



## “The Pragmatics of Autofiction”

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Any research project focusing in one way or another on autofiction should state what is meant by the term in that particular context. Indeed, Karen Ferreira-Meyers rightfully points out that “[t]here are numerous examples of academic writers including the terms ‘autofiction’ or ‘autofictional’ in their analyses without providing further details” (2018, 33–34). Furthermore, authors would also be well advised to keep in mind that, as Marjorie Worthington notes about her own approach, the definition with which one is working “is only one of many in circulation” (2018, 6). Consequently, let me start by reiterating in a concise way my own understanding of autofiction (as Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf also urges us to do in her contribution to this volume [see Chap. 2]). Autofiction, in my understanding of the term, is neither a new autobiographical form nor a hybrid genre, but should instead be regarded as “a hyperbolic form of autobiographical novel,” even “a baroque version” of it. It operatively rests on “paroxysmal associations” and “an extravagant presence of the author within her/his own fiction, a presence that follows the tradition of the

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autobiographical novel but also upends it” (Schmitt 2020, 9), a *presence* that can be quite simply defined as an avatar of the author within her own fiction. Thus, autofiction, as I use the term, is to be understood primarily as a fictional genre.

However, my purpose in this chapter is not to develop this, ultimately simple enough, definition any further, but to illustrate how the aforementioned “associations” actually function. For a relatively new literary concept, autofiction has been extensively defined, even over-defined for some (for instance, on the “theoretical soap opera” surrounding autofiction in France, see Worthington 2018, 3). Although I draw on select theoretical contributions (for instance, by Worthington and Hywel Dix), I adopt a more practical approach by studying what I have dubbed “the pragmatics of autofiction,” in keeping with the methodology that Gasparini partially adopted in *Est-il Je?* 16 years ago, concretely identifying stylistic, rhetorical, or paratextual elements in texts clearly identified as autofictions, or at least as ambiguous autobiographical novels, or in line with what Worthington accomplished in some chapters of *The Story of “Me”: Contemporary American Autofiction*, which consists in studying the actual textual signals and tropes that suddenly or progressively turn an autobiographical novel into autofiction.

In his introduction to *Autofiction in English*, Dix writes that “one of the key questions to be explored throughout this volume is whether the definition, components, characteristics and theories of autofiction remain the same when transplanted from French into English, or whether the components themselves undergo modification when the context changes” (2018, 5). It is my belief that, even though theoretical approaches may differ,<sup>1</sup> the practice of autofiction as a particular form of autobiographical fiction is common to many countries’ literary traditions. Apart from the usual cultural and historical discrepancies, the operative forms of US and French autofictions do not fundamentally differ, which is why the late arrival of the term autofiction in the theoretical lexicon of Anglophone academia remains surprising, as “[t]here was nothing, absolutely nothing, in the first steps toward coining, defining and deepening the concept of autofiction that barred it from being accepted worldwide” (Ferreira-Meyers 2018, 27). Indeed, “novels that feature a character who shares his/her name with the author,” one of the most salient features of autofiction, can be regarded as “a phenomenon of contemporary American fiction that took shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s and continues in earnest today [...] when it has become a postmodern trope” (Worthington

2018, 1). Ferreira-Meyers differentiates between these so-called postmodern tropes and the rise of a new kind of autofictional writing, which Jonathan Sturgeon describes as “autofictions that vigorously reasserted the self” through “the induction of a new class of memoiristic, autobiographical, and metafictional novels—we can call them autofictions—that jettison the logic of postmodernism in favor of a new position” (2018, 33). Worthington certainly underlines this new fad in American letters as, according to her, “[t]he autofictional trope has become so common in American fiction that it almost seems a requirement for contemporary authors to engage in it,” although again she finds it odd that “there has been little critical discussion of this trend” (2018, 1). But even though “autofictions themselves have proliferated in recent American literature” (10), she is also careful to insist that this recent proliferation stems from “a fictional tradition sixty years in the making” (4).

