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Born to Write: Discovery and Construction of Self in the Identity Stories of Poets and Writers

Abstract

The explorative study hereby presented is based on in-depth interviews with 16 renowned Israeli writers of prose and poetry. The aim of the study is to examine the identity-stories of these masters of the written word. By the term "identity-story", we relate to the self-reflective or "ars-poetic" sides of the life stories our interviewees presented, the hows, whens and whys which had brought them to realize their identities as their cultures' authorized authors or poets. Thematic analysis of these stories, conducted in the spirit of the Schutzian Phenomenological-Interpretive approach, reveals an interesting interplay of two seemingly contradictory core meta-themes - identity-creation and identity-discovery. The present paper is focused on the identity-discovery meta-theme. Unlike the identity-creation meta-theme, which illustrates active, deliberate and conscious processes of identity construction within the social world, the identity-discovery meta-theme is based on narratives that detect the belief in the feasibility of a transcendental revelation of a given identity, whose roots lies beyond the ties of time and place.

Keywords

Self-identity; Life stories; Phenomenological - interpretative approach; Writers; Poets; "I" & "Me"

The explorative study hereby presented is based on in-depth interviews with 16 renowned Israeli authors and poets. The study examines the identity-stories of these masters of the written word. By using the term "identity story" we refer to the forthright and conscious side of what Ricoeur (1991, 1992) calls "narrative identity", or what may be seen as the "ars-poetic" side of it. In other words, identity-story is the self-reflective story a person tells about the hows, whens and whys which have brought him or her to realize their present identity, in our case the identity of a poet or an author. The aim of the study, then, is not necessarily to show how one "really" turns out to be a writer or a poet. Rather, it is to explore how writers and poets tend to construct their identity-stories. Yet, based on the assumption that the life story - the total sum of the subjective and inter-subjective life experiences and their meaningful interpretations - is the core of one's identity, we cannot accept any positivistic distinction between what there "really" is and the personal perception of it.

In other words, the life story is not just about life constructing a story, but equally about the story constructing identity, as well as life itself.

This cycle of influences does not end there. It is inseparably intertwined with another cycle of influences that exists between self-perception and one's image in the eyes of others and vice versa. These two cycles of influences enhance each other, as determined by the driving principle of Symbolic Interactionism, which claims that the meaning of experiences, including that of one's identity, is set through ceaseless social interactions based on exchange of symbols and interpretations (Blumer 1969; Cooley 1964; Mead 1934).

Methodology

The study hereby presented was conducted in the spirit of the phenomenological-interpretative approach formed by Alfred Schutz (1962). According to Schutz, every biographical situation always includes sediments created by all the person's subjective experiences, while social interaction with another person means a mutual involvement in each other's biographical situation. Those past sediments are accumulated to a typifications reservoir which provides prescriptions for a variety of social situations.

Blumer (1969) urges that the research method should be compatible with the research topic and the philosophic approach that guides it. Based on this assumption, the present study uses the life history or personal history methodology which is common in interpretative research (Babad, Birnbaum and Benne 1983; Bertaux 1981).

This methodology seeks to set a holistic and meaningful interpretative framework, within which the participants' experiences are studied. For this purpose, it strives to achieve a subjective and inter-subjective understanding which represents tacit knowledge, and not only the formulation of an explanation that represents the explicit knowledge (Denzin 1970, 1989; Jones 1983; Langness and Frank 1981; Stake 1978; Titon 1980).

Research Tools

An open in-depth interview is a natural tool of interpretative research, whose approach is holistic, reflective, and inter-subjective. In particular, it is suitable for the studying of the identity-story, which is a dynamic, developing, and contextual phenomenon. Such an interview is considered as a primary means for producing a life story and understanding how people interpret it and the social phenomena of which they are part (Filstead 1970; Rosenthal 1993, 2004; Yin 2003). It is customary to assume that, unlike other research tools, the open interview can and should be carried out with minimum interference with, or enforcement onto, the worlds of the interviewee, and that an effort should be made to neutralize any premises and biases the researcher may hold through maximum reflective awareness (Bourdieu 1996). Nevertheless, an open interview cannot set a static or sterilized meeting environment. On the contrary, it is a reciprocal and developing process of negotiation between interviewer and interviewee, during which the interviewee interprets molds and changes his reality and himself, as the protagonist of his life story (Bruner and Kalmar 1998; Fischer-Rosenthal 1996; Guba and Lincoln 1982; Pack 2006).

Method

The interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Detailed inspection of the texts was used for identifying the recurring patterns. The typification produced was then interpreted in the spirit of Schutz's (1962) ideas, namely, aiming to turn "first order constructs" - the social world's actors' constructs of everyday knowledge - into "second order constructs" - the researcher's interpretations harmonizing both with the participants' personal social reality and a given conceptual context. The themes that this process produced were arranged using a cross-case study method, and gathered to shared-theme groups. This classification procedure was repeated until the two core meta-themes were isolated. As mentioned above, the present paper is focused on one of these meta-themes - the notion of identity discovery.

Participants

Sixteen well-known Israeli authors and poets participated in the study. They display a heterogenic distribution of age, origin, residence and occupations (for earning a living) other than writing. The participants also varied in their seniority in their creative writing career and the degree of social recognition they enjoy. Nevertheless, all of them met the predetermined criteria, namely:

- Repeatedly publishing works of literature in distinguished non-commercial publishing houses and literary journals.
- Accepted as authors or poets by recognized literature specialists such as critics, editors, academic figures, who interpret, criticize and cite their works.
- Known and commonly defined as authors or poets among members of society - readers and the media.

Conceptual Background

The concept of identity-story presented above is, we argue, flexible enough to contain a number of different and even contradictory perspectives, held by researchers and theorists occupied with identity in its many facets. Some, for instance, introduce "archeological" models of identity development representing communitarian, deterministic processes, involved in recognition, acceptance and internalizing of given and fixed social-cultural relational attributions, into which every person is born. As a counterclaim, constructive liberal models outline open and narrative processes of option and choice between different alternatives, in which individuals are portrayed as active and reflexive in shaping their own identity, continuously constructing an ever-developing narrative-identity (De Peuter 1998; Fischer-Rosental 1996; Gergen 1991; McAdams 2006; Presser 2004; Ricoeur 1991, 1992; Tamir 1996; Thorne 2004).

