From the Female Rock Memoir to the Personal Essay

The (Re)construction of Identity in Patti Smith's Autobiographical Prose Work

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FROM THE FEMALE ROCK MEMOIR TO THE PERSONAL ESSAY: THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN PATTI SMITH'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE WORK

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Que la Comisión Académica del Programa de Doctorado, en su sesión de fecha . . . . . , tomó el acuerdo de dar el consentimiento para su tramitación a la tesis doctoral titulada "From the Female Rock Memoir to the Personal Essay: The (Re)Construction of Identity in Patti Smith's Autobiographical Prose Work" presentada por el/la doctoranda D.ª Silvia Hernández Hellín y dirigida por el Doctor José Manuel Rodríguez Herrera.

Y, para que así conste, y a efectos de lo previsto en el Artº 11 del Reglamento de Estudios de Doctorado (BOULPGC 7/10/2016) de la Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, firmo la presente en Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, a . . . . . de . . . . . de dos mil veintiuno.

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Tesis Doctoral presentada por D.ª

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Dirigida por el Dr. D.

José Manuel Rodríguez Herrera

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the 1970s, when Patti Smith made her debut both as poet and singer-songwriter, she has been known most famously as the androgynous "Godmother of Punk" who merges music and poetry in one single performance. In 2010, Smith published her first autobiographical prose work, *Just Kids*, in the form of a memoir, revealing yet another facet of her voice. This book was followed by *M Train* (2015) and *Year of the Monkey* (2019), which have also been shelved as memoirs. All three accounts, indeed, are now considered to be part of the rising subgenre of the female rock memoir, a form that encompasses narratives by women who were part of the early rock industry. In this dissertation, I argue that Patti Smith's autobiographical prose works have been inaccurately classified, suggesting that there is a tendency, already present in *Just Kids* but more clearly discernible in her two other books, towards the form of personal essay and away from the female rock memoir. Alongside this examination, I also analyze the process of constructing a female identity through life writing—which, in Patti Smith's case is a process of (re)construction, her public image having already been constituted by others. In order to explore these themes, I delve into the main autobiographical forms present in *Just Kids* (relational memoir, *Künstlerroman*, autothanatography, and autoethnography), *M Train* (journal, grief memoir, autotopography, and travel narrative), and *Year of the Monkey* (autofiction, caregiver's tale, personal essay, and travel narrative), as well as the interplay between text and photography in these accounts.

In this research, which is grounded in life writing theory, I mainly raise questions on the blurring of the boundaries between genres and the role played by autobiographical forms in the construction of a public self, but I also explore issues concerning celebrity writing, the significance of the outside world in self-constitution, or the presence of fiction in autobiographical accounts, among others. Individually, *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* each deal with a period in Smith's life, revealing particular aspects of her private as well as public identity. Together, these books add up to a self-portrait (both literary and photographic) which challenges previous images associated with the author. Almost five decades after starting her career in the world of poetry and music, Patti Smith is now respected as a writer both in popular culture and in the realm of high art. With this research, I ultimately intend to bring Smith's autobiographical prose work into the spotlight so that we can get to know her through her own words.

RESUMEN

En 2010, tras forjarse una trayectoria de cuatro décadas más conocidamente como cantante y poeta, aunque también como artista visual, Patti Smith publicó su primer libro de memorias, *Éramos unos Niños* (*Just Kids*), obra galardonada con el Premio Nacional del Libro en la categoría de no ficción. A lo largo de la última década, Smith, que ahora tiene 74 años, ha publicado otros dos trabajos de prosa autobiográfica —*M Train* (2015) y *El año del Mono* (*Year of the Monkey*, 2019)— cada uno de los cuales aborda un periodo diferente de su vida. Aunque, durante muchos años, el foco ha recaído en la faceta de Patti Smith como «madrina del punk», la reciente publicación de sus trabajos de prosa autobiográfica nos descubre una nueva dimensión de una de las voces más poderosas y con mayor alcance en la cultura popular.

Éramos unos Niños, *M Train* y *El año del Mono* han sido catalogados como libros de memorias y son ahora considerados parte del emergente subgénero de las memorias de mujeres del rock («*female rock memoir*»). El principal argumento de esta tesis gira en torno a la incorrecta clasificación de la obra autobiográfica de Patti Smith, sugiriendo que existe una tendencia, ya presente en *Éramos unos Niños* pero más claramente discernible en sus otros dos libros, que se acerca al ensayo personal y se aleja de las memorias de las mujeres del rock. Junto con este análisis, se explora el proceso de construcción de la identidad femenina a través del discurso autobiográfico el cual, en el caso de Patti Smith, está inmerso en un proceso de (re)construcción, ya que su imagen pública ha sido previamente constituida por otros (la prensa, los fans). Los principales objetivos de esta investigación son: (1) analizar la construcción de la identidad a través de la teoría del *life writing*; (2) determinar si *Éramos unos Niños*, *M Train* y *El año del Mono* pueden ser considerados libros de memorias y, en su defecto, proponer una nueva categorización; (3) hacer un análisis detallado de la representación del yo y de la constitución de la identidad en *Éramos unos Niños*, *M Train* y *El año del Mono* explorando las principales formas autobiográficas presentes en los textos; (4) analizar la interrelación entre texto y fotografía en el contexto de la obra autobiográfica de Patti Smith y determinar hasta qué punto esta interacción afecta tanto al género de los libros como al proceso de construcción de la identidad; y, por último, (5) explorar hasta qué punto Patti Smith hace uso del *life writing* para cuestionar la imagen de su personaje público a través de la construcción de su personaje privado.