I have differentiated between theoretical and literary traditions when it comes to autofiction and, by referencing Worthington and Dix’s research, claimed that despite the lack of “critical discussion of this trend,” the practice of autofictional writing is very lively, maybe paradoxically even more so in the US than in France nowadays. I would now like to turn to my two case studies, Ben Lerner’s *10:04* (2014) and Siri Hustvedt’s *Memories of the Future* (2019), and justify my choice of primary texts. Published 5 years apart and written by authors of different genders and belonging to different generations (Lerner is 41 and Hustvedt 65), neither of these books is explicitly advertised as autofiction. Nonetheless, critics have not missed the opportunity to point out the highly autofictional logic of these authors’ narrative strategies,<sup>2</sup> and rightfully so, for, as we will see, both display archetypal features of autofiction. But in the domain of autofiction, it is now widely known that authors should not be trusted, and nor should the generic designation indicated on a book’s cover. It is part of the autofictional game to muddy the waters as early as possible in the reader’s experience of the text, epitextually and peritextually. As regards these two works, they were either, depending on the edition, labeled “a novel” or no reference was made to the genre of the text. Nevertheless, both authors drop recurring references to their own biographical data. Ben Lerner’s first novel *Leaving the Atocha Station* is more or less remotely based on the author’s own experience in Madrid (“no one will be surprised to hear that he has indeed spent a year doing some sort of research in Madrid” [Turner 2012]) and the narrator Adam Gordon is, like Lerner, a young American poet and shares other biographical traits with him. As for Siri Hustvedt,

whether in fictional (*The Sorrows of an American*) or nonfictional (*The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves*) form, she is known for inserting more or less explicit references to her own life into her work. Does this mean that readers were primed to read *10:04* and *Memories of the Future* as autofictional? Such a reading was certainly invited, although some readers may still have read the books as ordinary novels. As different as their authors' backgrounds might be, these two texts, published in the current proliferation of US autofiction and thus symptomatic of a literary trend, share many defining features that can help us better understand how autofiction actually works. We will see that these features can be divided between primary, or essential ones without which a text cannot be identified as autofictional, and secondary ones, or what I will call "enhancers," elements that enhance the reader's perception of a text as autofictional but do not initiate such a perception.

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Much has been written about autofiction's onomastic criterion, as many theorists regard it as a defining one, even *the* defining one in some cases (as is the case for Colonna 2004). Conferring your name on your narrator is a way for writers, especially writers whose biographical contours remain mostly unknown by their putative readers (which was certainly the case when Lerner published *10:04*, only his second novel), to bring to their readers' attention a closeness, or a similarity, between themselves and their narrators that might not be apparent otherwise. In other words, it is a way of starting the autofictional game by projecting a narrator very similar to you, named after you, into a world that may otherwise be fictional. Gasparini relevantly pointed out that autofictional texts are "saturated by conjunctive and disjunctive signs between the two instances [facts and fiction]"<sup>3</sup> (2004, 13; my translation), stating that "right from its very beginning, the double movement of confession and denial has been constitutive of the autobiographical novel"<sup>4</sup> (32; my translation), and the same can be said about autofiction. Inserting your name into your text is an easy way for the author to fulfill the confessional and the conjunctive function, and both Lerner and Hustvedt resort to it, although in different ways. Lerner's narrator is referred to as "Ben." Hustvedt's narrator refers several times to her younger self as "S.H." Refraining from using your full name while using your first name or your initials is obviously nothing new and is a way of suggesting proximity while maintaining a form of distance,

which is characteristic of autofiction. Worthington sees an identical strategy in Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* and reaches a similar conclusion: "*Lunar Park* toys with readers' sense of reality by depicting a 'Bret' whose biography is simultaneously similar to yet often distinct from that of the extratextual Ellis. The two become divergent yet metaleptically interconnected identities: this is the defining characteristic of autofiction" (2018, 2). Without referring to Gasparini, she nevertheless puts forward very similar analyses to the ones quoted above: "The primary defining trait of autofiction as I define it is the inclusion of a characterized version of the author, usually as the protagonist. [...] although they share a name, the protagonists and the authors are not identical to one another" (2018, 2). In my two case studies, they do not exactly "share a name" (merely a first name or initials), but the effect can be seen as similar.

