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Narrating the Self: Linguistic Features and the Construction of Discourse through Memory and Subjectivity in Petro Marko's Autobiography

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the autobiographical work of Petro Marko through a linguistic and discourse-oriented methodology, focusing on the interplay of memory, self-construction, and narrative discourse. The interview format functions as a metadiscursive strategy that challenges traditional autobiographical linearity, emphasizing a dialogic engagement between different temporal selves. Linguistic and stylistic features foreground the subjective perception of lived experience, highlighting the author's artistic mediation of memory and identity. The episodic structure of the text is explored as a narrative strategy that privileges subjective meaning-making over chronological coherence, contributing to the renewal and modernization of the autobiographical genre. By examining the linguistic mechanisms that sustain self-reflection and shape autobiographical truth, the study positions autobiography as a performative act of identity negotiation within a specific historical and cultural context. The linguistic and stylistic choices reflect the challenges of narrating both personal and collective histories under ideological constraints, against the sociopolitical backdrop of the author's time. Marko's narrative articulates both aesthetic control and personal authenticity, asserting autobiography as a sincere act of self-discovery. The theoretical framework draws on Roy Pascal's conception of subjectivity in autobiography and Nietzsche's notion of self-construction. Particular attention is given to the roles of interviewer and interviewee—both enacted by the aging

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author—as a performative device that enables layered self-reflection and the emergence of a multifaceted narrative voice. Through its fragmented architecture and metadiscursive devices, Marko’s text reconfigures autobiography as a dynamic site of memory, identity, and historical representation.

Keywords: Autobiography; Linguistic Features; Narration; Fragmentation; Stylistics

1. Introduction

Autobiographies hold significant importance in terms of their formal classification and the way they are conceptualized and constructed, ultimately contributing to the establishment of their own canon and its linguistic and stylistic features. However, their value expands beyond genre theory, encompassing their role in fostering a deeper understanding of the self and reflecting major historical events as inscribed within the personal and social lives of prominent figures, particularly writers. Our conception of identity has undergone considerable transformation, especially as we have become increasingly aware of the internal dynamics of the human body, now recognized as a primary locus through which our perception of the world is shaped. Language praxis (as in writing your own autobiography) is one of the most prominent ways by which we construct our thoughts and create ideas on self and world. According to Davis, Eichsteller and Baker, “Language communicates and represents, but also occludes the social relationships that constitute it as a form of power”^[1]. Ontogenesis, in this context, surpasses the mere physical development of the human organism, culminating instead in various forms of self-reflective knowledge, among which autobiography emerges as a principal mode, as one of the most sophisticated linguistic forms of knowing and constructing oneself. As Paul John Eakin argues in his canonical work *How Our Lives Become Stories*, the development of self-awareness begins at the physiological level, only to evolve and expand across multiple dimensions beyond it: “Contemporary medical technology, using computer imaging, fiberoptic photography, and a battery of ”graphs” and ”scans”, permits us to witness an astonishing array of physiologic processes in the body’s interior, but it doesn’t yet provide access to what Edelman calls primary consciousness”^[2]. Such consciousness is shaped by the linguistic praxis of writing an autobiography, which constructs meaning from factual events and personal experience. Language shapes realities, beyond merely representing them.

This article aims to investigate the ways in which Petro Marko’s *Interview with Oneself* reconfigures the conventions of autobiographical discourse through a distinct interplay of linguistic innovation, dialogic structure, and narrative fragmentation. It aims to examine how the text mobilizes formal disruptions—such as the self-interview format and non-linear temporal layering—not merely as stylistic devices, but as mechanisms for representing the fragmented processes of memory and identity construction.

The central research questions guiding this study are as follows: In what ways does Marko’s use of dialogism, as informed by Bakhtinian theory, destabilize the unified autobiographical subject? How does the formal fragmentation of narrative chronology serve to reflect the epistemological instability of memory within the context of both personal trauma and collective history? And to what extent does the linguistic hybridity of the text enable a rearticulation of autobiographical voice in a culturally and politically charged setting? By foregrounding these inquiries, the analysis seeks to contribute not only to the understanding of Marko’s singular contribution to Albanian literature, but also to broader theoretical debates concerning the relationship between narrative form, memory, and subjectivity in life writing.

Autobiography has long been recognized as a genre that records history, offering insight into the perception of major historical periods and their subjective reframing within individual lives. Yet, this rather elementary and reductive understanding view overlooks autobiography’s broader scope, which extends beyond documentation to reaching instead into philosophical reflections that extend far beyond the immediate historical context. For example, Georg Misch describes autobiography as a spiritual expression of an individual’s inner life and intellectual growth, especially in early figures like Saint Augustine and Marcus Aurelius. He argues: “The fundamental character of autobiography is determined not by the wish to give an objective account of the facts of a life, but by the desire to understand the inner meaning of life through the recollection of its course”^[3].

