



Toxicography: A Literary Defense of Cocaine Addiction in *Un Roman Français* by Frédéric Beigbeder*

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THERE is almost no border between the real and the imaginary in Beigbeder's books. Beigbeder transcribes his vicious nocturnal prowess (sex, alcohol, drugs, etc.) into his literary productions. This is the logic behind *Un roman français*, published by Grasset & Fasquelle editions in 2009. It is an autobiographical novel rooted in personal experience: the arrest and imprisonment of Frédéric Beigbeder on the night of January 28, 2008, for drug consumption on the sidewalk of avenue Marceau in Paris. The cocaine addict decided to write about this sad but crucial episode of his life. He operates, as in his previous works, what we coin toxicography, though this text deals with autotoxicobiography. Toxicography refers to the writing of a more or less fictional/real story, which has drug addiction as its matrix. To put it bluntly, this is an intoxicated writing (on the thematic view) whose stake is apologetic and/or critical. Autotoxicobiography is a blend of two words: autobiography and drug addiction. Literally, it can be understood as the personal or intimate writing of an addict's life that sheds light on his personality and his toxic addictions. In short, it is the autobiographical writing of an addict. *Un roman français*, beyond the quest for identity, is both an indictment against state paternalism and a plea or (self)justification of drug addiction in general, and cocaine addiction in particular. This article therefore aims to show how Frédéric Beigbeder

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manages to question the interdiction of cocaine consumption in France in order to justify his cocaine addiction and drug addiction in general in today's Western society. The article highlights Frédéric Beigbeder's indictment against state paternalism and abuse of authority on the one hand, and his plea for toxic addictions on the other. The reflection is conducted from the perspective of (civil)freedom problematized by the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill (2002) in his book *De la liberté*. Stuart Mill questions freedom from three aspects: freedom of thought and discussion, individuality at stake in the search for well-being, and the limits of the authority of society over the individual. Our work addresses the last two aspects of Stuart Mill's definition of Freedom.

I. DISCUSSION

Hedonism seems to be inherent in artists, especially writers. According to Frédéric Beigbeder, each drug has entered the literature through famous addict authors. The latter were able to praise or criticize their psychostimulating substance, the object of their addiction (cocaine, crack, heroin, cannabis, marijuana, opium, morphine, laudanum, etc.). They, like Frédéric Beigbeder, had the art of intoxicating themselves (somatic intoxication) but also that of intoxicating their writing (literary intoxication or toxicography). Beigbeder may have used or experimented with other drugs, but he may have specialized in one of them, becoming loyal to cocaine and a cocaineographer because of his cocaine addiction. He favors "coke", notably in *Un roman français*, and in rhetorical terms, makes it an apology. He writes at length about this toxic substance, which has become a source of inspiration and a leitmotif, assessed with a satirical and polemical aim. Frédéric Beigbeder therefore seems an informed advocate of all drug addicts through the exploration of the self as good charity begins at home. He broadens the scope of his advocacy when he defends social argument for all the other drug addicts' victims of other forms of toxic addiction.

It is clear that Beigbeder subscribes to the logic of social liberalization, practically at all levels and in everything. He defends the freedom of each individual to dispose of his life, to give it meaning, to destroy himself, if he wants to, without worrying about anyone and above all without being accountable to anyone. He is an individual very "attached to his freedom", that borders on libertinism. He sees self-destruction via drug addiction as self-sacrifice. According to him, each individual must be free to seek his pleasure through various practices, without having to undergo the influence and the moral or penal sanction of a society underpinned by a paternalistic and pseudo-protective political system.

II. CONCLUSION

Frédéric Beigbeder through *Un roman français* allows us to discover not only his personal journey but especially his world view and his existential philosophy. Besides the autobiographical dimension (identity reconstruction), his work has a socio-philosophical, satirical and polemical undertone (defense of a materialist and individualist vision of the world). Beigbeder is suing a Western society losing its bearings and enthusiasm, in which the individual feels trapped, weakened and anxious. This feeling of generalized social ill-being justifies contemporary hedonism, in particular via the quest for fleeting pleasures, including toxic ones provided by psychostimulant products. Thus, the novelist deals with his/the drug addiction through a discourse that is both apologetic (justification for consumption) and critical (condemnation of pathological postmodern Western society). He practices literary intoxication, which takes place with intoxicated writing. That is to say, a text in which the discourse on toxic substances, in this case cocaine, is manifest and apologizing or critical. We qualify this scriptural practice toxicography.

Ultimately, the article shows that Frédéric Beigbeder is a liberal drug-hedonist writer and *Un roman français* is an apologetic toxicographic expression. From a distance, this novel is an eloquent illustration of what we call, following Philippe Lejeune, the autotoxicobiography, understood as the writing of the self of a drug addict. Beigbeder's autotoxicobiography highlights the story of his toxic addictions, the sense of his personality and his philosophy of life.

Keywords— Auto(toxico)biography, Cocaine addiction, Hedonism, freedom, Posture, Toxicography.

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