To answer the Shakespearian question of this section's title, a reader can find in a name, even in a first name or initials, a strong hint of an autofictional intent. This onomastic nod to the author can be, and often is, supplemented with the insertion of autobiographical data. As expounded above, I equate autofiction with self-fictionalization, projecting one's self into a fictional world. This echoes Genette's definition,<sup>5</sup> but acknowledges that the projection may involve a form of ontological introspection on the part of the author who has an opportunity to contemplate himself or herself in a life that is sometimes not so drastically different from their real life. *10:04*'s almost programmatic epigraph reads:

The Hassidim tell a story about the world to come that says everything there will be just as it is here. Just as our room is now, so it will be in the world to come; where our baby sleeps now, there too it will sleep in the other world. And the clothes we wear in this world, those too we will wear there. Everything will be as it is now, just a little different. (Lerner 2014, 1)

This last sentence is repeated throughout the book in various forms, as if the author were particularly keen on the reader not losing sight of this prism through which to read the book. Lerner implements a differentiation that keeps his real self at bay but always within sight. In a way, Lerner's "now"—his real-life present—is not substantially different from the fictional world of *10:04*, but it is in the distance, the more or less perceptible gap, between life and art that autofiction exists. In fact, another reference to an autofictional blueprint can be found later in the text: "The poem, like most of my poems, and like the story I'd promised to expand,

conflated fact and fiction [...] part of what I loved about poetry was how the distinction between fiction and nonfiction didn't obtain, how the correspondence between text and world was less important than the intensities of the poem itself [...]" (2014, 170–171). Through "Ben," Lerner keeps "conflating fact and fiction," toying with the reader's horizon of expectation.

Trying to go beyond the onomastic criterion, Gasparini asked this seminal question: "Why not admit that, besides a family name and a first name, a whole series of hero/author identification operators exist: their age, their socio-cultural background, their profession, their aspirations, etc.?"<sup>6</sup> (2004, 25; my translation). Indeed, a stronger case can be made for labeling a text as autofiction when there is a certain resemblance between narrator and author based on similar biographical features than when the only conjunction is the name. Without these "identification operators," the name remains empty (to carry the Shakespearian metaphor further). Worthington notes that in the case of *Lunar Park*, the "onomastic connection between 'Bret' and Ellis makes that point more vividly than a purely fictional character could, for it lends a patina of 'reality' to an otherwise patently fictional situation" (2018, 3). But one could counterargue that a "patina" is not enough to uphold an autofictional reading and, what is more, there are more connections between "Bret" and the author than a simple first name, especially in the first chapter which generously taps into Ellis's biographical background, which has been epitextually documented.

As far as *10:04* is concerned, identification operators are plentiful. The narrator and protagonist is a poet and a writer who published a short story entitled "The Golden Vanity" in *The New Yorker*—Ben Lerner published this short story, exactly the same as the one found in the book's second chapter, 2 years prior to the publication of *10:04*—to which constant references are made throughout the book (for instance: "But you need to keep the New Yorker story in there, I think" [Lerner 2014, 157]); exactly like Lerner, the narrator was born in 1979 ("1985, when I was six" [6]) and grew up in Topeka ("my entire childhood in Topeka" [14]) and after several collections of poems published a first novel in which "the protagonist tells people his mother is dead" (138), as Lerner's narrator Adam does in *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011). This last element obviously requires knowledge of Lerner's first novel. Indeed, all his prose works are connected by means of intertextual references like this one. Many others can be found in his latest novel *The Topeka School* (2019), which centers on the

protagonist's youth in Topeka and his family life (unsurprisingly evoking what we know about the author's). Not all, but enough, parallels can be detected simply through the respective peritexts, and the first elements are quite easy to encounter epitextually in interviews or book reviews. Parallels are thus apparent even for someone who is not particularly interested in making detailed connections, but, of course, autofiction only makes sense, only exists, if there are readers who find such connections fruitful.

