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Bossypants: Autobiography and Women's Selves

Camila Gutiérrez¹

As a natural consequence of humankind claiming for equality, feminism ought to open the doors for women in a patriarchal society that has been, along history, reluctant to include them as a valid referent of power and order. Thus, the defense of women needs to be by and for all women, covering all sociocultural backgrounds, races and areas of interest. This means that the writings of women must not originate from the authoritative voice of academics but from the experience of each and every woman. This way the world of women will authentically be part of the “human” world, which until now has been mostly a “male” world. The belief on the extensiveness and necessity of this rewriting must grow in every woman, for the responsibility of “spreading the word” befalls on every woman as well. The female writer in particular has the responsibility of reconfiguring her role at her workplace and at home. The woman who writes must be aware of the concerns of the greatest minds and ideals of feminism, but also of the female population who craves for guidelines to rewrite themselves, their world. She shall not be exclusively academic, she must be popular, and her voice ought to be massively heard.

Tina Fey, US citizen, comedian, writer, mother, wife, boss and Bachelor of Arts on drama, has a vision of feminism that was built mostly on the experience of being a nerdy, awkwardly

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adapted brunette growing up in the seventies —accurate target of discrimination by the standards of beauty and fashion of the time. Her works as a writer of the late show *Saturday Night Live* in television and various movie scripts are filled with feminist messages for the not so stereotypical average woman, from the stay-at-home-wife to the workaholic. Her comedy delivers a feminist self-loving message to all women, and works perfectly as a translator of the academic feminism for the masses without betraying its original purpose: to transform women into individuals who value themselves.

Fey's autobiography, *Bosypants*, is a brilliant pop-culture oriented feminist work that meets all the requirements of a good autobiography which aims to rewrite women's experience of the world through essentially feminist principles —by defending her being a woman as something positive and beautiful of which she can be proud. *Bosypants* completes everything Fey has done so far in comedy, positioning her experience on the background of every script or character she has created, and showing at the same time that her works as a comedian are part of the construction of her, and all women's selves. She introduces us to unknown depths of her personal history going through passages of her childhood and early works as a comedian, and provides the readership with a personal insight into what they have witnessed of her television career. Thus, the private and the public persona of Tina Fey converge in *Bosypants* and are woven into a hilarious autobiography with a strong feminist worldview. A close reading of her autobiography reveals that, with the perfect touches of humor and wittiness, Fey means to open the task of rewriting the female gender to all women, contributing in her case with her experience as a boss, as a mother and as a writer. In *Bosypants*, Fey also gives a special reading to her anecdotes as an empowered woman in the television industry and offers her experience, if not as a role model, as a portrait of the contemporary working woman. Thus, the anecdotic, light and funny narrative of *Bosypants* is also very dense, personal, and aware of its own importance as a literary piece. In that sense, it is not simply another script written by Fey; it constitutes an immense achievement for an author experimenting with a new genre that presents her with multiple, unexplored possibilities for reinterpreting those events worth mentioning, revising and re-interpreting in an autobiography.

Bosypants' introduction welcomes the reader and immediately engages him or her in an intersubjective and conversational reading. The discussion on whether the autobiographer is writing for a reader or not, or whether the "I" in the autobiographical text is the subject or the object of the narrative act becomes unnecessary from the start. *Bosypants* makes evident the presence of the

reader by literally welcoming him or her as a friend, and congratulates whoever is the reader for they are about to read a book about tips, recipes, anxiety, cowardice and more importantly, about what the author explains as “the task of retracing my steps to figure out what factors contributed to this person... [fig. 1] developing into this person... [fig. 2] who secretly prefers to be this person [fig. 3]” (Fey 6).



Fig. 1, fig. 2, fig. 3. Different facets of Tina Fey. *Bossypants* (New York: Reagan Arthur, 2011) 5-6.

Combining her comical writing style with visual input, she introduces the reader to three facets of herself during her development that are to be explored throughout the narrative: herself as a child, in her role as a boss, and the inner persona of Tina Fey. Therefore, the intersubjective narration of *Bossypants* unfolds at several levels.

The first, more public, and most evident kind of intersubjectivity within the autobiography is the conversation between Fey and the reader, where both interact asking or answering questions. Fey's voice differs from the reader's though, since hers is literally present, whilst the reader's constitutes more of an internal, personal monologue.² The second one is a deeper, more personal kind of intersubjectivity where Fey introduces three subjects that lie within her: the person she was, the person she is and the person whom she prefers to be. However, the strong awareness of the presence of the reader does not necessarily turn *Bossypants* into a memoir. Fey's work is far from being a mere compilation of detailed anecdotes and, as such, it demands the readers' identification

² I consider the reader's participation in the intersubjective exchange as internal and similar to a monologue since when the reader questions the imaginary interlocutor of within the literary piece, he or she never actually speaks to the author of the book. Instead, the reader converses with an interlocutor within himself or herself.

with her personal history. Similarly, the presence of more than one “inner” Fey does not turn *Bosypants* into a strictly confessional autobiography.