Desde *Éramos unos Niños* hasta *El año del Mono* se observa una transición prácticamente lineal de las memorias de mujeres del rock al ensayo personal. A lo largo del último siglo, la autobiografía de personajes públicos ha ganado reconocimiento como género ya establecido, lo cual ha implicado un aumento en la publicación de autobiografías relacionadas con la industria de la música. Aunque Patti Smith no es necesariamente pionera en este tipo de escritura, la publicación de *Éramos unos Niños* guarda mucha relación con el aumento significativo de obras representativas de este fenómeno literario. Desde el año 2010, cuando el primer libro de memorias de Smith obtuvo el Premio Nacional del Libro en la categoría de no ficción, los nombres de otras mujeres del rock han empezado a ocupar cada vez más espacio en las librerías. Esto ha dado lugar a un nuevo subgénero, conocido en el mundo anglosajón como *female rock memoir* y traducido aquí como «memorias de mujeres del rock». Este subgénero engloba todos aquellos textos autobiográficos escritos por mujeres que formaron parte de los inicios de la industria del rock. En sus libros, las autoras abordan —de manera implícita o explícita— cuestiones relativas al género, la edad o la fama, temáticas que las diferencian de sus homólogos masculinos.

El ensayo personal, por su parte, se caracteriza por un estilo informal, una estructura flexible, un tono familiar y la clara huella de la personalidad del autor. Se trata de un género que no busca situar al autor en el centro del discurso; a pesar de que, ciertamente, existe un elemento autobiográfico inherente al texto, la figura del autor no debe prevalecer sobre los temas examinados en el ensayo. Además, la exploración del yo solo tiene relevancia si es extrapolable a la experiencia universal. Destacan en el ensayo personal la necesidad de establecer una relación de confianza lo más cercana posible con el lector y la búsqueda de un narrador fiable. En última instancia, el ensayista no tiene como objetivo escribir un texto lógico y estructurado, sino ofrecer al lector un conocimiento que va más allá de la experiencia personal.

Para entender los mecanismos que operan en la transición de un género a otro, es necesario hacer un análisis, tanto del texto como de las imágenes, de los tres libros autobiográficos de Patti Smith. *Éramos unos Niños* narra la historia de la relación de Patti Smith con el fotógrafo vanguardista Robert Mapplethorpe, así como su participación en la floreciente escena bohemia de la ciudad de Nueva York. Con la relación de Patti y Robert como hilo conductor, Smith nos lleva desde su llegada a Nueva York en 1976 hasta la devastadora muerte de Robert en 1989, al tiempo que retrata el viaje de estos dos

jóvenes deseosos de abrirse camino en el mundo del arte. Para Julia Watson, *Éramos unos niños* es un libro que combina diferentes géneros: memorias «relacionales», *Künstlerroman* (novela del artista), autotanatografía, y autoetnografía. El estudio de la obra desde el punto de vista de estas formas autobiográficas nos permite analizar tanto la evolución del discurso con respecto a *M Train* y *El año del Mono*, como la (re)construcción de la identidad pública de Patti Smith.

El término «relacional» hace referencia a aquellos textos en los que la historia del yo está insertada en la historia de otro(s), normalmente una persona muy cercana, como puede ser un familiar o una pareja. Aunque todos los libros de memorias presentan algún grado de «relacionalidad» (es prácticamente imposible contar nuestra historia sin hacer referencia a aquellas personas que nos rodean) *Éramos unos Niños* destaca precisamente por su alto grado de relacionalidad. Este libro no versa sobre la vida de Patti Smith o de la de Robert Mapplethorpe, sino sobre la vida en común de estos dos personajes. De hecho, todo cuanto está vinculado a Smith o Mapplethorpe como personajes individuales pero que no es relevante en la historia de su relación queda fuera del texto. Además, el libro se presenta como el resultado de una promesa que Smith le hizo a Mapplethorpe poco antes de que él falleciera. El grado de relacionalidad es tal que afecta a todos los demás aspectos de la historia.

En cuanto al *Künstlerroman*, esta forma encuentra su origen en el *Bildungsroman* o novela de aprendizaje, solo que en este caso se trata del aprendizaje y crecimiento de un artista. La relación de Patti y Robert está marcada desde un principio por el deseo de ambos de prosperar en el mundo del arte y de establecer contacto con aquellas personas que les pudieran facilitar el camino. Patti y Robert se mueven en ambientes en los que se respira arte en cada esquina, como es el caso del Hotel Chelsea. En *Éramos unos Niños* Smith retrata los primeros pasos de estos dos personajes en las diferentes disciplinas artísticas en las que van teniendo la oportunidad de adentrarse, hasta que, finalmente, Patti se decanta por la poesía y la música, y Robert por la fotografía. Este crecimiento artístico es directamente proporcional, en todo momento, al apoyo mutuo que reciben el uno del otro, así como al fluido intercambio de los roles de artista y musa: ambos son artistas, pero ambos también asumen el papel de musa.

El tercer género autobiográfico presente en el libro es el de la autotanatografía. A pesar de que este término suena contradictorio (uno no puede relatar su propia muerte), en este caso el término se ciñe a la relación tan estrecha que mantienen los personajes.

Aunque *Éramos unos Niños* no se centra en la historia de la muerte de Robert Mapplethorpe, este no deja de ser un acontecimiento que condiciona tanto la escritura de la historia como la lectura de esta. De hecho, el libro comienza y acaba con el fallecimiento de Robert, dotándose así de una estructura narrativa circular. Lo que lo convierte en una autotanatografía es el hecho de que una parte importante de Patti se pierde cuando Robert fallece. Además, *Éramos unos Niños* es también la historia de otras pérdidas: amigos, lugares, sensaciones.