Siri Hustvedt employs similar techniques. We find, in *Memories of the Future*, typical autofictional tropes about the equivocality of the narrative voice and overall project. The narrator speaks of "a voice that is at once mine and not quite mine anymore" (2019, 11) and reflects on pronoun use: "And I, or she (easier to say she)" (37). The narrator's background also matches Hustvedt's: a woman in her 60s who grew up in Minnesota and moved to New York to study at Columbia and become a writer. However, there are also discrepancies. Siri Hustvedt is married to fellow writer Paul Auster whereas in the novel, S.H.'s husband's name is Walter and he is a mathematician. Moreover, although the author's and the narrator's daughters are both musicians, again names differ (Sophie in real life, Freya in the book). *Memories of the Future* is composed of three interweaving texts, or narrative layers: the journal that S.H.'s younger self kept, long excerpts from what seems to be her first novel—which echoes Hustvedt's own first novel, *The Blindfold*, which focuses on a young woman also of Norwegian descent from Minnesota, who has just moved to Manhattan's Upper West Side to study at Columbia in the 1970s—and finally comments from S.H. in the narrative's present. Thus, Hustvedt sets up the typical (for autofiction) conjunctions and disjunctions, similarities and dissimilarities with her biographical background. Similar to *10:04*, the author's and the narrator's personas are very much alike in many aspects, enough for the reader willing to adopt an autofictional mind-frame. Resorting to autobiographical data is a necessary step to implement the necessary process of recognition. Indeed, if autofiction is the same (an autobiographical narrator or protagonist) but different (transposed into an overall fictional narrative), then to read these differences, one must first set up similarities.

### “ENHANCERS”

To create a sense of autofiction, that is to say, to make the reader aware of a form of saturation of autobiographical references in a novel, the author can rely on two types of elements: primary criteria and secondary ones. The former are to some extent compulsory; without them autofiction cannot work. The latter enhance the sense of the autofictional without creating it in the first place. There are only two kinds of primary criteria: onomastic correspondence and similarities in biographical background between author and narrator. I claim that it is inconceivable to consider a work as autofictional if there is not at least one of these elements in place, as they constitute the necessary signal. Secondary elements, which I call “enhancers,” contribute to the reader’s awareness of the necessary ambiguity of the generic status of the text, but do not create it.

#### *Metafiction*

The first kind of enhancer that I would like to explore, used by both Hustvedt and Lerner, is metafiction. This typically postmodern device has been associated on many occasions with autofiction, Worthington recently going as far as stating that “autofiction is a highly metafictional genre” (2018, 3) or, as we saw above, Sturgeon equating autofictions with “memoiristic, autobiographical, and metafictional novels.” However, it is my contention that autofictional and metafictional texts are dissimilar in many ways, but thrive on the same narrative environment: unstable narrative centers and authorial intrusions. The fact that some texts are both metafictional and autofictional does not mean that they are similar, simply that metafictional and autofictional elements can work together. Many autofictions do not include metafictional elements. *Lunar Park* is yet again a good example. Ellis’s references to Patrick Bateman, the notorious character from *American Psycho*, are not metafictional, but intertextual.