In “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography”, Georges Gusdorf, French philosopher, defines the memoir as an autobiographical type of narration that serves as a “revenge on history”. In a memoir, the author aims to justify his actions in front of an implied reader.³ Opposite to the memoir, the confessional type of autobiographic work constitutes an exchange of experiences and impressions within the author’s self. Thus, Fey’s autobiography reveals and handles personal information by slightly borrowing elements of the memoir and the confession. However, what truly makes *Bosypants* a highly personal and public autobiography at the same time is that it “properly speaking assumes the task of reconstructing a unity of life across time” and that Fey or “the autobiographer strains toward a complete and coherent expression of [her] entire destiny” (Gusdorf 35, 37). Here, both aspects of Fey’s narration function in plural terms for they are part of the author’s offering: sympathetic identification with the feminine experience. She engages the reader in a process of identification and intersubjective conversation by promoting her book as a “recipe” to follow in order to learn “how to raise an achievement-oriented, drug-free, adult virgin” (Fey 3). Thus, the unity of life that is reconstructed and the coherent expression of her destiny do not constitute an end or a product, but an invitation to reconstruct womanhood together, author and reader.

Besides inviting the reader to know parts of her life that until now she has kept to herself, she also filters and decides what *not* to tell. The selection of information proper to any autobiography is most evident to the reader when Fey chooses to omit the details about a specific childhood event. She provides very specific information about some traumas and conflicts she experienced during her upbringing (for example, when writing about her relationship with her father) but she omits important details about another traumatic event: the moment during the spring semester of kindergarten when she was slashed on the face by a stranger on the alley behind her house. Interestingly, that is all the information she gives about the event, and refuses to write openly about it for a reason. This very interesting selection of experiences reinforces the idea that her work is dedicated to an audience, to a sympathizing readership. Fey intentionally focuses her readers’

³ See Georges Gusdorf’s *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* for distinctions between types of autobiographical works and more examples of autobiographies being analyzed.

attention on what matters, and deviates it from certain details depending on what she wants to achieve.

The omission of such central details can obey, therefore, to either fear at looking at the darkest moments of a traumatic childhood or to an intentional filter that prevents the book from being excessively revealing, to the point it could be simply morbid for the sake of sales. Luckily, Fey clarifies the issue as follows: “Don’t worry. I’m not going to lay out the grisly details for you like a sweeps episode of *Dateline*. I only bring it up to explain why I’m not going to talk about it” (Fey 8).⁴ Then, she gives a list of insensitive questions that people have asked her about her scar, and continues with “So, you see, if I tell the whole story here, then I will be asked about it over and over by the hosts of *Access Movietown* and *Entertainment Forever* for the rest of my short-lived career” (Fey 9).⁵ This way, she keeps the reader from focusing on the wrong details. Fey avoids victimizing herself. Instead, she tries to portray herself as a woman who could take something positive out of hardships, which the women reading her book will hopefully learn to do. In the end, what matters about her scar are not the reasons behind the incident or the morbid details of the attack. The relevance of her being the victim of a violent attack at such an early age lies on the consequences it had on Fey’s personality and relationships with others: “It wasn’t until years later, maybe not until I was writing this book, that I realized people weren’t making a fuss over me because I was some incredible beauty or genius; they were making a fuss over me to compensate for my being slashed” (Fey 9). As she explains, writing *Bossypants* meant not only recollecting memories of her childhood, but also reinterpreting them and discovering their real importance. Through the writing of *Bossypants*, she gained a new perspective in the understanding of how events of her past constructed her present person. The particular example of her being slashed ended up becoming more than a traumatic event: for her, it meant receiving a special treatment, or being seen as someone different from the rest of her family.

For Gusdorf, the events included in an autobiography are relevant but not by themselves, since, in his own words, “events influence us; they sometimes determine us, and they always limit us. But the essential themes [for autobiography], the structural designs that impose themselves on the complex material of exterior facts are the constituent elements of the personality” (37). Following

⁴ *Dateline* is a news magazine of the television network NBC that investigates stories of true crimes in the U.S.

