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**NEW SINCERITY AND THE LITERARY SELF-PORTRAIT:
A CASE STUDY ACROSS MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM AND
BEYOND**

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Abstract: In this paper I take two recent cases of literary self-portraits to argue that both function as artistic manifestations of the 1990’s concept of New Sincerity, which was proposed by David Foster Wallace in “E Unibus Pluram” (1993), and theorized by Adam Kelly in 2010. Such self-portraits are Edouard Levé’s *Autoportrait* (2005) and Saúl Montaña’s *Autorretrato* (2017). Moreover, I analyze if these self-portraits contextualize New Sincerity in their respective local Zeitgeists (France and Bolivia, respectively). Additionally, I contrast the self-portraits written by Levé and Montaña with other two written in verse and belonging to the paradigm of Modernism in the twentieth century: one belonging to Pablo Neruda and the other, to Nichita Stănescu. By this comparison, I argue that New Sincerity might be shaping contemporary self-portraits with new features that differ from the Modernist tendency to fulfill contemporary local needs.

Keywords: New Sincerity, authenticity, self-portrait, French literature, Bolivian literature, modernism, postmodernism, post-postmodernism.

New Sincerity and Postmodernism

In his 1993 essay, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” David Foster Wallace expressed his concerns about the role of irony in United States culture (Foster Wallace 151-194). For Wallace, irony had initially served as a tool of

Postmodernism to challenge and critique the *status quo*. However, by the early 1990s, irony had been co-opted by mass culture, particularly television, and had lost its subversive power. Instead, it trivialised serious issues by treating them with cynical and passive humour. Irony even extended to meta-commentary on the passivity of the average viewer, who spent six hours a day consuming ironic content on television. It seemed to have devolved into a form of pseudo-rebellious humour that fostered alienation, cynicism, and resignation (160-163; 171).

Wallace argued that new fiction needed to abandon the evasiveness of irony in favour of sincerity. He envisioned literary “anti-rebels” who would address contemporary issues directly (Foster Wallace 193). Drawing on Lionel Trilling’s essay *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), Adam Kelly coined the term *New Sincerity* to describe Wallace’s vision and distinguished *sincerity* from *authenticity*:

Whereas sincerity places emphasis on intersubjective truth and communication with others, and on what Trilling calls the “public view”, authenticity conceives truth as something inward, personal and hidden, the goal primarily of self-expression rather than the other-directed communication (Kelly 132).

New Sincerity restores a connection between the text and extratextual elements, including the author and their readers. Within this framework, the author is committed to conveying truth to “others” — a concern that had diminished in Modernism and the strand of Postmodernism Wallace critiqued. By contrast, in the paradigm of authenticity, the focus is on the truth of the “self”; the author views their work as a reality hermetically sealed from the extratextual world. This paradigm aligns with Modernism, particularly in light of Roland Barthes’s distinction in *La mort de l’auteur* (1967): a separation between the text — anchored to the narrator — and the external world, where the author resides (Barthes 49-55). However, New Sincerity may be part of a contemporary literary movement to reassert the presence of the author (Ercolino 103-104).

In its commitment to conveying truth to “the other,” sincerity grapples with the complexities of communication. It recognises that no discourse is free from the risks of manipulation, conditioning, or misinterpretation. Nonetheless, such risks are embraced as inherent to communication, alongside the principle that there must

always be an “intent” to tell the truth, though not a “motive” that conditions the act of enunciation (Kelly 140). As Kelly observes:

This is a fraught distinction, and even the writer him – or herself will never know whether they have attained true sincerity, and the reader will never know either. And yet true sincerity happens, is in fact made possible by the impossibility of its certain identification (Kelly 140).

Thus, New Sincerity can be characterised by three key features: 1) a rejection of irony; 2) the openness of literature to extratextual elements (e.g., the author, readers); and 3) an acceptance of the risk of insincerity, balanced by an *intent* to communicate transparently. The second and third features distinguish sincerity from authenticity. In rejecting postmodern irony, New Sincerity is often positioned as both post-postmodernist and post-ironic.

Towards a definition of the literary self-portrait

I wish to focus briefly on the second feature: the blurring of boundaries between the extratextual space and the *œuvre*. More specifically, I want to talk about the cases when the author shares the same name identity with the instances of the narrator and the main character of a text. Phillippe Lejeune states that this trinity produces “intimate” works such as the autobiography, the diary, the self-portrait and the essay (Lejeune, *Autobiography* 4).