Some theorists who resort to these analogies between autofiction and metafiction even omit to differentiate between metatextuality and metafiction. In *La Figure de l’auteur*, Maurice Couturier makes a useful distinction between the two practices, reminding us that, according to Patricia Waugh, metafictional writers “explore a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction” (Waugh 1984, 2), whereas metatextuality consists in embedding texts whose origin is problematic because they are originally non-literary, even if the distinction between both terms can



occasionally be "thin" (Couturier 1995, 77; my translation). He goes on to compare John Barth's *LETTERS*, a metafictional text according to him as it is built on other fictions (the novels previously published by the author), to Richardson's *Pamela*, which is metatextual as the letters embedded in it did not have a literary status prior to their inclusion in the novel (77). Thus, *Memories of the Future* may be seen as both metafictional (the main narrative embeds S.H.'s first novel) and metatextual (it also embeds the journal of the younger S.H.). Similarly, *10:04* comprises Lerner's short story "The Golden Vanity," which first appeared in *The New Yorker*, but also "To the Future," a short piece about the apatosaurus written, the reader is told, by the narrator in collaboration with the young Roberto Cortiz (a non-literary text that turns out not to be as fictional as we might imagine at first, as we learn in the acknowledgments that "[t]he narrator's collaboration with 'Roberto' is based on a self-published book [he] cowrote with Elias Garcia, but 'Roberto' is otherwise a work of fiction"). Multiple layers of narrative make texts either metatextual, metafictional, or both, but as far as autofiction is concerned, they enhance the impression of confusion regarding the source of the narrative. By virtue of the increased hermeneutical effort required to make sense of the text, the reader's attention is drawn to the noncongruent origins of the narrative's components. By mixing fictional and non-literary texts, the book also echoes autofiction's mix of facts and fiction.

*Memories of the Future* and *10:04* are also metafictional in that, on several occasions, the respective texts refer to their own status as artifacts. For instance, in Hustvedt's book, S.H.'s mother asks her about the book she is writing, the frame narrative in other words: "She asks me about this book, and I tell her I am in the middle of it. 'You are writing about your life, your *own* life?' Only one year of it, I explain" (2019, 158). Lerner's narrator and other characters also make multiple references to the narrator's own work as a writer, for instance: "How exactly will you expand the story" (2014, 4) and "[...] over the next week, I began to work on a story, outlining much of it in my notebook while sitting in the theater. The story would involve a series of transpositions [...]" (54). The narrator then describes what will eventually become "The Golden Vanity," Lerner's real embedded short story. As in *Memories of the Future*, according to a metafictional logic, some characters in *10:04* display an awareness of the narrator's status as a writer: "I don't want what we're doing to just end up as notes for a novel" (137). Passages like these not only emphasize the splitting of the narrative voice—that of the narrator and her younger self, in

*Memories of the Future*, or that of the narrator and his imagined self, in *10:04*—they also inevitably evoke the very nature of autofiction: one real self and one invented self projected into a novel by a real self, a novel that is also, in the cases discussed here at least, strongly inspired by, even based on the author's life. We will see below that the switch between tenses in both texts further reinforces this perception of narrative complexity and generates an isotopy of division, of estrangement.

### *Time, Tenses, and the Fallibility of Memory*

Mimicking the chronological progression of traditional autobiographical form, autofiction is normally retrospective, an older self remembering or revisiting their past life. For Lejeune, this forms part of his definition of autobiography: “we call ‘autobiography’ the retrospective prose narrative of someone’s own existence” (1971, 14; my translation).<sup>7</sup> In autofiction, it is more precise to speak of an older self projecting himself or herself into an imaginary past. While Hustvedt complies with this narrative rule, Lerner offers a different, prospective version. Indeed, modeling his novel on autofiction’s principle of projection, he builds his narrative not only on the concept of everything being, in the future, “as it is now, just a little different,” but also on the idea of “projecting [himself] into the future” (2014, 109), a phrase which, similar to the Hassidic story, is repeated throughout the novel—for instance: “I’ll project myself into several futures simultaneously” (4)—and represents the narrative trigger of many passages such as the following one: “I imagined trying to explain all of this to a future child [...]” (91). However, despite this distinction between Hustvedt’s traditionally retrospective narrative (the title of which paradoxically seems to imply the opposite) and Lerner’s prospective one, nothing fundamentally changes: indeed, both are narrated *after the fact*, in a timeframe when the past can be reimagined as autofiction. Lerner projects himself into a future which he has already imagined when he starts narrating it. The narrative can be prospective, but the narrating act is always retrospective (it narrates what has happened, or what the author has imagined). In a fashion typical of any life narrative (even those that encompass only a particular period), *Memories of the Future* and *10:04* hinge on two periods, the past and the present, classically embodied by the *narrated* I and the *narrating* I. This is a narrative configuration that autofiction has widely embraced in its attempt to resemble autobiography, sometimes as closely as possible. Our two case studies do not depart from this rule,

enhancing this ontological duality by implementing recurring tense shifts, mostly from past to present tense and vice versa. Below are just a few examples:

*10:04*: "We sat and watched the traffic and I am kidding and I am not kidding when I say that I intuited an alien intelligence [...]" (Lerner 2014, 3); "I want to say I felt stoned, did say to Alex [...]" (19); "When the workers had moved on to Creeley's house and I could read—I can only read if it's quiet, but I can write against noise [...]" (173); "They looked two-dimensional, like cardboard cutouts in a stagecraft foreground. Lower Manhattan was black behind us, its densities intuitive. The fireworks celebrating the completion of the bridge exploded above us in 1883, spidering out across the page. The moon is high in the sky and you can see its light on the water." (239)

*Memories of the Future*: "I remember the eerie illumination that came through the broken blinds the first night I slept in apartment 2B on August 25" (Hustvedt 2019, 4); "I am still in New York, but the city I lived in then is not the city I inhabit now" (10); "Were you disappointed, Fanny? Maybe you didn't care? It seems I like girls more in my fantasies than in real life" (155–156); "They cross the street in our past but in their present and, as they walk, I adopt the present tense because you and I are with them now. It is May 17, 1979 [...]" (211)

These tense shifts emphasize the chronological and ontological separation of events and narration, thus undermining the credibility of these facts as they put the stress on distance rather than accuracy. Even if many authors of memoirs proceed in a similar fashion, questioning their ability to remember properly by drawing the reader's attention as much to the present of narration as to the past narrative, in memoirs such challenges to the narrative itself nevertheless take place within the framework of a reading contract that claims commitment to sincerity, if not accuracy. Autofiction undercuts this commitment, at times even ridiculing it. For doing so, it uses the same rhetorical strategy as autobiography, namely, focusing on the doubling of the authorial presence in the text, but in an autofictional context this distance has a stronger impact and resonance, as autofiction thrives on the kind of ambiguity that can emerge from the distance between narrated and narrating self. The same can be said regarding the fallibility of memory.

*Memories of the Future* resorts to the modern autobiographical trope of confessing to the flaws of one's memory more than *10:04*. As we see in

texts such as *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* and many recent interviews,<sup>8</sup> Siri Hustvedt is well aware of recent cognitive research on memory. There are countless studies on the limits of mnemonic capacity, from landmark texts such as Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons's *The Invisible Gorilla* (2011) to more recent research such as Mark Rowlands's *Memory and the Self*. Rowlands sums up the irony of memory's limitations: "But by the time you need memory the most, it is beginning to become clear just how unreliable this faculty is. And it isn't going to get any better—quite the contrary, in fact. As a general rule of thumb: the more important memory becomes in your life, the less you can or should rely on it" (2017, 6). Hustvedt integrates this knowledge into her autofiction by making her older narrating "I" constantly lament her limited ability to remember:

If you are one of those readers who relishes memoirs filled with impossibly specific memories, I have this to say: those authors who claim perfect recall of their hash browns decades later are not to be trusted. (3)

The past is fragile, as fragile as bones grown brittle with age [...]. (13)

I have no memory of Wanda [a person mentioned in her journal]. (17)

I have pictures in my mind that have lasted, but their accuracy is something I can't vouch for. (77)

I can't recover the now of it. It is a withered now. (91)

But what do I actually remember? [...] I find bits and pieces of recollections in various modes that have no particular order [...]. (93)