Finalmente, dada la importancia que adquiere el entorno en esta historia, se puede hablar de este libro de memorias en términos de autoetnografía. Tanto la ciudad de Nueva York como todos los lugares que allí posibilitan el desarrollo artístico y personal de Patti y Robert son clave en esta historia. No se puede pensar en estos personajes sin relacionarlos con todo lo que les rodea. Sin embargo, no se trata solo de lugares o personas, sino de todo lo que allí sucede: lo que se respira, lo que se escucha o lo que se siente. Smith retrata en este libro una atmósfera que condiciona todo lo que en ella sucede, una atmósfera que sigue intacta en su mente décadas después.

Éramos unos Niños puede ser clasificado como un ejemplo del subgénero de memorias de mujeres del rock en tanto en cuanto la autora pertenece a ese círculo de mujeres que formaron parte de los inicios de la industria del rock, en concreto del punk. No obstante, al compararla con los demás textos que se engloban dentro de esta categoría, se aprecian claramente una serie de diferencias que alejan el texto de Smith de la norma. *Éramos unos Niños* no narra la forma en que Patti Smith se convirtió en una de las primeras voces femeninas del punk, sino la historia de su relación de amor, amistad y, en última instancia, hermandad con Robert Mapplethorpe. Muchos momentos importantes en la carrera musical de Smith se omiten porque no son relevantes para la historia de la relación de los personajes. Lo mismo sucede con las fotografías que se incluyen en el libro: estas no muestran a Smith en el escenario, en el *backstage* o en el estudio de grabación, sino que se trata más bien de imágenes de la pareja más propias del ámbito privado.

M Train no es, como muchos esperaban, la continuación del primer libro de memorias de Patti Smith. Este libro no narra la vida de Smith tras la muerte de Robert Mapplethorpe, sino que se centra en el día a día de la autora a lo largo del año 2012. *M Train* contiene una prosa más experimental que refleja el fluir de la conciencia. Presente y pasado se entremezclan en un texto en el que Smith reflexiona acerca de la pérdida (en

especial la de su difunto marido Fred «Sonic» Smith), el autoconocimiento y el paso del tiempo. Esta obra, centrada en la cotidianeidad de la vida de Patti Smith a sus 66 años, se aleja considerablemente del fenómeno de las memorias de mujeres del rock. Tomando como base el análisis que hace Watson de *Éramos unos Niños*, en *M Train* se identifican las siguientes formas autobiográficas: el diario, las memorias de duelo («*grief memoir*»), la autotopografía y la narrativa de viajes. Estas denotan una clara tendencia hacia la reflexión y el carácter meditativo.

Cuando hablamos de diario en este contexto, no debemos entenderlo como la práctica tradicional de escribir sobre lo acontecido cada día de la semana (el equivalente de «*diary*» en inglés), sino como un texto en el que se reflexiona acerca de temas cotidianos (el equivalente de «*journal*» en inglés): el interés no reside tanto en lo que sucede sino en cómo lo sucedido afecta a la persona que escribe. Se trata, pues, de una narración poco lineal, que permite digresiones y que se asemeja a un monólogo interior. Es una forma que se acerca bastante al ensayo personal y que se aleja de la narración tradicional con planteamiento, nudo y desenlace. En el caso de *M Train*, Patti Smith escribe, sobre todo, acerca de la edad y del paso del tiempo y todo lo que ello conlleva: cambio, pérdida, entendimiento de una misma.

Respecto a las memorias de duelo, se trata de una traducción de la expresión inglesa «*grief memoir*», subgénero que engloba todos aquellos textos en los que existe una forma de duelo pero en el que destacan, particularmente, las historias de mujeres que han perdido a sus esposos. En este caso, la vida de Smith en *M Train* está marcada por el recuerdo de la muerte de su marido, en 1994. Aunque han pasado dos décadas desde ese momento, el día a día de Patti está todavía marcado por los lugares y objetos que le recuerdan a Fred. No se trata en este caso de una autotanatografía dado que no subyace esa «relacionalidad» que marcaba la historia de Patti y Robert: *M Train* no habla sobre la relación de Patti y Fred, sino sobre la vida, más bien solitaria, de Patti. Aunque el personaje de Fred (o su recuerdo) está muy presente, esta no es su historia. Smith se encuentra, pues, en un constante viaje entre presente y pasado, un viaje que está en todo momento marcado por un sentimiento de pérdida.

La tercera forma autobiográfica que encontramos en *M Train* es la autotopografía, un género en el cual los objetos son considerados artefactos autobiográficos, es decir, encierran información sobre la persona que los posee. Los objetos se convierten en representaciones físicas de nuestras relaciones, nuestros intereses o nuestro pasado. Smith

hace referencia en este libro a objetos a priori ordinarios que para ella encierran un carácter sagrado. Algunos de estos objetos actúan en *M Train* como catalizadores de recuerdos, transportando a Smith a historias pasadas. Otros se convierten en portales a universos paralelos, como es el caso de los libros o los objetos que poseían otros artistas. La importancia de los objetos es tal que puede afirmarse que estos son los grandes protagonistas de las fotografías del libro. A medida que vamos avanzando en la lectura, nos damos cuenta de que los objetos acaban convirtiéndose en extensiones de la propia autora.

Por último, *M Train* puede leerse, en cierto modo, como una narrativa de viajes. En este caso, podemos hablar de un viaje que tiene lugar tanto en el exterior como en el interior. En el libro, Patti visita ciudades como Berlín, Ciudad de México o Tokio, aunque también pasa gran parte de su tiempo rememorando viajes del pasado. Se produce, de esta forma, una especie de viaje continuo en el tiempo, y somos testigos de cómo la autora se mueve constantemente entre dos tiempos narrativos. Otra forma de viajar para Smith es a través de los sueños, muy presentes en el texto. Además de lo anterior, se produce, de forma paralela, un viaje interior en el que Patti Smith se va reconciliando con ciertos aspectos del sentimiento de pérdida y del paso del tiempo, entre otras cuestiones.