The term "identity-story, set at the center of our discussion, represents an organic combination of both these approaches. It acknowledges the importance of "identity", allegedly a static and given socio-cultural ascription, on the one hand and the dynamic and open processes of constructing the "life story" on the other. Identity-stories of authors and poets in particular, for whom the word is both the content and the instrument of their work, evoke a special interest. Throughout life every person answers the question "who am I?" by an act of on-going self-narration. In the case of writers, the contents of the meta-answer in response to that ultimate question are well documented and accessible to all through their writings. Of all art forms, literature, as a literal-conceptual formation, cannot help but record the internal essence of the contents, forms and processes of one's life story, fictional and

imaginary, as their external manifestations may appear in the literary work. One of our interviewees, the author I.O., referred to his writing as a "third eye". We espouse this metaphor, which suggests a further possibility of enriching the perception used to view the world. This super-eye, or rather, the ability it represents, not only constructs and sustains the work of art, but, in a circular process, becomes itself ever more penetrating and refined.

An analysis of the identity-stories arising from the interviews shows that they are characterized by a unique blending of two fiercely expressed and seemingly contradictory narrative meta-themes. The term "meta-theme" is used to indicate a comprehensive framework which includes different related narrative themes, each arranged around a thematic core of its own, as we shall see. The first meta-theme, identity-creation, depicts an active and conscious volition of an author's or poet's identity, and the daily choices and decisions which construct and affirm it again and again. The second narrative meta-theme, identity-discovery, emphasizes the opposite facet and expresses strong and almost mystical belief in the given, predetermined element of the writing gift and its role.

Significant resemblance exists between those two meta-narratives that characterize the identity-stories of our interviewees and the two theoretical approaches mentioned earlier - the constructivist approach and the deterministic "archeological" approach. But while the meta-theme of identity-discovery is fully compatible with the principles of the constructivist approach, there exists a meaningful difference between the meta-theme of identity-discovery and the deterministic approach. Using the conventions and jargon common in the social sciences, this approach is usually applied to identify and interpret the processes involved in identity-discovery that relate to given social affiliations such as gender, nationality, religion and so on. As we shall explore in the following discussions, in the case of poets and writers, the principles of this approach are applied to contents that describe their striving to rise above any given social affiliation.

We chose to interpret the dualism of the two meta-narratives involved in the identity-stories of our interviewees by conceptually distinguishing between the "Me" and "I" as their thematic cores. While the meta-theme of identity-creation expresses the characteristics of building the "Me", using a constructivist jargon and point of view, its seeming antithesis, the meta-theme of identity-discovery, outlines in transcendent-metaphysical terms, the pursuit towards an ever existing "I". As a rule, beyond its infinite variations, the "Me" is perceived by most researchers and theorists who use this term, as situated in the socio-cultural dimension of reality. It can also be conceptualized as that mental element responsible for the pursuit of distinctness and clear boundaries as well as interaction and relational emplacement in that dimension. The "I", on the other hand, has a more diverse range of interpretations. Amongst these different interpretations, we chose to define it here, based on our interviewee's words, as the primeval, non-verbal element of the self, characterized by a transcendent aspiration to break through time and place boundaries, in an aim to return to a primal unity with the environment.

The distinction between the "Me" and the "I" is not a new one, of course, and it repeats itself in different contexts and interpretations in the work of contemporary researchers and theorists (Alma and Zock 2002; Hermans 1997; Jaynes 1976; McAdams 1996, 1997; Sarbin 1986). Nonetheless, in general, it seems that the "Me" discourse alone is the most commonly used concept by researchers and theorist of the various disciplines of social science, usually under the influence of social constructionism. For example, most widely spread in different social sciences is the concept of the "dialogical self" (Josephs 2002; Raggat 2000; Sarup 1996; Tappan

2005). This concept suggests a decentralized self - an orchestra of different, sometimes contradictory voices. Together they present a polyvocality of "I-positions", a tapestry of past and present voices, each conditioned by its own set of cultural and historical contexts, social and power relations, which maintain dialogical relationships between them. This concept is usually displayed as an alternative to the opposing Cartesian notion of self as individualized, a-historical, non-cultural, disembodied and having a distinct central core (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Hermans 2001).

Consequently, the discussions relating to some primeval "I", whose very definition prevents it from being verbalized and explored directly, were almost completely abandoned. We argue, however, that a complete understanding of vocational development of writers is not fully possible, without referring to all the concepts involving both terms, the "I" as well as the "Me".

Moreover, we claim that despite the contradictory appearance of these two vectors, both types of these emerging discourses should not be viewed as dichotomous and not even as two poles on the same continuum. Rather, they may be seen as two autonomous and independent sequences. The identity-stories of authors and poets are apparently characterized by the tendency to the intense and high potency of the relating expressions of both these sequences. They include narrations of intended and active construction of identity, relevant to the social "Me", as well as narrations of discovering a given identity, related to the primeval "I", that hold an intense affinity to the metaphysical.

In the case of poets and writers, processes relating to the first narrative meta-theme of the identity-creation with the "Me" at its heart are reflected in different narrative themes. Some of the most salient, to mention them briefly, are a conscious choice in writing as a way of life, which is repeatedly affirmed again and again through day to day decisions designed to assert it; a gradual development of self-perception and self-definition as an author or a poet, shaped by experiences and feedback from the people around; organization and regulation of other identities, professional or domestic for instance, in order to establish them as subordinate to the superior identity of creating artists; basing the identity of an artist on a continuous critical comparison to an appropriate referral group of artists and poets, and more (Ben-Shir, Forthcoming). In this paper, we intend to focus on the second aspect of this world-view – the narrative meta-theme of identity discovery, and the "I" discourse which characterizes it.

This meta-theme also includes some sub-themes:

- A person is a poet or a writer because he or she was "born to write", as a given and pre-determined disposition. As this disposition gets exposed, during the process of identity-discovery, writing turns from a mere activity into an obligating way of life.
- Writing talent can serve as the first sign of the literary destination, but sometimes it can be revealed at a relatively late stage. More than talent, it is the powerful urge to write, the feeling that there is no escape from writing no matter what, which is the foretoken of a destined writer.
- The writer is not the source of his writings. He or she is just a medium through which the world is speaking, and as such, his assignment is to pass true messages, that are meaningful to all others.
- As the identity-discovery process advances, the writer is more capable of playing the role of the medium, based on experiences of self-negation during writing. This reduction of the immediate and the private increases the impact range of one's writings, and thus reinforces the identity as a writer or a poet in one's own eyes as well as in those of the public.

As we shall henceforth show, the identity-story of the writer or the poet, which is based on these themes, resembles, in form as well as content, the descriptions of the identity development processes of the ancient biblical prophets.