This connection deepens through discourse and narration, which function as linguistic practices intimately linked to interiority and meaning. Autobiography is not a mere chronicle of past events; it actively constructs the “self” — the narrating subject — through the practice of writing itself. From a linguistic and narratological perspective, autobiography is defined by the strategies within its discourse and narrative, constituting a performative act. This explains why autobiographical narratives often deviate from chronological or objective recounting, instead it adopts characteristics shaped by the perspective imposed by the narrative and linguistic act. Discourse analysis thus provides tools to explore how autobiographical identity is linguistically and socially constructed within historical contexts. In this sense, discourse analysis offers the necessary tools to examine how the identity of the autobiographical voice is constructed both linguistically and through broader social and historical stances. As Norman Fairclough observes, “language is a form of social practice and not simply a reflection of social processes or practices”^[4]. Here, the text is more than a memory archive; it is a site of ideological negotiation where norms, ethics, and identity emerge through storytelling and reflection on lived experience.

Narrative linguistics emphasizes that the *temporal* and *structural* dimensions of the autobiographical genre are inherently intertwined. Labov states that “narrative is a method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events that actually occurred”^[5]. The formal connection between language and the chronology of events is not merely technical or structural; it reflects a continuity of narrative and identity coherence. *Linguistic tools* serve to establish the narrator’s mediating role between events, memories, and their meanings. The autobiographical genre in Albanian literature occupies a paradoxical position—small in corpus but rich in potential for innovative literary expression^[6]. Amid this landscape, Petro Marko’s *Interview with Oneself (Clouds and Stones)* stands as a groundbreaking work that expands the genre’s boundaries and reshapes the relationship between self-representation and narrative form^[7]. Written in a *dialogic, self-interview* format, the text engages deeply with memory, identity, and history offering a layered exploration of personal and collective experience^[7].

Marko’s autobiography acknowledges the limits of linear storytelling in conveying the fragmented nature of mem-

ory; therefore, he employs innovative linguistic features to transcend this limitation. This narrative strategy aligns with broader literary movements that challenge traditional conventions, situating Marko’s work within a global dialogue with modernist and postmodernist approaches to autobiography and its linguistic form. The adoption of a dual-temporal perspective deepens the *narrative architecture*, as Marko juxtaposes the immediacy of lived experience with the reflective lens of retrospection. As its seen in the fragment below: Question: - “What do you remember from those days? Response: - Comic and tragic episodes...”^[7]. This dynamic interplay between *past* and *present* not only mirrors the reconstructive processes of memory but also invites the reader to engage with the narrative’s multilayered structure. Central to this formal innovation is the self-interview format, which decentralizes the authorial voice and foregrounds a dialogic interplay that deconstructs the binary opposition between narrator and subject. This technique reflects the fragmented contours of identity and resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of *dialogism*, emphasizing the coexistence and interaction of multiple voices within a single narrative space^[8].

Marko’s linguistic choices further contribute to the text’s thematic complexity. His deliberate use of colloquial Albanian, intertwined with poetic imagery, expresses the tension between the individual and the collective, anchoring the narrative in a specific cultural context while simultaneously engaging with universal themes of memory, loss, and self-discovery. The linguistic hybridity of the text immerses readers in an experience that is both intimate and expansive. The autobiography’s events are extraordinary, beginning with the Albanian uprisings against the Italian occupier during World War II continuing through Marko’s role as an internationalist volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, his forced return as a prisoner through Italy, and later the communist regime’s establishment in Albania^[7, 9].

His most significant contribution within the Albanian context lies in his lucid and unflinching perspective on key historical events—such as the Second World War and the rise of communism in Albania—which for decades were subjected to ideological interpretation. According to scholar S. Bejko, *Retë dhe gurët (The Clouds and the Stones)* by Petro Marko is not merely a source of readerly curiosity or aesthetic enjoyment; rather, it constitutes a text of indispensable value

for the literary historian^[10]. This formulation underscores the writer's role as both witness and interpreter, offering insight into the deeper significance of historical processes that have shaped collective memory.

Through an analysis of "*Interview with Oneself*", this study aims to highlight how Petro Marko reimagines the autobiographical form, positioning it as both a vehicle for personal testimony and a repository of cultural memory. Through structural innovations, thematic richness, and stylistic originality, Marko's work emerges as a foundational text for understanding Albanian literature's potential within the broader global literary tradition. The paper begins by outlining the methodological framework necessary for unpacking these dimensions, establishing a basis for a thorough examination of Marko's narrative techniques and thematic contributions.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodological framework to examine *Interview with Oneself*, integrating analytical-synthetic, interdisciplinary approaches combining linguistic and narratological approaches to provide a comprehensive exploration of its *structural*, *thematic*, and *historiographical* aspects. These methodologies are employed to explore the text's structural composition, thematic depth, and historiographical significance, with a particular focus on how autobiographical discourse negotiates memory, identity, and ideological positioning.

Corpus and Analytical Units: The primary material analyzed is the complete text of *Interview with Oneself* by Petro Marko. The analysis is conducted on three levels: (1) linguistic, focusing on syntax, lexicon, pragmatics, and stylistic markers; (2) narratological, addressing narrative structure, temporality, and focalization; and (3) comparative, placing the text within broader literary traditions of modernist and postmodernist autobiography.