En *M Train* lo mundano se convierte en extraordinario, los objetos se convierten en pequeñas autobiografías y los viajes al extranjero se convierten en viajes al interior. Este libro denota una evolución respecto a *Éramos unos Niños* no solo en la forma de Patti Smith de entender el mundo, sino en su narrativa. Si ya en el anterior libro la autora se alejaba de lo que otras mujeres del rock han escrito en sus memorias, en este apenas existe conexión alguna con el género. Smith se muestra como una mujer madura, con gran capacidad introspectiva, que encuentra consuelo en un mundo que, en ocasiones, se aleja de lo real y tangible. *M Train* es, en definitiva, una invitación a subir al tren mental de Patti Smith.

El año del Mono es el tercer trabajo autobiográfico de Patti Smith que se analiza en esta investigación. La historia de este libro comienza a principios de 2016, un año que Patti Smith supuestamente debiera haber disfrutado en compañía de su gran amigo Sandy Pearlman. Sin embargo, se encuentra sola en Santa Cruz, California, con Sandy en coma en Marin County. 2016 se convierte así en un año de vigilia, no solo por Sandy, sino también por Sam Shepard, que ha sido diagnosticado de ELA (esclerosis lateral amiotrófica). En esta historia, Patti viaja de este a oeste en Estados Unidos para cuidar de

sus dos amigos mientras reflexiona sobre el acto de la escritura, el paso del tiempo y el clima político. *El año del Mono* es la prueba de que Smith se siente bastante cómoda con el género autobiográfico; lo suficiente como para transgredirlo. Una vez más, esta obra se configura como un texto híbrido que da cabida a las siguientes formas: la autoficción, el cuento del cuidador («*caregiver's tale*»), el ensayo personal y la narrativa de viajes.

Si en *M Train* Smith ya jugaba con la idea de introducir sueños en una historia que era mayoritariamente verídica, en *El año del Mono* no duda a la hora de entremezclar sueños y realidad de tal modo que el lector deja de distinguir una cosa de la otra. Esta vez, la línea que separa lo ficticio de lo real se difumina intencionadamente. Esto da lugar al género de la autoficción (también llamado ficción autobiográfica), en virtud del cual la autora se inspira tanto en su vida real como en su imaginación para configurar el texto, manteniendo siempre una actitud de honestidad. En *El año del Mono*, Smith asegura mantener conversaciones con objetos inanimados, entabla amistad con personajes cuya existencia se torna dudosa a medida que la historia avanza y hace referencia a sucesos que ninguna otra persona parece haber presenciado. En última instancia, el lector debe entender que la autora se ha valido de este recurso para abordar temas que son supuestamente verídicos.

El género del cuento del cuidador hace referencia a historias narradas por aquellas personas que se ocupan, durante un tiempo considerable, de los cuidados de otra persona dependiente (normalmente a causa de una enfermedad). En *El año del Mono*, Patti Smith habla de dos amigos que están pasando por un momento delicado. Por un lado, Sandy Pearlman ha sufrido una hemorragia cerebral que lo mantiene inconsciente en el hospital. Por otro lado, Sam Shepard padece ELA, una enfermedad que limita cada vez más su movilidad y su autonomía. Aunque ni Sandy ni Sam necesitan una cuidadora (Sandy está rodeado de médicos y enfermeros en el hospital y Sam vive con su hermana), en cierta medida Patti asume ese rol, manteniéndose en contacto con ellos de una u otra forma en todo momento. Tratándose de amigos tan cercanos, Smith no puede evitar los sentimientos típicamente asociados al oficio cotidiano del cuidador: miedo, remordimiento, tristeza. Ambos personajes acaban falleciendo y Smith entiende al final que hay muchas formas de acompañar a nuestros seres queridos, incluso después de la muerte.

Uno de los principales argumentos de esta investigación gira en torno a la idea de que los libros de Patti Smith se acercan cada vez más al género del ensayo personal. *El*

año del Mono es, hasta la fecha, el libro en el que más nítidamente se puede constatar esa transición. No en vano, se trata de una de las principales formas autobiográficas presentes en el texto. Mientras que en *M Train* ya se advertía un carácter más reflexivo con respecto a *Éramos unos Niños*, esta vez Smith reflexiona no solo sobre temas que le afectan a ella personalmente, sino también sobre cuestiones globales de mayor alcance. Por primera vez en sus textos autobiográficos, Smith habla abiertamente de temas como el cambio climático o las elecciones presidenciales de Estados Unidos, aunque siempre circunscritas al devenir de su día a día (de ahí que el ensayo sea, ante todo, personal, y no crítico o sociológico).

Por último, *El año del Mono* comparte con *M Train* el género de la narrativa de viajes. Aunque en este caso la mayoría de desplazamientos se producen dentro de Estados Unidos, tiene lugar también, de forma paralela, un viaje interior. En esta historia Patti viaja, sobre todo, para visitar a sus amigos, aunque también para reencontrarse consigo misma. Viajar se convierte para ella en un ritual sagrado: preparar la maleta, inspeccionar la habitación del hotel, pasear por calles desconocidas; hasta el más mínimo detalle parece tener relevancia para la autora. Sin embargo, la comodidad de lo conocido y la estabilidad están también muy presentes en este libro. La clave reside, pues, en el equilibrio: para Smith el hogar cobra la misma importancia que el viaje.

En esta historia en la que nada es lo que parece y en la que algunos enigmas quedan sin resolver, Patti Smith también comparte con nosotros algunas certezas: se puede cuidar de los seres queridos en la distancia; el autoconocimiento es un proceso que nunca termina; y se puede viajar a través de la mente. *El año del Mono* es una vía de escape para Smith, una forma diferente de compañía. Aunque no se trata de un ensayo personal *per se*, ya que no existe una historia del todo fiable, en términos de veracidad absoluta, este género apunta hacia una nueva dirección en la narrativa de Patti Smith.