I wish to focus briefly on the second feature: the blurring of boundaries between the extratextual space and the *œuvre*. More specifically, I want to discuss instances where the author shares the same name identity with the narrator and the main character of a text. Philippe Lejeune argues that this trinity produces “intimate” works such as autobiographies, diaries, self-portraits, and essays (Lejeune, *Autobiography* 4). Interestingly, the self-portrait stands out as a particularly relevant artistic manifestation within the framework of New Sincerity, as it not only exemplifies the second feature but incorporates all three of them.

To define the self-portrait, I begin with the elements Lejeune identifies for an autobiography (Lejeune, *Autobiography* 4):

1. Form of language: a) narrative; b) in prose
2. Subject treated: individual life, story of a personality

3. Situation of the author: the author (whose name designates a real person) and the narrator are identical
4. Position of the narrator: a) the narrator and the main character are identical; b) retrospective point of view of the narrative

Autobiography exhibits all four elements, but for Lejeune, the self-portrait does not adhere to 1a and 4b. It is not centred on a narrative or a retrospective perspective; instead, it is descriptive and present-focused (a self-portrait would assert “I am this”). While it may include brief narratives of past events, these always serve to explore the current state. It is debatable whether self-portraits are confined to prose, as Lejeune suggests, since numerous examples exist in verse (as I will illustrate later). Building on Lejeune’s definition of autobiography (Lejeune, *Autobiography* 4), I define a self-portrait as follows: “Self-portrait: present-oriented description in prose or verse, written by a real person concerning their own existence, where the focus is in their individual life, in particular their personality.”

Although self-portraits are typically associated with the visual arts, examples of this literary definition, consistent with Lejeune’s categories, emerge throughout the twentieth century (as I will demonstrate later) when authors seek to explore themselves in present-focused prose or verse. The self-portraits of Levé and Montaña (the case studies of this paper) exemplify the prominence of this mode in recent years.

Like autobiography, the self-portrait involves what Lejeune describes as a “pact” between author and reader. This pact entails the author attesting that they are referring to themselves through the narrator-character, substantiating this claim by using their name (or a pseudonym) within the text and/or by designating the genre of the text (e.g., self-portrait) explicitly, often on the book’s cover. By doing so, readers tacitly “agree” to believe that the author is writing about themselves. Consequently, readers are less inclined to search for similarities between the text and the author’s real life (as with novels) and instead examine the differences, particularly when questioning the author’s sincerity (though not their authenticity).

It is possible for an intimate work (an autobiography, a self-portrait, etc.) to be authentic without being sincere. Within the “pact,” the author might write about themselves from a personal perspective, producing a self-referential text legitimised by their signature, thereby achieving authenticity. However, the work would not be

considered “sincere” if the author shows no interest in determining how closely their “personal” account aligns with factual reality or how “others” perceive it.

This distinction underscores the relevance of contemporary self-portraits for the concept of New Sincerity. Twentieth-century self-portraits (aligned with Modernism and Postmodernism) linked literature with its extratextual elements, thereby demonstrating the second feature of New Sincerity. However, these works primarily exhibited *authenticity*, as authors expressed their self-perception through highly subjective (often poetic) perspectives. By contrast, contemporary self-portraits (aligned with Post-postmodernism) appear to reject irony by employing straightforward, unembellished language that reduces ambiguity and manipulation. In doing so, they reflect an intent to communicate transparently—and, therefore, with *sincerity*.

Levé’s and Montaña’s self-portraits as a response to their local contexts

Let us now turn to two contemporary self-portraits: Édouard Levé’s *Autoportrait* (2005) and Saúl Montaña’s *Autorretrato* (2017). Both works exemplify continuity within a new, more sincere style of self-portrayal initiated by Levé in France (arguably the literary epicentre for this trend) and extended by Montaña in Bolivia. These self-portraits align with all three features of New Sincerity, even if they are not directly influenced by David Foster Wallace. The convergence appears to stem from personal motivations—rooted in individual experiences and the distinct literary *Zeitgeists* of their respective contexts—that led both authors to adopt a style consistent with New Sincerity’s principles: 1) rejection of irony; 2) openness to extratextual elements (e.g., the author and readers); and 3) an embrace of the risk of insincerity, countered by an *intent* to communicate transparently.