The analytical-synthetic approach deconstructs the autobiographical discourse, revealing how Marko's *fragmented narrative structure* organizes disparate recollections into a *cohesive yet fluid* representation of selfhood. This method is particularly suited to analyzing how the self-interview format challenges conventional autobiographical linearity, positioning autobiography as an evolving negotiation between past

and present identities. This includes identifying and interpreting instances of narrative fragmentation, discontinuity, and self-reflexivity. Through this approach, the study examines how Marko's reconstruction of his personal history functions as both self-reflection and ideological commentary, reinforcing autobiography's role as a literary and historical act.

The examination of syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic elements contributes to understanding the structure of the autobiographical discourse. More specifically, several aspects of *linguistic characteristics* are examined, the discourse markers, the usage of grammatical persons, the usage of past and present tense and modality. This linguistic fragmentation not only reflects memory's instability but also serves as a performative device for constructing a multidimensional self. Additionally, lexical repetition and semantic emphasis are analyzed as mechanisms that reinforce autobiographical authenticity, allowing the text to function as both personal testimony and historiographical intervention. The self-interview format, embedded within a discursive framework, disrupts linear autobiographical narration by foreground code-switching, register shifts, and dialogic engagement between temporal selves. The interplay between the personal and the collective can be examined by the singular and plural alterations. This linguistic fragmentation not only reflects memory instability but also serves as a performative device for self-construction. Additionally, lexical repetition and semantic emphasis reinforce autobiographical authenticity, allowing the text to function as both personal testimony and a historiographical intervention.

The comparative methodology contextualizes Marko's formal innovations within broader literary and linguistic traditions, drawing parallels with modernist and postmodernist tendencies in self-writing. This approach situates *Interview with Oneself* within international discussions on autobiographical experimentation, demonstrating its resonance beyond the Albanian literary landscape. Comparative analysis further highlights the interplay between individual and collective memory, illustrating how Marko's selective recollection of historical events engages with larger socio-political transformations while maintaining a distinct personal lens.

The narratological approach examines the structural, temporal, and formal aspects of the text, emphasizing how fragmentation, focalization, and embedded narratives shape

Marko's autobiographical voice. Particular attention is given to the dialogic structure, which redefines autobiography as an interactive process rather than a solitary act of recollection. By adopting an interview format, Marko challenges conventional notions of narrator authority, fostering a multi-layered engagement between historical context and autobiographical subjectivity. Additionally, this approach explores the function of temporality in self-representation, tracing how shifts between narrative *perspectives* reinforce the complexity of memory reconstruction.

By synthesizing these methodologies, the study aims to provide a nuanced analysis of *Interview with Oneself*, situating it as a pioneering work in Albanian autobiographical literature. The interdisciplinary approach not only facilitates an in-depth examination of Marko's narrative strategies but also underscores autobiography's evolving function as a literary, historiographical, and providing rich material for exploration self-reflective practice.

3. The Language of Fragmentation: Disrupted Coherence and Narrative Complexity P. Marko's Autobiographical Discourse

Petro Marko's text presents a distinctive model of autobiographical discourse, marked by the unique construction of its linguistic and narrative strategy. This strategy, carefully chosen by the author, offers multiple perspectives on the unfolding of events and the process of self-reflection. Langacker's states in "Cognitive Grammar" that autobiographical truth may be considered a matter of construal - the "capacity to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways"^[11]. Autobiography, as a literary genre, remains underdeveloped in Albanian literature, making the works of authors who have contributed to this genre particularly valuable for study. Beyond the documentary value that individual testimony and historical accounts bring, Marko's "Interview with Oneself" engages with the complex process of constructing narrative in the autobiographical form through linguistic fragmentation, syntactic incoherences, lexical choices, and ellipsis disrupt the narrative coherence.

Marko's "Interview with Oneself" (Clouds and Stones) introduces several intriguing elements in its narrative and linguistic structure, particularly with its division into two tempo-

ral stages. While frequently incorporating autobiographical notes into his fictional novels (ex. "Hasta la vista") *Interview with Oneself* stays true to the autobiographical genre but employs other literary techniques, discourse-oriented literary techniques^[7], including the framing of the narrative as an "interview"? This raises critical questions: how "authentic" is this interview? What does it mean to conduct an interview with oneself, and can such a form truly function as an interview?

The text's complexity arises from the fact that the narrator adopts the guise of the interviewer, while the self-reflective character assumes the role of the interviewee. These two figures, who are in essence one and the same, create a narrative dynamic that complicates the text. This fictional choice introduces four characters, who, though distinct, ultimately represent different facets of a single persona, further complicating classification. Marko employs his own life story to construct a fragmented, interview-like structure, which simultaneously mirrors the essence of autobiography and adopts the innovative literary form of self-interview. Through this technique, the author shapes a narrative that is both sincere and elusive in its content.