I have argued elsewhere (Schmitt 2011) that "coming clean" about the limitations of our mnemonic efforts and still attempting to build a self-narrative is not a contradiction, and that this is more or less what we have to do every day. However, the complexities of the process of remembering and its flawed results remain an oft-cited *raison d'être* of autofiction. Gasparini emphasized this aspect when he stated that disrupting "the representation of the time of memory in fiction and autobiography" by "constantly confronting one's personal history with mnemonic capacities" (2004, 229; my translation)<sup>9</sup> is part of autofiction's own history. Autofictionists are often suspicious of autobiography on account of the latter's perceived overreliance on memory's ability to conjure up accurate memories. This suspicion is part and parcel of autofiction's ethos and Hustvedt repeatedly taps into it to undermine her narrator's authority.

### *Apostrophe*

As mentioned earlier, the common denominator between metafiction and autofiction is the will to navigate in the same text through several narrative layers. This hermeneutical navigation can be *descending*, that is to say, shifting from the frame narrative to the first embedded narrative, then to the next one and so on. In cases of *ascending* frames, characters might meet their author in a metaleptic upward move (although in this case, it can also be said that the author is descending into her fiction). This ascending movement normally allows readers to zoom out and embrace all the ins and outs of the text they are reading, its narrative hierarchy, in other words. One ancient way of zooming out is the apostrophe, an actor or coryphaeus directly addressing the audience, putting an end to or temporarily suspending their immersion. A modern version of the apostrophe is when the narrator of a work of fiction directly addresses readers, a device which is quite common (one can find many examples in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, for instance). The effect is slightly different, however, in an autofictional text. In this case, the apostrophe is a way of refocusing the reader's attention on the matter of different narrative times and on the identity of an addressee who may or may not be the author, in other words, on the context and intent of narration and its ambiguities.

Apostrophes are abundant in both texts:

*Memories of the Future*: "At least a year after the book you are reading now ends [...]" (Hustvedt 2019, 118); "Tell me why I need you with me as my fellow traveler, my variously dear and crotchety other, my spouse for the book's duration. Why is it that I can feel your stride beside me as I write?" (128); "I need you as my intimate witness because without you, none of my stories will be real" (129); "Do not be misled. These stories are not extraneous to the question at hand" (181); "We all suffer and we all die, but you, the person who is reading this book right now, you are not dead yet. I may be dead, but you are not" (294); "I am going to tell you a secret now: There is a doctor in this story, but she arrives much later, well after the millennium has ended." (301)

*10:04*: "You might have seen us walking on Atlantic, tears streaming down her face, my arm around her shoulder [...]" (Lerner 2014, 8); "Do you know what I mean if I say that when I reached the second floor [...]" (14); "You might have seen me sitting there on the bench that midnight [...]" (109); "Reader, we walked on" (234); "[...] maybe you saw me" (235); "[...] my book—not the one I was contracted to write about

fraudulence, but the one I've written in its place for you, to you, on the very edge of fiction.” (237)

Apostrophe is not a primary feature of autofiction, but drawing attention to the intersubjective nature of literary communication, emphasizing how meaning is built jointly by both narrator and addressee, fittingly serves autofiction's purpose to position a text “on the very edge of fiction,” as Lerner's narrator claims is true for his writing, or at least on *a* narrative edge where authors can suddenly surface, confess to or lie about the nature of their text, and thereby sow the necessary seeds of doubt within the minds of their readers. Edges, limits, and boundaries are constituent parts of the topology of autofiction: “Unlike memoir or autobiography, autofiction often depicts its author-characters in clearly fictional situations, thus blurring the already hazy *boundaries* between fiction and nonfiction” (Worthington 2018, 2–3; my emphasis). For some theorists, like Lejeune, for instance, these boundaries are not “hazy” at all, but autofiction's very existence depends on creating an ambivalence. To exist as autofictions, to be seen as autofictional, these novels cannot content themselves with being only “primarily novels.” They must also exist as *something else*, as potentially autobiographical, to be specific. Referring to controversial French autofictions such as Guibert's, Angot's, or Millet's, and their “outpouring of resentment and orgasms that can only create a neurotic atmosphere,”<sup>10</sup> Claire Debru went as far as claiming that “autofiction is born of neurosis” (2007, 54; my translation).<sup>11</sup> Being constantly on the edge in order to exist does also create, to some extent, a form of neurosis.

