

Writing of Mythical Proportions: Myths and Intertextuality Revisited in Amélie Nothomb's Oeuvre.

Karen Ferreira-Meyers
University of Swaziland,
Kwaluseni – Swaziland.

Abstract:

The myth of Orpheus has been re-written several times by Amélie Nothomb, Belgian author of the 20th and 21st centuries. Intertextuality as described by Julia Kristeva involves re-writing based on readings by an author. Postmodern writing, largely based on intertextuality, gives us a better insight in the reasons for the so-called 'theft'. Palimpsests (Genette, Derrida, Barthes) provide a model for the function of writing. The palimpsest foregrounds the fact that all writing takes place in the presence of other writings: "palimpsests subvert the concept of the author as the sole originary source of her work, and thus defer the "meaning" of a work down an endless chain of signification". Dictionary definitions often include "something having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface" when defining palimpsest.

In view of the foregoing, can Amélie Nothomb's writing then still be qualified as original and as genuine creative writing? From *Hygiène de l'Assassin* (1992) to *Acide Sulfurique* (2005) and *Journal d'Hirondelle* (2006), Nothomb's oeuvre has used myths to re-write her story. Autobiographical or auto fictional/factional, the main thrust of her writing lies in re-writing, be it of myths or other literary tools. In this article, an overview of the myths used by Amélie Nothomb, Belgian Francophone author, will be analyzed using the main components of her 15-year old literary career.

Introduction

Intertextuality - the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts - has always been regarded as one of the main characteristics of post-modern literature. It can refer to an author's borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. French semiotician Julia Kristeva's coinage of "intertextuality" (1967) represents an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist semiotics (1916) —his study of how signs derive their meaning within the structure of a text—with Bakhtin's dialogism (1929)—his examination of the multiple meanings, or 'heteroglossia', in each text (especially novels). It has to be clear that intertextuality renders each text as a "mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva, 1967) and part of a larger mosaic of texts. Intertextuality is strongly linked to the concept of re-writing or 'réécriture'. Since Aristotle, re-writing poses the question of mimesis or imitation poetry. He clearly associated mimesis with creation and not only with simple imitation (Poetics, chapter IV) because mimesis involves a transposition of reality in figures or narrative facts. In

this article we will link post-modernity with intertextuality via the use of myths in the literary oeuvre of the highly graphomaniac Amélie Nothomb, feminine Francophone author of the 20th and 21st century, and her vision of inclusion and transformation.

Conceptual issues relating to intertextuality

Intertextuality changes the chronologically earlier concept of the text as a self-sufficient, hermetic totality, and foregrounds the idea that all literary production takes place in the presence of other texts; they are, in effect, palimpsests. It is this latter concept, palimpsests, which refers to what Barthes (1981), Genette (1982) and Derrida (1996) describe as a model for the function of writing. According to these literary critics, all writing takes place in the presence of other writings. Stronger still, the "meaning" of a work is deferred down an endless chain of signification, as palimpsests are often defined as having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface.

As any text is a new tissue of past citations it should be 'easy' to expose the links between them by deciphering bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, literary citations, and other intertextual indices which pass into the text and are redistributed within it. Many times, however, the condition of any text cannot be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; as Barthes (1973: 39) contended, the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks.

While the theoretical concept of intertextuality is associated with post-modernism, the device itself is not new. New Testament passages quote from the Old Testament and Old Testament books such as Deuteronomy or the Prophets refer to events described in Exodus. We use this example from biblical writings in particular as, so we will see, Amélie Nothomb utilises the Bible and more specifically the parts on Genesis in her re-writing work. One of the main issues remains, of course, whether this type of re-writing, of using other people's words and thoughts remains 'writing' or not.

There is an apparent danger that intertextuality becomes mere plagiarism. An example exists in the case of Spanish writer Lucía Etxebarria whose poem collection *Estación de infierno* (2001) was found to contain metaphors and verses from António Colinas. Etxebarria claimed that she admired him and applied intertextuality. Examples from the African literary world include famous plagiarism 'scandals' over the works of Y. Ouelegem and Calixthe Beyala¹.

