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THE NOTION OF 'MEMORY' IN THE WORKS OF TIMOTHY FINDLEY

Memory, Chekhov also discovered, is the means by which most of us retain our sanity. The act of remembrance is good for people. Cathartic. Memory is the purgative by which we rid ourselves of the present. (T. Findley, Inside Memory, p. 4)

Key concepts: recursive nature of memory, sense-contents, sense-experiences, sense-histories, memory as a function of the past and as a function of the future, topology and typology, memory lane

This article is part of a bigger project that in the long-run is to result in a paper on the notion of insanity in Timothy Findley's literary works. T. Findley (1930–2002), one of the outstanding contemporary Canadian writers, explores in his works such aspects in human relationships as domination, the nature of reality, an open-ended question – 'who is insane?' as well as a number of other issues. Being particularly attracted to private obsessions he scrutinizes deeply private events making them unfold against the background of public domain.

This paper is devised to keep in perspective the landscape of memory and consider the means used by the writer while simulating different situations to make a whole world-scheme shrink to the dimensions of the individual consciousness which in its turn is presented as a depository for collective memory where the symbolic emotions of society are being concentrated. The answer to the question calling for a definition of memory in the realia of T. Findley appears to be quite qualified and composite. His books are memories in the telling; his characters seem to be circling in and out of memory, they make their way to summon themselves by warping their memories and not only theirs but also memories they happen to claim.

Memory in the works of T. Findley surpasses a purely technical ability to retain knowledge; it becomes particularized and individualized; it is "the act or

a specific instance of remembering" [2]. It also fulfils a preservative function being it "the preservation of knowledge [or] celebration of a deceased person or past event" [ibid.] where the latter echoes the etymology of the word *memory*, denoting the facet of mourning:

"13th century. Via Old French *memorie* from Latin *memoria*, from *memor* "mindful." Ultimately from an Indo-European base meaning "to remember," which is also the ancestor of English *remember* and *mourn*" [ibid.]. Likewise, the writer turns to the aspect of "temporal extent of recollection" [ibid.].

In his documentary piece of prose "*Inside Memory. Pages from a writer's work-book*" Timothy Findley speaks profoundly on the notion of memory as he sees it for himself and for his readers. The book starts and ends with contemplations on that aspect of the human being in the world, thus creating a circle of existence arrowed by the linear time. The selection of the following citations illustrates the way Findley speaks of memory:

- *Memory is a form of hope* [9, 4].
- *Still, a sad memory is better than none. It reminds you of survival* [ibid., 4].
- *Memory is survival* [ibid., 7].
- *Memory is making peace with time. They say that loss of memory is not to know who you are. Then, I suppose, it has to follow that we are what we remember* [ibid., 5].
- *So memory is other people – it is little of ourselves* [ibid., 6]. Remembrance is more than honouring the dead. Remembrance is joining them – being one with them in memory.
- *People are the landscape of memory* [ibid., 11].

It is obvious that one can hardly speak of memory being ignorant of the other part of the binary opposition – remembrance/forgetting. T. Findley topographies his fictional realia drawing the demarcation lines for remembering and forgetting, and moreover for forgetting to remember and remembering to forget: "*The nation's syntax of remembering and forgetting or forgetting to remember*" [ibid., 132]. Frequently remembering and forgetting are applied interchangeably as instruments to continue the process of simplification, to transfer chaotic reality into a meaningful and coherent story as coherence rooms continuity, thus enabling the characters to pass their story further.

Given the recursive nature T. Findley assigns to the notion of memory, readers end up with the potentially infinite expansion of memory manifestations.

Findley asserts that he has *"an endless resource in what appears to be a bottomless pit of memory. [...] And, when [his] memory fails – there is always [readers'] to plunder – or someone's. The communal memory also prods [him] with its news"* [ibid., 313].

The process of remembering reverses the time arrow as to remember one as if looking forward *"looks ahead into the past and back into the future"* [ibid., 268].

A number of T. Findley's stories, *"Can you see me yet?"* including, develops sub-entries for the concept of memory, viz. voluntary and involuntary which might be constructed and re-constructed holding performed or performing selves within.