Let us begin by addressing the first feature: rejection of irony. However, before doing so, it is important to consider that New Sincerity arose as a response to irony within late twentieth-century United States culture. As such, applying the concept of New Sincerity to contexts outside the United States necessitates a careful approach. Furthermore, the authors discussed here were responding to different literary traditions than those confronted by Foster Wallace. Nonetheless, I use the term New Sincerity in non-U.S. contexts because both Levé and Montaña reject irony in their works, albeit driven by distinct circumstances. Moreover, it is worth noting that the postmodern irony critiqued by New Sincerity is part of a broader American

postmodern apparatus, which, as George Ritzer observes, has been globalised, exemplified by the “McDonaldization” of society (Ritzer 186). Ritzer concurs with Fredric Jameson in asserting that Postmodernism, despite its discontents, became a globalised response to the worldwide crisis of late capitalism (Ritzer 52-53).

If Foster Wallace’s concept of New Sincerity emerged to address a cultural crisis closely tied to U.S. late capitalism, it is unsurprising that parallel trends have developed globally, initially as reactions against the worldwide “McDonaldisation” of late capitalism and, subsequently, against the discontents of globalised Postmodernism (and its hallmark, postmodern irony). Another global response to the limitations of Postmodernism, which intersects with New Sincerity in certain respects, is Metamodernism, a concept I will discuss later in this paper.

In the self-portraits of Levé and Montaña, the rejection of irony (and, specifically, postmodern irony) appears to stem from a shared desire to convey information transparently (a topic I will address in more detail below). This desire seems to have driven both authors to adopt a style that eschews distortion. Irony, with its inherent inversions, creates the kind of distortions Foster Wallace criticised in “E Unibus Pluram.” Within the literary *Zeitgeists* of their respective contexts, omitting irony (if not outright rejecting it) seems to have been a necessity.

In the case of French literature in the latter half of the twentieth century, the *Nouveau Roman*, Oulipo, and autofiction emerge as significant influences on Levé. Regarding the *Nouveau Roman*, Levé mentions in his self-portrait that Alain Robbe-Grillet was an important influence (Levé 21-22). Levé appears to share Robbe-Grillet’s views on breaking away from the traditional novel (he openly expressed his dislike for “the novel”, see Levé 20) and his preference for exploring everyday life in an “objective” manner. Importantly, irony was not a central feature of the *Nouveau Roman*. As for Oulipo, Levé acknowledges the influence of Georges Perec at the very beginning of his self-portrait (Levé 6). It is likely that Oulipo’s experiments with new literary forms inspired Levé’s own creative endeavours, though his work retains a seriousness that diverges from the playful tendencies of the French experimental group. With autofiction, there seems to be a notable rejection of the genre. Serge Doubrovsky, also influenced by Robbe-Grillet, coined the term autofiction in response to Philippe Lejeune’s concept of the “autobiographical pact.” Doubrovsky proposed a type of novel that was both fictional and autobiographical (Doubrovsky, *El pacto autobiográfico* 135). However, Levé sought to return to the purely factual

and non-fictional, while remaining self-referential. This commitment once again highlights his effort to eliminate distortion from his prose.

Levé presents a soberer — if not less playful — approach to creative writing than the works of the Oulipo group. Perhaps influenced by the *Nouveau Roman*'s rejection of the traditional novel, he concentrated on writing that appears to reflect the objective world. Finally, he distanced himself from autofiction, opting instead for a purely nonfictional (albeit still personal) prose. Through these significant influences, his literary sincerity took shape.¹

It is worth noting Fredric Jameson's perspective on the relationship between the *Nouveau Roman* and Postmodernism. According to Jameson, both reject the notion of linguistic transparency, extending this to a rejection of the primacy of phenomenological experience (Jameson 134). For the *Nouveau Roman*, this rejection led to the production of texts that focused on everyday objects and their linguistic representation, where the signified was subordinated to its material signifier in what Jameson describes as an "eclipse of the illusion of transparency" (Jameson 140-141). Levé appears to have drawn from the *Nouveau Roman*'s emphasis on the mundane and the material, yet he seems to have sought to restore the "illusion of transparency" in both the signifier and the conveyed message, thus breaking with the postmodern (and *Nouveau Romanesque*) tendency to overemphasise language itself.

