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in Gwenaelle Aubry's No One*

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“To be novelized”: An Investigation of Autofiction
& How it Operates in Gwenaëlle Aubry’s *No One*

by

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Gwenaëlle Aubry's *No One*, is a complex text in memoriam to the author's father. And yet, in the introduction, Rick Moody surmises, "The story is simple" (8). Both claims are true in their own right. Francois-Xavier, the father of both the narrator and of Gwenaëlle Aubry, is an affluent and respected member of the Parisian bar who struggles with a progressive mental illness. His bipolar disorder eventually becomes hyper manic and ultimately affects both his life and his daughter. *No One* was written after the death of Aubry's father when she found his manuscript entitled *The Melancholic Black Sheep*. A note attached read: "To be novelized." This is where Aubry's text begins to get complicated in both plot and form. In order to write through the mourning of her father's death, Aubry followed the note's instruction and brought his words to life by braiding passages of *The Melancholic Black Sheep*, her father's attempt at autobiography, within her own text. "On the file that contains his manuscript he wrote, To be novelized and beside that a subtitle, which he later crossed out: A Disturbing Specter. That was what he called his illness" (22). In this line, Aubry identifies a major issue with representing his manuscript as an autobiography proper. *The Melancholic Black Sheep* is life-writing that is not only influenced by Francois-Xavier's bipolar disorder but subjugated by the dissociative nature that his mental illness afflicts on his identity. His mania effectively rips apart his ability to establish a singular portrait of the man. He is the melancholic black sheep, and the figure haunted by the "disturbing specter" of his illness. It seems that Francois-Xavier was aware of the need to fictionalize his life in order to create a coherent telling, as his note wishes for the manuscript to be "novelized" into a singular form. Aubry mediates this problem of coherence by structuring her text between twenty six chapters into an abecedary form from A (for Artaud) to Z (for Zelig) with each chapter focusing on an element of the interlaced italics of her father's manuscript. These are sandwiched between Aubry's own ruminations on the topic (or memories) at hand. As

the reader delves into the story they are thus presented with two protagonists. To start, there is the “I” of Francois and the “I” used by his daughter. However, when Aubry uses the “I,” it is not so much to tell her own life story but to reflect on her father’s life. Thus, her portions can not be entirely called memoir as there is no central focus on Aubry as the protagonist of the text. This is the most blatant complication of *No One*, confusion in genre. If *The Melancholic Black Sheep* is not an autobiography, and *No One* is not entirely a memoir, then what exactly is the reader holding in their hands?

The neologism “autofiction” offers a potential solution to this question as the term signifies a new genre that denies conventions of life writing while encouraging atypical plot, form and writing styles. Autofiction was created by Serge Doubrovsky in the late 1970’s and puts the paradoxical genres of “autobiography” and “fiction” into a unified form. As “autofiction” blends The term initially reads as contradictory as autobiographies are built upon a basis of complete honesty. Antagonistic to this, autofiction’s intention is to blend fiction into its life-writing by disregarding some of the conventions of truth-telling that autobiography operates on. The critics and literary theorists of genre are still debating the precise meaning (and validity) of autofiction in the larger arch of life writing. Doubrovsky, a literary critic and writer himself, created autofiction as a direct response to the restrictive conventions of autobiographical genre writing as he coined the phrase in 1975 in the explanatory blurb on the back cover of his novel *Fils*:

Autobiography? No, that is a privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the end of their lives, in a refined style. Fiction, of events and facts strictly real; **autofiction**, if you will, to have entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language, outside of the wisdom and the syntax of the novel, traditional or new.

Interactions, threads of words, alliterations, assonances, dissonances, writing before or after literature, concrete, as we say, music. (qtd. in McDonough 7)

While this is the first of its definitions, this description is still quite elusive when trying to identify what the reader is reading and how they should approach it. Upon publication *No One* was readily regarded as autofiction, which is noted as a particularly “French term for the stylized hybridization of autobiography and fiction as applied in contemporary literature” (7). As autofiction was coined in the 1970’s, this means that it has only recently been developing and carries most of its significance in France, the country of its origin. We are given multiple instructions when approaching *No One*, the first of Aubry’s work to be translated into English. The front cover of *No One* gives the subtitle of “a novel” while the back blurb considers it a “fictional memoir.” Step inside and Rick Moody’s introduction specifically reinforces how integral *No One*’s awareness of autofiction plays out in the reading of Aubry’s text. It’s important to note that Doubrovsky created the term and consequential genre as a response to traditional autobiographical theory. Also, Moody suggests that autofiction resists the tenets of conventional life-writing by situating itself between “autobiography and fiction, between genres, finding in this impulse the liberty that is released by recombination” (8). With this, the writers are able to manipulate language to represent their lives in the way that they see fit and thus are also able to represent lives that defy convention.