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It has been the purpose of this chapter to show how these two autofictional texts “straddle the line,” both rhetorically and stylistically, from a practical point of view. Indeed, if a “consensus definition of autofiction has become virtually impossible” (Mortimer 2009, 22), we should now focus less on deciding what autofiction is and more on what it means concretely, textually, for an author to project himself or herself into a text without an autobiographical pact. I have argued that there are some primary features without which autofiction does not exist and that it relies moreover on a series of tropes—enhancers, as I have called them. How these contribute to the interpretation of an ambiguous text by readers as autofiction might be the most important aspect of autofictional studies right now.

Autofiction has always been energized by an unresolved authenticity/sincerity dialectic. This dialectic is based on Lionel Trilling's (1972) *Sincerity and Authenticity* and especially on how Trilling conceives of authenticity, namely, "as something inward, personal, and hidden, the goal primarily of self-expression rather than other-directed communication" (Kelly 2010, 132) and tries to reassess the value of sincerity, especially in an autobiographical context. Autofiction, definitely leaning toward sincerity, albeit a sincerity that is in no way connected to accuracy, aims to produce an autobiographical *intent* without clearly identifying the autobiographical *content*, and the stylistic and rhetorical skills employed in the effort are worthy of scholarly investigation. Autofiction is not a case of split personality, but clearly one of split narration: the pronoun used by the author to refer to himself or herself, whether it is the first-person singular or the third, points in two directions that are hard to reconcile. It conjures up Dorrit Cohn's "disjunctive model" (1999, 126), the fundamental difference between narrator and author, which, for autofiction to make any sense, must somehow be or appear to be "rejoined." I have tried to demonstrate how two different authors have resorted to similar conjunctive means to bridge this gap—but not fully—and to bring to light their use of specific rhetorical tools, some essential, others secondary (enhancers), to create what I have called a sense of the autofictional.

## NOTES

1. "While in French and other Francophone literatures, the main focus remains on the endless discussion regarding truth, fact and fiction, the real and the 'made up,' other world literature stakeholders turn away from this debate and instead look for an answer on how to live and how to create, not on how to truthfully write how one lives" (Ferreira-Meyers 2018, 33).
2. See, for instance, Judith Shulevitz's review of *Memories of the Future* in *The New York Times* or Stephanie Bishop's (2015) piece on *10:04* in *The Sydney Review of Books*.
3. "[I]e texte est ainsi saturé par des signes de conjonction et de disjonction des deux instances."
4. "Dès ses origines, le double mouvement d'aveu et de déni est constitutif du roman autobiographique."
5. "I, the author, am going to tell you a story in which I am the hero, but which never happened to me" ("Moi, auteur, je vais vous raconter une histoire dont je suis le héros, mais qui ne m'est jamais arrivée"; Genette 1991, 86).

6. “Pourquoi ne pas admettre qu’il existe, outre les nom et prénom, toute une série d’opérateurs d’identification du héros avec l’auteur: leur âge, leur milieu socioculturel, leur profession, leurs aspirations, etc.?”
7. “Définition: nous appelons ‘autobiographie’ le récit rétrospectif en prose que quelqu’un fait de sa propre existence.”
8. See, for instance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsbxlNyb7hE> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzeMsrwOtJg>
9. “la représentation du temps mémoriel dans le roman et dans l’autobiographie”; “en confrontant constamment l’histoire personnelle aux capacités de la mémoire.”
10. “[...] le grand déballage de rancœurs et d’orgasmes ne peut qu’exhaler un climat névrotique [...]”
11. “C’est bien dans la névrose que naît l’autofiction.”

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