On a personal level, Levé's work appears driven by an urgent need to communicate openly and exhaustively, even to the point of self-imposed catharsis: "Maybe I'm writing this book so I don't have to talk anymore" (Levé 25).² Here, sincerity seems to serve as a relief from personal anguish: "I wonder sometimes if I am doing art or just art therapy" (Levé 48).³ In this context, there is little room for irony.

Turning to Bolivian literature, prose has historically been dominated by realism, with a focus on the country's socio-historical conditions and the quest for a national identity (Antezana 27). In the 1980s, Jaime Saenz's ground-breaking novel *Felipe Delgado* (1979) catalysed a shift towards urban novels, marked by a more gnostic exploration of the individual, while still engaging with broader social and

¹ Perhaps Levé was also influenced by the fact that his main activity was photography, which could have contributed to his artistic vision focused on representation.

² J'écris peut-être ce livre pour ne plus avoir à parler. My translation.

³ Je me demande parfois si je fais de l'art ou seulement de l'art thérapie. My translation.

national dimensions (Antezana 47-48). By the twenty-first century, the collective pursuit of national or socio-historical representation was largely abandoned, allowing Bolivian literature to explore more diverse themes. Among these, the depiction of the individual's crisis became a recurring motif (Virguetti Villarroel 80). On the back cover of Montaña's self-portrait, literary critic Maximiliano Barrientos notes that this move away from the socio-historical focus of Bolivian literature reflects the shedding of an earlier sense of *pudor* (decorum), enabling a deeper engagement with intimacy (Montaña, back cover).

As Barrientos suggests, Montaña's self-portrait exemplifies a rejection of Bolivia's traditional socio-historical literature in favour of what I term a "new intimacy." While Montaña adopts a less serious tone than Levé (perhaps as a means of differentiation), he demystifies the *authorial* persona by offering an unembellished portrayal of "only" the *writer*. Notably, he achieves this without resorting to irony, even when employing humour. By foregoing the *pudor* that characterised earlier Bolivian literature, Montaña avoids concealing or "disguising" his intimacy through irony, which would otherwise serve as comic relief, distraction, or distortion. Instead, he represents himself directly, deploying blunt humour where appropriate.

For instance, Levé's restrained prose is evident when he discusses sexuality, even when addressing taboo topics: "I appreciate swingers' nightclubs, which take the logic of the nightclub to its natural conclusion" (Levé 80).⁴ In contrast, Montaña, while sometimes adopting a serious tone, allows for humour without irony in his reflections on sexuality: "At some point I thought I deserved to get laid with Lady Gaga" (Montaña 15).⁵ Interestingly, Montaña seems conscious of writing in the post-ironic age: "A friend told me: «We are no longer in the nineties, leave behind the cynicism and the irony»" (Montaña 18).⁶

Levé's and Montaña's self-portraits

I will now demonstrate how the second feature of New Sincerity—literature's openness to extratextual elements—manifests in Levé's and Montaña's self-portraits.

⁴ J'apprécie les boîtes de nuit échangeistes, qui poussent la logique du night-club jusqu'à sa conclusion naturelle. My translation.

⁵ En algún momento creí que yo merecía coger con Lady Gaga. My translation.

⁶ Un amigo me dijo: "ya no estamos en los noventa, deja atrás el cinismo y la ironía". My translation.

To do so, I will examine how each author portrays himself in relation to his surroundings.

Levé presents himself in a single paragraph spanning nearly 100 pages, filled with both qualitative and quantitative information. He describes his physical and psychological traits, his preferences and dislikes, his habits, memories, and expectations. His ideological, political, philosophical, and artistic opinions are shared, along with his sexuality, factual details about himself, and his reflections on what he knows and doesn't know. Furthermore, he offers insights into the people, objects, concepts, works of art, and commercial products associated with him:

I appreciate the simplicity of the biblical language. I vote. I live better in two houses than in one. I appreciate swingers' nightclubs, which take the logic of the nightclub to its natural conclusion. I was five years old when the clown said, "And now I'm going to ask a little boy to come to the middle", a drum roll accompanied the spotlight that came to rest on me, when the clown stepped forward, I cried so hard he turned to another child. I had measles, mumps, chicken pox. I saw an eagle. I saw starfishes. I learned to draw by copying pornographic pictures. I have a rather vague perception of history, and of stories in general, the chronology bores me. I do not suffer from the absence of those I love. I prefer desire to pleasure. My death will not change anything. I would like to write in a language that is not my own (Levé 80).⁷