The organization of the text into *two structurally distinct parts*, with a 14-year time lapse between them, facilitates the presentation of the author's intellectual and personal development. "Why did you interrupt this interview with yourself fourteen years ago and continue it again now, in July 1991?"^[7]. The shift in tone, perspective, and sensibility between the two sections reflects the natural changes experienced in life over time. Time itself emerges as the driving force behind the narrative structure and grammatical time (past and present) support this, shaping both the form and the content of the text. The result is a deeply tragic yet profound human portrayal of Petro Marko, whose self-revelation in this work is both a process of artistic formation and existential exploration.

The structure of the text reflects an internal necessity that arises from the genre's requirements, as the chaotic and multifaceted nature of life demands innovative syntactical and narrative forms. "Thus, the very process of creation, which is the writing of autobiography, inevitably leads to the need for new structures that enable the presentation of another reality"^[12]. In this way, autobiography in Marko's hands leads to the creation of new structures that better cap-

ture the reality of lived experience. Therefore, “Interview with Oneself” becomes not just a personal reflection, but an innovative approach to autobiographical writing, presenting a new kind of structure that can accommodate the complexities of human existence.

The first part of Marko’s work involves the elderly Petro Marko being interviewed by his younger self, creating a narrative dynamic where the older character, acting as interviewer, invites the reader into his past. “This interview, I, the old Petro Marko, conduct with the young Petro Marko. Let’s begin”^[7]. As suggested by the title, we are presented with the perspective of the observer (the interviewer, in this case, the old P. Marko), who establishes the so-called autobiographical pact^[13], by introducing and affirming his presence in the text. While this approach belongs to the autobiographical genre, it also raises questions about the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, as the text blends elements of both to create a multifaceted linguistic and narrative experience. This interaction, framed as an autobiographical ‘interview,’ invites reflection on the nature of time, selfhood, and narrative.

“Interview with Oneself” invites readers to reflect not only on the life of Petro Marko but also on linguistic mechanisms, the nature of autobiographical writing itself, where the boundaries between fact and fiction, self and other, are fluid and interconnected. Naturally, the complication arises when elements of autobiography are strongly present in fictional prose, merging both fiction and biography into a single, cohesive narrative. In essence, the theory of literature, in its attempt to distinguish genres, first focuses on the differentiation between fiction and fact, which are both present and merged in this biography are interwoven in this biography to create a harmonious narrative-linguistic text.

The opposition between these genres, even when clearly defined, cannot be absolute without losing validity. Poststructuralists have challenged this binary, primarily relying on the idea that every narrative has world-creating potential. In “Fiction and Diction”, Genette examines this from a narratological standpoint, arguing that in factual narratives—such as biography and autobiography—the author and narrator are one and the same, while in fictional narratives, the narrator (within the fictional world) and the author (in reality) are distinct^[14]. Literary techniques—including digressions, vivid descriptions, and emotional depth—transform the au-

tobiographical form into a richer, more compelling narrative, establishing this work as a significant contribution to modern Albanian literature.

4. Linguistic Framing of Memory, the Dialogic Voice, and Narrative Construction in Petro Marko’s Autobiography

The narrative discourse in Petro Marko’s “*Clouds and Stones*” unfolds through the lens of memory, crafting a nostalgic atmosphere underscored by a rhythm that resonates with sincerity. This linguistic tempo is marked by repetition, semantic choices, and modal tones that evoke the texture of remembering. It adopts a childlike perspective on the depicted events, intertwining naivety and the enchantment of the world. The elderly narrator introspectively explores his inner self and ventures beyond it, recounting the origins of his family, his grandfather’s, and father’s stories, ultimately culminating in the account of his own existence. The narrative is characterized by the rediscovery of a naive child striving to comprehend the world. Despite the tragic dimensions of the narrative, it maintains a joyful rhythm, suggesting a glimmer of light beyond prevailing darkness. This rhythm is often embedded in the syntactic flow and lexical choices, emphasizing the importance of memory, as shown in the following words: “Question: - Why did you stop this interview with yourself fourteen years ago and continue it again now, in July 1991? Answer: It was impossible to write it, because even thinking about it would be life-threatening...”^[7]. The voice of the elderly Petro Marko emerges as both compelling and enigmatic.

The events narrated do not unfold in a strictly linear sequence; rather, they are recounted according to the desires and impulses of the narrator, who enters into a tacit dialogic agreement with his younger self. This interplay is linguistically implied through shifts in person, time, discourse deixis, tone, and temporal framing, which mark the alternation between narrative levels. For example, the elderly Petro Marko’s recollections are often instigated by questions that redirect the narrative trajectory, such as: “Wouldn’t it be better for you to tell us a few words about those quinces?”, or through playful invocations like: “You didn’t tell us about Mama Milla. How do you remember her?”^[7]. These shifts

exemplify the intersubjective dynamic established by Petro Marko with his younger self in the act of narrating his life. The combination of voices is a stylistic feature, embedding dialogism at the rhetorical level.