This thesis qualifies that autofiction should be distinguished as a valid genre, because it is definitively characterized by counter-qualities of conventional modes of autobiography. These counter qualities include, but are not limited to: manipulation or distortion of time, atypical use of language such as syntax and grammar, genre mixing and more. We will look to Sarah Pitcher McDonough’s close reading of Serge Doubrovsky's first autofiction entitled *Fils*, as well as a

return to analyzing how Aubry uses autofiction in *No One*. But first, in order to further inform our understanding of autofiction, we will examine the parenting genre of autobiography that it resists through two seminal theoretical essays. The first gives us the benchmark definition of “autobiography proper” from Roy Pascal’s 1960’s essay, “What is an Autobiography?” With it gives the outline of what makes an autobiographical writing successful as it focuses its examination on how the individual’s life shapes the text they write. Then we’ll look at “The Autobiographical Pact” of 1975 where Philippe Lejeune conversely considers the reader’s perspective as they enter into an institutionalized contract with the author regarding the intention of the writing. Lejeune’s essay focuses on how the autobiographical writings are given definition through the reader’s experience and does not lay as much importance on the author as Pascal does.

Pascal relates the writers of autobiographies as “heros,” which turn writers into characters. Lejeune will also later use his language in his own essay. At the start, Pascal notes the voyeuristic quality of reading an autobiography that allows the reader to become privy to the “particulars” of a person’s life and, more importantly, offers an “unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men.” He goes on to say that this insight, even if “not factually true, or only partly true, it is always true evidence of their personality.” The rest of the essay will continue with a preoccupation of identifying the personality of the writer. This personality is what will “win over” the reader, as the hero of a novel does. Pascal notes that the autobiographer differs from the hero in that their readers are not won over by moral acts or superlative achievements, but are “won over simply by being admitted to his intimacy” (1). Establishing intimacy seems an indicator of a personality successfully translated through text. He later references a colleague in the life-writing discourse, Georg Misch, who wrote the four volume

work in 1950 that can be partially summarized in its title alone, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*. Pascal counters that Misch's "over-riding historical purpose leads him to overlook the difference between the shape of life and the shape of an autobiography" (2). Misch's work is a laborious tracing of the history of the genre itself. For Pascal, this mode of analysis is useful but further perpetuates the traditional forms of autobiographical writing without analyzing their character (for example, the character of the autobiographer). This, in turn creates conventions that writers are expected to write in, readers to read in, and critics to critique them in. Thus, declining the possibility of innovation within life-writing, innovation such as autofiction. In order to narrow his own investigation of how to recognize autobiographies as "works of art," Pascal discriminates between "autobiography proper" and similar forms — primarily that of diary, memoir, reminiscence and philosophical reflection.

From diary, we learn the value of reflection. Pascal notes that however meditative a diary may be, it differs from autobiography as it takes into account what was important to the writer at the time, instead of adjusting the priority of their focus to consider moments of "long-range significance" (3). Even the use of diary-material in an autobiography is suspect, especially if unaccompanied by comment, as it mainly reveals what the individual *was*, and not *is*. This focus shifts towards the past, and unsettles the tone of the writing. Here, our analyst is beginning to touch upon what will become important in his definition of the genre. In Pascal's "autobiography proper, attention is focused on the self" while "in memoir or reminiscence on others."

Concerning philosophical reflections, Pascal highlights the importance of the interplay between the inner and outer world that the autobiographer inhabits. The philosophical reflection attempts to use introspection as a means of identifying the personality. To this, Pascal notes that the

“autobiography is on the contrary historical in its method, and at the same time the representation of the self in and through its relations with the outer world” (8).

