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Philippe Lejeune, On Autobiography. Ed. Paul John Fakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1989. Pp. xviii-269.

The publication in the United States of Philippe Lejeune's essays is yet another proof of the popularity in that country of French literary theory. During the last decade the world of literary criticism in America has witnessed the triumphs of the French post-structuralists. This time American scholars have a chance to become acquainted with the ideas of the major European authority in the field of autobiography.

Serious research in autobiographical studies has been going on in America for over two decades and the number books and articles on the subject has been steadily increasing. Methods and particular areas of interest have been as varied as the autobiographical texts themselves. Autobiography studies at American universities are becoming as fashionable and important as feminist criticism or deconstruction. An awareness among American critics of the existence of significant European, notably French, research in the field of autobiography has undoubtedly become general. It seems, however, that the only widely known essay of Lejeune — the author of half-dozen books and numerous articles on the subject of autobiography — until now was his famous "Le Fictif autobiographique." Among those aware that Lejeune's concept of autobiographical pact was only one of his many contributions to the study of autobiography was Paul John Fakin, himself a leading American specialist in the field.

Fakin, who is the book's editor, wants to present as

complete a picture of Lejeune as possible, and thus shows him not only as a formal theorist - as he has come to be known by most American critics - but, also, as a critic who respects the socio-historical approach. Lejeune's unusually wide range of interests is reflected here in thoughtful selections from five of his books, in which the French critic shows not only his impressive knowledge of the theory of autobiography and of autobiographies in French but also refers frequently to American criticism and American autobiographical texts.

The book is divided into two parts. The first contains six essays, in which Lejeune deals with various aspects of the theory of the genre. Besides the seminal "The Autobiographical Pact" and its lesser known continuation and clarification "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)", this section contains Lejeune's analyses of autobiographies in the third person (in America made famous by Henry Adams and Norman Mailer), autobiographies of childhood and the autobiography of Sartre, *Les Mots*. All these essays are perfect examples of "solid formal criticism", terms often used in discussing Lejeune. However, the shortest essay in this section "Looking at a Self-Portrait", shows us a different Lejeune: here we have a series of very personal, impressionistic remarks on the subject of painting and self-portraits. The same personal tone can also be found in several other recent essays by Lejeune, wherein the critic, whose chief field of interest is autobiography himself becomes - though on a limited scale - an autobiographer. In these essays Lejeune is far from the authoritarian tone of many formalist critics; he is willing to admit his shortcomings, to express his doubts and question his own assumptions.

The essays included in the second part of the book are less theoretical. Here the author discusses the history of various approaches to the genre, tries to characterize and categorize nineteenth century French autobiographies, writes about the problem of collaborative autobiography and finally turns his attention to various books of instruction for would-be autobiographers.

The evolution of Lejeune's interests, methods and style of writing, which can be discerned in the present volume, is discussed by Paul John Sakin in his introductory essay.

Sakin also describes the major critical accomplishments of Lejeune, compares his approach to that of other European and American critics and elucidates Lejeune's most important theories. Sakin's comprehensive survey serves as a useful supplement to the book.

The previous volumes published in the "Theory and History of Literature" series of the University of Minnesota Press, which included works by Tzvetan Todorov, Vladimir Propp, Mikhail Bakhtin and other famous European critics, provoked a wide critical response in America. It is very likely that Lejeune's theories will prove equally stimulating. The full importance of the present volume should be recognized in the coming years, as American critics respond to Lejeune's ideas in their own books and essays.