïla Slimani, and Almodóvar expresses his enthusiasm for it, finding it extremely interesting. He projects quotes from another author into his diary entries, engaging in a kind of dialogue and interpretation. The book constantly prompts him to question his own relationship with writing, art, and his relationships with other people. He occasionally includes quotes, comments on them, replies, and presents counterarguments. In this self-dialogue, Almodóvar points out his loneliness and the need to analyse his own actions. By choosing that particular book and recording quotes from it, he has made it a permanent part of his intimate space, reconnecting with what, alongside films, represents his other love – literature and writing.

Finally, the text “A Bad Novel” is a personal homage to the act of writing with which Almodóvar concludes his collection of stories. On the conceptual and thematic level, the text can be classified as an essayistic-reflective piece, containing characteristics of a personal essay characterized by narration and its retrospective perspective (Lejeune, 1989). For Smith and Watson, this is a form of discourse that shows “one’s own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic” (2001, 200) and it combines narrative, reflective, autobiographical, and theoretical elements (Zlatar, 2000). Starting with the sentence “I have always dreamt of writing a bad novel”, Almodóvar initiates a kind of literary-theoretical discussion about the novel and the screenplay as narrative forms.⁹ He speaks from the position of a filmmaker, not a literary theorist, so his conclusions primarily concern his own experiences in writing and his relationship with that activity. He considers himself an author of good screenplays, but he is equally aware that this is not the case with writing novels: “It has taken me a long time and quite a few films to admit that, as a novelist, I wouldn’t be up to the task, despite the fact that my screenplays are becoming more and more literary and some of my works, had I had the talent, would have made better novels than films” (2024; 157). Discussing what represents his private and professional sphere, Almodóvar employs autobiographical strategies to examine his subjective position and personal perspectives in the context of literary creation. He approaches this matter very seriously, aware of his strengths and weaknesses in writing. He supports his claims with concrete examples and analyses, shaping a text that leaves the impression that he needs much more “practice in self-criticism” to write a novel. At the same time, he reveals himself as a very skilled and creative storyteller.

6. Conclusion

The focus of this work has been directed towards the analysis of texts by the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar. Seeking to establish their aesthetic and narrative coherence, the aim was to identify all those works that can be encompassed within the domain of autobiographical discourse. The corpus for such research included the books *The Patty Diphusa Stories and Other Writings* and *The Last Dream*, which to the greatest extent open space for discussion on narrative models based on

⁹ In the discussion, he interprets a subtype of text, calling it a “novelization”, which, for him, is “a means of spinning out the success of the movie by repackaging it as a novel” He describes it as self-deception, even in the case of autofiction (2024, 156).

authenticity and credibility. Starting from the theoretical assumptions of Philippe Lejeune and Gérard Genette and their discussions on autobiographical discourse, through the typology of narrative models by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, it has been pointed out that Almodóvar, despite his resistance to writing an autobiography, largely chooses a form of expression in his texts that does not adhere to the criteria of a typical autobiography, but can be classified as life narrative form within its discourse.

Patty Diphusa belongs to homodiegetic fiction in which the narrator and the character are identical, but on an emotional and cognitive level, certain details about the author are implicitly revealed through the character. Almodóvar has attributed importance to Patty Diphusa in his professional career for decades, often emphasizing that he has created a character “uninhibited in every way” that has evolved over forty years into a “new character (...) more somber, more austere, more melancholic, less certain, more insecure, and more afraid”, while always highlighting that it is the same person (2024, 9). In line with this, Almodóvar, through the fictional character Patty Diphusa, establishes a self-referential relationship on a certain level. A somewhat clearer picture emerges in *Other Writings* that are more difficult to classify in terms of genre but can, based on certain parameters, be grouped among diary entries, fragmentary associative autobiographies, and letters as models of intimate writings. In most cases, an autodiegetic narrative and an autobiographical agreement have been observed. The same applies to the collection *The Last Dream*, where the autobiographical act is recognized in only four stories, primarily in the form of diary entries and essays.

To conclude, it can be said that Pedro Almodóvar’s texts do not represent typical autobiography, but rather life writing and life narrative forms which can be categorised or at least analysed in terms of autobiographical discourse. Writing them he shows his writing sensibility, even though he cannot be considered a conventional writer. He does this effortlessly and without the fear that his artistic work will be evaluated solely through what he has written. He has proven to be, above all, a storyteller who blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. Simultaneously, he finds inspiration in his own life to shape autobiographical discourse because “reality needs fiction in order to be more complete, more pleasurable, bearable” (2024, 79). For him, as a filmmaker, screenwriter, and narrator, this has proved to be crucial.

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OD ŽIVOTA DO TEKSTA I FILMA: PEDRO ALMODÓVAR I AUTOBIOGRAFSKI DISKURS

Rad analizira tekstove Pedra Almodóvara objavljene u dvjema knjigama *Patty Diphusa i drugi tekstovi* i *Posljednji san* u kojima je primjetno njegovo poigravanje autobiografskim diskursom. Kako oduvijek govori da ga ne privlači pisati autobiografiju niti želi da to drugi čine, ni objavljeni tekstovi ne podliježu takvom žanrovskom određenju. Međutim, detaljnijom analizom mogu se prepoznati obilježja tekstova na granici dnevnika, asocijativne autobiografije, pisma ili eseja. Polazeći od teorijskih pretpostavki Philippea Lejeunea, Gérard Genetta o autobiografskoj prozi i tipologije pripadajućih narativnih modela Sidonie Smith i Julije Watson, ukazalo se na to da Almodóvar u velikoj mjeri izabire oblik izričaja koji ne podliježe kriterijima tipične autobiografije, ali se po određenim mjerila mogu svrstati u njezin diskurs. Time Almodóvar podjednako predstavlja određene trenutke iz vlastite prošlosti, ali i dopunjuje podatke o svojim filmovima.

Ključne riječi: Pedro Almodóvar, autobiografski diskurs, Patty Diphusa, *Posljednji san*