Make note, Pascal never gives a prescriptive definition. Rather, he aims to lead “us a good way towards” it by illustrating his points through the writings and quoting of Stendahl, Sartre, Nietzsche, Yeats, Augustine and more. For example, Pascal noted Gandhi’s accounts of his activism in Africa and India as a true autobiography because his political activity sprang from a “deep personal conviction.” Gandhi’s political account is noted as exemplary in this essay as it falls into line with various recommendations of facets by Pascal that compose a successful “autobiography proper” (7). First, Gandhi’s autobiographical writings were written well into his life, after his major political achievements had been completed. Pascal notes that not only are the lives of successful men and women more interesting to read, but also that the autobiographies of younger men are rarely satisfactory” (10). This brings us to one of his last points: the conceit of the “standing point,” which Pascal notes as crucial to a successful autobiography.

The standing point may be the moment that the writer writes of their life, their social position, the acknowledgement of achievements in their field, their current philosophies. No matter the standing point chosen by the writer, it is this “position that enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order.” With this, we are able to gather the pieces (points) of “What is Autobiography?” in order to answer the question. His loose definition of an “autobiography proper”:

It involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its centre of interest is the self, not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that, in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape. But “reconstruction of a life” is an impossible task.

A single day's experience is limitless in its radiation backward and forward. So that we have to hurry to qualify the above assertions by adding that autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on life, constructs out of it a coherent story.

Throughout our analysis here, we have gleaned what facets make a successful autobiography proper. But from Pascal's definition, we also learn that autobiography is a retrospective reconfiguring of the past up to the current moment and perspective of the individual, aka their standing point. With such reflection that shapes the story of an autobiography in a coherent and factual mode, Pascal believes that autobiographical writing can translate the true personality, or unified identity, of a person's life.

Moving forward in time and in the development of theory, Philippe Lejeune publishes his seminal essay in 1975 entitled "Le pacte autobiographique" or, in English, "The Autobiographical Pact." It is this essay that will serve as impetus for the term autofiction that Serge Doubrovsky created in response to the suggested pact, which we will discuss later. Like Pascal, Lejeune recognizes the various frameworks that can be used to dissect the genre. By doing so we are able to see the different factions of the discourse community whose investigations range from, "a historical study, since the writing of the self as it has developed since the 18th century is a phenomenon of civilization; a psychological study, since the autobiographical act raises vast problems, such as those of memory, of the construction of the personality, and of the self-criticism" (4). He goes on to say that despite these various modes, there is a commonality between all of them that is central to his work. No matter the system of criticism, "autobiography presents itself first as a text." With this, Lejeune's essay will serve as an exploration of how autobiographies function as a text, "by making it function, that is to say by reading it" (4). With this, Lejeune begins to hint at how his approach to literary criticism will

develop, "By taking as the starting point the position of the reader, (which is mine, the only one I know well), I have taken the chance to understand more clearly how the text functions (the differences in how they function) since they were written for us, readers, and in reading them, it is we who make them function" (4). While Pascal concentrates his study of autobiography on the writer's intentions, Lejeune seeks to define autobiography by identifying how the reader interprets the text. Lejeune's attention to the reader allows him to formulate the autobiographical pact. If the reader is what makes a text function, then reading becomes a communicative act between author and audience.

This level of communication creates a contract between the author and the reader. This contract is cemented in the pact that will allow the reader to trust the author, their life and the text that contains it. To gain such sincerity, Lejeune believes that the major criterion for the genre lies in "the identity ("identicalness") of the *name* (author-narrator-protagonist). The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the name of the author on the cover." Lejeune goes on to say that the autobiographical pact varies in form, but that the author must always "demonstrate their intention to honor his/her *signature*" (14). If the sincerity of the autobiography is established, the writer may employ stylistic devices such as third person narration or altogether lack of name in text itself, so long as the pact remains intact by maintaining the singular, unifying identity that is necessary for Lejeune's definition of autobiography. It is what many call this triple reference of the proper name that allows the reader to believe that each faction (author-narrator-protagonist) share a common identity, meaning that they are giving a unified and thus truthful recounting of their life in the text. This creates trust between the author of the autobiography and its reader. These are the conventions of autobiography, as set by the historical development of the genre, and

therefore these conventions dictate how the reader perceives the genres. Lejeune's essay considers how the reader will approach the text, which is why sincerity and consequential trust is highlighted. However, it is when the trust is shaken (yet not entirely broken) that autobiography will enter the realms of what becomes autofiction.

