

## Summary

Public exposure of intimate writing began on a big scale in the XIX century, the period during which sciences such as psychology and psychoanalysis achieved recognition and started to constitute a crucial part of knowledge concerning the domains focused on understanding the individual. This, in turn, led to an increase in interest in diaries, journals, reports, chronicles and other types of writing from the field of autobiographism. Together with the modernistic approach to literary genres, which reached its climax at the break of the XIX and XX centuries, the essential change in the evaluation of autobiographical, intimate writing took place, resulting in the inclusion of intimistic writing in the spheres of fictional, belles-letters literature.

The appreciation of ‘written intimate confession’ of a character has become more popular over the last one hundred and fifty years, and its establishment as a literary genre in the XXI century is undeniable. Not only has the intimistic writing been recognized as a valuable literary work but also it has undergone an internal transformation. To observe such a generic mutation and illustrate the above-mentioned changes, this dissertation approaches the subject through an analysis of autobiographical novels by Paul Auster and Julian Barnes.

The purpose of this work is to show the inner changes of autobiographical writing and the hybridization of autobiography. Both Auster, one of the most famous and acknowledged modern American writers, and his English colleague, Julian Barnes, have written novels that can be undoubtedly termed autobiographical writing. The novels reflecting their autobiographical nature were written when both those writers reached maturity in their profession and experienced the pain connected with ageing and death. However, despite being contemporaries, there is a stark contrast in how each of them approaches the need to write about themselves. This difference in presenting their own thoughts and private aspects of life may stem from the differences in their background and upbringing. Nevertheless, both Auster and Barnes express a great appreciation for the cultural and artistic achievements of France, which seems to be an inspiration for their development in the field of autobiographical writing.

In the case of Paul Auster, the autobiographical novels chosen for this dissertation show the Author/Narrator figure becoming a writer. They focus, in the main, on the beginning of Auster’s career. *Hand to Mouth. A Chronicle of Early Failure* and *Report from the Interior* are

typical examples of Bildungsroman, whereas works such as *The Invention of Solitude*, *Winter Journal* or *Travels in the Scriptorium* have features of a Künstlerroman. The analysis of these novels reveal that Auster's later literary works are imbued with a sense of autobiography which creates a literary play between the hero – a cognitive subject in the text - and the reader, provoking strong tensions in the chronotop of these works.

*Hand to Mouth. A Chronicle of Early Failure* depicts the beginnings of the main protagonist's writing career. He resigns from Columbia University and decides to go to Paris to develop as a writer. Although his life in the writers' Mecca is full of hardship and failure, the detailed description of the daily routine and the chain of jobs connected with writing done by the protagonist in order to shape his passion for words into a profession, clearly suggest the presence of actual, external author in his fictional Author/Narrator figure.

In *Travels in the Scriptorium* the main protagonist – Mr. Blank, an old man locked in a hospital-like room, suffers from lack of memory. The furnishings of the room, however, resembles Auster's office, the very one often shown in interviews with him which can be seen on YouTube. In the course of novel, Mr. Blank is visited by some characters he has no recollection of, yet faithful Auster readers immediately recognize these protagonists as being from his novels. This unique combination of the fictional world with the central character's regaining of memories surprisingly engages even the unversed Auster readers, making them personify Mr. Blank with Paul Auster. Additionally, as in his later works- *Report from the Interior* and *Winter Journal*, both chosen for discussion in this dissertation - Auster uses the second-person narration so enforcing the effect of direct communication with the implied reader. The impact of ageing and the loss of parents due to the unavoidable seem to be the spark that ignited Paul Auster's intimate writing.

When analysing the autobiographical writing of Julian Barnes identifying the external writer and the Author/Narrator is not as obvious as it is in Auster's output mentioned above. Unlike Auster, Barnes hides his real self in writing defined as autobiographical by his editors. He creates a sylleptic cognitive subject, a narrative figure that is the writer's assumed *alter ego*, his literary phantom, fictional double. However, Barnes's reader must be aware of the fact that the worlds of real and fictional in his novels penetrate each other, easily transgressing their boundaries. The border line between them is not a clear, dividing one. It is left to the skills of the perceptive reader to recognize the difference between reality and fiction, which itself requires a careful 'walking' inside this author's fictional and non-fictional worlds so as not to fall into one of his literary traps.

Barnes also plays an unusual game with his literary interlocutors. While giving directions, revealing some clues that could help to decode what is real and what belongs to the world of literary fiction, Barnes cleverly manipulates his readers, misleading them by making them believe that the features of the external author are to be found in his protagonists, and simultaneously undermining the presented “truth” that relies on faulty human memory. To distinguish the two worlds that overlap in Barnes novels, the reader must be aware that the Author/Narrator figure from *Nothing to be Frightened of* and *Something to Declare*, as well as the author’s alter ego, such as the doctor in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, Nadar from *Levels of Life* or the paranoid husband from *Before She Met Me* are those characters that can leave some traces of the external world inhabited by author himself.