Although there is occasional inventiveness or solemnity in his style, Levé's sentences are stripped of adjectival embellishments and overt value judgements. The rhetoric avoids manipulation, refraining from advancing a thesis or producing mannerist effects. Instead, the information is presented plainly and "naked," suggesting an intent to communicate transparently. Levé explicitly states his preference for direct speech in his self-portrait:

⁷ J'apprécie la simplicité de la langue biblique. Je vote. Je vis mieux dans deux maisons que dans une. J'apprécie les boîtes de nuit échangistes, qui poussent la logique du night-club jusqu'à sa conclusion naturelle. J'avais cinq ans lorsque le clown a dit : «Et maintenant je vais demander à un petit garçon de venir au milieu de la piste», un roulement de tambour a accompagné le spot qui s'est arrêté sur moi, lorsque le clown s'est avancé, j'ai pleuré si méchamment qu'il s'est tourné vers un autre enfant. J'ai eu la rougeole, les oreillons, la varicelle. J'ai vu un aigle. J'ai vu des étoiles de mer. J'ai appris à dessiner en copiant des photos pornographiques. J'ai une perception assez vague de l'Histoire, et des histoires en général, la chronologie m'ennuie. Je ne souffre pas de l'absence de ceux que j'aime. Je préfère le désir au plaisir. Ma mort ne changera rien. J'aimerais écrire dans une langue qui ne me soit pas propre. My translation.

In poetry, I don't like the linguistic craft, I like facts and ideas. I am more interested in the neutrality and anonymity of common language than in the poets' attempts to create their own language; factual reporting seems to me the most beautiful non-poetic poetry (Levé 40).⁸

For Levé, the transmission of facts and ideas takes precedence over linguistic craft. The text itself is not an end but a means of achieving effective communication. As with sincerity, Levé's self-portrait centres on dialogue between oneself and "the other" rather than prioritising the textual form itself. He reinforces this position by stating: "Rather than Joyce who writes banal things with extraordinary words, I prefer Raymond Roussel who writes implausible things with common words" (Levé 35).⁹

Levé's preference for Raymond Roussel over James Joyce underscores his rejection of Modernism in favour of later forms, particularly those influenced by Roussel, who had significant impact on the Oulipo group and the *Nouveau Roman*.

On the back cover of the first edition of *Autorretrato*, Maximiliano Barrientos observes a similarity between Saúl Montaña's self-portrait and Levé's approach. However, this observation is only partially true. Montaña's self-portrait recalls Levé's strategy of self-description using straightforward, transparent language. Like Levé, Montaña shares information about his memories, physical and psychological features, sexuality, ideologies, opinions, and associations with people, objects, and works of art. Yet Montaña diverges from Levé in tone and style. While Levé employs a serious and restrained approach, Montaña incorporates references to pop culture and uses colloquialisms that break the solemnity of the text, lending it a more conversational and light-hearted character.

I like to watch the movement of the tree leaves, caused by the wind blowing. I get bored in talks about literature. At some point I thought I deserved to get laid with Lady Gaga. The first memory I have of a song is the intro to Soda Stereo's *Cuando pase el temblor*. And the first approach to the mystery (albeit rustic) of poetry, was through another song: *Pastillas de amnesia*, by Bronco. I don't know what to expect from literature. My family's hacienda is called *Kaukaya*, a Guaraní word that has two versions of its

⁸ En poésie, je n'aime pas le travail sur la langue, j'aime les faits et les idées. Je suis plus intéressé par la neutralité et l'anonymat de la langue commune que par les tentatives des poètes de créer leur propre langue, le compte rendu factuel me semble être la plus belle poésie non poétique qui soit. My translation.