We would like to stress the point that this is not the case with Nothomb's novels and short stories. Her intertextuality is a way of putting forth her own vision, of playing a strategic formal game (this strategy of form refers to Laurent Jenny's literary theories) and is indicative of cultural transformation. It is indeed in times of cultural transformation and upheaval that intertextuality seems to be more prominent: Gignoux (2005: 40) explains that the intellectual avant-garde uses

intertextuality because it wants to criticise an earlier text, subvert a genre that has been overtaken ideologically; it is this intertextuality then which allows texts to be re-activated, re-newed and which prevents them from "congealing".

Our argument here is based on the fact that re-writing can be seen as writing as long as literary changes and thought transformations are present in the 'new' literary work, which is the case in Amélie Nothomb's oeuvre.

Myths as part of the writing process in Nothomb's literary texts

Amélie Nothomb's unique incorporation of myths, legends and text from other authors forms the second part of our presentation today. Indeed, a number of questions come to mind when looking at this prolific writer³¹: does Nothomb use re-writing techniques as a way to show respect to her predecessors and to indicate her adherence to a particular school of thought? Should we see it as a type of interlocking of two or more texts and as such as a means of reconsidering at the same time certain ideas and the form of transmitting these ideas? Or is it rather a sign of lack of inspiration or a possibility of opening a new discursive playground in which young female francophone authors propose their views, their discourse on history and stories, on cultural heritage and literary past by means of deconstruction and reconstruction through language? Let's not forget that Blanchot's principle (quoted by Obiang Essono, 2006: 126) can be applied to many literary texts: "Tout doit aboutir à une invention mythique; il n'y a pas d'oeuvre que là où s'ouvre la source des images révélatrices" (my translation: Everything arrives at a mythical invention, there is no literary oeuvre unless the sources of the revealing images are clear).

A rapid overview of some of Nothomb's novels and theatre plays will show the myths and literary canons at work in her texts and aid to prove that literary writing only exists when myths are invented and re-invented.

Set in the European section of Peking during the mid-70s, *Le Sabotage amoureux* (*Loving Sabotage*) (1993) is the story of the seven-year-old daughter of Belgian diplomats, Amélie. It opens with a pretend-war between the compound's children—the Allies vs. the Germans—and continues at a remarkable pace as this energetic little girl experiences a great infatuation (with Elena, a young Italian child) in the midst of all the play.

In the Greek legend, Orpheus, musician and poet, falls in love with Eurydice, but she dies instantly after being bitten by a snake. Then Orpheus descends to Hell to charm Pluto with his music. He is then allowed to bring Eurydice back to earth on one condition: he shall not turn back to look at her. Unfortunately for him, he cannot keep his promise, brings about Eurydice's second death and loses her forever.

Amélie Nothomb re-writes the Orpheus' myth with multiple changes, inversions and transfers (Helm, 1997). In Nothomb's writing Eurydice's murder is provoked

by Orpheus himself. This is exemplified through the couple Léopoldine-Prétextat in *Hygiène de l'Assassin* (1992).

Prétextat Tach, the novel's protagonist, holds the Nobel-prize of literature. In the novel he is death's door and wishes to give his ultimate interview. The first four journalists abandon the interview as he assaults them with verbal atrocities. The fifth one, Nina, compels Prétextat to go back on memory lane and to confront his past, namely the murder of his childhood friend, Léopoldine. Léopoldine can be seen as the classical Eurydice, who strangled by her man, Prétextat, allows, we may even say, wills, herself to die at the bottom of a lake. In the traditional version of the myth, Orpheus does not cause Eurydice's death, but it is clear that he involuntarily has brought about her demise. The link death-writing in Nothomb's oeuvre, similar to the link death-music/art in the mythical story of Orpheus, is obvious.

Nothomb's preference to pervert ancient myths does not stop here, as she links this literary myth to that of Ophelia who nymphatically rejoins her aquatic element (Helm, 1997). In Nothomb's fictional world, there is often a meeting of extremes, the ugly and the vile contrasting with the beautiful and the sublime, both oscillate in a conceptual realm that flouts genre conventions and challenges established discursive realities.

