

ROBERT KUSEK
Institute of English Studies,
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

IN AND OUT, OR THE MEMOIR'S MANY POINTS OF VIEW

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[...] He was never
myself, this boy, but I know if I tell you his story,
you'll think we are one and the same: both of us hiding
in fictions which say what we cannot admit to ourselves.¹

Andrew Motion, "Open Secrets"

I have realised that I am not pretending while writing this
very book.²

Inga Iwasiów, *Umarł mi*

[H]e now begins to feel closer to *I*: *autre*biography shades
back into autobiography.³

J. M. Coetzee, "Interview"

1. What is the memoir?

Among a number of life-writing genres that have, over the last two or three decades, come to prominence in literature in English as a result of the so-called "autobiographical turn,"⁴ the genre of memoir appears to have attracted the

¹ Andrew Motion, "Open Secrets," in Andrew Motion, *Secret Narratives* (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1983), 10.

² Inga Iwasiów, *Umarł mi. Notatnik żałoby [He Died on Me. Journal of Mourning]* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2013), 123. If not marked otherwise, all of the translations in this essay are mine – R.K.

³ John Maxwell Coetzee, "Interview," in John Maxwell Coetzee, *Doubling the Point. Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 394.

⁴ Michael Gorra, "The Autobiographical Turn," *Transition*, no. 68 (1995), 143–153.

greatest attention of writers and critics alike.⁵ The sheer number of the genre's specimens, as well as of studies dedicated to this literary phenomenon, unambiguously testify to the fact that today the memoir is, indeed, the *flavour de jour* of the publishing industry and the "new arch-genre of the stories of the self"⁷ (*un nouvel archigenre des récits de soi*). Perhaps the most trenchant diagnosis of the memoir's current position on the map of life-writing regimes was formulated by G. Thomas Couser, who famously inquired: "Memoir, memoir, memoir! Doesn't anyone write autobiography anymore?"⁸ And to which inquiry he himself thus responded: "According to various cultural commentators – critics, scholars and reviewers – this is an age – if not *the age* – of memoir."⁹

However, acknowledging this all-pervasive memoir-boom is not tantamount to admitting that the genre in question – unlike, for example, autobiography, which is the memoir's more venerable "relative" – has been sufficiently and exhaustively addressed by narratologists and that its generic status has been definitely and unequivocally asserted. Of course, in recent decades critical recognition of the memoir has undergone a major shift. Nowadays, it seems rather unlikely¹⁰ that the memoir would still – in line with Georg Misch's authoritative work – be condescendingly described as a sub-class of autobiography characterised by a "peculiarly loose and apparently unregulated method"¹¹;

⁵ Perhaps the only "literary" life-writing genre that could stand up (quantitatively speaking) to the popularity of the memoir is biofiction, namely all kinds of biographical fiction. On its current fashionableness among the literati, kindly consult Michael Lackey, ed., *Biographical Fiction: A Reader* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). What needs to be stated is that this essay deliberately ignores the most popular life-writing forms related to the so-called "online lives," namely such digital life narratives as blogs, vlogs, self-videos, online memoirs, online journals, or "auto/tweetographies." See Laurie McNeill, "Life Bytes: Six-Word Memoir and the Exigencies of Auto/Tweetographies," in *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, ed. Anna Poletti, Julie Rak (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press), 144–165.

⁶ For more on the present-day memoir boom, see Robert Kusek, *Through the Looking Glass: Writers' Memoirs at the Turn of the 21st Century* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2017), 13–33.

⁷ Jean-Louis Jeannelle, *Écrire ses Mémoires au XX^e siècle: déclin et renouveau d'une tradition* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 229.

⁸ G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Though not impossible. Some still consider the memoir to be secondary, sketchy, unliterary, and passive – see Lee Quinby, "The Subject of Memoirs: The Woman Warrior's Technology of Ideographic Selfhood," in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1992), 297–320; Helen Buss, *Reproducing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1992). Others also see the memoir as simply synonymous with autobiography and nothing more than the latter's more "popular" or "contemporary" version – see Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 35.