⁹ À Joyce qui écrit des choses banales avec des mots extraordinaires, je préfère Raymond Roussel qui écrit des choses invraisemblables avec des mots communs. My translation.

meaning: “place where only the owner can live” and “mountain that gets you drunk”. I had a hallucination in which Jesus Christ appeared flying over my bed and freed me from a demon, it was the Jesus of The Last Supper by Da Vinci. When I write I read little. I kissed a prostitute thinking of a friend with whom I was in love, I imagined her hair, her face very close to me (Levé 15).¹⁰

One element that both texts undeniably share is their approach to the author’s self, to the extent that intimacy is created with the reader (the extratextual space) through memories and information presented as truthful. This does not imply that such intimacy is achieved through emotional manipulation, as both self-portraits avoid the use of value judgements or narratives designed to justify the authors’ life decisions. Instead, intimacy appears to emerge from the absence of literary artifice and the presentation of information in a raw, unembellished, and seemingly more trustworthy manner (for the purposes of self-representation). As a result, both self-portraits engage the reader by projecting a sense of courage (sincerity) in exposing the self to such a degree that vulnerability becomes evident. This willingness to take the risk of “over-showing” the self seems central to fostering the connection between author and reader.

Modernist self-portraits (and how they differ from contemporary ones)

In addition to demonstrating that self-portraits are not a new literary form, I will now present examples of modernist self-portraits produced in the twentieth century to highlight how contemporary self-portraits tend to be more “sincere” (transparent) compared to their modernist counterparts, which often focus on the author’s own authenticity. In doing so, I aim to show the extent to which Levé and Montaña’s self-portraits align with the third feature of New Sincerity: the assimilation of the risk of insincerity, confronted with a commitment to communicating transparently.

¹⁰ Me gusta mirar el movimiento de las hojas de los árboles por la acción del viento. Me aburro en las charlas sobre literatura. En algún momento creí que yo merecía coger con Lady Gaga. El primer recuerdo que tengo de una canción es la intro de Cuando pase el temblor, de Soda Stereo. Y la primera aproximación al misterio (aunque rústico) de la poesía, fue a través de otra canción: Pastillas de amnesia, de Bronco. No sé qué esperar de la literatura. La hacienda de mi familia se llama Kaukaya, es una palabra en guaraní que tiene dos versiones sobre su significado: ‘lugar donde solo el dueño puede vivir’ y “monte que emborracha”. Tuve la alucinación en la que Jesucristo apareció sobrevolando encima de mi cama y me libraba de un demonio, era el Jesús de La última cena de Da Vinci. Cuando escribo leo poco. Besé a una prostituta pensando en una amiga de la que estuve enamorado, imaginé su cabello, su cara muy pegada a mí. My translation.

It is important to note that, although Foster Wallace's essay responds to ironic postmodernism rather than Modernism, Adam Kelly's subsequent concept of New Sincerity (which has become the most widespread theorisation of the subject) begins by contrasting Foster Wallace's concept of sincerity with modernist authenticity. Indeed, in the case of sincerity: "truth to the self is conceived as a means of ensuring truth to the other," whereas modernist authenticity "conceives truth to the self as an end and not simply as a means" (Kelly 132).

When authors aim to convey truth to others, rather than solely to themselves, they may be more inclined to adopt transparent language to minimise the risks of insincerity. This is evident in the works of Levé and Montaña. However, in the case of twentieth-century self-portraits, there appears to be a greater emphasis on constructing the self through language, treating texts as hermetic spaces. Unsurprisingly, self-portraits from this period were often expressed through poetry, as the polysemy of poetic verse was aesthetically favoured over the representational qualities of prose.

In French literature predating Levé, this preference for poetry can be observed in *Portrait* by Louis Calaferte. In Bolivian literature, early examples are seemingly absent, but in Hispanic literature, authors such as Manuel Machado (1), Pablo Neruda (2), Nicanor Parra (53), and Guillermo de Torre (18) composed poems titled as (self)portraits. In both the French and Hispanic poems mentioned, compositional demands led self-portraits to sacrifice transparency in favour of aesthetic considerations, transforming the author's image into a purely poetic (and richly polysemantic) construction.

An extreme case of this poetization of the self can be found in a self-portrait written by the Romanian poet Nichita Stănescu (*Autoportret*):

I am nothing but
a bloodstain
that speaks (Stănescu 328).¹¹

This is a personal synthesis rendered through the poetic image. In just three lines, Stănescu maximises the semantic potential of his words to evoke an indeterminate

¹¹ Eu nu sunt altceva decât / o pată de sânge / care vorbește. My translation.

meaning, while remaining authentic within the confines of the text and the author's self-perception.