Lejeune's essay is full of anecdotes, references and visual representations of these topics. One chart is used to explain what genre a text falls under depending on the various configurations of their use of proper names in relation to their agreement with or against the autobiographical pact. For example, if the protagonist and author share the same name and agree to the autobiographical pact, then they fall under option 3b) autobiography. Or, if the protagonist shares the author's name but follows no pact, then it falls under option 1b) novel. There are various combinations given, but one empty box begs Lejeune to question,

Can the hero of a novel declared as such have the same name as the author? Nothing would prevent such a thing from existing, and it is perhaps an internal contradiction that from which some interest effects could be drawn. But, in practice, no example of such a study comes to mind. (18)

To answer Lejeune's empty box, we will look to contemporary writer Sarah Pitcher McDonough as she analyzes how Doubrovsky's writing in *Fils* demonstrates the intentions and application of autofiction in her insightful, yet non-prescriptive thesis "How to Read Autofiction." In order to describe the genre, she begins her investigation with the text that it germinated from. *Fils* "recounts the true events of the author's life in the first person, but disrupts the traditional autobiography by using unconventional syntax, chronology, and perspective" (17). She close reads a brief section from *Fils* in order to demonstrate this subversion of autobiographical convention,

cars cars cars the bus tears along squared like a tiled coachbus windows
like portholes the conductor in the large clear eye cabin made of undulating iron pilots
brushes me stop at the corner obscures the way, obstructs I wait. (qtd. in McDonough 17)

From this excerpt, McDonough points out how Doubrovsky's recollection of a New York street is allowed to penetrate his "psychological perception of those events" through autofiction (17). She notes that his alliteration, repetition, and unusual grammar are used in order to mirror his thoughts. With this, the readers of *Fils* can feel how Doubrovsky personally experienced the "rhythm and chaos of a New York street scene" in a more visceral way than a strictly non-fiction telling might. McDonough affirms the importance of the writer's individual writing style when discussing the use of repetition in the excerpt. Of the repeated "cars cars cars," McDonough suggests that the reader is invited "to imagine a stream of cars passing" Doubrovsky in this scene, just as the visual representation of the word indicates (18). With McDonough's close reading, we begin to see exactly how important writing style is for autofictional texts. By explicitly subverting the conventions of autobiographical writing, the text destabilizes the reading experience altogether; this is central to autofiction. McDonough suggests that this allows the writer not to have "to cater fully to the expectations of their readers"; a line of thought very different from Pascal and Lejeune's theories on autobiographical writing. If one does not need to cater to the expectations that readers have of genres, then the writer may use language in any way they see fit to translate their experiences. For the autofictionalist, this may include: manipulation of time, utilizing disruptive syntax or imagery, and dismissing the standard usage of the triple reference of the same proper name (writer-narrator-protagonist) made necessary by Lejeune's pact. While Lejeune believed that the writer-narrator-protagonist needed to exhibit identicalness in identity and perspective in order to portray a true account of the autobiographers

this, Doubrovsky believed that this obsession with truth and meaning denied the reader the ability to experience the life Doubrovsky appropriated the triple reference of the proper name in order to show that life, even if the writer-protagonist and narrator share the same identity, While using atypical language may challenge the reader's notions of autobiographical writing, the text would still be understood as factual. However, the repudiation of the triple reference proper name completely destabilizes the reader. If the identity of the "I" in the text can be manipulated and fictionalized, then how can the reader believe that the writer is telling the truth about their life? This may be an important concern for the autobiographer, but not for the autofictionalist. McDonough suggests that this destabilizing experience is imperative to autofiction's desire to encourage an active reading experience.