Cassandra, the main character of the above-mentioned play, while in the process of recollection lets us see her past encroach upon the present. She stages her memories and inmates don't oppose her drive to re-create the world that once was hers. *"Can You See Me Yet?"* along with other works by Timothy Findley demonstrates what might be called an example of discursive memory when the narrative of one's life is construed on the principle of causal history.

The process of remembering, the activation of memory to shape a life-story as an inner narrative is a means to gather, to reacquaint with and to consolidate one's identity. Cassandra Wakelin is a dramatist: to feel a personal meaning and relevance she stages rather than tells her memories. Her photograph album is the visual imagery to bridge the past and the present, or as she says: *"all I have that tells me who I am"* [3, 42].

As an inward, Cassandra can hardly be trusted with the narrative of her life made public. Photographs she uses as evidence *"carry no certain meaning in themselves, because they are like images in the memory of a total stranger, that they lent themselves to any use"* [1, 51]. In Findley's fiction photographs can never replace words. Instead, they generate more words as narrator tries to understand what lies behind and within the stories that photographs both suggest and hide. Cassandra's fellow-patient Annie announces, *"There aren't any pictures of you in there,"* and goes on to ask *"Did you steal it? (...) You don't even know their names. You made them all up. Liar!"* [ibid., 145].

According to Jean-Paul Sartre [17, Part 1] any conscious being is not only self-conscious all the time but he is also capable of self-deception. And that stands for the ways Findley's characters are describing themselves to themselves and to the others making readers aware that these are partially misdescriptions. Cassandra's memories of the Wakelin family home in Laurel are full of these misdescriptions. She herself seems to suspect her staged memories of

misrepresentations directing her father's image, inventing Aunt Doretta, and interpreting other photographs in the album.

Readers witness causal history of recollections in the room of a psychoanalyst in such works as "*Spadework*", "*Headhunter*", "*Pilgrim*" etc., which provide an example of how psychoanalytic theory utilizing the concept of memory gathers account of one's life, shows the influence of the past upon the present and the future of the individual.

The process of recalling in the room of a psychoanalyst uncovers to the reader in one case memories suppressed in another a different aspect of existent memories, showing an emotional charge of certain recollections.

Timothy Findley lets one see how memory works to organize experience on the basis of significance – in part a question of perceived value and in part of its familiarity or recurrence in one's life. His characters return to the landscape of their childhood/youth/times bygone to ascertain the continuity of selves which is of utmost importance for identity formation; awareness of identity over time is crucial for the feeling of completeness. The concept of memory and that of one's identity, one's continuity through time have a mutual link.

The narrator of Findley's story "*Stones*" sees everyone's life have "*its demarcation lines*", some spotting purely private memories and others that are publicly shared.

Findley remaps these private and public territories through the interplay of individual and communal rememberings. The most powerful public demarcation lines of memory in Findley's work are images of the holocaust. These historical images expand outward for Findley into other public signs of the misuse of power, such as environmental destruction ("*Headhunter*"), and inward into the destructive effects of power and powerlessness on the minds, souls, and bodies ("*Headhunter*", "*The Stillborn Lover*", "*You Went Away*").

Memory as extended consciousness can also suggest a sanctuary from the horrors of the outside world, or, less positively, a retreat from the world of the present into a private space dedicated to the past. In what ways are these two ideas compatible? How can the same book be both a retreat and a witnessing? How can a character perform his or her witnessing, which is usually perceived as an intervention into public space, through a private retreat into madness, which is normally seen as the space furthest removed from the world of the real? In Findley's fiction these boundaries are repeatedly transgressed and thrown into question. Madness is often privileged as the highest form of truth telling

and the space occupied by the visionary. Far from being on the fringes of the world, the mad or those deemed mad by those with the power to enforce this naming are at its true centre, and they pay the cost for centrality.

Frequently the combination of two Ms, hence, mystery & memory, becomes inseparable in Findley's works. As, for instance, in *"Not Wanted on the Voyage"*, destroying mystery, Noah also destroys memory.