Findings

The Identity Discovery Meta-Theme: Born to Write

According to the meta-theme of identity discovery, the processes of shaping identity express, as any other phenomenon in reality, a unified truth that goes beyond human relationships and social regularizations. These processes are characterized by a pursuit of the primeval "I", perceived as a given core of selfhood. In our case, descriptions of that core's revelation were often built on a scaffolding of an explicit or an implied metaphor that emphasized the resemblance between the literary creator and the ancient biblical prophet. Metaphors can give the life story meaning and coherence (Keller-Cohen and Gordon 2003). Here, too, this metaphor served as a framework for describing the different stages the writer had to experience before fully accepting the life mission of writing. Just as in the prophets' stories, acknowledging the special designation exists much before actually starting to write:

Y.H.: I believe for me it was an immanent and continuous way to poetry. No skipping or leaping or arbitrary choosing. It was a way that had been fine-tuned from within. It was stronger than me, perhaps.

S.J.: An author or a poet, if at a certain moment he has the choice between writing a pretty good line or being a millionaire or a prime-minister - I have absolutely no doubt what he will prefer. It's not even a question of choice - it is his destination to be a poet. Just like that.

A.M.: There is no such question "why are you a poet". I am a poet, and I knew it much before I even understood it.

In contrast with the natural and continuous course implied above, A.M. herself, like other interviewees, depicts a pursuit against all odds, or rather, a steeplechase, towards the assigned mission:

I immigrated here with my family when I was four years old. We lived in a small town, a god-forsaken place. I was completely isolated, lived in a vacuum. I did not have any books at home, so I simply didn't read, except text books at school. This is very strange, really, because you always think that if you'll give a child a lot of books to read, than he'll write. And I am an example of a person who contradicts this theory. I think that somewhere, in the human resources department up there, it was written that I should be a poet. It came out like that although my whole life stood against it. I see it as something that is beyond me. For me this really is proof.

The theme of obstacles placed by the surroundings, which only strengthen the power of the internal calling and drives it to materialization, repeats itself with L.A.'s story:

I came from a family where people had absolutely no connection to literature. They were hard-working, poor people. It was also a home that contained no ornaments at all. No paintings or pictures or statues - nothing of this sort, and of course - no books at all. Well, we had two books only - there was a breviary

that my grandfather, who was a religious man, had once brought, and there was a driving lessons booklet that belonged to my brother. That's it. Those two 'books' were standing there, proudly, along with some vase, on the buffet, and that was it. So I taught myself to read. All by myself. Obviously, none of them read, I mean, really read. My brother used to read 'Bill Carter' and stuff like that, pulp fiction, and my sister read dime novels. And still, I learned to read with no help at all. You see, my father had those birdcages, he raised birds for sale, to maintain the family, so he used to buy old newspapers for draping the bottom of the cages. I started reading those old newspapers. My parents were never at home 'cause they were working from dawn to sunset, and I am sitting there, all alone, and reading those old newspapers, and from then on I developed it more and more, reading, and then writing.

In both of the stories presented above, repeated statements about growing up in families that couldn't nurture reading, let alone writing, emphasize the notion of them turning into writers out of nowhere, thus strengthening the destination hypothesis they hold. Nevertheless, an alienated surrounding is not the only way to demonstrate the power of the inner calling. O.B., son of another well-known author, who had the advantage of growing up in a home satiated in literature and culture, presents an inverted mirror image of the same idea. For him, the real obstacle he had to overcome on his way to fulfill his calling was none other than that profound cultural background. Here too, despite the reverse in the factors presented as interceptive, lies the idea of an internal calling stronger than outside circumstances:

My mother came from Russia in 1911. She graduated there from a known art college; she learned painting, immigrated to here and married my father, who was already a young and successful author and a school principal. So I was actually born and raised in a writer's home. The whole house was full of art and artists. Most of the famous artists, musicians, writers and great singers used to come to us. It was a custom to take them to 'the author's residence', you know... That was the concept. We grew up in the author's house, and all our life none of us dared to write, because father was "the author". In the psychologist's language, one would say that father had castrated us. Even if we wanted to, we didn't dare start writing.

Although the sense of calling, as reported above, leads the writers to follow their destiny, it doesn't need to be clear to them in advance. Sometimes it can evolve from a trial and error procedure. O.B. himself, for example, tells of indecisions and much searching which paved the way to writing. Amongst others, he describes schooling in an agricultural school, studying in a prestigious intellectual school, studying painting, living on a kibbutz as well as in the big city, and working as an artist and as a teacher. It was only at a relatively late age that he arrived at writing. Like him, Y.K. declares:

I tried. I really did try everything. There is nothing I didn't do at one time or another. I was a barman, a guard, a shepherd, I painted swimming pools... Nothing I didn't try... and really, by default, writing is all I have now. That's where I feel best.

Let us not be mistaken. This account and its similar do not wish to portray writing as the fruit of a gradual and natural interaction with the environment, or as just one of many possible outcomes of a trial and error process. On the contrary, they only emphasize what is predetermined. These self-quests are of the highest

importance. Perhaps they are the throes of the real and the absolute. They demonstrate the power of the inner injunction compelling them to keep searching, even when they don't yet know what it is they are looking for, or not even that they are, in fact, looking for something.

At the end of a long and intensive quest, the encounter with the calling, just as in the biblical prophets' stories, can occur as if by itself in an incidental manner. Thus, for example, testifies the author D.B.S., who started writing at the age of 42 at a workshop for prose writing. By his own account, he came into the workshop as a result of surprising circumstances. He found in his mailbox an advertisement for the workshop but ignored it and almost tossed it away. It was his wife who drew his attention to the fact that the ad mentioned the name of his commander from his days in the army, as the manager. That commander was the only person to notice, prior to his recognition as a successful author, his unique language skills, and praised him for that. His wife's encouragement along with the pleasant memories from the only compliments he had ever received for his language skills, led him, finally, to enroll in the workshop.

O.B., an influential and admired children's author, had also first started writing, in his opinion, at a late age, when he was already in his thirties. He too came upon it as a result of circumstance. During his stay in the United States he corresponded with his six year old niece. In order to strengthen his relationship with her and to amuse her, he garnished his letters with fictional descriptions and stories. His sister, reading the letters, referred them, at her own initiative, to a renowned poet and editor, who liked those poetic letters, and recommended to publish them as a book. Only from that point on did O.B. become committed to writing.

A similar incident happened to E.K., who actually wanted to be a journalist. As a twenty year old with practically no journalistic experience, he sent a local newspaper a short story he wrote. Some years later, by now an appreciated author who never really turned to journalism, the chief editor of that newspaper told him he didn't even like that first story of his. He admitted that he agreed to print that story just for the purpose of annoying his deputy editor who disliked the story even more, because they were in a quarrel at that time... E.K.'s stories later on became the crowning glory of that newspaper.

These three stories have some striking similarities. In all of them, the speakers mark a critical point in time, only from which turning point they consider themselves authors. All three state, spontaneously, their age at that point, a mark destined to sharpen the difference between the phases prior to the most important experience of identity discovery, and all that happened after it. The age of the discovery is different, but in all the cases, the way things were put is designed to emphasize, not only a sudden breakthrough, but also, in accordance with the speaker's feelings, a relatively late one. In addition, in all three cases, the discovery emerges from casual circumstances, but the triviality of the earthly details only emphasize an event rich in meaning, and as such, an event that could not but take place.