Mixing the Orpheus' myth with the most famous biblical myth of Genesis, the snake which kills Eurydice resurfaces in Nothomb's texts as language, bearer of death. Words become more dangerous than snake bites. Indeed, in *Mercur* (1998: 179), one of the main characters, Omerⁱⁱⁱ has the following to say about Françoise: "She is the snake that talks to my Eve. Why is that something so stupid as language can completely wipe out the garden of Eden?" Orpheus has the characteristics of a monster and he brings along death by word instead of death by crime. His eternal song is repeated over and over (Amanieux 2005: 146). It is this repetition that mimics the author's quest to return to childhood. According to Caine (2003: 76).

The endeavours of Nothomb's *narratrices* to attain oblivion (re) present an impossible, and a manifestly 'unreal' fantasy of returning to an untroubled, childlike state where they would be once more unperturbed by the frustrations and lacks occasioned by being in the (adult) world.

Nothomb's desire to employ the myth of Orpheus is manifested in her 1996 novel, *Péplum*, as well. A parody of Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, this so-called "dialogue novel" broadcasts the author's views on societal conflicts in a science-fiction-like manner. In a degenerate 26th century civilization, an aesthetic coefficient is set. All individuals are assessed against this coefficient to determine whether they can become part of the reigning oligarchy.

In her subsequent novel, *Attentat* (1997: 2007) the author writes: "If Orpheus had been Eurydice's murderer, he would perhaps have been able to bring her back from hell".

Exemplified by this type of intra-textual writing (by directly referring to Orpheus and Eurydice in *Attentat*, the author links her own writing with previous novels), Nothomb transcends her usual palimpsest stratagems (all her novels contain explicit intertextual references and allusive titles) to focalise her re-writing exercise on both the founding myths of femininity and the major 'récit des origines' (Oberhuber, 2004). In *Mercure*, Nothomb's 1998 novel, the author incorporated three well-known fairy tales: The Beauty and the Beast which is the dominant model for Nothomb's story narrated by Hazel, saved from the war and who is told that she has been disfigured by a bombardment. This fairy tale is easily perceptible by the reader and capitalized ex negativo on the myths of the young woman waiting to be rescued by her Prince Charming which brings us to the second and third fairy tales present in *Mercure*: Cinderella who is immobilized by her so-called ugliness and Sleeping Beauty.

To lock up his young protégée with him on the island and to re-invent his life, Omer Loncours, one of the main characters of the novel and staunch mythomaniac, systematically takes away all mirrors and all surfaces which could possibly reflect Hazel's face and her beauty. Just like the author of the *Odyssey*, Omer, the old captain, structures and organises the life of a war victim, just like Ulysses himself, he uses several tricks to achieve his goal: he nourishes his pupil with a false perception of her persona and he weaves a web of constant deceit. However, Nothomb's re-interpretation of the myth has a two-fold outcome: on the one side, Nothomb offers an idyllic ending, even though it has incestuous undertones as the separation scene between Omer and Hazel ends as follows (my translation): "He took her in his arms. He took the face of his love between his hands and devoured it with his eyes. It was she who pushed her lips towards him." (*Mercure*, 1998: 201). Hazel and Françoise, the nurse-saviour, then leave the island, with Omer's blessings to go and live in a beautiful apartment overlooking Central Park. But, in Nothomb's vision, there has to be a twist: not happy with a single 'happy' ending, the author proposes a second, psychoanalytical variation of the symbiotic couple of Omer and Hazel. Different from the first ending, a second possible ending is suggested after the novel's last words in a note by the author where she recognizes having felt the need to write a different ending altogether: here, Omer drowns and the dialogue between Hazel and Françoise following this unfortunate event indicates a reversal of roles, the old torturer dead, he is now replaced by a new one, Françoise, no longer an angelic nurse, she is transformed into a new torturer who perpetuates the lie about Hazel's supposed ugliness. It is only at the end of her life – when the victim is 70 years old – that Hazel finally finds out the truth about her beauty. Having fully interiorised her role of victim, Hazel thanks the liar because she has saved her from the temptation of showing off and from the suffering inflicted by humans and time passing by on beauty (my translation, *Mercure*, 1998: 226).