¹¹ Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity: Part One*, trans. E.W. Dicks (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

or as a piece “sketched or written without care” and having “no personal connotations”¹²; or as “a title for notes of purely factual content”¹³; or as a work whose “author has or affects to have no intention at all of coming forward as a literary person” since he or she “proposes only to supply material for a literary work that may be compiled by a future historian, or serve for research in other ways.”¹⁴ As a matter of fact, studies of the memoir that have been released since the late 1980s¹⁵ – not to mention some outstanding specimens of the genre that have been published in that given period¹⁶ – have consistently and conclusively proven the genre’s idiosyncrasy and singularity as well as its positive proliferation. Their authors have also persuasively argued against a narrow understanding of the memoir as a true yet partial story of the (authorial) self,¹⁷ in which the self – at least according to Philippe Lejeune – is no more than a “witness”¹⁸ (*un témoin*) to some larger historical events and social processes.¹⁹ Nevertheless, a thorough investigation of the memoir’s critical history reveals that a fully-fledged narratological approach²⁰ is still largely missing from the various definitions of the memoir that have been developed by the genre’s practitioners and theorists.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Suffice it to mention Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press); Nancy K. Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent’s Death* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996); Jean-Louis Jeannelle, op. cit.; Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010); Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); S. P. Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club*, ed. James M. Haule (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), and G. Thomas Couser, op. cit.

¹⁶ My personal “canon” of contemporary memoirs in English would include such volumes as John Updike’s *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (1989), William Styron’s *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (1990), J. M. Coetzee’s trilogy (*Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* [1997], *Youth* [2002], *Summertime: Scenes from Provincial Life* [2009]), Martin Amis’s *Experience: A Memoir* (2000), Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), Doris Lessing’s *Alfred and Emily* (2008), Diana Athill’s *Somewhere Towards the End* (2009), and Julian Barnes’s *Levels of Life* (2013).

¹⁷ See Philippe Lejeune, “Le pacte autobiographique,” in Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique: Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 14–15; Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity: Part One*, 6–7; Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History*, 1–3; Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, 113–114; S. P. Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group Memoir Club*, 16–19.

¹⁸ Philippe Lejeune, *L’autobiographie en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), 13.

¹⁹ According to Lejeune, the memoir’s subject is not the individual’s life nor is it the story of his personality. See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary, ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

²⁰ Such as the one proposed by Joanna Jeziorska-Haładyj in her study dedicated to the genres of reportage and autobiographical novel. See Joanna Jeziorska-Haładyj, *Tekstowe wykładniki fikcji na przykładzie reportażu i powieści autobiograficznej* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013).

A brief overview of some of the major present-day theoretical (and influential) discussions of the memoir may be particularly helpful when trying to substantiate the above-formulated claim.

For example, in her reading of the genealogy of the memoir entitled “Are Memoirs Autobiography?” published in 2004, Julie Rak not only questions the genre’s secondary status but also pays attention to the transgendered nature of the memoir since – all at once – it blends private and public; its subject may be one’s self or others; it is equally written “by the most powerful public men” and “the least known, most private women”;²¹ it describes “writing as process and writing as product.”²² Rak also notes that it is inconsistent in number and gender,²³ and, most interestingly, it has been both a masculine and a feminine noun.²⁴ Finally, it profoundly violates the laws of genres since it can be “a document note or a record, a record of historic events based on the writer’s personal knowledge or experience, an autobiography or a biography, an essay, or a memory kept of someone.”²⁵ Correspondingly, Nancy K. Miller also asserts the memoir’s unwillingness to “define the boundaries between private and public, subject and object.”²⁶ In *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent’s Death*, she calls the memoir (after Susan Chever) an “un-biography” and states the following:

I prefer the term *memoir* [over allography or life writing] for literary reasons but for etymological ones as well. By its roots, memoir encompasses both acts of memory and acts of recording – personal reminiscences and documentation. The word *record*, which crops up in almost every dictionary definition of memoir, contains a double meaning too. To record means literally to call to mind, to call up from the heart. At the same time, record means to set down in writing, to make official. What resides in the province of the heart is also what is exhibited in the public space of the world.²⁷

²¹ Julie Rak, “Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity,” *Genre*, vol. 36 (2004), 316.

²² *Ibid.*, 317.

²³ The term can be both singular and plural (and mean the *same*). In fact, Rak’s discussion of the genre of memoir is heavily indebted to Jacques Derrida’s study titled *Mémoires: Pour Paul de Man* (1988), in which Derrida pays attention to a number of characteristics that are, subsequently, prioritised in Rak’s analysis, e.g. the question of gender and number: “*Mémoires* in the plural. Too many memories. [...] The plural might lead one to understand something else, for example the multiplicity of dissociation of memories. And first of all the meaning of the French word ‘*mémoire*,’ in the unstable crossings of its gender (masculine or feminine) or its number (singular or plural).” Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), xi.