Even in other attempts to provide more concrete information through poetry in prose, there prevails a *motive* for the poetization of the self. Consider this self-portrait by Chilean writer Pablo Neruda:

As for me, I am or I think I am hard of nose, minimal of eyes, scarce of hair on the head, growing of abdomen, long of legs, wide of soles, yellow of complexion, generous of loves, impossible of calculations, confused of words, tender of hands, slow of walking, stainless of heart (Neruda 2).¹²

The rhetoric of the poem employs emotional devices, inviting the reader to empathise with the author's poetic image rather than providing straightforward information. This yielding of identity to the constraints of poetic language is succinctly captured in Neruda's own words: "If you ask me what my poetry is, I must reply: I don't know; but if you ask my poetry, it will tell you who I am" (Estévez).

The relevance of New Sincerity and the self-portraits today

Although Levé and Montaña's self-portraits respond to their respective local literary contexts by rejecting irony, it is worth considering whether they belong to a broader constellation of contemporary self-portraits shaped by New Sincerity. Confessional literature has undeniably become a trend in recent years, yet its resources and strategies vary greatly between authors. As I have demonstrated, the post-postmodern self-portrait represents one of the most risk-laden practices of confessional literature due to the degree of intimate openness it fosters with the extratextual world. However, when executed effectively, it functions as a literary mechanism that connects the author with their readers rather than serving as an act of narcissistic self-glorification.

In summary, whether appearing as a critical synthesis of diverse influences, as in the case of Édouard Levé, or as a departure from previous traditions, as seen with Saúl Montaña, contemporary self-portraits embody the features of New Sincerity in

¹² Por mi parte, soy o creo ser duro de nariz, mínimo de ojos, escaso de pelos en la cabeza, creciente de abdomen, largo de piernas, ancho de suelas, amarillo de tez, generoso de amores, imposible de cálculos, confuso de palabras, tierno de manos, lento de andar, inoxidable de corazón (...)
My translation.

both France (the first case study) and Bolivia (the second). From a literary-historical perspective, both works seem to respond to their local *Zeitgeist*. On a personal level, they serve as analytic devices for expressing the author's relationship with their readers and for facilitating a process of self-reflection. This mirrors the post-postmodern dynamics seen in the United States, initiated by David Foster Wallace.

Why, then, does New Sincerity remain relevant? Firstly, it serves as a counter-reaction to the problems of Postmodernism and irony, as discussed earlier, by encouraging a direct approach to contemporary issues. Secondly, it promotes the creation of works that aim for transparency in written communication, raising ethical questions about the author's role in shaping the reader's perspective. New Sincerity asserts that an author's authentic perspective is insufficient if it fails to address and mitigate the risk of influencing the reader unduly. It proposes a conscious writing-reading dynamic that remains alert to the risks of manipulation. Finally, New Sincerity offers a powerful tool for self-exploration in the context of self-portraits. This is evident in Levé's case, where writing a self-portrait provided him with momentary relief, and in Montaña's, where his self-portrait demystifies the author's image, rendering him more human and accessible.

Since New Sincerity, a broader and more encompassing concept has emerged in the new millennium, addressing similar postmodern discontents: Metamodernism. This paradigm suggests a current tendency in many artistic and cultural works to oscillate between the modern and the postmodern, opposing "the scientific reductionism of the modernist perspective and the ironic detachment of the postmodern sensibility" (Dember). Moreover, Metamodernism seeks to restore affective sensibility within texts, addressing the scepticism of language characteristic of postmodern writing. It also reflects the author's self while considering the impact on the reader, an aspect Greg Dember refers to as "Empathic reflexivity." These characteristics align with New Sincerity, which, as argued earlier, opens texts to extratextual dimensions with the aim of achieving transparency for the reader.

Further research could explore whether New Sincerity constitutes a distinct literary mode within the Metamodern paradigm. I would tentatively suggest an affirmative answer, albeit with qualifications. Unlike many forms of Metamodernism, which oscillate between irony and other forms of humour, New Sincerity consistently rejects postmodern irony in favour of delivering unambiguous

messages. In this sense, the self-portraits examined here represent metamodern expressions that also fit, more specifically, within the framework of New Sincerity.

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