In this narrative on mirrors and duplicity, Nothomb operates a double type of re-writing. Firstly, intertextually, the re-writing allows Nothomb to move certain fairy tale and mythological narrative's fixed thoughts but, secondly, at an intratextual

level, because of the suggested second ending to the novel, *Mercure* opens the way towards a third reading space, that of uncertainty and doubt. The intertexts chosen by Nothomb (19th century authors mostly in the case of *Mercure*: Dumas, Stendhal, Sheridan Le Fanu, Lewis Carroll, Charlotte Brönte, Shéhérazade, etc.) showcase the liberating power of language and literature because "the dilemma between freedom (into the unknown) and the safety of the family (if oppressive) status quo, is played out in the structuring of the novel and in the dialogues between the two female protagonists" (Bainbrige, 2003: 116).

In *Stupeur et Tremblements* (1999) several issues are at stake. On the one hand, there is the straightforward reference to Søren Kierkegaard's *Crainte et tremblement* (*Fear and Trembling* is the English translation of both Nothomb and Kierkegaard's work). In *Fear and Trembling*, the philosopher Kierkegaard exposes the third stage of human existence: the religious stage which is beyond reason, beyond any idea of 'good', because Abraham decides to sacrifice his own son Isaac on the command of God. At this religious stage, man decided to live in conflict with human morals and in fear and trembling. In *Stupeur et tremblements*, an autofictional/factional^{iv} novel, Nothomb who is author, narrator and main character, wants to be above traditional moral judgment and therefore exemplifies Kierkegaard's ethics.

In 2000, Nothomb published *Métaphysique des Tubes*, once again an autofictional novel, in which she describes the first three years of her life.

Whoever has read the first few pages of the Bible easily finds the references to it in Nothomb's novel: an omnipotent creator God, conscious of his founding acts is parodied and becomes the incarnation of nihilism (I translate):

In the beginning there was nothing. And this nothing was neither empty nor vague; it did not need anything else but itself. And God saw that this was good. He would not create anything. The emptiness was more than sufficient to him: he loved it. [...] God was fully satisfied. He wanted nothing, expected nothing, perceived nothing, refused nothing and was interested in nothing. Life was at this point plenitude such that it was not life. God did not live, he merely existed (*Métaphysique des Tubes*, 2000: 7).

These "antiphrases" are at the crossroads of two fundamental Judeo-Christian texts: the Old and the New Testaments.

The myth, tragedy and fascination of Dionysus in Amélie Nothomb's work was cleverly analysed by Amanieux. Dionysus, twice-born God, underlies the theme of the double birth as found, for example, in *Métaphysique des Tubes*. Several main characters in Nothomb's novels bear strict resemblance to Dionysus both physically and psychologically^v. The first and most obvious one is Prétextat, possessed by destructive love and with an appetite for monstrous purity. Omer and Epiphane are possessed by perverse love and the Professor in Nothomb's only theatre play to date (*Les Combustibles*) are Dionysus-like in their desire to justify

themselves and their tendency to have sudden fits of anger and mad outbursts. On the other hand, some characters remain silent as well as Dionysian:

Palamède, in *Les Catilinaires*, embodies a terrifying yet silent Dionysus: this Dionysus is no longer delirious and thus emptied of his substance. The human being is invaded by nothingness. By essence, Dionysus is double: presence and absence, boisterous delirium and deathly silence (Otto Walter quoted by Amanieux, 2003: 136)

In the same way as Dionysus likes to be surrounded by beautiful women do we find Nothomb's male characters accompanied by heroines of a fatal beauty. Bloodshed, metamorphosis into a savage beast, a carnivorous appetite tied to a desire to tear raw flesh – all these Dionysian 'attributes' are part and parcel of the fictional make-up of Nothomb's larger-than-life 'monstres' (Terrasse, 2003). Amanieux concludes that "as a God of sexual frenzy, Dionysus unleashes passions in which pleasures of love and pleasures of death merge" (2003: 138) which is exactly the case with some Nothombian characters such as Epiphane who kills Ethel in *Attentat* (1997).