²⁴ Rak notes that after the centuries of fluctuations, the Middle French masculine word *mémoire* became feminine; yet it lost its second “e” which would be a clear mark of a feminine noun in French. Julie Rak, “Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity,” 316.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

²⁶ Nancy Miller, *Bequest and Betrayal...*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Miller ultimately classifies the memoir as a “hybrid form” and a “cross,”²⁸ and thus points to the borderline characteristics of the genre’s poetics, which becomes particularly endorsed in G. Thomas Couser’s 2012 study of the genre. This, so far, the most thorough discussion of this literary form, postulates what follows: the memoir belongs to the realm of non-fiction since it depicts the lives of real people,²⁹ but since it is based on the working of memory it is inevitably selective,³⁰ it can be both self- and other-life writing,³¹ it is a “term of art, the prestige term” which has recently spurned its centuries-long attribution of inferiority;³² it is “relational,”³³ i.e. concerned with intimate relationships, and focused on a discrete part of life.³⁴

What appears to be obvious in the context of the memoir’s poetics is that the definitions provided above ignore a number of thematic, modal, and formal markers that traditional³⁵ genre theory finds instrumental in defining a specific generic identity, including, for example, paratextual signposts or what, after Gérard Genette, one could call “semantic and stylistic microstructures”³⁶ (*micro-structures sémantico-stylistique*). While many generic *marqueurs* do, indeed, seem to require a more in-depth exploration with regard to the memoir (e.g. the form of language, the notion of the person as defined by a grammatical criterion, the position of the narrator *vis-à-vis* the character), this essay wishes to focus on one specific index – in line with the theme of the whole volume – namely “mode,” which, according to Genette, is concerned with the point of view, with “direct access to the characters’ subjectivity.”³⁷ Following Genette’s division into “internal focalization,” “external focalization,”³⁸ and “zero focalization,”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction*, 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

³² *Ibid.*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵ As opposed to, for example, semiotic or rhetorical genre theory.

³⁶ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 9.

³⁷ Gérard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 65. It needs to be emphasised that the use of the term “mode” with regard to the genre of memoir is based on the premise that the memoir is “a good story” and not “the truth” (Nancy K. Miller, “The Ethics of Betrayal. Diary of a Conundrum,” in *Truth in Nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar [Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2008], 44) and that, consequently, the individuals that populate the memoir’s pages can be legitimately labelled with the category of “character.”

³⁸ Gérard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 65–68. I remain aware that the choice of theoretical underpinnings that form the foundation for the present paper might be seen by some as limited and anachronous, particularly in light of a number of new studies dedicated to narrative perspective which follow the tenets of post-structuralist or cognitive narratology and which remain skeptical as far as Genette’s proposition is concerned (e.g. *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. Willie van Peer, Seymour Chatman [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001],

this paper will examine several contemporary specimens of the memoir (selected on the condition that they meet the criteria of the genre as stipulated by Rak, Miller, and Couser) and it will try to identify the occurrence of Genette's triad in their respective narratives. What is more, this paper will try to conclude whether such a narratological category as "mode" can be considered a generative tool as far as the memoir's genology is concerned and, if so, what overall implications this recognition might have for the understanding of the memoir's poetics.

2. In

If one considers the memoir to be an *Untergattungen* of autobiography – in other words, if one perceives it in terms of representing a classical autodiegetic historical narrative governed by the formula: author = narrator = character³⁹ – then one is more than entitled to declare that the genre's pre-eminent "narrative attitude"⁴⁰ is internal focalization, which most conspicuously manifests itself by means of internal monologue. A typical example of such a strategy can be encountered in what is widely considered a classical specimen of the parental memoir, *A Life's Work* by Rachel Cusk (2001):

Winter draws in. I begin to feel a more or less constant despair at my predicament. In the mornings, when I wake up, I observe the rising mountain of my stomach and have to fight surges of intense claustrophobia. With many weeks of pregnancy remaining I am marooned as far from myself as I will ever be. It is not just abstinence, stripped of the pleasure of the possibility of giving in to temptation, that grates upon me; not even the extremity of my physical transformation, not the strange pains that accompany it, not the surreally floundering being that writhes like alive fish in my stomach, not the disempowerment I feel, the vulnerability to others' eyes and assumptions. It is the population of my privacy, as if the door to my room were wide open and strangers were in there, rolling about, that I find hard to endure.⁴¹

Indeed, like many memoirists that focus on the stories of their "selves," throughout the whole narrative Cusk does not abandon the point of view of the narrator⁴² (= herself) concerned with the early experiences of motherhood and consistently gives voice to her own subjectivity.