El uso que Patti Smith hace de la fotografía viene a confirmar las premisas sobre las que se sustenta el análisis textual de *Éramos unos Niños*, *M Train* y *El año del Mono*. Lejos de encontrar imágenes de la autora sobre el escenario, en el estudio de grabación o en el *backstage* (lo cual es típico de las memorias de mujeres del rock), nos encontramos con fotografías que están en consonancia con los subgéneros presentes en los diferentes textos. Tratándose del libro más convencional, *Éramos unos Niños* cuenta con más fotografías de la autora que los otros libros. Sin embargo, las que destacan son las fotografías que muestran a Patti y Robert juntos, insistiendo una vez más en el carácter

relacional de la obra. En *M Train* encontramos, ante todo, instantáneas que muestran objetos o lugares significativos para Smith, aunque también podemos ver a Smith y a Fred en algunas imágenes. Lo mismo sucede en *El año del Mono*, donde solo tres fotografías muestran el rostro de la autora, siendo una de ellas la imagen de la portada. De esta manera, Patti Smith construye su identidad de una forma poco convencional (a través de su relación con otras personas, lugares u objetos); la clave reside en la combinación de texto e imagen.

El uso que hace Smith de la fotografía, no obstante, va más allá de la relación con las formas autobiográficas mencionadas. La imagen también complementa al texto en lo que se refiere a la dualidad realidad/ficción. En *Éramos unos Niños*, una historia que se presenta como verídica, las fotografías están en todo momento directamente relacionadas con lo que se cuenta en el texto: dicho de otro modo, sirven de apoyo gráfico a la narración. En *El año del Mono*, por el contrario, el uso de la imagen sirve para cuestionar aun más los límites que separan la realidad de la ficción. Así, encontramos en el libro imágenes de lugares que Smith dice no haber visitado y objetos que pertenecen a personajes que, aparentemente, no han existido.

Éramos unos Niños, *M Train* y *El año del Mono* son, en cierto modo, fotobiografías independientes en las que la interrelación entre texto e imagen (dónde están colocadas las imágenes, si cuentan o no con pie de foto, si sirven o no de complemento a la narración) desvela diferentes aspectos sobre la obra. Sin embargo, podemos pensar también en estos tres libros como una narración continua que da lugar a un único autorretrato literario en el que se muestra una construcción identitaria mucho más rica y compleja. Este sería, entonces, un autorretrato literario híbrido que evidencia las múltiples facetas de las que puede constar una única identidad. De la interacción entre texto e imagen nace una tercera narración que queda de esta forma sujeta a la interpretación del lector.

Las conclusiones que se derivan de este estudio giran en torno a la (re)construcción de la imagen pública de Patti Smith a través de los géneros enmarcados dentro del *life writing*. La literatura autobiográfica de Patti Smith se caracteriza por una hibridez que se resiste a cualquier tipo de clasificación reduccionista, de ahí que se haya realizado un análisis exhaustivo de los libros. En primer lugar, queda claro que *Éramos unos Niños*, *M Train* y *El año del Mono* no pueden ser clasificados de la misma manera, puesto que presentan diferencias no solo temáticas, sino también narrativas. Se aprecia

una evolución de lo público a lo privado, de lo real a lo ficticio, del ámbito de lo propiamente narrativo al ámbito del fluir de la conciencia, de las memorias de mujeres del rock al ensayo personal. Para que el pacto autobiográfico funcione correctamente y el horizonte de expectativas del lector no se vea afectado de forma negativa, es necesario tener todos estos aspectos en consideración. En última instancia, la mezcla de formas autobiográficas en la obra de Patti Smith tiene como resultado una narración con múltiples niveles de significado, lo que permite a la autora (re)construir la identidad de su personaje público a través de la exploración de su personaje privado. A raíz de la publicación de *Éramos unos Niños*, *M Train* y *El año del Mono*, Patti Smith se ha convertido en una autora muy respetada en escenarios tan diversos como el de la cultura popular y el de la alta cultura.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If you came of age during the late sixties or early seventies, chances are you have heard of Patti Smith, the Godmother of Punk: androgynous, rebellious, non-conformist, revolutionary. I came of age during the 2010s and, up to that point, had never properly heard of Patti Smith. Her name did ring a bell—it had probably entered my cultural imaginary through the occasional allusions on television or on the radio—and I could even hum the melody to her hit record "Because the Night." I had not anticipated, however, that I would find in her autobiographical prose work[1] a remarkably well-read, deeply introspective, committed and passionate writer.

In 2010, after carving out a four-decade career as performer and poet but also as visual artist, Patti Smith published her first memoir, *Just Kids*, which won the National Book Award for Nonfiction. Over the last decade, Smith, now 74, has published two other autobiographical prose works—*M Train* (2015) and *Year of the Monkey* (2019)—each of which examines a different period in her life. These two books have also received praise from the literary community and have helped Patti Smith establish herself as a respected writer. Before the publication of these three works, Smith had already been named Commander of the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*[2] by the French Ministry of Culture (2005) as well as inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (2007). Apart from the National Book Award for Nonfiction, she has now received the 2020 PEN/Audible Literary Service Award and the 2020 Wall Street Journal Magazine Literature Innovator Award, and is set to receive the 2020 Washington University International Humanities Prize, whose ceremony is yet to be held due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the spotlight has normally been on Patti Smith's androgynous rockstar persona, the publication of her autobiographical prose works has revealed yet another dimension of one of the most powerful and far-reaching female voices in popular culture.