Autofiction unsettles the reader in form and style in order to invite them to question the text. By doing so, it resists a passive reading that would accept the text as completely true. Autofiction resists this and instead asks the reader to engage and participate with the language in their text by approaching life writing from a new perspective. This is why there is no strict need for honesty in autofiction, as that would provide comfort to reader. Regarding sincerity, Doubrovsky responded to Roger Celestin in a 1997 interview:

We have learnt that sincerity, which was the old regulating principle for autobiography, is not enough. The meaning of one's one life in certain ways escapes us, so we have to reinvent it in our writing, and that is what I personally call *autofiction*. It doesn't mean you write any old thing that comes to your mind about yourself. You try to recapture phases of yourself, but you know, you're aware, to a large extent, it's only the way you tell the story to yourself.

In this statement, Doubrovsky addresses what conventions are expected and swiftly casts away their presumed necessity. Earlier, in the interview, he notes that “Memory itself is fictive, is fictitious” and “may harbor screened memories” (400). Even in our attempts to be factual and sincere in the report of our lives, one must recognize that our own memory plays against us. Memory is selective, ambiguous and colored by bias; thus, it eludes the possibility of complete sincerity. Autofiction understands and explores this. Also, Doubrovsky is careful to mention that autofiction tends to focus on a “phase” of one’s life. *Fils* itself was an attempt to capture an “experience of analysis within one day of the narrator’s life” (400). In this, the writer aims to immerse themselves in that individual part of their life. This allows the writer, and their reader, to understand them as they were in that moment by taking away the prescriptive tone of retrospect. The nature of reflection is to look back, bringing your present together with your past, in order to examine and judge said past. This is similar to Pascal’s concept of the “standing point.” However, autofiction is not interested in turning the life into one coherent story to consume by resolving one’s past. Doubrovsky reveals in this interview that the mode of the autofictionalist in particular is no longer concerned with the totalizing of one’s life to capture the whole or unifying meaning. Instead, autofiction attempts to recreate the “phases” of life in order to better connect to the self, or the multiplicity of the self, that existed in that time.

In another interview in 2016, Ricky Moody discusses with Gwenaëlle Aubry how *No One* deals with the phases of her father’s illness and death. He also questioned what her thoughts on autofiction were during the live reading recorded at 192 Books in Chelsea, New York. In the live recording, Aubry admits that she is reluctant to, though not rejecting totally, the French publishing industry’s quick application of autofiction as the genre of *No One*. She states that the initial restriction she set for herself when writing the text was to omit the “I.” And that in *No*

One, she believes that “There is no ‘autos’ to speak of”; meaning there is no Gwenaëlle Aubry present (2:00 - 8:20). While Gwenaëlle Aubry’s name is literally nowhere physically in the text and is not attributed to the “I” directly, it is made clear through the story and presentation (and naming) of her father, François-Xavier, that this is a recounting of her life to some degree. Her desired anonymity for the narrator/protagonist would undermine the ownership and intentional fictionalization of the triple-reference proper name (writer-protagonist-narrator) that Doubrovsky suggested as a focal point of autofiction. However, whenever the “I” denotes Aubry or François-Xavier, we have real identities to place that “I” on. Thus, despite the author’s direct intention, the text still is still seen by its larger audience as autofiction. This is especially true when noting the effect of paratext that informs us of Aubry’s identity in and out of the pages. Included here would be the informative introduction by Rick Moody, the author’s bio at the end of the book, as well as the front and back cover that claims Gwenaëlle Aubry as both the writer and daughter of François-Xavier. This is something that Lejeune believed highly informative and necessary for the reading audience to consider in his own genre analysis of autobiographical writings.

Despite the complications of the text, *No One* finds its place in genre as an interesting example of autofiction. In our own analysis here, we will further this claim by investigating the influence of autofiction in Aubry’s text. First, let’s revisit the conceit of the abecedary structure. We learned from Pascal that one of the fundamental aspects of autobiography is the form of a coherent story, a unifying aspect as influenced by his benchmark definition of the genre. Coherence of a life indicates a linear storyline from birth to old age that the reader can mark and identify with throughout the telling. This gives them the comfort of a comprehensive and thus legible life. However, life does not always follow a linear perspective as we account for memory

or, in the case of Francois Xavier, a dissociative worldview as affected by his mental illness. Thus, Aubry aptly works within the realm of autofiction to subvert this deficit of autobiography by applying the unifying structure of the abecedary in order to impose a linear temporality to her father's life. While *No One* doesn't provide a traditional beginning to end, we can follow at least the phases of both Francois-Xavier and Aubry's life from chapter A-Z. The abecedary explicitly addresses Francois Xavier's bipolar condition, one composed of various conflicting selves; and also gives the reader a thorough line to follow as they proceed through the pages.