Point of View, Perspective, and Focalization: Modeling Mediation in Narrative, ed. Peter Hühn, Wolf Schmid, Jörg Schönert [Berlin and New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2009]). However, for reasons of clarity and functionality of the category of mode with regard to the memoir's poetics/genology, I have decided to deliberately limit my discussion of point of view to Genette's triad.

³⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁴¹ Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 39–40.

⁴² The narrative does not allow for the voices of others – be it by means of direct or indirect speech.

However, as has already been stipulated, the memoir, more than any other life-writing genre, is happy to embrace other “voices”⁴³ and by no means can it be reduced to straightforward (and “pure”) autobiographical accounts only. Though the narratives that accede to the A = N = C (author = narrator = character) rule appear to be most favoured by contemporary memoirists, other formulas are also aplenty; suffice it to mention here heterodiegetic autobiography, which may be described in the following manner: author ≠ narrator, narrator ≠ character, author = character.⁴⁴ In recent years, a number of such unorthodox autobiographical (or *autrebiographical*, to use J. M. Coetzee’s useful phrase) accounts have been produced, just to mention Paul Auster’s *Winter Journal* (2012), in which the narrator refers to Paul Auster with the pronoun “you”⁴⁵ and Salman Rushdie’s *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012) (in which Salman Rushdie is addressed as “he”⁴⁶). Perhaps the best-known example of heterodiegetic memoir is J. M. Coetzee’s *autrebiographical* trilogy whose first volume uses free indirect style in a religious manner.⁴⁷ The passage quoted below, which opens the second chapter of *Boyhood* (1997), is a prime example of the memoir resorting to yet another form of internal focalization:

He shares nothing with his mother. His life at school is kept a tight secret from her. She shall know nothing, he resolves, but what appears on his quarterly report, which shall be impeccable. He will always come first in class. His conduct will always be Very Good, his progress Excellent. As long as the report is faultless, she will have no right to ask questions. That is the contract he establishes in his mind.⁴⁸

True to the characteristics of free indirect style as defined by Genette, the consciousness of the character (John), whose separation from the author has been achieved by the introduction of a grammatical person (“he”), “permeates the discourse in its entirety”⁴⁹ and allows for a thorough and uninterrupted merge of the character and the narrator.

⁴³ Understood as the position of the narrator and his or her relationship to the text’s characters (Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 68–69).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁵ Auster’s memoir opens memorably with the following sentence: “You think it will never happen to you, that it cannot happen to you, that you are the only person in the world to whom none of these things will ever happen, and then, one by one, they all begin to happen to you, in the same way they happen to everyone else.” Paul Auster, *Winter Journal* (New York: Henry Holt, 2012), 1.

⁴⁶ The book’s opening line reads: “Afterwards, when the world was exploding around him and the lethal blackbirds were massing on the climbing frame in the school playground, he felt annoyed with himself for forgetting the name of the BBC reporter, a woman, who had told him that his old life was over and a new, darker existence was about to begin.” Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2012), 3.

⁴⁷ Though by using the present tense instead of the past tense its application of free indirect speech is not particularly orthodox.

⁴⁸ John Maxwell Coetzee, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (London: Vintage, 1998), 5.

⁴⁹ Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 65.