⁵ Both *Access Movietown* and *Entertainment Forever* are invented names that mock two of the most famous television shows about celebrities in the US: *Access Hollywood* and *Entertainment Tonight* respectively.

this idea, bringing up the subject of Fey's being attacked serves the purpose of contextualizing her being treated differently through her childhood, and is the triggering event that helps her reaching that conclusion. Although the details are kept in the private realm of her memories, the passage is narrated in a very public manner: once again, directed to a very alive, breathing, understanding and sympathetic audience.

The public, audience-oriented aspect of autobiography and the fact that information is selected and manipulated with the purpose of building a specific story or character can be seen as an example of fictional craft, but it should not necessarily have to be seen that way. The truth of the writer, of Fey in our case, is not fictional as long as it is the truth of the writing subject, of her experiences and opinions. That the narration is highly subjective and the facts may not be accurately narrated or that the visions of the author may change is an undeniable part of autobiography and a consequence of human subjectivity, but that does turn the product into a fictional piece.

Louis Renza treats the issue of fiction and autobiography borrowing elements from each other in "The Veto of Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography." Renza raises two questions that are essential to understanding his viewpoint on the genre: "Is it [autobiography] an indeterminate mixture of truth and fiction? Is it based essentially in fact rather than self invention?" (268). Whilst the first question inquires into the nature of the craft of autobiography, the second is concerned with the material that constitutes it. When answering both queries, Renza questions the authenticity of autobiography for it relies heavily on the author's subjectivity (which he calls imaginative discourse) when trying to convey "truth". For Renza, when struggling between truth and fiction, the autobiographer is caught in a vicious circle for he cannot escape the inherent closeness to memory and the "dreamlike" setting he digs into when trying to remember and write simultaneously. The result of the autobiographer's craft is, for him, a hybrid, arbitrary and incomplete literary project (295). However, considering autobiography as such a defective product implies the denial of the capacity of human beings to convey truth at all. Even if we work on the assumption that human discourse is essentially subjective, assuming that everything a human reports is fictional would be rushing into an unfair conclusion. The human experience, and more importantly the feminine experience cannot be regarded as mere fiction. The lives of ordinary women, historically guarded by patriarchal censorship, are worth being analyzed from the point of view of truth. If literature were led astray and gave up to such analysis, notions such as womanhood, manhood and human nature would just become dark, blurry concepts. Female autobiographers must work against such

assumption and at least figure out what the experience of women is about. Consequently, subjectivity should not be equated to fiction; even less if it comes to an autobiography like *Bossypants*.

If one considered the narration of memories as something that impedes the conveyance of truth and objectivity, events that are narrated in different occasions could be regarded as increasingly subjective. The real effect of human narration on truth is quite the opposite, as can be seen in the analysis of the following excerpt from *Bossypants* in which Fey refers to the day in 2001 when she discovered that anthrax had been found in the building she was working in:

If you have decent reading comprehension skills you will remember... that I, too, was at 30 Rockefeller Anthrax Plaza. Not 45 Rockefeller Plaza. Not 1661 Sixth Avenue ... 'Nope' I thought. 'I give up.' I put on my coat, walked downstairs past my friends and coworkers without saying anything. I walked right past the host for that week, sweet Drew Barrymore, without telling her what I had heard. I just went to the elevator and left. (Fey 129-130)

A year before the publication of *Bossypants*, this very same event was reported by Fey in the documentary *SNL in the 2000s Time and Time Again* with the following words: "Breaking news, anthrax has been found in 30 Rockefeller Plaza, and I was like I'm sitting in 30 Rockefeller Plaza, I'm not even sitting at 45...[I] got up, got my stuff, walked downstairs, walked past Drew Barrymore, did not tell her what was going on" (Fey, *Saturday Night Live in the 2000s* 00:26:47). The documentary account of the event is shorter, less specific on her thoughts, and lacks the author's later interpretation, but it does resemble enough the autobiography version to be considered a fact and not a fictional or imaginative creation of Fey's. The main and most important difference that the two accounts of anthrax being found on her workplace have is that in *Bossypants*, Fey has the opportunity to give the event a second reading. In her autobiography, she acknowledges that her reaction was inappropriate, and that her boss' management of the panic of her coworkers taught her how to properly deal with extreme situations in a "non-Bossypants" way (Fey 130). The differences also make clear that *Bossypants'* version constitutes the report of a fact permeated with the learning it involved. It works as a middle point between truth and self-invention, or as the comprehension of the meaning behind a fact. Therefore, although it is true that the selection and ordering of the writer's experiences according to her own teleological demands implies aspects of "imaginative" discourse, that does not transform facts into *artifacts* —nor facts into mere self invention (Renza

269). The facts of which we become aware thanks to autobiography are essentially self-invention, not its opposite. Consequently, autobiography should be considered a truth that has gone through a process of re-interpretation, for it is the truth of the “I” that also reflects the truth of the “we” of the author’s surrounding society.