Referring to the distinction between narrator and narrative as conceptualized by Émile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson—that is, the differentiation between the past as reconstructed in autobiography and the simultaneous reconstruction of that past within the present of the autobiographical act—Lejeune aligns with Olney and Mandel in emphasizing that the primary locus of autobiographical reference does not reside at the level of the narrator *per se*^[15–18], but at the level of the narrative itself: the autobiographical act in which the identities of author, storyteller, and protagonist are textually posited and apprehended by the reader^[13]. This triangle is linguistically articulated through enunciative markers that create the shifts in subjectivity and narrative authority.

The social and historical context within an autobiography holds undeniable significance, especially for Petro Marko, whose life spans tumultuous eras marked by a transition from idealism to tragedy, this context is particularly salient. The author navigates the confrontation between emerging and declining systems, capturing a wide temporal scope and diverse geographical and historical contexts. This broad perspective affords “Clouds and Stones” a comprehensive portrayal of his life experience. Unlike autobiographies that remain confined to specific periods, Marko’s work encompasses nearly his entire existence. Such a panoramic vision imbues the narrative with a contemplative tenor. His lexicon reflects this temporal scope, shifting between archaisms and modern colloquialisms that express the socio-historical changes. Enveloped in nostalgia, especially for his youth, Marko eschews the enthusiasm and passion characteristic of his earlier work, “Hasta la vista”, favoring a more subdued reflection.

Petro Marko does not aim to provide a chronological or panoramic account of his era. Instead, he exercises selectivity in foregrounding episodes, a process facilitated by the interview structure that assists him in discerning what merits inclusion. This selective narration relies on linguistic condensation and narrative ellipsis, with language serving as a tool to reveal his story. He distances himself both from the classical autobiographical conventions of the 17th and 18th centuries and from the modernist tendency to subordi-

nate narrative to the self^[19]. Instead, he constructs a modern narrative that embodies his personal experiences and vividly reflects the hues of Albanian life across several decades. In this way, his autobiography emerges as an extraordinary testimonial work, arguably surpassing even his fictional oeuvre in compelling power. His testimonial work remains one of the most important works that reveal the truth about the communist regime in Albania, which together with other fictional writings and memoirs reveal the truth hidden behind propagandistic literature^[20]. Language in Marko’s testimonial narrative is charged with performative acts of witnessing that convey retrospective reflection, where linguistic choices such as modal verbs, intensifiers, and evidential markers play a crucial role.

The writing exhibits a deeply reflective quality, aimed at extracting generalizations and lessons from lived experience. Consistent with the characteristics of modern autobiographies, where the act of writing is oriented more toward self-understanding than mere historical chronicling, Marko’s text functions as an act of self-discovery. This discovery of oneself unfolds linguistically, through iterative structures, metaphoric expressivity, and shifts between registers that expose the stratification of the subject’s nature. This is manifested in the dialogical engagement with oneself, bridging distinct temporal selves. Ultimately, it is an interview with oneself that culminates in a confrontation with one’s life confrontation that, arguably, every individual owes to themselves. Language becomes the tool of existential analysis, exposing that the meanings and constructions we assign to memories are supported and created through the linguistic act.

5. Articulating Subjectivity, Self-Interview as a Linguistic Choice in Autobiographical Narrative

According to Roy Pascal in *Truth in Autobiography*, subjectivity is the principle that defines the genre, produced through the linguistic and stylistic features of the text. The very expectation of autobiography lies in the inclusion of the author’s perspective, emotions, and retrospective reflection—beyond the transparency of factual events. “Whether words are used to represent actual lives or characters of fantasy, the gap between the signifier and the signified is always the

same. It is language that describes both the real and the imaginary^[21]. In “Clouds and Stones”, Petro Marko embarks on a self-interview, an approach that, while logical in its design, is not exhaustive in its scope. He neither questions every period of his life nor follows strict chronology; instead, he selects episodes that hold personal significance^[7]. Guided by subjective preference rather than a documentary impulse, the self-posed questions function as a rhetorical device that deepens the autobiographical voice and highlights introspection. This semiotic variability lays the groundwork for a more complex role for language, which becomes a generative force shaping the contours of subjectivity.

Truth, Pascal argues, resides not only in factual accuracy but also in the meaning events acquire for the author^[22]. Subjectivity therefore mediates between memory and textual construction. It is not solely about the emotional impact of events on the author’s life, but also their selection, organization, and interpretation all depend on the author’s stance, giving autobiographies their distinctive tone and authenticity. This point is especially pertinent for Marko because the book is his final literary contribution.

Within this framework Marko constructs a fragmented mosaic of his life, titling stand-alone episodes that he deems meaningful, such as “Again with Devils and Priests”, “Bus-tiana”, “An Event I Will Never Forget”, and “After Spain: The Odyssey Continues”^[7]. Each titled segment is a discrete lexical unit whose autonomy emphasizes the artistic nature of the work and mirrors Marko’s tendency to fictionalize even autobiographical material. Autobiography is less about a continuous life story and more about a selective, creative interpretation of past events. This composition reflects a narrative poetics established by linguistic autonomy, where each titled section becomes a lexical unit, containing meaning within a broader discursive constellation. This method mirrors Marko’s tendency to fictionalize even autobiographical material, emphasizing the artistic nature of the work.