"The Telling of Lies" talks on the fictional level of what Findley's memoir, *"Inside Memory"* talks on the documentary level, viz., the importance and potency of memory. Findley's characters are evidence of varied manifestations of memory, viz., unconscious and conscious; involuntary and voluntary; spontaneous/representational and ordinary/habitual.

Conscious memory is based on speech and manifests itself as ability to promise.

The initial memory is not a function of the past anymore, it is a function of the future. It is not a memory of sensuality but of will; memory of words rather than traces.

With Findley's characters' sense-content occurs in the sense-history of more than a single self due to the memory lane, the past shared and remembered by family members or any other unit via various instruments, such as photography, diaries, recollections, retained impressions and a posthumous impression. And if we look into the nature of self, we see that sense-experiences are subjective, thus, all sense-contents are subjective. Self-consciousness as the ability of a self to remember some of its earlier states calls to the idea of identity formation and one's continuity over time expressed earlier in the article. And to say that Cassandra, Charlie, Lilah, etc. are able to remember some of their earlier states and that some of the sense-experiences, which constitute them, contain memory images which correspond to sense-contents, which have previously occurred in their sense-histories, is to say merely that via recollections they aspire to secure their identity.

Perception matters. Findley's characters never could be caught at any time without a perception, and never could observe anything but the perception. As the main character in *"The Telling of Lies"* says: *"All our memories are wrong"* [13, 158], they are not actually wrong, there is just a perplexity of true, real and actual.

Memory has to be regarded not as producing, but rather as discovering personal identity. Self-consciousness might be defined in terms of memory for the

definition of self-identity memory is not sufficient, for the number of perceptions remembered at any time always falls far short of the number of those which have actually occurred in one's history, and those which cannot be remembered are no less constitutive of one's self than those which can be.

One of the answers to the question what is the essence of one's life revisited was given by Findley in the article "*The Countries of Invention*" and it seems to hold in itself all the above-mentioned:

"Memory provides a ground ... on which we can face reality, accommodate reality and, possibly, even survive it" [6, 106].

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Margarita Spirida Jēdziens "atmiņa" Timotija Findlija daiļradē

Kopsavilkums

Raksts veltīts atmiņu jēdzieniskajai izspēlei T. Findlija daiļradē. Tajā aplūkoti veidi un līdzekļi, ko rakstnieks izmanto dažādu situāciju radišanai, liekot visai pasaulei sarukt līdz individuālās apziņas dimensijai; individuālajai apziņai savukārt likts reprezentēt kolektīvās atmiņas krātuvi, kurā tiek koncentrētas sabiedrības simboliskās sajūtas/emocijas.

Atbilde uz jautājumu par atmiņas jēdziena iezīmējumiem T. Findlija darbos atrodama daļēji, jo tās definējums stiepjas gluži vai visas rakstnieka daiļrades garumā. Viņa grāmatas ir atmiņas stāstījumā, viņa raksturi klejo atmiņā un ārpus tās, viņi dodas atmiņu meklējumos, lai nodrošinātu savas patības kontinuitāti, viņi atrod īpašu sevis izpausmes veidu, sagriežot, saraustot un savērpjot atmiņas, turklāt ne tikai savējās, bet arī atmiņas, kuras viņiem gadījies pasludināt par savējām.

Atmiņa T. Findlija darbos nekādā gadījumā nav reducējama tikai uz tehniskām iespējām saglabāt zināšanas; tā iegūst savdabīgas iezīmes un tiek individualizēta; tā ir "specifiska atcerēšanās gadījuma akts" [2]. Tā pilda arī glabātājas funkcijas, tādējādi būdama "pagātnes notikumu vai mūžībā aizgājušu cilvēku zināšanu (vai) godināšanas saglabāšana" [turpat], kas sasaucas ar vārda *memory* etimoloģiju, norādot uz vārda *mourning* cilmi: 13. gs. caur vecfranču *memorie* no latīņu *memoria* no *memor* "tāds, kam ir apziņa". Sākotnēji no indoeiropiešu pamatnozīmes "atcerēties", kas ir arī angļu *remember* un *mourn* cilmes avots [turpat].