When Suzanne Nalbantian writes about the management of an author’s memories in the creation of an autobiography, she explains that the recurrent themes of the genre are also to be found in aesthetic autobiographies (or fictional ones) but in a universalized, stereotypical manner (Nalbantian 5). She applies theory on autobiographies to different works of four authors, among which she highlights Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a good example of the adaptation of memories into fictional, universalized narration. The difference this case has with an autobiography in the traditional sense, like *Bosypants*, is that the author and the protagonist differ, and that the experiences narrated, although based on real events, are adapted to facilitate the reader’s identification with more “universal” or “stereotypical” characters. Regarding Nalbantian’s example, Joyce’s protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, is only a fictional alter ego of the author, whilst the “I” narrator of *Bosypants* is the same “I” of the author. In both cases, the experiences and memories of the past serve the author as raw material for the processing act of writing. However, as James Olney explains in “Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography”, autobiography is an exercise that apart from differing from autobiographical narrative, also comes later in the author’s career:

When the autobiographer thinks of himself or herself as a writer and would put down ‘writer’ ... when asked for a profession, the tendency is to produce autobiography in various guises and disguises in every work and then —his being the other side of the coin— to seek a unique form in a work properly called ‘an autobiography’. (Olney 236)

In other words, the writer’s path towards autobiography is paved with a series of exercises on autobiographical writing through the creation of a fiction that is based on his or her experience, in order to write later in his or her career an autobiography that constitutes a full panoramic view of his or her life. *Mean Girls*, the film, and sketches such as *Mom Jeans*, from *Saturday Night Live* are some of the works that can be considered as Fey’s “disguised” autobiographical works. Though at the time *Mom Jeans* appeared on the show Fey was not a mother yet and though she was definitely not a teenager anymore when *Mean Girls* screened on 2004, both works reflect Fey’s view of the feminine

experience in a global way. As a writer of fiction, she did her research in recollecting bits and pieces of the feminine experience in a global way, and created and adapted scripts that portrayed universalized matters of womanhood. Next to these works, the character of Liz Lemon in *30Rock*, whom Fey plays and writes, is the most autobiographical of all. This fictional character shares more or less the same aspects of Fey's personality, as she admits in *Ask Tina*, a section on the NBC website where she answers people's questions in relation to her show *30Rock*: "The character of Liz is basically like me ... but she has a different life from me because she's single and she doesn't have a kid, and she is um... more focused on work probably than I" (Fey, *Ask Tina* 00:00:50). Therefore, Liz Lemon is for Fey what Stephen Dedalus is for James Joyce: Fey's autobiographical fictional person in an autobiographical fictional writing that is meant to represent at least a portion of the female population of her time.

Interestingly, Liz Lemon and *30Rock* are the first conscious attempt of Tina Fey to deal with autobiographical writing, as she explains in *Bossypants*: "Kevin Reilly suggested for my next idea that I write something closer to my life. 'Why not write about what it's like to work at *SNL*?' I was reluctant because it seemed self-indulgent to write about the show directly" (Fey 170). Self-indulgent or not, *30Rock* became a comically awkward and essentially fictional predecessor to the actual autobiography. A different reading of the *Bossypants* could, however, attempt to consider it a fictional piece based on the assumption that, as Renza explains, the highly subjective nature of human narration interferes with the delivery of truth through writing. Fey's autobiography includes interesting hints in that respect. The thirteenth chapter of *Bossypants* opens as follows: "In 1997 I flew to New York from Chicago to interview for a writing position at *Saturday Night Live*" (Fey 119). Since the imaginative and subjective act of writing and selecting information would interfere with the autobiographer's enterprise, according to Renza, this line should be considered fiction, as the rest of the lines that, deliberately put together by the author, compose *Bossypants*. If so, the following lines from Tina Fey's acceptance speech of the Mark Twain Prize for American Comedy should be fiction as well: "In 1997 I flew to New York from Chicago to interview for a writing position at *Saturday Night Live*, and I was hopeful 'cause I heard the show was looking to diversify ... I remember I came for my job interview and the only decent clothes that I had at the time were a pair of black pants and a sweater from Contempo Casuals" (Fey, *Tina Fey: The Mark Twain Prize* 01:20:40). Fey's "fictional" "I" also recounts having worn "[b]lack pants and a lavender chenille sweater from Contempo Casuals" for her job interview with Lorne Michaels in 1997 (Fey 119).