3. Out

Although internal focalization may appear to some to be the only possible modal category within the memoir, a careful and detailed investigation of the genre's various specimens reveals that such a supposition is erroneous. In fact, external focalization, which "consists in abstaining from *any* intrusion into the characters' subjectivity, reporting only their acts and gestures as seen from the outside with no attempt at explanation,"⁵⁰ is often encountered in the memoir since that genre's preoccupation with the lives of *others* (human or non-human) is not secondary to the interest it takes in the stories of the *self*. Consequently, the narrator (= author) is many a time only a catalyst for sharing with his or her readers the *bioi* ("acts and gestures") of the book's protagonists. In such cases, the memoirist becomes the biographer – though the reasons for becoming the latter and, therefore, refraining from "intruding" into the subjectivity of the biographical subject⁵¹ may not be related to the pragmatics and inherent limitations of every biographical endeavour but to the memoirist's wish to protect the other from speculations formulated by the authorial/narratorial self.⁵²

One is tempted to speculate that such a rationale might have guided the critic and writer John Bayley when he was writing a memoir dedicated to his late wife Iris Murdoch and in which he narrated the loss of his spouse to Alzheimer's disease. *Elegy for Iris* (1999) appears to me to be a prime example of the use of external focalization – the mode which focuses on the life of the body but which keeps the life of the mind secret and unavailable to both the narrator and the book's readers. To Bayley, Murdoch is gone – she is, to use one of the phrases from the volume, a "corpse" whose grey substance "ceased to function."⁵³ For this very reason at no time does he enter his wife's subjectivity; what he does instead is to exclusively report (the events) and describe (the features; e.g. Murdoch's "lion face"⁵⁴), as in the following passage:

She protested [...] as I tugged off the outer layer. In her shabby old one-piece swimsuit (actually two-piece, with a separate skirt and tunic top), she was an awkward and anxious figure, her socks trailing round her ankles. She was obstinate about not taking these off, and I gave up the struggle. A pleasure barge chugged slowly past, an elegant girl in a bikini sunning

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵¹ Of course, I am referring here to traditional biographies and not to the genre's unorthodox specimens in which the biographer, using the formulas of fiction such as free indirect speech, freely imagines the life of the mind of his or her character (e.g. *Dickens* by Peter Ackroyd [1990]).

⁵² Particularly if the memoir's subject is someone dear to the author – be it a parent, sibling, child, or a spouse. Sometimes, as in the case of pet memoirs, the memoirist necessarily needs to refrain from any attempt at entering the subjectivity of his or her feline or canine protagonist.

⁵³ John Bayley, *Elegy for Iris* (New York, Picador USA, 1999), 76, 259.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

herself on the deck, a young man in white shorts at the steering wheel. Both turned to look at us [...] an elderly man struggling to remove the garments from an old lady, still with white skin and incongruously fair hair.⁵⁵

But in contemporary memoirs one will also find a slightly different example of the genre's application of external focalization to its narrative tissue. In Philip Hensher's *Scenes from Early Life* (2012), which by means of its use of the formula of homodiegetic fiction (author ≠ narrator, narrator = character, author ≠ character⁵⁶) may well be perceived as a tribute to Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, it is not the author/narrator institution that reports (and refuses to invade the character's subjectivity) but the narrator/character figure who "speaks in the voice of Zaved Mahmood,"⁵⁷ namely Philip Hensher's real-life husband. Indeed, the whole volume is written in the first-person narrative voice of the young Zaved, who recalls the story of his childhood and, most importantly, the story of his family. His parents, grandparents, and other relatives are, in fact, the major protagonists of *Scenes from Early Life*, and the stories of *their* lives take pride of place in the whole narrative. Zaved the narrator, a young Bangladeshi boy, is simply an observer, a chronicler, an aspiring historian of his family's "acts and gestures":

They [Nana, his grandfather, and his friend, Mr Khandekar-nana] both lived in the Dhanmondi area, very close to each other. It was the best place in Dacca to live. Nana's house was in road number six; Mr Khandekar-nana's was in road number forty. Both of them were two-storey houses with glass walls to the porch and flat roofs, both intricate and complex in their ground plan. It was only a ten-minute walk from Nana's house to Mr Khandekar-nana's, and it was a pleasant walk. The roads of Dhanmondi were quiet, and lined with trees, all painted white to four feet high, to discourage the ants. [...] On the walk from Nana's house to Khandekar-nana's house, you would see only the occasional ayah, or mother, walking with her children, only the occasional houseboy loafing outside against the high, whitewashed walls of the houses, in those days. but my grandfather had a big red car, a Vauxhall, I think, and we drove the short distance to Mr Khandekar-nana's house.⁵⁸

4. In and In and...

The third category of mode identified by Genette in his *Fiction and Diction* is the so-called zero focalization, which the French structuralist also calls a "nonfocalised mode"⁵⁹ and which applies to narratives that "seem to privilege no single 'point of view' and enter in turn, at will, into the minds of all its

⁵⁵ Ibid., 36–37.