Marko’s idealism further colors the narrative. Throughout his life he believed society could become just and dreamed of a better world, based on his humanist convictions. What today, through a reductive logic, would be called communist utopia, in his time was an idealization of the possibilities of society and of human potential to create a better reality. The autobiographical voice thus articulates, both linguistically and narratively, the tension between personal

idealism and collective political memory^[23].

The interview format provides the structural spine of the text: each question prompts reflection and reveals key moments in his life, creating dialogue between past and present selves. In Bakhtinian terms the book is dialogic, allowing multiple internal voices to interact and turning the life story into a character-driven exploration of memory and identity, generating a modern discourse. This format blurs the line between autobiography and fiction, as the interview structure brings out multiple dimensions of the same person, transforming the narrative into a character-driven exploration of memory and identity.

Marko further enriches the narrative through retrospective loops, foreshadowing and anticipatory hints, techniques that create a dense, compelling narrative. Signals such as “Since you mentioned the revolver, I wish to revisit some memories from the Trade School,” or “This was my first meeting with Migjeni. I will speak of the second and final meeting later,” guide the reader to anticipate future developments and sustain forward momentum despite a non-linear structure^[7]. These metadiscursive clues function as temporal markers and as linguistic signals of narrative intentionality, shaping the reader’s perception of coherence through rhetorical anticipation. These narrative strategies serve to heighten the reader’s engagement, creating a layered text that resists linearity in favor of a more complex structure.

The first part of the autobiography is expansive and emotionally vivid, though marked by silences that betray self-censorship, with Marko taking more time to elaborate on specific episodes and provide greater detail. This section reflects his ability to delve deeply into personal and political experiences, despite the looming constraints of fear. Silence, reticence, and ellipse here acquire linguistic weight, because they are absences that signify censorship and external pressure. According to the preface by his daughter, Marko’s decision to withhold certain details was driven by a careful self-restraint intended to avoid jeopardizing both himself and his family in the face of political repression.

In contrast, the second part of the autobiography, where Elderly Petro Marko interviews Elderly Petro Marko, shifts toward a more compressed and succinct narrative style. The stylistic condensation underscores the urgency of final expression and heightens the sense of fragmentation. Juxtaposing sentimental recollection with cerebral

retrospection accentuates the heteroglossia of the narrative, and language mediates the temporal and emotional distance. The questions, while still brief, prompt a series of digressions that move through different phases of Marko's life. This section reflects a change in tone: the narrative becomes more condensed, characterized by intellectual clarity rather than the emotional depth and nostalgia of the earlier chapters. The stylistic condensation and the linguistic distillation (the economy of language), underlines the gravity of retrospection. The shift is attributed to the evolving nature of Marko's own circumstances, particularly his declining health, which casts a different light on the events he recounts. This section, marked by a more formal, intellectual tone, contrasts sharply with the warmth and curiosity of the earlier reflections, further deepening the sense of fragmentation within the text. The juxtaposition of sentimental versus cerebral tones, enhances the heteroglossia of the text, language is thus a mediator of temporal and emotional distance. Through the interplay of narrative form, episodic structure, and personal reflection, "Clouds and Stones" demonstrates how autobiography can blend history with artistic creation to explore the complex nature of memory, identity, and storytelling itself.

6. Self-Construction and Narrative Strategy in Petro Marko's Autobiography

In "Clouds and Stones", reality and language intertwine, each shaping the other, with the protagonist—who both lives through and is shaped by language—at the center of this dynamic. From the realities, events, and episodes that make up his life, the author emerges—this time in confrontation with himself. The autobiography functions as a tool of self-construction^[24]. Interviewer and interviewee—both depicted as elderly—share a communication code marked less by curiosity than by mutual understanding and anticipation of the next story to be recounted. An event that will be narrated through a language that presents and conveys fragmentation, but at the same time makes the connection between the past and present time. Through this telling, the interviewee builds a reality that, though structurally fragmented by time, remains energetic, dense, and intense, owing to the concentration and multitude of events.

The narrator in both parts of the autobiography is simultaneously the interviewer and the interviewee, a dual role that brings them closer to the "zero degree" of self-awareness, where total alignment with oneself occurs. This assumed distance fosters an original linguistic architecture realized through playful narrative strategies that allow him to (re)construct identity across different periods of his life. It also brings the development of an original and unique linguistic structure realized through different narrative games and strategies which helps the narrator to construct his different periods of his life, using different narrative times. The technique of integrating autobiographical narration within the framework of an interview remains an original approach, enabling the author to select, recount, and shape his life's evolution in the form and dimensions he desires. This is the essential function of autobiographical narration the identity construction caused by different stages of events and progressive development of the personality which is narrating^[25].

