

## **Trust Limited: Suspended Authorship and Narratorial Takeover in (a) Ghostwritten Self-Narrative**

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Insofar as the commonly sought homology between the narrating and narrated selves is central to the normative functioning of autobiographical genres, ghostwritten celebrity memoirs comprise an instructive oddity that deserves some narratological attention. A reason for the phenomenon's relative obscurity to our field might be its successfully operating set of commercial market conventions, whereupon the ghostwriter's invisibility is contracted to satisfy all (Crofts 2004, Knapp and Hulbert 2017). A deviation from that status quo occurs when a society's ethics enforced by political authorities approves no such author-function transfers and hypocritically silences them, unable to suppress the common knowledge about that hypocrisy. A resulting dispersal of authorial, narratorial, and actorial roles among several historical as well as fictitious entities associated with the narrative at stake is the subject of this paper. The presented case study might serve as a brief prehistory to the contemporary proliferation of auto-, bio-, and exo-fictional and -graphical narratives.

The case in question is the late USSR leader Leonid Brezhnev's autobiographical trilogy, which he is popularly believed to have neither written nor read, according to a Soviet political joke (cf. Adams 2005; Davies 2007). Complementing recent theoretical overviews of authorship and authorial ethos (Korthals Altes 2014; Gibbons and King 2023), this paper discusses how the protagonist's identity is mashed, authorship suspended, and narratorial responsibility taken over by an anonymous extradiegetic instance. The instance is strongly implied, signaled by the formulaic party-journalism rhetoric of "Brezhnev's" "personal" "memories" of "his" 1954 - 1955 agricultural mission to Kazakhstan in part III of the trilogy, *Virgin Lands* (Brezhnev 1982). The extremely low tellability of that first-person account of the federal attempt to turn North Kazakhstani steppes into a grain paradise (cf. Savin and Doenninghaus 2024) is determined not only textually through its lack of experiential anchors and abundance of bureaucratic clichés, but also contextually--through the reputed falsity of its authorial attribution. Drawing a parallel between ghostwriters and translators, who, pace their stereotypically prescribed timidity, author the entire text of the translation and appropriate the source text author's name as their fictional narratorial heteronym (Robinson 2022), the paper addresses some postmodern dystopian overtones of the trust issues that Brezhnev's prose raises among its Soviet (non-)readers. The complex discursive roleplay the early 1980s Soviet subjects (both writers and readers) partake in (see Yurchak 2005) as they practice a willing suspension of Brezhnev's authorship reaffirms the doublethink insulation between the (un)empathetic readerly Self and the (non-)immersive authorial Other(s), against which autobiographical narrative is generically inclined. Revisiting this case may possess some heuristic value in explaining narrative communication under post-truth and the current relapse of totalitarian practices.

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