In the same novel, Nothomb's acerbic irony transforms the myth of Quasimodo. Hunchbacked, scruffy, with a face resembling an ear and eyes similar to two flabby and suppurating buttonholes, corrupt and cynical, but with an exceptional intelligence, her anti-hero becomes an anti-model in fashion shows where he is extremely popular. He falls in love with one of the most refined models but of course the end of the story is catastrophic. Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* is the most discernible intertext, given the main character's (Epiphane) nickname: Quasimodo. However, it has been pointed out that Hugo's portrayal of Quasimodo is incontrovertibly subtler than is suggested in *Attentat*. Nothomb's version, including the popular, simplified perception of his character, serves to show the inconsistency of the myth:

Through his sadistic sexual fantasy, then through his murder of Ethel, Epiphane is shown to be very far from a pure, beautiful soul concealed behind a hideous exterior, while Ethel, despite her beauty, gives the impression of being a perfectly average woman, neither angelic nor diabolic. (Rodgers, 2003: 55)

Intertextuality often refers to literary relations of conscious influence (for example Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, or between the poets Shelley and Wordsworth). On the other hand, intertextuality also refers to intentional allusions, be they overt or covert, by the hand of the author: citations or quotations from previous texts in literary texts are examples of these intentional allusions. It is clear that Nothomb's preferences permeate her work, citations, camouflaged as her own lines sometimes, come from Bernanos, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Pascal, Diderot, Stendhal, Dumas, Sartre, etc. The list seems never-ending.

Intertextuality can be seen at two levels, at a microstructural level, in the form citations, references and allusions which are frequent in Nothomb's work, and at a

macrostructural level, which then refers to imitation of style and transformation of text. What is surprising with Nothomb's use of intertextuality is that she goes beyond justified and 'morally acceptable' use of intertexts. Apart from openly referring to existing texts and novelists, this female writer 'plays' non stop with her readership. She even goes so far as to invent authors and titles, especially in *Les Combustibles* where she brings in non-existing baroque-sounding authors such as Blatek, Kleinbettingen, Sterpenich and Faterniss as well as kitsch titles such as *La Poupée parlée* and *Le Mythe du sultan*.

In Nothomb's case the re-writing of Eurydice's myth, linked to Orpheus' myth, corresponds to a fundamental need to define literature as a "Graal", as a feminine quest.

Conclusion

Literary re-writing is not only a fundamental characteristic of modern and post-modern writing, especially at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century; it is also a sign of literary value which turns a text into a literary text. When re-writing an author uses what has been termed 'intra-referentiality' (Georges Molinié): based on Jakobson's poetic function of language, language uses itself as its referent. Myths inherited from Antiquity, fables and bible stories are the main sources for these re-writings. Nothomb certainly has one famous Belgian francophone predecessor, Henri Bauchau who published a trilogy with the following titles: *Oedipus on the road*, *Diotimus and the Lions* (*Diotime et les lions*), and *Antigone*, but the incorporation of myths into post-modern writing is definitely not a specific Belgian literary trait.

Intertextuality and the use of myths as exemplified above in Nothomb's oeuvre are the author's winks towards the reader who above all has the intention of desacralising writing, reading and myths (Helm, 1996: 113). Nothomb's intertextual practices are considered as the author's way of "playing with themes of freedom and confinement" as she may be "weaving associations with other writers and works into her texts, perhaps unable (or unwilling?) to escape the clutches of her literary predecessors" (Bainbrigge (2003: 122). For Nothomb, reworking familiar tales, myths and stories does not stifle her creativity, to the contrary it unleashes and stimulates her imaginary abilities.

The link between intertextuality, myths and autofictional writing (or 'faction' as it is known in the Anglophone literary world) is not the main thrust of this article. Nevertheless, it has to be clear though that Amelie Nothomb in her literary undertakings - be they autofictional, autobiographical or completely fictional in nature - likens herself as an author but even as a human being to Dionysus through the trance-like state she feels when she creates ("Writing is the very release, the catharsis of Dionysian pulsions which enables [Nothomb] to avoid madness", Amanieux, 2003: 140). As typical post-modern showmanship, Nothomb's undying love for myths and their representations does not mean that she hides behind the next. On the contrary, she uses them to persistently draw the reader's attention to the person behind the 'writer'.