⁵⁶ Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 76.

⁵⁷ Philip Hensher, *Scenes from Early Life* (London, Fourth Estate, 2012), 309.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁹ Genette, *Fiction and Diction...*, 67.

characters.”⁶⁰ In short, zero focalization is synonymous with the omniscient narrator. Although the presence of the latter in the genre which is traditionally recognised as belonging to “non-fiction” may appear unlikely, the corpus of contemporary memoirs does, indeed, contain specimens which combine the formula $A \neq N \neq C$ (author \neq narrator \neq character⁶¹), namely classical heterodiegetic fiction, with the “omniscient attitude.”⁶²

One such example is Doris Lessing’s *Alfred and Emily* (2008), a parental narrative in which Lessing juxtaposes the faux lives of her parents with their actual history. The piece’s narrator fulfils all of the criteria typically attributed to the all-knowing mode: unlimited access to the consciousness of the book’s characters (not only the titular Alfred and Emily but *every* protagonist that attracts the interest of the narrator) and complete knowledge about the diegesis, e.g. when the first chapter of the book opens, the readers learn that “the suns of the long summers at the beginning of the last century promised only peace and plenty, not to mention prosperity and happiness. No one remembered anything like those summer days when the sun always shone.”⁶³ Later they are also told that in “imagined” (and for this reason not affected by WWI since the Great War did not break out) 1920 “Britain was wealthy, was booming, was at a level of prosperity the leader writers and public figures congratulated themselves and everybody on. Britain had not had a war since the Boer War; nor were there wars in Western Europe, which was on a high level of well-being. It was enough only to contrast the dreadful situation of the old Austrian Empire and the Turkish Empire, in collapse, to know that keeping out of war was a recipe for prosperity.”⁶⁴ Most importantly for the deliberations on the category of mode, no single subjectivity is privileged and the narrator constantly travels from one character’s point of view to another, always knowing their innermost thoughts and feelings; from Mrs Lane to Alfred, from Alfred to Emily, from Emily to Dr Martin-White, etc. Not to mention the “excursions” the narrative makes into the historical figures, from the fictional Emily to the historical one, from the “fake” Alfred to the “real” one that fathered Doris Lessing.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 76.

⁶² Ibid., 67.

⁶³ Doris Lessing, *Alfred and Emily* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83–84.

⁶⁵ At the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century “Emily and Alfred were at the top of their lives, their fortunes – of everything,” states the narrator of the volume. But this phrase is immediately followed by an autobiographical intrusion of Doris Lessing (one of many) which disturbs the coherence and “purity” of the fictional narrative: “‘If only we could live our good years all over again,’ my mother would say, fiercely gathering those years into her arms and holding them safe, her eyes challenging her husband as if he were responsible for the end.” Ibid., 24.

5. Conclusion: In and Out

The aim of the above, succinct discussion of various “modes” operating within the genre of memoir attempted to show that contemporary memoirs exhibit a wide variety of relations that might exist between the narrators of the stories and the characters’ subjectivities. In fact, not some but *all* of the categories that were identified by Genette (internal, external, and zero focalization) are to be encountered when close-reading narratives classifiable as specimens of the memoir. What needs to be emphasised is that although the present paper has isolated individual modes and ascribed them to specific texts, in many cases those diverse narrative “attitudes” can be observed as appearing one next to the other, in the very same specimen of the genre. And hence, in Joyce Carol Oates’s *A Widow’s Story: A Memoir* (2011), the first-person narrative that gives voice to the grief of the widowed writer is accompanied by a third-person narrative in which the narrator describes the actions of “the Widow” – sometimes using free indirect style and imagining her thoughts,⁶⁶ sometimes doing as little as reporting her actions and critically commenting on her activities.⁶⁷ In Helen Macdonald’s *H is for Hawk* (2014), an internal thanatographical monologue by Macdonald is supplemented by a homodiegetic historical narrative, namely a biography of the writer T. H. White, in which “psychological explanation” (an entry into the subjectivity of the historical figure) is “justified”⁶⁸ by such strategies as references to external sources,⁶⁹ as well as heterodiegetic fiction (fragments in which the narrator freely imagines the life and thoughts of White *via* free indirect style⁷⁰).