In fact, in all three stories, the hero is displayed in the role of the naive figure. Therefore, the course of external events which leads the future author or poet to confront his mission is of crucial importance. The figure of mediator – the commander, the sister or the editor, who is, just like in legends, a genuine fate's messenger, has a special part in this course of events, leading the writer to the internal recognition vital for writing. The belief in fate shown in those descriptions is but another way of trying to give a sense of unity to what otherwise may appear as a mix of frightening coincidences, lacking any sense of meaning or direction.

The discovery of a writer's identity is not necessarily the end of the struggle. It is not, according to the way most interviewees put it, just picking an elective role, but a lifelong assignment, with a heavy personal price, therefore the ordained often tries to rebel. As Moses refused leadership and Jeremiah refused prophecy, both claiming that they were not qualified enough for their assignments, nowadays writers may also deny their special abilities and try to turn their backs on their designation. This can happen even after gaining significant recognition. D.B.S. tells how after excelling in the prose writing workshop he attended, winning a contest, and the manuscript being chosen for publication, he still hesitated:

I said: 'Yes, I'll send them the manuscript', but I didn't. I just did not believe in myself. But my wife saw that the whole thing was becoming pathological, and she said to me: "agree or not, I'm sending it myself". She printed it, 20 pages, and I changed them. She printed them again, and I changed the whole thing all over again. I did it on purpose, to wear her out. It went on like this, again and again - a real cockfight. And like in any cockfight at the end only one rooster stays in the arena. That was my wife. Finally, the manuscript was ready, but I ignored it. So she said to me: 'If you don't take it to them, I will. Make up your mind'. I surrendered, I took it to the publishers, went there really trembling. I am not sure a virgin on her wedding night is more frightened than I was, submitting my manuscript.

The similarities between the contemporary writer and the prototype - the ancient prophet - are clear. Both are chosen to specialize in the spiritual dimension of life and search for eternal truths in the service of the public. The realization that this is a risky task and certainly not a profitable one, along with a feeling of incompetence for the lofty designation, drives them both to an escape voyage - in vain. They must become what they are meant to be.

In the case of writers and poets, then, the meta-theme of identity discovery can have many facets. It can be expressed in accounts of trial and error that stop only when the true identity is finally realized, or it can be portrayed as a relatively linear process developing directly to its peak. This process can include expressions of deep self-awareness, or, in its absence, the process can be described as a succession of random occurrences whose true meaning is revealed only towards its end.

One way or another, all these different versions demonstrate the same idea that frames the identity-story of the artist of the written word: the identity of a poet or writer is not chosen as any other arbitrary choice may be made. This is a process of identity-discovery, tuned by the primeval "I" that lies in the roots of one's soul, and it cannot but lead to a full realization of the a-priori destination.

On Destiny, Destination and Acceptance: Decisive Moments in the Construction of the Identity-Story

The messenger as we have seen, does not choose his mission, but is chosen for it. Nevertheless, what makes one person, and not another, into the chosen one? A simple answer is in the convention determining that authors or poets are separated from the rest, first and foremost, by their talent for writing, O.B.'s answer, as follows, represent this convention well:

People are born with given pre-dispositions, it's not just about learning things. For one it's more towards doing things with his hands, for another it's a tendency to heal, and for some - it's to writing. That is what God gave them.

It's not intentional. It's a fact - some write, some don't. It's a gift. One of those things you can't teach. Well, you can teach, I guess, the technical things that concern writing, but that's it, it's not that special sparkle. Any real art contains that sparkle. The sparkle that makes Mozart's symphonies divine, and someone else's symphony - a piece of garbage. Same tools, almost the same tunes, but here you have that divine sparkle, and there - nothing.

O.B. takes here a clear religious tone – the artist is blessed with a gift from God. Even the "spark" he is referring to, is a concept rich in connotations with the divine. According to Cabbala's view, for example, the sparks of sacred divinity fell down onto the world after the "Shattering of the Vessels" (in Hebrew, "*Shevirat haKeilim*") of the world of *Tohu* - the prior form of Creation, mentioned in Genesis. From this assumption stems the idea that the human being's mission in life is to search for those lost sparks. In Greek mythology, as well, Prometheus, who stole the fire from the gods, needed a spark taken from Mount Olympus to light a stalk of a fennel plant, using it to bring fire to the people. If so, the literary talent is God's gift, a priori distinguishing between the "true" artist and everyone else. Praise from the environment is sometimes the first hint of a given natural ability. Thus, they promote the development of an artist's identity and constitute the first signals to what will become a central and life-long commitment:

D.Z.: It started in the third grade, the writing. And it was not only I that said it - my whole surroundings said it. I started to write all the time - a diary, stories, even essays that the teacher had not asked for, volunteering.

S.J.: I was an outrageously spoiled student. My Arabic teacher just loved me, and he always helped me. He knew I was a good writer, and whenever there was a ceremony or a party, I was always asked to write the poems. And when I started to publish my poems, for my father it was as if I had reached the sky. He was so proud. And not only him - everybody, all his friends, all my friends, the whole village, everyone.

Y.B.: At the age of thirteen, just before I immigrated here, three poems of mine were published in a poetry journal. It was grown-up people's journal, not something for kids. There, in the editorial column, the editor wrote: 'Here you have an example of the renewed young poetry, which is restoring itself after the flames of World War 2...' etc. That was me. But I didn't really understand at all the importance of that declaration. Besides, it wasn't even me that had sent those poems to the journal. One of my teachers sent them without telling me. I did not understand that it was important.

Many studies have tried to empirically map the course running from talent, as a "natural" given, to the realized artist. Some go to the length of pointing to DNA as a key to the riddle (Eysenck 1995). Others content themselves with presenting the personality factor, as that natural element to which talent is connected. Still, the theories and studies in this field exhibit extremely varied results, indicating links between every imaginable personality trait and a creative talent of some sort (Gedo 1996; Simonton 1984; Storr 1972; Young-Bruehl 1991).

Such a setting makes it particularly interesting to examine the stories in which the speakers choose to testify about failing to exceed normative requirements of creative writing at the beginning of the way:

E.K.: As a child, a teenager, no one ever ascribed me any special talent or ability to write. I was quite a good student at high school, but at composition writing lessons I had my lowest grades. The teachers, all of them, said that there is absolutely no connection between my sentences, that I just can't develop a plot, that my characters' behavior is completely arbitrary. Not even one of them thought otherwise. I accepted it. That is, I loved writing, I just knew that it wasn't something I was good at.