Since it is assumed that Tina Fey is the author of *Bossypants* and that the experiences narrated there are at least partially based on her experience, but could be regarded as “fictional”, then the question that remains unanswered is whether the woman whose acceptance speech was broadcasted on November 14th 2010 was playing a fictional role or not. For those who believe that the person who accepted the prize that night was the actual Tina Fey and neither her fictional alter ego nor a fictional character based on her experience (like *30Rock*'s Liz Lemon), autobiography should be regarded at least as non-fictional narrativized truth.

Regarding "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", Hayden White refers to the difficulties that narrativization of actual events poses when we “wish to give to *real* events the *form* of story” (White 4). Since real events do not narrate by themselves, it is the author's duty to give them narrative continuity. For White, this can be done in two ways: either as a historical discourse that narrates –which openly looks out on the world and reports it– or as a discourse that narrativizes –the one that makes the world speak itself as story (White 3). Since autobiography has been acknowledged as a kind of narrative where personal historical facts and the personal narrativization of them converge, autobiography would become a middle point between the two kinds of narrativization suggested by White. The experience narrated in it would become truth, and the genre of autobiography could be considered a perfect hybrid between fact and the truth of the “I”.

If it were otherwise, and autobiography were doomed to be considered mere fiction, chronicles or annals, medieval forms of historical record of “truth” would be the only tools for conveying factual truth without creating fiction, and the construction of self that autobiography makes possible would be pointless.⁶ As a consequence, female or male experience would remain unexplored areas of humanity and neither traditional autobiographies like St. Augustine's *Confessions* nor Fey's *Bossypants* would be worthy of attention. The key to autobiography, therefore, is that it is not simply a narrative “genre, but a practice. It is a search for self-knowledge even if this knowledge of oneself can never be reached” as Valérie Baisnée explains in her introduction to *Gendered Resistance* (Baisnée 5). Autobiography, therefore, is a practice that although tied to subjectivity and omissions, is valuable as it seeks self-knowledge and truth. Such search for self-knowledge becomes especially important for female writers, since it is their truth that has been undermined and ignored along

⁶ For examples of chronicles and annals as forms of factual narrative see Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”, *Critical Inquiry*, Chicago 1980.

history. Consequently, the truth of the “I” of autobiography is attributed a special role in writing the truth of women, a truth that has come late to the study of human identity but which cannot remain neither as the unknown nor as the fictional side of humankind any longer.

Baisnée states that the need of establishing the boundaries between truth and fiction is relevant to autobiography only if we ask for whom it is that we are clarifying these concepts (Baisnée 7). The discussion is, therefore, especially relevant for feminist writers since autobiography is a genre that “can promote women’s status as writers, and recover them from the literary margins” that have been imposed by a patriarchal system (1). Female autobiographers make the discussion on truth and fiction relevant, therefore, to such system. In relation to this is that works like *Bosypants* reassure their importance. This work, conceived away from the academic hustle and freed from its eagerness to define and delimit literature in all its forms, goes beyond narrativization of truth and the negotiation or confession of factual events that normally occupy male autobiographers. *Bosypants* reveals “patterns of resistance to the ideologies of [its] writer’s youth, especially in [her] opposition to familial and educational authorities” in a similar way autobiographies such as de Beauvoir’s, Duras’, Angelou’s and Frame’s do (Baisnée 1). Thus, the discussion on the fictional aspect of female autobiographies validates their work as works that are based on the truth of the female community and on the assumptions women ought to challenge daily. The autobiographical works of women, therefore, do not serve the purpose of simply opening their selfhood to the world and proving that women can be writers against all odds. Their autobiographies represent the feminine truth often ignored, displaced and undermined by literary studies in all areas.

Fey makes her own contribution to bringing to light women’s experiences in her autobiography too. At the time she worked in SNL as a writer and boss, she realized that there was no “institutionalized sexism” at her workplace. Instead, she was faced with plain ignorance regarding feminine matters (Fey 141). Writer Paula Pell and Fey herself had proposed shooting a “classic” commercial parody named Kotex Classic, which “featured the women in the cast enjoying fun ‘modern gal’ activities while giant sanitary napkins poked out of their low-rise jeans” (Fey 140). She realized one of the reasons why this particular script she thought was interesting for the feminine audience was troublesome for the male producers was because they had no idea how these particular feminine products looked in the first place. As a boss, Fey realized women were seen differently in comedy because there was ignorance regarding which feminine experiences could be comedy material. As a woman, she realized something more important, that “for all those years that [she]

was *sure* that boys could tell when [she] had a loaf-of-bread-size maxi pad going up the back of [her] pants, they actually had no idea” (Fey 141). At that point feminine experience was not just a secret to comedians but to all manhood. Therefore, sexism at the workplace was to be eliminated by exposing women’s case to men, so they knew that not because they did not like comedian women, they did not exist.