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[1] Throughout the dissertation, whenever discussing *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* in the same context, I will refer to these as Patti Smith's 'autobiographical prose work(s)' in order to avoid more specific labels such as 'autobiographies' or 'memoirs' which are not entirely adequate (except when quoting other authors who have labelled the works as such). Despite not being autobiographies per se, they are, to a greater or lesser extent, autobiographical in nature, hence the use of the adjective 'autobiographical.' I also specify the fact that these are prose works in order to differentiate them from other autobiographical literature produced by Smith in the form of poetry.

[2] It is the highest of the three grades (Commander, Officer, and Knight) granted by the French Ministry of Culture as a recognition for artists who have contributed to the field of arts and/or literature.

Born in Chicago but raised mainly in rural New Jersey, Patti Smith was, from a very early age, exposed to music, painting, and literature.[3] Brought up as a Jehovah's Witness, she soon found in literature what religion failed to offer her: the possibility to enter other universes and the hope that one day she would create those universes herself. Barely twenty years old and having put her first child up for adoption, Patti Smith changed her rural environment, still heavily influenced by the fifties reality she so clearly deplored, for New York City, the place where she would ultimately blossom personally, socially, and artistically. Together with Robert Mapplethorpe, whom she met shortly after arriving in the city, she slowly climbed the social ladder of the underground scene. At first lovers and then lifelong friends, Smith and Mapplethorpe explored different artistic expressions until she settled for performing her poetry and singing, and he for photography. Smith famously delivered her first poetry reading at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in 1971 with Lenny Kaye on guitar and, soon after, she received offers to publish her poetry. It was not until 1975 that her debut album, *Horses*, was released. From this moment on, Patti Smith came to be known primarily as a punk poetess and singer-songwriter. Throughout the seventies, she released three other albums with the Patti Smith Group until, around 1980, she married guitar player Fred "Sonic" Smith and moved with him to Detroit to start a family, retiring from music. In 1988, Patti Smith released *Dream of Life*, an album made together with her husband. The couple continued with their life in Detroit until, in 1994, Fred "Sonic" Smith passed away. Two years later, Smith moved back to New York with her children and resumed her career. She has since released six more albums with the Patti Smith Group and has published a dozen books (poetry collections, autobiographical prose, or photography collections).[4]

Patti Smith has normally been considered an essential figure in seventies New York's countercultural scene, especially as regards the birth of punk music, hence her nickname "the Godmother of Punk." Her countercultural roots, still present in her personality as well as in her writing, can be traced back to the literature of the Beat

[3] With this brief biographical sketch I do not intend to examine Patti Smith's life in detail. The information has been taken from different sources (interviews, biographies, and the writer's own work—all of which are included in the list of works cited) and condensed to provide the reader who might not be familiar with the author with some context.

[4] Apart from her own work, she has featured in various albums by the Soundwalk Collective and has written prefaces, forewords, and introductions to several books, among which we find Janet Hamill's *Tales from the Eternal Café* (2014) or Sam Shepard's *The One Inside* (2017).

Generation and the French Symbolists, with Arthur Rimbaud as her main inspiration. Among other disparate influences, she found inspiration in music as well, notably in Bob Dylan's songwriting. However, while hers may still be a voice of dissent, her discourse has evolved. In a 2012 interview for the Louisiana Literature Festival in Denmark, she admitted that she is "still the girl that can put her foot through the amplifier," but she also paraphrased Walt Whitman, reminding the audience that "we contain multitudes"[5] ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:00:48-00:01:26). There is more to Patti Smith than merely a punk attitude and an androgynous sense of style. Through her autobiographical prose work, we get to know a woman who always chooses resiliency in the face of loss; an artist who never ceases to admire the work of others; an activist concerned for the environment and for those who are not granted a voice; above all, we get to know a writer whose exquisite literature explores the self in an attempt to make sense of a life. This is the Patti Smith that will be presented in this dissertation, one whose work speaks for herself.

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to examine life writing and the process of self-representation and identity construction in Patti Smith's autobiographical literature, while reconsidering the genre to which *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* should be ascribed. The title of this essay consists of two interdependent parts which introduce the central hypotheses on which the study is based. On the one hand, the scope of this thesis attempts to address the imprecise categorization of Patti Smith's autobiographical work by demonstrating how, with each new publication, Smith progressively moves away from the genre of memoir. "From the Female Rock Memoir to the Personal Essay" points to a shift (in form but also in content) in Patti Smith's autobiographical literature, from a more conventional rockstar narrative to a rather introspective meditation on a number of issues that concern her and the world around her. On the other hand, "The (Re)Construction of Identity in Patti Smith's Autobiographical Prose Work" refers to the process which takes place alongside the life-writing act. I have added the prefix *re-* to the idea of constructing an identity because Patti Smith is a public figure whose image has been, for a long time, constituted through other people's words. Based on personal perceptions and judgments of Patti Smith's public actions, journalists and writers (the so-called 'unauthorized biographers') have been constructing a public identity for her. Now,

[5] All video transcriptions are mine. Quotations may have been lightly edited for concision and readability.

through her autobiographical prose work, Smith has started to reconstruct this public image through the exploration of her most private self.

In order to address these matters I have defined the following main objectives: (1) to analyze the construction of identity in life writing; (2) to determine whether or not *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* can be considered memoirs and, otherwise, propose a new categorization; (3) to make an in-depth analysis of self-representation and the constitution of identity in *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* exploring the main forms of life writing found in the narratives; (4) to analyze the interplay between text and photography in the context of Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work and determine the extent to which it informs both the transition in genre and the process of identity construction; and (5) to explore the extent to which Patti Smith makes use of life writing in order to challenge her public image by means of devising and sharing her own private image.