Y.O.: I recently found poems in Yiddish which I wrote when I was 11 or 12. Totally immature, so sentimental and weepy... I could write, back then, entirely worthless stuff, and with such emotion and enthusiasm, as if they were masterpieces.

A.M.: I started to write when I was 15, romantic texts in the 18th century age of enlightenment style. I had the guts to write without reading anything, and really, I wrote such strange things, desolated. I thought that's how everybody was writing.

L.A.: I wrote my first poem when I was five years old. Well, it could hardly be considered as a poem or as writing. At the age of seven, or eight, I was already writing like mad, enormous amounts. I wrote and wrote and wrote. I used to imitate those horrible school readers. Tried to write like that and like that. All sorts of loaded and complicated poems, and quite awful, to be honest.

The marking of the chosen one, then, does not necessarily express itself from the beginning in a prominent literary talent. That is to be revealed only at a latter phase. Therefore, for the first miles of the road one must find its manifestations in more hidden and complex ways. The self-irony expressed by the speakers in these stories plays a double role here: first, it is proof of the highest "even though" hurdle they ever skipped over. Despite the unpromising start, they had the upper hand. Second, these descriptions accentuate the importance of that uncontrollable urge to keep writing, to make writing the center of life, as a factor that truly designates the artist to be. The following speaker highlights this idea:

D.B.S.: Sometimes you may meet someone who has the talent for it. God had blessed him with the verbal capability, the associative thinking, and you ask him, 'have you ever considered writing?', and he says: "No, come on. Who has time for it"? So he has, maybe, that gift, but he doesn't have the drive, the misery that gives birth to the deep, moving, profound story. For me, you see, writing is based on a wild, even evil need to translate crying into words. It's an almost obsessive process, forced by some kind of demonic world. We are actually only mouthpieces to those demons. So, it is not necessarily the talent for writing that signals and hints about the life mission that awaits the writer or poet to be. Rather, the identity-stories they set makes it clear that it is the importunate urge to write that proves writing to be an attribute, an inner call that must become realized, and not just another activity one can decide to undertake or give up.

The Writer as a Medium

According to the identity-discovery meta-theme, as we gather from all these accounts, a writer is a writer long before he or she starts writing. The designation lies at the core of one's being, and much like religious faith, does not need reasons, purpose or proof. To understand the nature of this core, let us look at the following descriptions:

D.B.S.: Writing ability is kind of a huge umbrella, underneath it are crowded all the tools of expression - verbal richness, ability to shape your characters psychologically, brilliant ideas - and yet, all of those things are not the heart of it. The heart of it is within the writer himself. Those tensions and hidden chords in him, through which a tune that tells a human's story is being played.

Y.H.: It is very hard to explain what turns someone into a poet. One can only guess. For a poet, every thing is meaningful. It's a mind that absorbs everything, that receives, accepts all the time, processes everything. All the voices are imprinted in me. I get them, but they just elapse, pass through me, and then they come out in the shape of poems.

According to this, that unique spark of the artist is not conditioned by a positive ability. Rather, it is a negative one. The most important ability that is required for writing is the ability to put one's self aside, and thus become a medium – mouthpiece, a vessel, a channel, chords– through which the world is heard and played. Only as a medium, not as a private person, can the artist realize his/her essence as a messenger, and to pass meaningful messages, going far beyond the total sum of private experiences. Our interviewees described themselves as expressing the human experience in its different facets, and as bearers of different kind of messages – moral, psychological, socio-cultural and esthetic. The power of projection processes, enabling the writers to unite with the subjects of their writing, is so extensive, that in some cases their messages can precede and predict events in reality. D.Z. tells of this:

People think sometimes that first of all the writer is impressed by something, and then he writes it down, but for me it's the other way round. First I write, and then it actually happens. Happens in real life. Unbelievable coincidences. It has happened to me a lot of times. Well, if I was writing about myself, and it would have happened, I guess one could explain it as a self-fulfilling prophecy, but I write about others. I don't influence them. I don't bring it on them. I simply 'guess them', because of the huge investment of emotional strength while writing of them.

The similarity between today's artist and the ancient prophet is even more striking when the contemporary writer sees himself as committed to a mission of correcting society, reality itself, recreating the world through words. The image of the writer as an ancient prophet, with an evident social and moral role, is still influential and valid in different theological and literary cultures (Ben-Bassat 2000; Davidson 2003; Galvin 2002; Goroncy 2006). The following speakers both express awareness and commitment to this specific aspect of the artist's role:

Y.B.: For me the image, the ideal of the true poet includes a clear destination, but as something that is revealed post factum. Not something that one takes

on himself in advance. Like the prophet Amos. He says, 'I was taken from my plough. What am I? I am nobody. A simple farmer', so he says. You can say it's vain...but that is truly how I feel. Because I, as well, haven't set in advance that this is who I am. I just realized it. It's like Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote - a poet, living in his society, his community, has to be very attentive to social 'invitations' or expectations, has to sense, and express, the feelings of unease around him. This is not a role one knowingly chooses, but when you read his biography and the literature he created – you can eventually understand his role in society.

S.J.: From a very young age, I had this notion that a poet is like a prophet, a doom prophet. I don't believe that inspiration comes directly from God or anything, but poets do possess a strong feeling of destination. Like Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, poets too are messengers. Some say God's messengers, and I say messengers of that vague, general feeling, they want, they need, to change the world. That's the *raison d'être* of a poet's existence. Never to stay indifferent in front of life's situations without making a stand, never without a commitment or recruitment. That is on one condition – that one doesn't rationally decide to become a messenger.

For both Y.B. and S.J., the poet is a kind of social messenger, but only in retrospect, not as an outcome of a conscious choice. Either way, the mission must be backed by deep self-conviction as to the truth and justice of the message. In this sense the resemblance between the prophet's role and the role of the writer stands out - they both must feel as the bearers of the flag of truth, whether it is a binding social or political truth or a timeless religious or metaphysical truth. In fact, in this aspect in particular, the contemporary artist goes back to wear, as S.J. puts it, the big shoes of the prophet, fulfilling a divine assignment, as M.A., too, clarifies:

We are, actually, nothing but pipes, channels. The world is in constant motion. The moment something stops moving, stops accepting, it becomes sealed, opaque, it becomes defiled. We must avoid it. We must keep ourselves open, like open vessels. Torah fills those vessels. But when a vessel is filled, it has to be cleared, evacuated, and then it can give. In my writing, too, I give. This is a kind of circulation.

