

Public Abstract

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Title: Georges Perec: Autobiography and Trauma

Georges Perec (1936-1982) has been widely studied for his linguistic prowess and his unique talent as a writer. However, a new area into which the critique is now looking, trauma, is relevant at the utmost for studying the work of this author, and particularly his autobiographical work. This dissertation shows that *W or the Memory of Childhood*, but also *Ellis Island*, highlight the originality of Perec's autobiography –widely due to the trauma incurred by Perec as a young child, namely that of the destruction of his Jewish family by the Nazis during the second world war. Such an experience becomes particularly interesting when tied to autobiography.

Additionally, the relationship between memory and recounting of the trauma lies at the heart of Georges Perec's writing, which I demonstrate in the analyses given of the autobiography and autobiographical endeavor of this author through the two above-mentioned books. In fact, Perec truly creates a new autobiographic genre with *W or the Memory of Childhood*, an autobiography which must resort to fiction so as to better express the trauma of an I (claimed amnesiac by the author) shattered by –History with its Great Axe, – in other words: the real. With *Ellis Island*, Perec's autobiographical approach turns into a research of collective memory through which he is in search of the memory of his own identity by means of meeting those, such as the Jews, who have gone through a similar experience of being forced into exile from their culture and identity.

With this in mind, this dissertation introduces and defines trauma, in particular as applied to Perec, and explains it notably via a Lacanian approach, thus demonstrating that Perec, as any human being, was subjected to the very first traumatic instance presiding over the human condition: that of the real. This dissertation, focusing on Georges Perec's case, will explore the links between the individual and its relationship to that real, acutely harsh in the case of the writer since his entire family (with the exception of his paternal aunt) was deported and annihilated before 1944. I show that Perec chose literature as a means by which to tackle his trauma, which becomes obvious in the particularly intimate genre of autobiography.

The conclusion of this dissertation establishes that Perec did not come to terms with his trauma. Autobiography is not, with Perec, a way to tell and explain oneself (as Rousseau had done), but it is the writing of a broken life, a broken I, who, to the contrary of his annihilated family, wanted to leave a trace of his passage among us.