The majority of the chapters identify a range of various personalities he inhabited in his life and thus his life writing. A for "Antonin Artaud," the famous French dramatist and poet who struggled with mental illness and was known to have been subjected to electroshock therapy. Aubry uses Artaud here to act as a shadow character that reflects and reinforces Francois-Xavier's own madness. Later Francois-Xavier's characters become more colorful. B for "Bond (James Bond)." Aubry's father "wanted to be James Bond because he wanted to be *an agent of the shadows*," a man capable of slipping in and out of reality at *his* leisure (26). C for "Clown," a freeing childlike character he felt unable to fully embody in his professional world of law. M for "Mouton Noir" ("black sheep"), to exhibit the otherness he felt throughout his life; alienated from his own family for his eccentric behavior. As the abecedary progresses, the letters become less concrete. Q for "Qualities (a man without)" addresses this as Aubry comments, "At the end of his life my father didn't want to be anything. By that I mean he wanted just to be, to take off his masks, cast off his rags, abandon the roles, the characters that throughout his life he had expended so much effort in playing, shed the qualities he had put on one by one, seeking the one that would define him, give him form and content" (127). As his illness progress, Francois-Xavier removes himself from Aubry's life when she's very young. He is intermittently present

when capable. He cycles between living independently and successfully and at other times being completely debilitated by manic highs and lows. He lives in and out of sanitariums and at more despondent times, as a homeless man.

The words “define,” “form” and “content” in this line are important to note as Aubry’s father is a man obviously comprised of multiple selves (a fragmented identity) due to his bipolar disorder. This is important to note when we consider his life and his attempt at autobiography in *The Melancholic Black Sheep* that would ultimately fail to gain Pascal’s definition of “autobiography proper” that champions a coherent life story in order to create a unified identity. Francois-Xavier is not entirely capable of creating the unified self, as we see in *No One*’s braided passages of both his manuscript and Aubry’s text. Autofiction thus works well for the telling of Francois-Xavier’s life, as it does not mandate a need for a chronological timeline. Aubry creates the abecedary to establish this timeline so as to create some kind of order for the reader to still be able to follow along with the text. This helps them further get to know her father. This is also interesting as Lejeune’s concern for autobiography is more about how the reader gages the life writing. In this, Aubry is utilizing autofiction’s rejection of conventional life writing to creatively meet both Pascal and Lejeune’s concerns about the identity of the person whose life is being written about and also the reader who is attempting to understand that life. Also, when Aubry calls attention to these various personalities that her father adopts in order to seek one that “defines him,” we can make the argument that the abecedary is also working as an external “form” capable of containing the multiplicity of the father’s “content.” The alphabet is a singular unit, or form, comprised of twenty-six letters. For Francois-Xavier, his life is the alphabet and his multiple selves are the letters. In the fashion of autofiction, Aubry rejects Pascal’s notion of confining her father to a singular identity. Instead, this abecedary allows for all aspects of his

personality to combine and presents the closest portrait possible of her father. Also, by allowing for multiple selves or identities to be considered in one person, the text rejects defining Aubry's father simply by his mental illness. Instead, the abecedary is the process we must read through to learn about him on the whole.

Another way that Aubry uses autofiction's rejection of the traditional writing mode of autobiography as established by the seminal works of Pascal and Lejeune is in the creative style of her writing. Following contemporary writer Sarah Pitcher McDonough's lead, we will close read a section from *No One's* chapter, "T for Traitor" in order to see Aubry employing unconventional form, syntax and grammar in said chapter. We see run-on sentences all throughout Aubry's text. However, this is not a deficit in the writer's command of language. Instead it is used stylistically as her run-on sentences across multiple pages and sometimes comprise an entire chapter. "Traitor" is three pages long and is composed of only two sentences in all. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the portion of the chapter that starts with:

To the already veiled promise in the eyes of the little girl with
 blonde hair cut anyhow whose photo he kept among his papers
 to the two syllables that I hear my daughters babble and
 that I have not heard for so long, to all they imply of trust,
 strength, tenderness, and presence
 to the memory that returns, sharp and clear, one sleep-
 less night, of his smell, his warmth, his arms around me when
 we had to part, those moments when he was, yes, a rampart,
 strength — when, like anyone else, I had a father

As we shift focus from Francois-Xavier to Aubry herself, we see the grief felt by the woman who lost her father not only in death, but also in the complicated relationship they shared while he was alive. “Traitor” is a complex chapter that grapples with this trauma in a poetic form. Indeed, the passage I’ve quoted above is a direct representation from the text. Visually, the form looks similar to a poem. Though this is the beginning of a run-on sentence, the portions of it are split into lines, as poems tend to be. Arguably, the two run-on sentences that make “Traitor” could be read as stanzas. The repetition of the “To” may be seen as an invocation, a technique familiar to lyric poetry. On another level, the address of the “to” shifts from Aubry as a child, her daughters and also to the father that Francois-Xavier was and wasn’t always capable of being. If we choose not to read “Traitor” as a poem, it can also be seen here as an open letter to her father. The images are wrought with sentiment as we see Aubry as a little blonde girl whose photo is kept close by the impossible father. And though not directly stated, the “two syllables” are heard by the reader as either “dada” or “papa” and so on as their focus is aimed toward capturing the father figure. The commas separate these bittersweet images as the speaker reaches toward holding “the memory that returns, sharp and clear” of “his smell, his arms around me when we had to part.” This last line is where Aubry, the presumed speaker, connects to Francois-Xavier not as the mediator of his life writing, but as his daughter. To reinforce this, the passage ends with “when, like anyone else, I had a father” (149). Whether we read this as a poem or an open letter, it doesn’t change the bittersweet sentiment that comes through to the reader. Again, Aubry’s *No One* proves to be a useful example of autofiction as we see that conventional form and modes of autobiographical writing are not necessary when the aim is to be sincere.

Whether we read “Traitor” as a poem or otherwise, the inclusion of such a form would never fit a “true autobiography” from the viewpoint of conventional autobiographical theory.

Pascal believed that the inclusion of these forms in an autobiography would misrepresent the current state of the writer and either muddle the long range significance of their life, or at least distract the reader. All of which would lessen the truth telling of that life. The ability to combine multiple forms of writing, whether they be nonfiction or not, adds to the strength and possibility of autofiction; especially as the concern with this genre is not to tell the truth but to be sincere in their writing. If we examine the braided passages of *The Melancholic Black Sheep* we see Aubry interweaving separate forms again. Earlier, we mentioned that this inclusion of his manuscript brings her father's words "to life." In chapter "I for "Illuminated," Aubry mentions that she found fifteen pages of the manuscript where Francois-Xavier rewrites Aubry's translation and additional commentary of a treatise of the soul by Plotinus. Not only is she shocked that he has read her philosophical work, but that he has translated parts of her writing himself and even adds his own commentary. In his commentary, he keeps their "kinship quiet" and never identifies Aubry as his daughter. Instead, Aubry writes in *No One* that he consistently calls her "the *author* and, once, *my dear philosopher*." Aubry openly tells the reader that she is touched by his appreciation of her life's work. But more so, "This inversion and adoption of distance moved me deeply; it seemed to attest to a timeless complicity between him and me, unconnected to heredity" (81). For Aubry and Francois-Xavier, the traditional relationship of father to daughter is not possible. Therefore, it makes sense that *No One* takes on the atypical genre of autofiction. By having the ability to reject conventions of life writing and incorporate her father's dissociative manuscript, Aubry is able to enter into a dialogue with him as his italicized words speak with and to her own times new roman type font. She attempts to embody her father not only in memory, but also physically in the form of the text.

This thesis does not intend to claim that *No One* could not have been told as strictly autobiography or memoir. Those versions would simply be a more familiar telling. Instead, this thesis implies that autofiction allows for a different kind of truth to be reached. One that gives Aubry room to disassemble the complicated struggles with mental health and identity that her father faced, as well as how her own life was affected by that. Francois-Xavier is an impossible figure to reach, even in his own life writing. Through Aubry's autofictional recounting of their relationship, we are able to get as close as possible to the man she tried and is still trying to understand.