Regarding men’s approach to feminine comedy, Baisnée explains that the female autobiographer—and for purposes of this essay, the female comedian who writes female-oriented comedy, an unexplored topic in the area—is in a position in the symbolic order where her “sense of self is mediated by the identity the dominant male culture imposes on her, [thus,] it is more difficult for a woman to express the strong sense of individuality often displayed in male autobiographies” or, for our case, male comedy (Baisnée 9). Under such conditions, the contemporary woman hardly finds scenarios to expose her often ignored struggle, since “[h]er invisibility results from the lack of tradition, her marginality in the male-dominated culture, her fragmentation-social and political as well as psychic” (Baisnée 9). Furthermore, displaced and censored by the dominant male majority in comedy, women are oftentimes restricted to being “a man’s something”, and their contribution to the genre remains that of a complementary presence in male dominated scenes rather than a contribution that makes sketches gender equitable, as evidenced by Fey (86-88).

So far, Fey has been the only woman to dismiss such restrictions from the writer’s seat, earning herself the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor and the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series among other recognitions for her work as head writer, but this she has not achieved alone. In *Bosypants*, Fey acknowledges other female cast members’ contribution to the rewriting of female roles in comedy. In a chapter titled “I don’t Care If You Like it”, she narrates one of the moments that were especially eye-opening for the male members of the cast. Her friend and co-worker Amy Poehler had been told off by a male cast member, Jimmy Fallon, for making an “unladylike” joke (Fey 143). In reply, “Amy made it clear that she wasn’t there to be cute. She wasn’t there to play wives and girlfriends in the boys’ scenes. She was there to do what she wanted to do and she did not fucking care if you like it” (Fey 144). It was that support from female co-workers that kept Fey working towards a future where women were taken seriously in comedy, paradoxical as it reads. Yet what makes *Bosypants* go a step further is that Fey does not only recall difficult moments of her career, she provides advice for similar situations. Instead of encouraging women to apologize in a situation where they have been reprimanded for being themselves, she advises women

to ignore these negative authorities and move on, to make the “cosmic shift” and spend their energy in doing their work and outpace people that way (Fey 144, 145), or in Baisnée’s words, “to turn this marginality into the key to their creativity” (1). Fey finally concludes the episode saying that “[i]t is an impressively arrogant move to conclude that just because you don’t like something, it is empirically not good” (Fey 144). Thanks to such autobiographical revision, and to the marked intersubjective tone of her advice, the attempts to undermine women are transformed into opportunities to revise women’s strengths as well. Fey invites the reader to take Poehler’s example and her own as a boss and to learn from their experiences. Pell’s, Poehler’s and Fey’s experience of working in the comedy industry is narrated by Fey in order to illustrate that challenging and restructuring the pre-established order of their area is possible by taking feminine experience, whether positive or negative, in order to transform it into something that positively challenges the patriarchal imposed pattern.

In the private realm of her narration, Fey does something similar in the sense that she covers not only her vision of women at the workplace. She rescues those passages of women’s lives that are normally tabooed and writes them down in an attempt to make her autobiography a work that writes and rewrites women’s experience in its entirety, covering most of its truth from the private to the public, from childhood to adulthood. The second chapter of *Bosypants* deals with the beginning of her coming of age, with her entrance into womanhood and the way her mother dealt with her menarche. This very intimate passage of the autobiography shows the inner persona of Tina Fey narrating a very personal thing that probably most women went through: the revelation that their bodies not only grew and changed but started functioning in a new manner. In a very critical and funny way, Fey explains why she was so astonished by this realization: “I knew from commercials that one’s menstrual period was a blue liquid that you poured like laundry detergent onto maxi pads to test their absorbency. This wasn’t blue, so... I ignored it for a few hours” (Fey 14). Even though her mother had handed her a book which was meant to prepare young girls and teach them what menstruation was about, young Tina ignored the most important detail: what menstruation *really* was about. Since neither the media nor her parents had given her detailed explanations, she was ignorant about herself the same way many women of our time ignore the validity that feminine experiences have. Things that really mattered about her becoming a woman were a complete taboo in her family environment and in the media. Society had hidden other women’s experiences so well, that when faced with the actual thing, Fey had to ignore it.

The tendency Baisnée refers to regarding women being prone to write about private matters originates from such tabooed state of feminine experience. Fey pushes the taboos away as she unites all the dimensions of female experience challenging the belief that “women write more about private matters than men” (Baisnée 9). She proves that women need to write about menstruation, about them shaving their legs for the first time or about what it was like to get a Pap smear (Fey 11, 17) so that other women know these are acceptable things to comment on, that their experiences must never be again a forbidden topic.