As for my research process, it was divided into three different stages: documentation, organization, and writing. The documentation stage involved compiling bibliography and attending conferences. The bibliography mainly included the author's work, academic books, journal articles, news articles, and interviews with the author. While several of these resources were found online, others were provided by university libraries, namely the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the Complutense University of Madrid, and the University of Alcalá. Attendance to the 14th International SAAS (Spanish Association for American Studies) Conference in Salamanca (2019) and to the 6th IABA (International Auto/Biography Association) Europe Conference "Knowing the Self: Auto/Biographical Narratives and the History of Knowledge" in Madrid (2019) allowed me to collect information on matters directly or tangentially related to my thesis topic. At the SAAS Conference, I read a paper on Patti Smith's *Just Kids* and *M Train* for the panel "An Uncomfortable Truth: Women's Autofiction in American Literature and Media." This talk would eventually result in the publication of my article "'I Have Lived in My Own Book': Patti Smith and the Reconstruction of Her Public Persona in Life Writing" (2019) in the *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, which ended up becoming the starting point for this dissertation. At the IABA Conference, I attended several panel sessions, one of which dealt with "The (Re)creation of Identity in the Memoirs by Female Punk Rockers."

Once I had compiled and consulted bibliography on the author, on literary theory (auto/biographical studies in particular), cultural studies, textual analysis, and image/text theory, I proceeded to plan my dissertation. After reading the scant literary criticism available on *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey*, I decided to base my research on Julia Watson's proposal in "Patti Smith Kicks In the Walls of Memoir: Relational Lives and 'the Right Voice in *Just Kids*" (2015). In her article, Watson argues that this relational memoir encapsulates the "seemingly incompatible autobiographical genres" of *Künstlerroman*, autothanatography and autoethnography (132). Drawing from this hypothesis, I proceeded to analyze *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* following the same procedure, that is, I selected those autobiographical genres present in each of these narratives and made the pertinent, detailed examination. Once the textual analysis was complete, I examined the interrelations between image and text in the three books discussed, focusing on the way text and images interact in Smith's life writing. This research on the presence of life writing in Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work allowed me to reach conclusions concerning the construction of a public image through the exploration of the private self and to question the terminology used when dealing with Smith's literature.

Finally, the writing stage resulted in the present dissertation. As for the structure, this first introductory chapter, which addresses the main objectives of the study and the methodological approach used, is followed by a second chapter ("Life Writing and the Construction of Identity") containing a literature review on the state of the art, in which I focus on life writing and the concept of identity in autobiographical accounts. In chapter three, I analyze the forms of the female rock memoir and the personal essay from a theoretical approach, proposing a new definition for Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work. Chapter four contains an in-depth analysis of the life writing forms found in the narratives of *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey*, respectively. Each of these forms is studied individually but the analysis is at all times informed by the way Patti Smith (re)constructs her identity. Besides, it shows how Smith's work gradually moves away from the form of the female rock memoir and closer to the personal essay. A fifth chapter is devoted to the study of the interrelations between text and photography in the aforementioned three books through the lens of photobiography and the literary self-portrait. This chapter is illustrated with some photographs pertinent to the analysis.

Finally, the conclusions are outlined in a sixth chapter, which is followed by the list of works cited in this dissertation.

Most literary criticism concerning Patti Smith revolves around either her music (with special attention to her lyrics) or the issue of gender performativity. With three highly acclaimed autobiographical prose works already published, it is about time her narrative was thoroughly analyzed, for her writing not only displays literary value, but it also stands as testimony to the reconstruction of an identity and to a life entirely committed to art.

2. LIFE WRITING AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

When writers set out to write about their own lives—or part of them—they engage in the process of constructing an image of themselves. This image may remain private or become public if we decide to share it; either way, the assertions we make about ourselves will shape a fixed identity on the page. We live in a society where people are eager to share their lives and learn about the lives of others by means of a screen. With social media in the lead, followed by reality television, people's sense of privacy is rapidly declining as their existence becomes more public than ever. In the literary world, personal stories have come to the fore, too. Life writing (or 'life-writing') is a practice that writers and non-writers alike have been mastering in its various forms for a few centuries now. Not until the arrival of the 21st century, however, has it received sufficient recognition within the literary community. In order to understand the implications of putting a life to paper, we must first examine the main forms this act may take.

2.1. The fundamentals of life writing

Life writing seems to be at its finest moment now, partly because authors have been turning increasingly often to auto/biographical forms but, perhaps most importantly, because readers are showing more interest than ever in this kind of literature. This has resulted in a shift from the more stylistically elaborated genres to those where the art of storytelling prevails over the intricacies of literary devices (which is not to say that these devices are not present at all, only that they receive less attention). Hence the rise in the production of life writing and, more precisely, of memoir, this being the form that currently enjoys the greatest success. We speak today of "the age of memoir": throughout the last two decades, writing memoirs has become a common endeavor among the celebrities and the "nobodies." Still, despite its current ubiquitousness, there seems to be a lack of general consensus in regard to the terminology that surrounds life writing. The definitions of the key concepts that will be used throughout this paper are thus presented below.

2.1.1. Life writing and life narrative

Life writing is defined in the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) as "biography," where its first use is traced back to 1687, namely to Francis Atterbury's *An answer to some considerations on the spirit of Martin Luther and the original of the Reformation.* However, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, in

its 7th edition, provides a more comprehensive definition of life writing: "A broad term for all forms of writing about lives, including autobiography, biography, memoirs, diaries, and letters, widely used since the 1970s." Likewise, in the editor's note to the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Margaretta Jolly notes the concept's "openness and inclusiveness," arguing that life writing "encompasses the writing of one's own or another's life" (ix). In his introductory volume on memoir, Thomas Couser agrees that "*life writing* has become the umbrella term used to refer to all nonfictional representation of identity" (*Memoir* 24) thus comprising practices such as biography, autobiography, or memoir, among others. All these first approaches tend to highlight the concept's broadness, already hinting both at its richness and its complexity.