Earlier, we noted that this thesis qualifies that autofiction should be distinguished as a valid genre, because it is definitively characterized by counter-qualities of conventional modes of autobiography. Therefore it obviously cannot fit into autobiography. By deconstructing the benchmark definition of "autobiography proper" in Pascal's seminal essay we learned what makes up the tenets of conventional autobiographical writing. Pascal's definition highlighted the importance of the writer and dictated how their life should be written. One of the most important aspects of Pascal's essay was the idea that a successful autobiography should be a coherent, unifying (and thus chronological) telling of that person's life. This would exclude, of course, our example of contemporary life writing from Gwenaelle Aubry that dips in and out of time and perspective. From Lejeune's essay, we look at autobiography as being defined by the reader's experience. The French theorist demands that clarity in representation of the writer-protagonist-narrator is necessary for the reader to believe the life writing as factual. Again, we see how this convention would also refuse the current telling of Gwenaelle Aubry's text that deals with the dissociative "I" of her father, as inflicted by his bipolar disorder and also the distance she keeps from her own "I" in the narrative due to the grief she is working through. By looking at these

seminal works that provide the conventions, we are given a greater understanding of what autofiction is trying to resist. Then, by taking a turn and looking at the development of autofiction in McDonough's close reading of Doubrovsky's excerpt from *Fils*, we may further understand the benefits and application of the elusive genre as his writing is engaged with the immediacy of the psychological experience of the moment. By educating ourselves in the history and development of autofiction, we were able to better analyze our contemporary example in *No One* and how it uses the genre in order to write a representation of an incredibly unconventional life. By acknowledging autofiction here, this thesis hopes to provide greater exposure to a new kind of life writing for the contemporary subject. By identifying autofiction as its own genre, we — readers, writers and critics alike — are able to mold autofiction for our own benefit. Through autofiction, the writer is not made to submit to genre conventions of life writing or the expectations that the reader might have of those modes. Instead, it allows for a new mode of writing the unconventional and largely contemporary life. Again, Aubry could have written *No One* in a variety of autobiographical forms that rely on the conventions of a nonfictional telling, but through autofiction she is able to freely blend the transcribed documentary aspects with her own imaginary narrative. A traditional autobiography requires a beginning, middle and an ending. However, *No One* does not provide closure. Closure would only be beneficial for the reader. By not offering closure to the reader, we understand that closure might not yet be possible for Aubry herself. In fact, she calls *No One* an “impossible portrait” that she writes, in part, to “defer” her father's death (170). She blatantly remarks, “Ultimately, all I'm doing in writing this book is to speak his name” (114). This rejection of closure is a truth in and of itself. In reading this book, the reader is allowed to participate with the work of processing grief and letting go of a loved one. All of which provides intimate insight to another human beings life

experience. Aubry's text would be a completely different story if made to submit to the conventions of autobiography. It is one thing to be written about, and quite another, "to be novelized." If written about, the reader is made to stand outside of the life. To hear the recounting of moments and memories from a retrospective viewpoint. This would give the reader a life to be consumed and left when the book is closed. Autobiography imposes this kind of unifying form, or plot, on life writing. However, this imposition can also be read as autobiography using tools of fiction to create coherency. Life is exponentially varied and can be experienced in a plethora of ways. This can be noted through the factual, the psychological and the emotional register that influence the perspective we place on the stories that we tell about ourselves. Autobiography asks the reader to choose one line of experience, while autofiction allows for multiple registers to be expressed at once through the individual writer's creative styling of their language. Autofiction does not only allow for unconventional lives to be told — tellings that would be rejected by the standards of autobiographical genre — it also allows for stories that defy genre expectations in order for the writers to tell stories in a way that is more true to *their* experience. Aubry does so by rejecting closure. There is no comfort in her ending, no overall meaning to be derived from her story. She has not totalized her or her father's life story for the reader to understand. Her text is not focused on comprehension of their lives, but experiencing it as we work through the language we read. The only totalizing form that this autofiction seeks to place on the story of a life, are the physical pages that contain it.

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