On the contrary, men’s autobiographies are nowadays seen as less private and personal than women’s, according to Baisnée (9). This, however, does not obey something inherent to men’s nature. It is rather a consequence of men having had the literary genre of Bildungsroman all to themselves since the 18th Century. Maria Karafilis treats the relevance that the Bildungsroman novel has acquired in feminist literature, analyzing the works of Sandra Cisneros and Jamaica Kincaid. Karafilis defines Bildungsroman as a literary genre that originally “relates the development of a (male) protagonist who matures through a process of acculturation and ultimately attains harmony with his surrounding society” (63). As a consequence, men’s narrativization of experience is at least two centuries ahead of women’s regarding coming of age matters. Male coming of age has been studied in depth because of this, whilst its female counterpart has been swept away from literary studies. Though Karafilis explains that Bildungsroman has been recently seen as a dead literary genre, she identifies some areas in which coming of age literature has enjoyed rebirth (Karafilis 1). Among these we could include autobiographies like *Bosypants*, which has a large section devoted to narrating Fey’s coming of age. Her intimate narration about the experiences listed above, summed to her awkward anecdotes about being a not-at-all stereotypical beauty for her time turn key chapters of *Bosypants* into Bildungsroman narrative (Fey 19, 26).

Karafilis sees the need to rescue Bildungsroman and continue writing it as a consequence of us still being “interested in how texts negotiate the development/education of their protagonists and how these protagonists negotiate themselves in a larger social context” (63). Applied to female autobiography, this can be read as autobiography, or *Bosypants*, writing down women’s negotiation of their intimacy as worthy of attention in the male-dominated context they cope with. Through such collection and negotiation of very intimate experiences and comments, *Bosypants* serves as a mirror for women to feel comfortable with their own experience. Fey, like Simone de Beauvoir, considers the public sphere of experience, but complements it with that which is intimate and

unwritten, making her work even more complete. Because of this, *Bossypants* is not tied to preconceived ideas about feminist autobiographies. This particular literary work is an autobiography that, as Rita Felski notes, arises from a breakdown of generic forms. According to her, “the division between sequential, public autobiographies by men and subjective, disjointed autobiographies by women has become far less clear-cut in the twentieth century” (Felski 87). However, there are aspects that concern the original Bildungsroman genre that are still missing in female writings and which constitute part of these newly revealed intimate relationships of women. One of them, according to Baisnée, is women’s relationship with their mothers.

Baisnée’s view on mother/daughter relationships is that the autobiographies she works with “acknowledge the special bond that ties daughter to mother” (13). However, compared to the “plethora of representations of father/son relations, ... nothing in our patriarchal cultures mediates the mother/daughter relationship at a cultural level ... [h]ence, these female autobiographies constitute an act of reparation to the mother whose place in the symbolic order has been usurped by the daughter” (Baisnée 13). In Baisnée’s analysis, the daughter who has displaced her mother writes about their relationship and about their being displaced women in order to compensate the mother whom she has somehow betrayed in seeking the father’s complicity (13). Fey’s approach to her relation to her mother is different, but compensatory as well. One hint of such reparatory act is, first of all, Fey’s dedication of *Bossypants* to her mother: “For Jeanne Fey: Happy Mother’s Day. I made this out of macaroni for you” (Fey i). These tender lines are followed by a series of chapters in which Fey refers to her childhood. Among these, there is one chapter in which she gives a very detailed description of her relationship with her father (a fearful one), but omits much of her relationship with her mother. Most of what we know about Jeanne Fey is that she failed to explain her own daughter what menstruation was, that she skipped the part where she was supposed to read the book meant for mothers and inappropriately handed it to her daughter, and that her female co-workers ironically regarded her last daughter as a change-of-life baby for a woman in her forties (Fey 7). The tone of Fey’s narration startles when referring to her mother. She is severely critical to her progenitor when revising those moments in which she seemed negligent from a present perspective. But the harsh revision of her relationship with her mother is not only done with a critical eye. Fey acknowledges her mother’s errors and sympathizes with her since, after all, she realizes having old parents would inevitably lead to confusions (Fey 7).