M.A. is using here a concept from the world of Kabbalistic philosophy in order to clarify the idea that humans are none other than holy objects. In this context, the artistic work, as a form of giving, opens the way to "acceptance" (in Hebrew, "*kabala*"). Writing, so we see again, is perceived as another legitimate way to find amendment, to reform, and by that to realize the highest purpose of human existence. In M.A.'s case he interprets this process in terms taken from his religious world view. The secularist western world view, on the other hand, tends to prevent such open externalization of the search for connection with the sacred. Some mark Freud's theories as the turning point from which time on religion was placed on the treatment couch. From this point of view, phenomena like anxiety and denial were presented as the foundations of religion's domination of mankind, and the unconscious had replaced God and the soul as the guides of our self understanding (Gargiulo 1997). Under these conditions, the search of the secular writer after the mystic experience is reflected in more personal and internalized terms, as we can find in D.Z.'s description:

For me, it all started with the car accident. There are still things I'm afraid to say out loud. It's not accepted anymore to talk about communicating with the dead, but since the accident I do have an open channel to my beloved dead relatives. All these things arise now, in the book I'm writing. Suddenly, I can define in words a little more of what was sealed in me the whole time. In a strange way, writing about the accident has recalled another mystical event that happened when I was 8 years old. Not much of a story in terms of its plot. The story is that I used to go out with shorts and braids, the white demon they called me. It was summer that particular day, afternoon, and a sun's ray came down and I was sort of trapped in it. It was such weather - wine, womb, not too hot, not too cold, pleasant, embracing. I felt like merging with the sun's ray, with nature, with the tree, even with that cement block on which I was standing. I was alone. I don't know for how long. Later on the clouds came and hid the sun, and as much as I tried to get into the ray again, I couldn't anymore. Never again. And it has been years that I am still trying in my writing to find again that experience, actually, that moment which mystics try to summon artificially, by praying, by ecstasy, by all means that aim to invite inspiration - that one-minute union between me and the universe.

From this description rises an experience of being thrown out of time and place, an experience that writing alone could restore. In fact, such an experience of stripping down from the material reality, and stepping out from the "Me" into the domain of the "I", is the exact experience for which the believer searches all his life, and tries to call upon himself through prayers and rituals. D.Z.'s words reflect, so it seems, the typical embarrassment originating from today's secular, objective-scientific culture, when standing at the gates of the religious or metaphysical subjective experience. Thus, unlike other interviewees who described themselves as channels of history, society or nature, such an image of connecting to the metaphysical does not suit D.Z. Her embarrassment is noticeable in the statements of reservation she places in her words: "There are still things I'm afraid to say out loud ", "It's not accepted anymore to talk about communicating the dead". But although she expresses a need to dissociate herself from what may sound like a too esoteric or mystical description, her stories highlight the intensity of the experience and its meaning to her. The search for a transcendent experience, it seems, has not been completely expropriated. It just takes other forms. The most important to our case is the linkage between the transcendent and the creative process. According to D.Z.'s narration, it was writing which brought her back to the accident event, as well as to the childhood experience she described - two occurrences which she considers to be key experiences in her spiritual development.

Another interviewee, Y.O., has a well-defined theoretical outlook on the metaphysical mindset evident from D.Z.'s words. The concept of "light", not surprisingly, is as a key theme in his account:

When you look at a work of art, you can feel as if something is threatening your sanity, any human's being sanity. That threat is what creates art. We can know all our life: 'this is a table' but when a good poem, a good story, sheds light on it - only then you really see it for the first time. It's as if someone has turned on a flashlight, and it could turn off any moment. You feel that this is a signal light. The search after that light, that sign, is what I call the secular pilgrimism. It is maintained due to the dialectics that exists between those two pillars - secularity and pilgrimism. Remove one of them, and the whole thing collapses.

Y.O.'s point of view resembles other claims to a link between art, or creativity in general, and the religious experience. Both these basic aspects of human existence express the pursuit for revelation, illumination and inspiration (Coleman 1998; Fauteux 1995).

Accounts of revelation, illumination and inspiration are indeed characteristic of the identity-story of the writer or the poet. In the process of identity-discovery, driven by the force of the "I", one has to learn how to get rid of the burdens of daily events and personal obligations, and to find within oneself the power of the medium. The medium's entity represents refinement of the "I"'s aspiration to total unity with the universe. As a vessel that absorbs the entire human experience, the medium thus gains the merit of being relevant to the readers.

Self Nullification as the Core of the Medium's Special Ability

Turning into a medium requires flexible boundaries and maintenance of an absorbent and accepting state of mind. Purification from ego's stumbling-blocks may be essential threshold conditions to achieving such a desired state of mind, as is clear from M.A.'s words:

The first and utmost important thing is to get rid of vanity, of hubris. When you understand that you're nothing but a tool, only then you are open to accept. Who is the wise guy? A person that learns, learns continuously, from everything and everyone. It's not is if you learn, get a degree, and that's it, you know it all. No such thing. Wise men have already said: the purpose of knowing is not knowing. It's humbleness in the good sense of the word.

According to the idea expressed here by M.A., a certain degree of self-nullification is a vital first step on the way to acceptance and inspiration. Knowing what is unknown is the key to self-negation, that is, to the blurring of the firm boundaries of the "Me", and thus creating an opening for the "I" to unite with the world. These ideas are rooted deep in the world of Kabbalistic philosophy. They present, indeed, a model stating that creation, both creation of the world and its splits and splinters in the form of human creation, is possible only based on a self-reduction process, designed to clear space to unify with the other (Rotenberg 1995a, 1995b).

The worldview of Zen-Buddhism also maintains that insight and illumination, which are among the cornerstones of the creative process, are not possible within the framework of the firm and fixed models of selfhood, portraying a false ideal of self-continuity (Thomas 1999).

From a different point of view, the concepts of Sartreian Existentialism may also offer an intriguing interpretation of the writer's experience of being a medium. According to Sartre (1966), human consciousness exists only as absence, as nothingness. The human consciousness is aware, by its very nature, of the nothingness of its essence, and its infinite activeness arises from its efforts to lift this burden from its shoulders, and to step out of itself by means of unifying with the objects around.

Let us be reminded again that we are focused here on only one aspect of the identity construction processes of authors and poets. As mentioned, we also found that their discourses revealed many patterns expressing the opposite need in building a stable and well-defined "Me". Such a "Me" is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition, for a life dedicated to art – the ability to persevere in spite of difficulties, the ability to cope with others and one's self for recognition in their art and

in themselves as artists, and more. Therefore, this is the root of the paradox they face. On the one hand, they are subject to factors of time and place, which have a crucial role in defining the "Me" in general, and for writing literature relevant for others in particular. On the other hand, in order to write a true literary work, they must annul the private and reach the universal. A.M. is keen to describe this aspect:

It's customary to think that writing a poem is a matter of concentration. I say it's the other way around; it's rather a matter of distraction, of an absent mind. I mean, the less I'm focused on me and my life, the more I open and enable layers that are much deeper, much wider than myself. The experience of being a channel is so strong. It really is a paradox: the more I succeed in emptying myself out of me, turning myself into a vessel that receives, that gets, so my poetry gets stronger, has a much larger radius.