Autobiography as a literary form is very old and has traditionally been written by individuals with tumultuous lives, during pivotal historical moments. Whether penned by writers, like in the case of Petro Marko, or by prominent figures from other fields, it always serves a purpose. It could be argued that this purpose is twofold. Most visibly, it testifies to and immortalizes, through writing, the experience of an era—usually one of significant social or political upheaval. This is typically linked to periods of major social, political, and other transformations, where such experiences are significant enough to be narrated. As noted, this always occurs through the lens of the author and not as a mere chronicle, while at the same time, the optics of the writer is determined by the space^[26]. Petro Marko's autobiography recounts tumultuous events, dramatic change, wars, and even inner struggle.

A more attentive reflection on Friedrich Nietzsche's work *How One Becomes What One Is* suggests that through what an individual documents in language, based on their experiences and thoughts, they become who they are, for in this process, they build themselves through their reflections. Writing about oneself places the individual on a sacred and profound trajectory, that of self-knowledge. "Seeing that I will soon be going against the world, I find it necessary to say who I am. [...] In such circumstances, it is a duty against

which my habits, and especially the pride of my instincts, cry out: Listen to me, for I am such and such. And above all, do not confuse me with anyone else”^[27]. Petro Marko’s “Interview with Oneself” offers a significant contribution to the autobiographical genre, language, different times of narration, particularly through its innovative self-interview format. By dismantling conventional linear narration, Marko reconstructs the autobiographical act as an evolving dialogue between past and present selves, emphasizing memory’s fluid and fragmented nature. His approach transcends mere historical documentation, positioning autobiography as a reflective and performative discourse in which selfhood is continually remade.

Within Albanian autobiographical writing, Marko’s text occupies a unique position, enriching a genre that has remained relatively underdeveloped in Albanian literature. The complexity of his narrative strategies, particularly through its specific language and the interplay between historiography and self-reflection, contributes to broader discussions on identity construction, memory, and the subjective articulation of lived experience. By merging personal and collective histories, Marko elevates his work beyond individual testimony, establishing it as a foundational text within Albanian literary traditions.

7. Results

Petro Marko’s *Interview with Oneself* offers a significant contribution to the autobiographical genre, particularly through its innovative self-interview format. By dismantling conventional linear storytelling, Marko reconstructs the autobiographical act as an evolving dialogue between past and present selves, emphasizing memory’s fluid and fragmented nature. His approach transcends mere historical documentation, positioning autobiography as a reflective and performative discourse wherein selfhood is continuously reconstituted.

Within the landscape of Albanian autobiographical writing, Marko’s text occupies a unique position, enriching a genre that has remained relatively underdeveloped in Albanian literature. The complexity of his narrative strategies, particularly the interplay between historiography and self-reflection, contributes to broader discussions on identity construction, memory, and the subjective articulation of lived

experience. His ability to merge personal and collective histories elevates his work beyond individual testimony, establishing it as a foundational text within Albanian literary traditions.

The integration of historical data and personal testimony is central to Marko’s autobiographical project, as his firsthand accounts of pivotal historical events—including the Spanish Civil War, internment, and Albania’s political transformations—offer an invaluable perspective on ideological transitions and lived realities. Rather than presenting history as an objective sequence of events, Marko’s narrative functions as a testimonial, where personal recollection reframes and interrogates dominant narratives. His work illustrates how autobiography serves as both a repository of historical consciousness and an act of reinterpretation, bridging individual and collective memory.

The importance of narrative structure and formal aspects is evident in Marko’s intentional fragmentation of discourse, the juxtaposition of temporal perspectives, and the destabilization of the narrator’s authority. His manipulation of autobiographical conventions—particularly through the interview format—problematizes traditional notions of authenticity and self-coherence. By disrupting linearity and imposing a dialogic framework, Marko redefines autobiography as an adaptive, polyphonic construct rather than a fixed representation of identity.

The relevance of linguistic tone is integral to the autobiographical experience, as Marko’s stylistic choices shape the reception of his narrative. His oscillation between colloquial speech and poetic expression reinforces the duality of autobiography as both an intimate recollection and a literary endeavor. The hybridity of his linguistic register reflects a complex negotiation between the personal and the collective, demonstrating how language mediates autobiographical self-fashioning.

Subjectivity, as an aesthetic and epistemological principle, emerges as a defining characteristic of Marko’s work. His selective reconstruction of events and self-perception underscores the modernist inclination toward introspection and fragmentation, distancing autobiography from historical neutrality. Through narrative self-construction, Marko foregrounds the autobiographical act as a process of continuous meaning-making rather than as a static recounting of facts.

The formal and stylistic significance of *Interview with*

Oneself lies in its ability to challenge literary conventions and reframe the autobiographical genre within broader contemporary theoretical frameworks. Marko's engagement with dialogism, linguistic hybridity, and narrative fragmentation aligns his work with global literary movements, situating Albanian autobiography within wider discursive traditions. His text exemplifies how autobiography functions as both a testimonial document and a literary artifact, reinforcing its evolving role in shaping cultural and intellectual histories.