In the end, *Bossypants* is dedicated to her mother, although a much more praising chapter is dedicated to her father, Don Fey. After her critical yet conciliating approach to her mother, Fey devotes 10 entire pages to explaining the paradoxical nature of her relationship with her father. At the beginning of the chapter named “That’s Don Fey”, the author reviews her own narrative in the following way: “Let’s review the cost-free techniques that we’ve learned so far for raising an achievement-oriented, obedient, drug-free virgin adult: Calamity, Praise, Local Theater, and flat feet. Another key element is ‘Strong Father Figure/Fear Thereof’” (Fey 45). Again, her mother is absent from the recipe as if her figure were sufficiently acknowledged through a revision of her flaws which she makes up for with a dedicatory epigraph. According to Baisnée, this elision of the mother figure is explained because “outside her social and material role as reproducer of children, there is no imaginary representation of the mother” (13). Consequently, if Jeanne Fey was a neglectful mother to her daughter’s eyes, reconciliation could not imply recognition rather than forgiveness. However, the second choice is not a minor issue either.

It is thanks to autobiographical revision and narrativization that Fey dedicates and attributes her life, her success, to her mother’s efforts. The case of Fey’s relationship with her mother does not conclude in this preliminary analysis on behalf of Fey’s thought. Near to the end of *Bossypants*, Fey also revises her own role as a mother. In regard to breast-feeding, she writes: “I knew that when it came to breast-feeding I had an obligation to my baby to pretend to try”, and explains that after failing to breast-feed her daughter Alice, she opted for a product that had been “perfected to be a complete and reliable source of stress and shame for mothers” (Fey 237-238). Her failure regarding breast-feeding can be seen under the same critical eye she saw her mother’s flaws. In the end, Fey overcame the guilt that being unable to breast-feed caused her and learned that “[w]hen people say, ‘You really, really *must* do something, it means you don’t really have to. No one ever says, ‘You really, really *must* deliver the baby during labor. When it’s true, it doesn’t need to be said’” (Fey 242). What she rescues overall is that neither motherhood nor womanhood can be prescribed. For her, women who measure the sacrifice of being a mother and undermine those women who do not sacrifice enough (by feeding their children with formula instead of milk) cannot appreciate the whole spectrum of what motherhood is. For Fey, these women “are a solely western upper-middle-class phenomenon occurring when highly ambitious women experience deprivation from outside modes of achievement” (Fey 242). Once again, Fey recommends ignoring these people’s restrictive view.

Through *Bossypants*, Fey legitimizes alternative options to motherhood and womanhood. Regarding this, Fey's autobiography becomes "a place in which the female subject not only records personal growth but also tackles certain crucial political issues linked to the position of women in society. ... The autobiographical form, situated at the border between public and private discourse, and in which the present perspective mixes with that of the past, enables a registration of these changes at both individual and social levels" (Baisnée 12). By tackling these preconceived ideas about women, Fey resituates women's myriad of experiences regarding motherhood (as daughters and mothers) and womanhood as valid ones, regardless of their flaws and mistakes. She invites women to embrace their own way of being mothers and to value themselves for what they manage to achieve, not for what they fail to comply with according to the patriarchal worldview.

Like any autobiography worthy of literary analysis, *Bossypants* revises these personal aspects and validates them, creating a written record of that part of feminine experience which is yet unspoken and unwritten. Fey, boss, mother, daughter, child and adult woman rescues her own experience and exposes it in order to get women to expose their own too. She intends to convince women into writing about their experience, or at least tries to help them identify with her own struggle towards equality. She also shows that the limitations she has encountered so far have not kept her from reaching the peak of her career, in spite of her career being an especially challenging one for women. Through example, Fey advises her female contemporaries to continue to perfect themselves in any area they wish to develop. Her discoveries as a boss also reflect that it is not always sexism that keeps women from being seen as valid referents in whatever area, but ignorance. In order to construe women's identities at a cultural level, and get rid of the ignorance that restrains them, Fey encourages women to openly comment on the matters that are particularly conflictive due to patriarchal conventions. Her work translates feminism in a pragmatic way, taking passages of her life and using them to illustrate that the patriarchal order of ideas is not only oppressively reaffirmed by men but also by women. In Fey's eyes, women have failed to see that womanhood and motherhood are concepts that are for them to create and define, not for men to impose, and her autobiography constitutes an example of how women should proceed in the recovery of such right.

Thanks to the slow but steady growth of feminist comedy, factual and real feminine experience has earned its place in television and has become, therefore, more acceptable to the female and male masses. However, because she has been a key contributor in this process, Fey has gained enough perspective to conclude that the collective self-image of the female gender has yet to

undergo many transformations before achieving true equality. This task she offers for her female peers to take, and although she does not portray herself as the ultimate feminist role model, she portrays herself as a real woman who has at least begun to reconstruct and rewrite the feminine world. Her truth, incomplete, subjective, limited, filtered and narrativized is the truth of women, the truth of the female "I" that longs for definition. It is such definition that she seeks; it is such definition for womanhood that Fey invites all women to construct, treasure and stand for.

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