Consequently, as we have seen, only through this "self-nullification" process can the writer unite with his/her objects, and become the world. This tendency defines the essence of the "I", which, as mentioned, opposes the detached self-definition of the "Me", and aims to break boundaries and to reach unity with everything. The progress of such a quest can occur only by way of negativity – removing the unimportant, reducing obstacles and expelling disguises of all sorts. The "I", which is not constructed based on outside circumstances, represents, therefore, a dimension beyond the social, beyond the personal, as A.M. continues to explain:

There isn't much new about how a person lives. Everyone is living somewhere, working somewhere, has his people. It's up to us. But deep inside it all, there's the essential, spiritual nucleus, and it has got nothing to do with all the fuss that surrounds it. It's as if there's the consciousness in the center and life around it. You must have some sort of a life, must sort of produce your life. But those inner layers, that really matter, are the most impersonal. Writing poetry demonstrates it. It's like in meditation, putting myself aside, expanding, losing outlines, giving up the personal. Not all my poems come from this layer. Some come from the personal. I can tell the difference. But for me, poems that emerge from this empty, pure, mirror-like layer, are the most meaningful, the most interesting. Actually, there's a lot of hubris in saying "personal". What's personal? What have I got that all others haven't? It is vain, almost comical to experience things in a "personal" way.

Such being the case, the "I", is found beyond the "Me", beyond who that person is – residence and occupation, social and family bonds and so forth. The big paradox is that the internal core contains nothing personal, only formless and endless possibilities. A similar approach is found in Sartre (1966), when he states, that in fact, it is the surrender to the social imposition determining human beings should be "what they are" which is one of the most common ways of self-deceit. According to him, a person can fulfill a social role only in that neutralized existence he calls "entity for itself", thus, in existing in a form of what one is not. Self-negation, so it seems, is paradoxically portrayed here as the main road to self-discovery. In spite of the apparent contradiction this is understandable, as true writing itself, no doubt the cornerstone of the writer's or poet's identity-story, cannot exist, so our interviewees believe, without the discovery of the ability to surpass one's own self.

Concluding Remarks

Our study shows that the two components of the term "identity-story" - the personal dynamic story at one end and the identity as a close social label at the other - are actually inseparably interwoven with each other. The accounts of our interviewees move to and fro from the subjective transcendental experience that lies at the base of writing, towards, and sometimes against, the approved social identity of each of them as a writer or a poet.

In their identity-stories are interlaced themes which we identified as serving the needs of the "Me" that describe how they actively and intentionally construct their identities as literary creators, with themes that outline the "I" forces that drive them gradually, allegedly passively, to discover the core of their identity as writers and poets. Both these narrative meta-themes - identity-creation and identity discovery - maintain constant correspondence with cultural models and images concerning the term "writer" or "poet".

The main principle of the identity-discovery meta-theme, on which we focused our discussion in the present paper, lies in the idea that even in reducing all possible surrounding influences, whether objective or their various subjective interpretations, something will always still remain, that something being, in fact, the core of selfhood. That primeval universal human core is perceived as the source of humans' motivation to keep searching for the meaning of existence beyond the borders of externals and circumstances. In the case of authors and poets, as we showed, it is also perceived by them as the main source for the creative power and the motivation to write. The meta-theme of identity-discovery is composed of sub-themes that describe how they came to realize that they were born to write, as a kind of destination they did not choose but were chosen for, and how they gradually become committed to the assignment. In the process of identity-discovery they acknowledge the signs of their destination - sometimes, though not necessarily, the talent for writing, but always, inevitably, the urge to write, no matter what. They discover the need as well as the ability to experience, in the creative process, an experience of self-negation, and in that to fulfill the medium's role, and mediate to others messages that exceed the limits of their own private existence.

The combination of the two narrative meta-themes - identity creation and identity discovery, so we claim, is important to the construction of any identity-story and is certainly critical to the to the self-definition processes of authors and poets as such.

The apparent contradiction between these two kinds of discourses, as well as the one that may seem between the unique "stranger" image and all others, is only on the face of things. We all create our identity and discover it at the same time. On the one hand, identity-creation does not happen in a vacuum - even when the process occurs within an extensive spectrum of choices, it is always based on construction and re-construction of given materials whose source is always the socio-cultural dimension. Just the same, identity-discovery, on the other hand, does not end with the exposure of what is regarded as the true core of selfhood. This core of identity is indeed seen as absolute and ultimate, and yet here, too, as we have seen, the discovery requires an endless process of reinforcement and refining.

The uniqueness of our interviewees' identity-stories does not rest, therefore, in the mere combination of creation and discovery themes in their identity-stories, but perhaps just in the intensity and forcefulness of both these kinds of discourses in their accounts.

The literary practice itself, so it seems, requires, and eventually also enhances the two tendencies at the same time. The characteristics of this art of the written word and the abstract idea - the search for some eternal truth on one side and the creative game with endless options, images, imaginations, not limited by actual material on the other side - are compatible both with the demands of the search after the primary true core of identity as well as with those of identity's construction, interpretation and its constant editing and styling.

However, disassembly of this mosaic picture to its separate components does raise a question. It is quite clear how the identity creation meta-theme, with its focus on the social "Me", contributes to the writers' understanding of the vital cultural-symbolic negotiation they hold with their surrounding, just as it is vital to the understanding of any identity narration. However, what, we may ask, is the contribution of the somewhat esoteric identity discovery meta-theme with the "I" discourse that characterizes it?

Unlike the "Me" centered themes that are related to identity construction, the identity discovery concept is not even commensurate with the premises of constructivist methodology and methods we have adopted for the present research. By definition it points to eternal truths that rise above the day-by-day negotiations and social reality. We have tried, therefore, to treat the "I" discourse statements produced by our interviewees like any other possible content, without judging or sorting those ideas and certainly without disqualifying them according to any scale of importance or scientific "truth" foreign to the speakers' world and their own frames of reference. Moreover, the constructivist "dialogical self" concept itself does immanently contain the possibility of dualistic thought, and that should include the coexistence of diversity and unity, of the social and the spiritual, or of the relational aspects of the self alongside the feeling of distinctiveness (Alma and Zock 2002; Valsiner 2005; Yau-fai Ho et al. 2001).

Still, apart from this methodological principle, what if any, is the role of this abstract discourse, to the game of constructing an identity story of an author or a poet?