References

Amanieux, L. 2003. 'The myth of Dionysus in Amélie Nothomb's Work'. *Amélie Nothomb. Authorship, Identity and Narrative practice*, pp. 135-141.

2005. *Amélie Nothomb. L'éternelle affamée*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Bakhtin, M. 1929. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. Published in 1984 as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press.

Bainbrigg, S. & den Toonder, J. 2003. *Amélie Nothomb. Authorship, Identity and Narrative practice*. New York: Peter Lang.

Barthes, R. 1973. *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Le Seuil.

1999 [1981]. *Le grain de la voix*. Paris: Le Seuil (Poche).

Blanchot, M. 1987 [1929]. *La part du feu*. Paris: Gallimard.

Caine, Ph. 2003. 'Entre-deux inscription of Female Corporeality'. *Amélie Nothomb. Authorship, Identity and Narrative practice*.

Derrida, J. 1996. *Le monolinguisme de l'autre ou La prothèse d'origine*, Paris: Galilée.

Genette, G. 1982. *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Le Seuil.

Gignoux, A.-Cl. 2005. *Initiation à l'intertextualité*. Paris: Ellipses Edition.

Helm, Y. 1996. 'Amélie Nothomb: "l'enfant terrible" des lettres belges de langue française', *Etudes francophones*, II (1996), pp. 113-120.

1997. 'Amélie Nothomb : une écriture alimentée à la source de l'orphisme'. *Religiologiques 15*, (Spring 1997), pp. 151-163.

Kierkegaard, S. 1843. *Fear and Trembling*.

Kristeva, J. 1967. 'Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman'. *Critique*, n°239 (avril 1967), pp. 438-465.

Lipovetsky, G. 1983. *L'ère du vide: essais sur l'individualisme contemporain*. Paris: Gallimard.

Nothomb, A. 1992. *Hygiène de l'assassin*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1993. *Le Sabotage amoureux*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1994. *Les Combustibles*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1995. *Les Catilinaires*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1996. *Péplum*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1997. *Attentat*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1998. *Mercur*. Paris: Albin Michel.

1999. *Stupeur et Tremblements*. Paris: Albin Michel.

2000. *Métaphysique des Tubes*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Oberhuber, A. 2004. 'Réécrire à l'ère du soupçon insidieux : Amélie Nothomb et le récit postmoderne'. *Etudes Françaises*. Vol. 40, numéro 1 (2004).

Obiang Essono, F. 2006. *Les registres de la modernité dans la littérature gabonaise*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Rodgers, C. 2003. 'Nothomb's anorexic beauties'. *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*. New York: Peter Lang, pp.50-63.

Saussure, F. de. 1916. *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye, with the collaboration of A. Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; trans. W. Baskin, Course in General Linguistics, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977.

Terrasse, J.-M. 2003. 'Does monstrosity exist in the feminine? A reading of Amélie Nothomb's angels and monsters'. *Amélie Nothomb. Authorship, Identity and Narrative practice*, pp. 85-90.

¹ For an in-depth discussion of Yambo Oueleguem's alleged plagiarism, see Dabla, S. 1986. *Nouvelles écritures africaines. Romanciers de la Seconde Génération*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 44-49. For a similarly appropriate overview of the polemics involving Calixthe Beyala, see Gallimore, R.B. 1997. *L'Oeuvre Romanesque de Calixthe Beyala*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 205-210.

¹ 16 novels were published by A. Nothomb in the period between 1992 and 2007.

¹ Names have great significance in Nothomb's work: Omer refers to Homer, the blind minstrel recounting the myth of Odysseus and his legendary journey, the Odessey.

¹ Autofiction as it is known in the Francophone world translates to 'faction' in the Anglophone literary circles. "Faction" was first coined in French as « autofiction » by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 when he published his novel *Fils*, which has a polyphonic title that shows the ambiguity of the reading contract. The word « faction » is a contraction of *fact* and *fiction*. Three of Amélie Nothomb's

novels feature in this category which has the triple identity of author, narrator and main character as one of its main characteristics.

¹ Attention to appearance has become exacerbated in the post-modern era, part of this trend manifesting itself in the contemporary obsession with the body (Lipovetsky, 1983: 86-91) as exemplified in Nothomb's oeuvre.