Geoffrey Braithwaite, the doctor following the steps of Gustave Flaubert and while doing so, revealing the complexity of writing profession, seems to have a surprisingly large amount of relevant experience and knowledge of authorship for a person whose profession is strictly connected with treating sick people. The biography he is writing may be suspected, however, since it does not correspond with the rules typical of this genre. Hence, the question arises, whether the doctor figure is an unskilled writer, a protagonist showing his love of the great French novelist in a clumsy way or perhaps there is more to be found in *Flaubert’s Parrot* and the reader is invited to participate in an unusual game with the author.

*Something to Declare*, on the contrary, claims to be the report from Barnes’s frequent visits to France, a specific Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman combination, visibly describing the development of the Author/Narrator’s fascination for the country of Franks. Nonetheless, careful readers must bear in mind that they face an accomplished opponent. The Author/Narrator figure by revealing some verifiable fact of Barnes’s private life tends to hide the real face of the author.

What the intimistic works of Auster and Barnes have in common, apart from the fascination for France and initiating a game with the reader, is the creation of literary *alter ego*. This phantomic figure exposes itself to a great extent when facing old age and the loss of beloved ones - both to a fatal disease, such as cancer (Barnes’s wife) or to ageing and the death of parents. The awareness of the unavoidable end, however, appears in divergent ways in the works of these authors. The protagonist’s recognition as a mortal entity in Auster’s *Travels in the Scriptorium* results in the creation of a perplexed hero whose identity is gradually exposed by his visitors and who finally is revealed to be the creator of his guests. In such a complex way Auster implies that the author’s creations may save him from eternal extermination. Barnes, on

the other hand, confronts the difficult topic of ageing and death with a typical British sense of humour and wit. In *Nothing to be Frightened of* the Author/Narrator cognitive subject describes his attitude to the infirmity of old age and his fears that are awoken by it. As objects of comparison, he chooses not only the members of his family but also famous figures from literary and cultural spheres. While presenting a series of mini-biographies, the Author/Narrator expresses his attitude to the fragility of human existence and its finiteness, making the reader believe that these thoughts come from the external author and, by that, revealing the autobiographical content hidden in the text.

The problem of self-inflicted harm of the cognitive entity in Auster's *Winter Journal*, unlike in Barnes's works, is presented in a double system of relations between the characters. Auster introduces 'Reader', the figure inside the text that makes the internal split of the cognitive subject, and who is referred to as 'you'. Uncovering his childhood and adolescence he perplexes the reader by ascribing these as autobiographical facts to the Reader.

The novel in which Barnes's protagonist shows the greatest resemblance to the external author is *Levels of Life*. In its final part the cognitive subject shares his grief and anger after the loss of his beloved wife. A careful analysis of Barnes biography infers on assumption that this literary figure can be identified with the real writer. The depth of his confession and the inability to accept the tragic loss, direct the external reader towards the external author.

A final conclusion based on analysis of the cited works by Auster and Barnes reveals the intense presence of autobiographical aspects in all these books. Nonetheless, one must not forget that both those authors are skilled writers who use words with unusual precision which suggests that very little may be taken at face value or assumed to be straightforward. This stems from the fact that the Author/Narrator figure lures the reader into a peculiar game which requires great attention and erudition.

Moreover, the reader should not forget the cultural background of the authors whose literary self-portraits he is to see in the books chosen for the purpose of this dissertation since this has substantially influenced how they deal with their respective autobiographical issues in the novels. Despite being almost coevals, Auster and Barnes differ here significantly. Being mature writers, they both undertake the topics of ageing and death. Nevertheless, the tools and style chosen to reveal these emotive subjects to the public seem to reflect their cultural background. Whilst analyzing Auster's autobiographical writings, the reader is exposed to Narcissus-like confession, where facts and dates are abundant, and the reader remains under

impression that the cognitive subject creates his image in the way mastered by celebrities in American popular TV shows. Contrary to Auster's approach, the cognitive subject in Barnes's works is generally a frustrated neurotic, hiding his real emotions behind humour, wit and sarcasm. Here, the autobiographical facts are scarce, mostly hidden behind mini-biographies of others; the only reliable connection between the intertextual and external author, bearing the signs of intimate writing, are the descriptions connected with the finiteness of human existence and the loss of relatives and beloved ones.

Those two writers prove that not only has autobiography transformed itself, introducing non-fictional writing into the world of fiction, but has also accumulated generic features of various types of writing: both fictional and non-fictional. Consequently, the typical autobiography, in which an author presents his life and thoughts, has mutated and, as is clearly seen in the works analyzed in this dissertation, has formed a literary hybrid. Finding the autobiographical aspects of the external author, recognizing his second self in such an artistic creation is a real challenge and requires a skillful, eloquent and experienced reader. This lends further support to the argument that this transformed genre no longer belongs to non-fictional, popular writing.