Hence the question that should finally be addressed is how knowledge about the occurrence of all the narrative modes affects one’s understanding of the memoir’s poetics.

⁶⁶ “The Widow is consoling herself with a desperate stratagem. But then, all the widow’s stratagems are desperate right now. She will speculate that she didn’t fully know her husband – this will give her leverage to seek him, to come to know him. It will keep her husband ‘alive’ in her memory – elusive, teasing. For the fact is, the widow cannot accept it, that her husband is gone from her life irrevocably. She cannot accept it – she cannot even comprehend it – that she has no relationship with Raymond J. Smith [Oates’s husband] as his widow = the ‘executrix’ of his estate.” Joyce Carol Oates, *A Widow’s Story: A Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 97.

⁶⁷ “In this way, at this moment, the Widow acts instinctively – she does not drive home alone as perhaps she’d fantasized and she does not do harm to herself as perhaps she’d fantasized – she calls friends. But only friends whose telephone numbers she seems to have memorized.” *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶⁸ Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 66–67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “White was petrified. On his hawk’s tail were strange pale traverse stripes, as if someone had drawn a razor blade across the quills. He knew what they were: hunger-traced caused by lack of food as the feathers grew; weaknesses that made them liable to break. Guilt and blame. [...] Love me, he is saying. Please. I can make it up to you, make it better. Fix you. Please eat.” Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014), 74–75.

In light of the above, it needs to be noted that the category of mode can by no means be recognised as a productive generic index due to the fact that it does not operate as a valid *differentia specifica*. Since the memoir, as the present paper has attempted to argue, appears to welcome all points of view, any claim that would postulate that the materialisation of a specific mode in the narrative (next to the presence of other signposts) should be seen as a determining factor with regard to the establishment of a given generic identity needs to be rejected as fallacious.

However, this is not tantamount to stating that the manifestation of various types of narrative attitudes (i.e. modes) provides no insight into the memoir's conceptualisation as a literary genre. On the contrary, acknowledging this fact should be perceived as an important contribution to a larger debate regarding the provenience of life-writing genres as far as their belonging to the fictional and factual realms is concerned; a debate that may be summed up by Virginia Woolf's famous dictum: "Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously."⁷¹ If the theory of the points of view – which is organically linked to the idea of fictionality and traditionally applied to fictional narratives only – may be found useful when analysing contemporary memoirs and the category of "mode" is recognised as an operating tool for the discussion of the relationship between the memoirs' authors, narrators, and characters, then it may supply a legitimate argument to those who postulate that there is an inherent flaw and inadequacy in defining memoirs as works of non-fiction. And thus it may emerge as another incentive to re-think the poetics of the memoir and, consequently, its current position on the map of literary genres.

S u m m a r y

The aim of this paper is to investigate the concept of the point of view with regard to the genre of memoir. Having provided a brief discussion of the genre's poetics and various, often conflicting attempts at establishing its generic indexes as well as its generic identity, the paper will examine several contemporary specimens of the memoir and will try to identify the occurrence of Gérard Genette's modal triad (i.e. internal focalization, external focalization, and zero focalization) in their respective narratives. What is more, the paper will attempt to conclude whether such a narratological category as "mode" can be considered a generative tool as far as the memoir's genology is concerned and, if so, what overall implications this recognition might have for understanding the memoir's poetics and its traditional understanding as a genre of non-fiction.

⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," in *Virginia Woolf, Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 99.

NA ZEWNĄTRZ I WEWNĄTRZ.
WIELOŚĆ PUNKTÓW WIDZENIA W PAMIĘTNIKU

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę punktu widzenia w pamiętniku. Po wstępnych ustaleniach dotyczących poetyki gatunku i omówieniu licznych, często sprzecznych, prób określenia jego gatunkowych wykładników, badam jego współczesne realizacje, wykorzystując do analizy triadyczny model trybów narracji Gérarda Genette'a (fokalizacja wewnętrzna, zewnętrzna i zerowa). Próbuję odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy kategorię trybu uznać należy za operacyjną w odniesieniu do specyfiki gatunkowej pamiętnika i jakie konsekwencje ma jej zastosowanie dla tradycyjnych ujęć pamiętnika jako gatunku niefikcyjnego.