8. Discussion

Petro Marko's *Interview with Oneself* emerges as a significant contribution to autobiographical discourse, reflecting a complex interplay between memory, identity construction, and literary innovation. The adoption of an interview format allows for an unconventional approach to self-narration, wherein the author simultaneously occupies the roles of both interviewer and interviewee. This structural choice facilitates a dynamic reflection on personal and historical events, breaking away from traditional autobiographical linearity. The fragmentation of memory in Marko's text underscores the inherent instability of self-representation, aligning with broader theoretical perspectives that view autobiography as a performative act rather than a mere recounting of lived experience.

The linguistic hybridity in *Clouds and Stones* further reinforces the autobiographical voice, blending colloquial expressions with poetic imagery to construct a deeply personal yet socially resonant narrative. This stylistic fusion accentuates the tension between individual identity and collective memory, positioning Marko's work within a broader literary dialogue that transcends national boundaries. By adopting a dialogic structure, Marko's text invites an analytical comparison with Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, wherein multiple voices coexist within a singular narrative framework. This approach complicates the boundaries between self-reflection and historical testimony, revealing autobiography as a fluid and evolving discourse.

Additionally, the methodological framework applied to Marko's work—combining analytical-synthetic, comparative, and narratological approaches—enables a deeper examination of its structural and thematic intricacies. The use of retrospective shifts and anticipatory references reinforces the

layered complexity of Marko's self-narration, challenging conventional assumptions about autobiographical coherence. Rather than presenting an objective chronology, *Interview with Oneself* foregrounds selective inclusion, emphasizing subjective interpretation over factual reconstruction. This selective narrative strategy prompts critical engagement with autobiographical authenticity, particularly in relation to the autobiographical pact that Marko establishes through his interplay of past and present selves.

Marko's engagement with historical contexts further adds to the text's significance, offering insights into ideological transformations and personal reflections on turbulent socio-political periods. His perspective on key historical events, including the rise of communism in Albania, serves as both personal testimony and a broader critique of political discourse. By integrating subjective experience with historiographical reflection, Marko positions autobiography as a crucial medium for understanding memory's role in shaping literary and cultural identity. Through these strategies, "Interview with Oneself" not only enriches Albanian literature but also contributes to global discussions on self-narration, identity formation, and the evolving nature of autobiographical writing.

9. Conclusions

Petro Marko's *Clouds and Stones* stands as a transformative work within Albanian autobiographical literature, demonstrating a unique approach to self-representation through its innovative self-interview format. By structuring his autobiography as an ongoing dialogue between different versions of the self, Marko challenges conventional frameworks of autobiographical writing, embracing a fragmented, introspective method that foregrounds the complexity of memory and identity. This technique allows for a layered exploration of personal and historical narratives, reinforcing the idea that autobiography is not merely a factual recounting but an interpretative act of meaning-making.

Through the disruption of linear storytelling, Marko resists traditional chronological autobiography, opting instead for a selective and episodic structure that mirrors the non-linearity of human recollection. His approach underscores that memory is inherently unstable and shaped by both introspection and external forces. The fragmented

nature of *Clouds and Stones* reflects the fluidity of autobiographical discourse, positioning Marko's work within broader literary movements that explore memory, temporality, and subjective experience. The text does not seek to reconstruct history as a static entity; rather, it negotiates between personal recollection and collective consciousness, offering an intricate interplay between self-reflection and historical engagement.

In addition to its literary innovations, Marko's autobiography holds significant historical value, providing insight into major socio-political transformations of 20th-century Albania. His selective engagement with events—ranging from war, exile, and ideological shifts—positions *Clouds and Stones* as both a testimonial document and a deeply personal account, demonstrating how autobiography can function as a bridge between individual narrative and collective history. By intertwining the self with broader historical forces, Marko foregrounds the impact of political upheavals on personal identity, highlighting the inseparable relationship between autobiography and historiography.

Beyond its engagement with history, *Clouds and Stones* expands the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, questioning the very nature of self-narration. By adopting a self-interview format, Marko establishes a narrative dynamic that blurs distinctions between subject and object, past and present, self and other. His work exemplifies how autobiography serves not merely as a record of personal experience but as a medium for exploring identity through literary construction. The shifting roles within the self-interview destabilize the notion of a single, coherent autobiographical voice, reinforcing the fragmented and dialogic nature of self-representation.

Ultimately, Marko's autobiography reflects a modernist approach to self-writing, marked by thematic depth, structural experimentation, and a reimagining of autobiographical conventions. His work challenges rigid genre classifications, demonstrating how self-narration can accommodate both factual testimony and artistic innovation. As a pioneering text in Albanian literature, *Clouds and Stones* offers a profound meditation on memory, history, and identity, solidifying its place within broader discussions on the nature of autobiography and its evolving role in literary and historiographical discourse.

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Conceptualization, B.Z. and M.B.H.; methodology, B.Z.; software, E.R.; validation, B.Z. and E.R.; formal analysis, M.B.H. and E.R.; investigation, B.Z. and M.B.H.; resources, B.Z.; data curation, M.B.H.; writing—original draft preparation, B.Z.; writing—review and editing, B.Z. and M.B.H.; visualization, M.B.H. and B.Z.; supervision, B.Z. and E.R.; project administration, B.Z. and M.B.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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