We propose a few possible answers. First, the typical belief in dimensions of super-time and super-place originating from the identity discovery theme can serve as a refuge from various day-to-day, here and now stressors. Writing, in this context, is understood as both deriving from those supreme dimensions as well as creating them. Such a belief is a natural promoter of self-esteem, probably not at all redundant to holders of an artistic task which has, in recent decades, lost much of its former glory. Moreover, this kind of belief may intensify the creative power, helping the artist to confront the hindrances and blocks to writing that the daily pressures produce, through by-passing them on the way to those experiences of a higher existence.

Secondly, the characteristics of the identity discovery theme and the "I" discourse accompanying it, illustrate the writer as the ancient prophet or the tribe's magician. We witnessed a developing metaphor that enhanced this impression of the elected, somewhat freakish, supernatural image. Born to this special destiny, committed to a lifetime assignment and bound to play the role of mouthpiece to the voice of truth, the writer is almost automatically situated in that well known, heroic-romantic blend, structuring culture's myth of the artist as a lonely genius - agonizing, fighting, sublime, mad - all at the same time. Vasari (1996), Michelangelo's 16th century biographer, had already portrayed the artist's superior image. In fact, much before that, even ancient Greek culture considered the artist a person whose source of inspiration was one of the nine muses - the goddesses that encouraged the arts.

Hence, by excluding themselves from the public the writers do not set for themselves a real banishment. On the contrary, by this they actually speak of themselves as leading carriers of their culture, fulfilling and reinforcing its role expectations and myths. In this classic process of symbolic interaction, the writers rebuild themselves from the artist's myth that their culture offers them, and at the same time, by accepting it, they strengthen and empower not just that specific myth of the artist's image, but the whole cultural patrimony for which it stands. In this sense our own study, for example, reflects the hidden streams, originating from the archaic biblical culture, that still affect the current Israeli modern and secular society.

Moreover, this particular cultural myth enables them to aspire to a position, of what we might call an "all-sider" - the joint position of the "outsider" and the "insider", at the same time. A certain feeling of oddness is characteristic of writers, and it can turn into a virtue if they manage to assimilate it into their writing and identity (Day 2002). Perhaps this is the case because as Schutz (1971) has pointed out, the stand of the stranger always involves distantness, hesitation, insecurity and mistrust, but also the ceaseless attempt to interpret the cultural patterns of the social group he seeks to join. For writers this is an especially suitable stand. It enables them to interlace their need to understand their society, and gain its understanding and recognition as its authorized authors on the one hand, and on the other, keep watching and describing it from outside, forever from a fresh and genuine point of view. In other words, the "madness" of the artist represents, amongst other things, a justification and even an invitation to individualism, authenticity, flexibility and openness. These abilities and characteristics are known to be connected to the multi-directional thinking that is necessary for all forms of creativity (Fine 2003; Griffin and McDermott 1998; Kwang and Rodrigues 2002).

Thirdly, the image of the artist as a medium, mediating truths and forces stemming from timeless and placeless strata of the human existential experience, coincides well with the flourishing contemporary New-Age sub-culture. Our era - secular, technological, commercial - has a preference for the immediate, the practical and the earthbound. Manifestations of the intangible, let alone the divine, have been driven to the corner. The universal spiritual needs which, in the past, religion was authorized to express, have been partly blocked. On the other hand, this censorship of authentic human tendencies and aspirations has created a whole burst of extracanonical sub-culture of mysticism and transcendence for the masses. The fine arts have also gained extra power, regarded as being able to raise one-time personal experience into allegory status, much in the way holy scriptures have done for a long time. Literature especially, due to its cultural, intellectual, explicit and verbalized aspects, is more than suitable for that purpose. Thus, a window has opened here for nowadays authors and poets for public serving in this kind of postmodern sanctuary.

Fourthly, as we have seen, the "I" discourse situates the author or the poet in the world, not only as a source but also as a vessel, as many of our interviewees noted. In many ways, this belief can represent a counterbalance to another common life stand between authors and poets, these natural storytellers, proclaiming that "life is nothing but a tale". It can offer them, therefore, a refuge in the idea that there is, after all, something absolute in life, something that goes beyond their own tales and interpretations. In a way that tends to turn every detail of the historical biography, and primarily of the emotional one, into the next line or verse, there is something very soothing in knowing that you are not just telling and recognizing - that at the very same time you yourself are also told and recognized by something much bigger than yourself. Whilst the importance of the "Me" discourse and the identity creation meta-theme lies in its strengthening the personal experience of having a place and a voice

of your own in the social-cultural ensemble, the "I" discourse, as opposed to that, reinforces the level of the historic precisely because it goes beyond it. Apparently, the secret of its charm derives from the idea that it gives the personal life-story an echo in the unhistorical and impersonal levels of existence. In some sense, it can be looked upon as a metaphysical parallel to the fondness toddlers have for stories in which they are placed as the protagonists, stories that validate and add worth to their very existence in the world.

Finally, let us be reminded, that there is an in-advance difficulty in constructing an identity of an "author" or a "poet", and the quotation marks are not accidental in this context. In relation to more common professional occupations, those vocational definitions tend to suffer from an inherent ambiguity. This is because all human beings use words to tell their personal stories and to create meaning. Moreover, nowadays, in the era of computer communication technologies, more than ever, it seems everyone can publish their meditations and raise them to nobility through the power of the printed word. We should note that literature-making is not conditioned by unique tools, materials or techniques, it is not performed in an exclusive pre-defined physical or cultural institution, nor does it require a training period, admission requirements or membership in a formal guild. Thus, even in relation to other forms of artistic expression the weakness inscribed in advance in the titles "author" or "poet" is evident.

In a way, this weakness sheds light on the crucial importance of the tension that exists between the "I-Me" discourses, typical of writers' understanding of their own identity construction process. It seems, to a large extent, that this tension serves as a powerful engine that outlines the course of these expert writers to the so much needed self-definition as authors and poets. Eventually, it enables them to construct clear, distinct and potent identity-stories, despite the immanent difficulties that characterize the way they must conquer in order to reach their destiny as writers.

So, do writers expose the predispositions that enable, and perhaps commit them to write or, do they merely choose to write as they could have chosen any other way of life? Do they discover their identity as authors and poets or gradually construct it? We know, by now, that in their understanding, it is not an either/or question. In any way, and certainly in this context, the identity story of the writer, just like any other story, aims to stand the test of the aesthetic rules. It strives, as Erikson (1963, 1971) had taught, to reach for homogeneity and consistency of its unique ingredients. In our case, as we have tried to demonstrate, this all-human tendency to construct a unique identity story from universal components is intensified. The identity-story is the ultimate story created by each of us. We have seen, in the case of these literary creators, that they strive, just as in their writings, to play it as a harmonious choir of the discovered and the constructed, the given and the chosen, the one-time and the eternal.

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