

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Aesthetics and Politics of First-Person Writing: Autobiography, Autofiction, Autotheory in France, Italy, Romania, 1990-2020

SUPERVISORS

	First name	LAST NAME	University	Research Unit
Supervisor	MATEI	ALEXANDRU	TRANSILVANIA BRASOV	Literature and cultural studies
Co-Supervisor	BOSCO	GABRIELLA	TORINO	Foreign languages and modern cultures

Fields of study**Literature****Requirements (academic background, languages...) needed to apply for this research topic**

BA in humanities, literary studies is an advantage; three languages known: English and French (C2) and Italian or Romanian (B2)

5 main KEYWORDS

romance contemporary literatures, autofiction, autobiography, autotheory, literature and ideology

ABSTRACT (250 words max.)

Since the 1990s, the way of writing about “the self” in Western and Eastern Europe has undergone significant change: the boundary between ‘classical’ autobiography, autofiction, and more theoretical and reflexive forms of self-writing (sometimes referred to as “autotheory”) has become permeable. In France, this field is marked by its theoretical heritage (Lejeune, Doubrovsky) and by a variety of literary practices—Annie Ernaux, Christine Angot, Hervé Guibert, etc.—that reexamine the veracity, ethics, and staging of the “I.” The term “autofiction” was coined in French literary practice (Serge Doubrovsky, 1977) and subsequently spread as a critical category. In Italy, self-writing takes various forms—from

“classical” autobiographical narrative to experimental writing—and benefits from an active academic tradition (seminars and collective volumes) that questions the porosity between fiction and memory. In Romania, the reception of French theories (Barthes in particular) and local practices give rise to political and contextual readings of personal writing. On a theoretical level, the notion of “autotheory” (writing that combines essay, testimony, and theory, sometimes claimed as a political/ethical gesture) is increasingly used to consider texts that lie between autobiography and critical reflexive practice; recent journals and dossiers discuss this from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Research aims and methodology

General Orientation

This is a **comparative, qualitative, and interpretive study** that analyzes self-writing practices (autobiography, autofiction, autotheory) across three literary-cultural contexts (France, Italy, Romania). It combines **close textual analysis** with **cultural transfer studies** and **reception analysis**. The study is also **transnational**, investigating how concepts circulate, are redefined, or resisted.

Main research aims:

1. Mapping three forms of personal writing (autobiography, autofiction, autotheory) in France, Italy, and Romania between 1990 and 2020
2. Analyze the “policies” but also the politics (with its aesthetic, ethical, institutional dimensions) that govern these forms of writing depending on national and global chronologies
3. Bring together English, French but also Italian, and Romanian approaches based on the contributions of main researchers to produce a contextualized transnational comparison, opening up towards a more comprehensive European project

2. Comparative Axes

The design rests on **three main comparative axes**:

1. **Formal axis** (textual/narrative strategies)
 - How “the self” is constructed (first-person voice, hybrid genres).
 - How fiction, testimony, and theory intertwine dialectically during 1990-2020 in each of those three countries
2. **Contextual-political axis** (historical/social conditions)
 - Post-Cold War transition (mostly Romania).
 - Feminist, queer, and gender and ethnic minority discourses (mostly France, Italy).
 - Political role of literature in a neoliberal context and in memory studies.
3. **Critical-reception axis** (academic and media frameworks)

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- France: dominance of *autofiction* as a critical category and influence of socio-auto-biography, terrain literature and nonfiction literature
- Parallels with Italian and Romanian fields and influence of French Theory

3. Methodological Paradigms

- **Literary Theory & Genre Studies:** use Lejeune (autobiography), Doubrovsky (autofiction), recent work on autotheory (Lauren Fournier, Paul Preciado, etc).
- **Comparative Literature & Transfer Studies:** Michel Espagne on cultural transfer, Pascale Casanova or Franco Moretti on world literary space.

Analytical Procedures

1. **Close Reading** (formal strategies: voice, temporality, intertextuality).
2. **Contextualization** (historical, political, gendered frameworks).
3. **Reception Analysis** (reviews, academic debates, terminological differences).
4. **Comparative Mapping** (synthesizing cross-national similarities/differences).

Cross-case Analysis

- Build matrices (FR–IT–RO) with variables such as:
 - Terminology (autobiography/autofiction/autotheory).
 - Political themes (memory, gender, trauma).

Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

Added value:

- Brings together three literary traditions often studied separately.
- Highlights the political and ethical dimension of self-writing (gender, memory, post-communism, minority discourse).
- Integrates underrepresented critical voices (Bosco, Matei) into a European conversation dominated by Anglo-Saxon and French theorists.
- Advances cultural transfer studies by showing how categories (*autofiction*, *autotheory*) travel, mutate, or resist across borders.

Relevance:

- A nuanced typology of autobiographical practices across three countries.
- Evidence of how *politics of the self* vary depending on historical and cultural context.
- A model for transnational analysis of self-writing.
- Integration of underexplored Italian and Romanian contributions into the broader European conversation.

Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

- ☐ The project directly addresses CHORAL’s mission of cross-linguistic, cross-national humanities research.
- ☐ Builds bridges between Western (France, Italy) and Eastern European (Romania) scholarship.
- ☐ Promotes dialogue among research teams with complementary expertise:
 - **Team France:** specialists in autofiction (beginning with Doubrovski, Lejeune, etc.) and autotheory (Jean-Christophe Cavallin comme praticien, Marilyne Heck théoricienne émergente)
 - **Team Italy:** Bosco and colleagues, expertise in “scrittura in prima persona” and Proustian legacies.
 - **Team Romania:** Pirjol and others, on the changes in first person narratives after the collapse of communism.
- ☐ Encourages capacity building by involving young scholars and doctoral students across three countries.

Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

- ☐ **Academic outputs:**
 - 1 monograph (the PhD thesis comparative study FR–IT–RO, 1990–2020).
 - 2–3 peer-reviewed articles in leading journals ().
 - Edited volume with contributions from French, Italian, Romanian scholars.
- ☐ **Conferences & workshops:**
 - Annual workshops rotating between Torino and Braşov
- ☐ **Dissemination:**
 - Open-access repository of bibliographic resources.
 - Public lectures and roundtables (aligned with CHORAL outreach goals).
 - Blog or podcast series on “Self-Writing and Politics in Europe” targeting broader audiences.
- ☐ **Training & impact:**
 - Involve PhD students in archival and bibliographic work.
 - Develop teaching modules on autobiographical practices for comparative literature curricula.
 - Facilitate translations (FR–IT–RO–EN) of key theoretical texts to broaden accessibility.

Estimated schedule

Year 1 (Oct. 2026 – Sept. 2027)

Focus: Foundations & Corpus Building

- **Oct.–Dec. 2026:** Project kick-off; coordination meetings (Braşov).
- **Jan.–Jun. 2027:** Literature review; mapping existing scholarship
- **Mar.–Jun. 2027:** Corpus constitution (selection of primary texts FR–IT–RO, translations when needed).

- **Jul.–Sept. 2027:** First workshop (hosted in Torino); presentation of initial bibliographies and theoretical framework.
Deliverables: Annotated bibliography (open-access), working paper on theoretical frameworks.

Year 2 (Oct. 2027 – Sept. 2028)

Focus: Analysis & Comparative Studies

- **Oct.–Dec. 2027:** Close readings of French corpus (autobiography, autofiction, autotheory).
- **Jan.–Mar. 2028:** Close readings of Italian corpus; integration of Bosco's frameworks.
- **Apr.–Jun. 2028:** Close readings of Romanian corpus; integration of Matei's frameworks.
- **Jul.–Sept. 2028:** Comparative synthesis workshop (Braşov); preliminary results shared with CHORAL network.
Deliverables: 2 peer-reviewed articles submitted (1 on FR/IT, 1 on FR/RO). Draft chapters for monograph.

Year 3 (Oct. 2028 – Sept. 2029)

Focus: Synthesis, Dissemination & Training

- **Oct.–Dec. 2028:** Final comparative mapping (FR–IT–RO).
- **Jan.–Mar. 2029:** Drafting and revision of monograph.
- **Apr.–Jun. 2029:** International conference (Brasov, hosted with CHORAL programme) with the possible title *"Self-Writing and Politics in Europe, 1990–2020."*
- **Jul.–Sept. 2029:** Submission of monograph to publisher; public dissemination activities (roundtables, blog, teaching modules).
Deliverables: Monograph, edited volume, 3–4 journal articles, final conference proceedings.