Confusion arises when, in defining life writing, scholars attempt to determine its scope. Hermione Lee, for her part, argues in *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* that, apart from encompassing all the forms concerned with the narration of a life-story (i.e. memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, among others) when discussed together in the same context, "life writing" is also "used when the distinction between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred" (100).[6] However, in *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, Lee notes that "the word 'biography' literally means 'life-writing'," pointing out the fact that "[t]he two halves of the word derive from medieval Greek: *bios*, 'life', and *graphia*, 'writing'" (5), and she proceeds to use these terms (biography and life-writing) interchangeably throughout the book. She therefore states in one of her works that life writing comprises forms as distinct as biography and diary, while in another work she uses life writing as synonymous with biography. Interestingly, according to Meg Jensen, "life writing" was actually used from the 18th century up to the 1980s to make reference to those texts that would later be known as "biographies" (xxvii)—although, as indicated above, the *OED Online* has recorded an earlier usage. Finally, Zachary Leader calls attention to the fact that life writing not only refers to the more traditional genres concerned with self-writing that we know (biography, autobiography, memoir, diary), but also to legal practices such as writs or depositions, and to digital practices such as blogs or Facebook entries, as well as to certain approaches to poetry or history (1)—something that is worth noting in an era in which the world of communication is so rapidly evolving. So far, it has been generally agreed that "life

[6] This practice will be further analyzed below as auto/biography.

writing" is the blanket term which encompasses various forms dealing with life storytelling. There is, nevertheless, another expression which is often used alongside "life writing" and oftentimes adds to the general confusion: life narrative.

Literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson make a significant distinction between life writing and life narrative in their *Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. While they understand life writing as the general term concerned with the "writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject" (3),[7] they think of life narrative as a narrower term which makes reference only to writing that deals with oneself. In this sense, both autobiography and biography would be forms of life writing, but only autobiography would be considered as an example of life narrative. Jensen also distinguishes between life writing and life narrative, but hers is not a distinction based on who the subject of the story is. Rather, she suggests that, due to the considerable emergence of storytelling forms, life writing has remained the more specific term making reference only to those forms which are textual, whereas life narrative is the less restrictive term that was subsequently coined in order to include non-literary forms as well (xxvii-xviii). Similarly, Couser leans towards the use of life narrative on the grounds that there are representations of the self which do not necessarily involve the act of writing. Yet, although his view coincides with Jensen's, he also wonders where an art like portraiture would be included: since it is not a written form, it would supposedly fall into the category of life narrative, but the fact is that there is no narration involved either (*Memoir* 24).

There is, then, agreement on the terminology itself—life writing and life narrative have remained the preferred expressions—but not on its usage. Despite the controversy, as of today it seems that life writing is the term which has gained in popularity, with a number of reference books opting for it in their titles, such as Sally Cline and Carole Angier's *Arvon Book of Life Writing* or Zachary Leader's *On Life-Writing*, apart from the already mentioned *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*. Besides, no entries are found for "life narrative" (or "life-narrative") in the *Oxford English Dictionary* nor in the latest edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, whereas "life writing" appears in both of these.

[7] Unless otherwise noted, I am quoting from the first edition of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*.

For the sake of avoiding further complications, "life writing" and "life narrative" will be used interchangeably in this thesis. Since the object under study will be Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work, that is, written narratives dealing, for the most part, with herself, both terms are pertinent here. *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* are generally referred to as memoirs and are often found in the nonfiction shelf, together with literary criticism, philosophical essays, or history books. Yet, are these actually nonfictional accounts? How are they different from autobiographies? Do they share elements with fictional forms such as the novel? In order to answer these and other questions, we should first examine the various forms that fall under the category of life writing.

2.1.2. Autobiography, biography, auto/biography

An explanation of the terminology surrounding the genres of biography and autobiography might seem superfluous today. We shall see, however, that discrepancy still arises. According to A. O. J. Cockshut, "both biographical and autobiographical forms are ancient, and both spring from the same ultimate source, the wish to avoid oblivion" (78). Despite this common purpose and their apparent interdependency, Cockshut acknowledges an evident contrast between the two forms. The difference between autobiography and biography seems to be clear: the former focuses on the life of the person who is writing and the latter on the life of an individual different from the writer. Autobiography is therefore subject-centered, whereas biography is object-centered. For Smith and Watson, the difference between these forms is so evident that they do not consider the possibility that autobiography might be simply a kind of biography performed by oneself. Biographers, they argue, necessarily write from an external point of view and their accounts are, as a general rule, backed up by verifiable evidence. Autobiographers, however, have to place themselves both inside and outside the story in order to construct their narratives, which they do by taking their (subjective) memories as a starting point (4-6). And yet, confident as they are of this marked opposition, Smith and Watson concede that contemporary practices have inevitably led to the coinage of the term "auto/biography" or "a/b," denoting the sometimes unclear boundaries between the autobiographical and the biographical.

Jolly also makes reference to this concept in her introductory note to the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*: "Readers will also find the term 'auto/biography' used frequently by contributors as a convenient way of indicating a scope that is both

autobiographical and biographical" (ix). Interestingly, this matches the second sense of Hermione Lee's definition of "life writing" stated above—"used when the distinction between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred" (*Body Parts* 100). What is more, Max Saunders notes that, depending on the context, auto/biography may also be used "as a shorthand for 'autobiography and/or biography'" when dealing with different works of both types (6), which coincides with the first definition provided by Lee for "life writing." Life writing and auto/biography, then, are synonymous for some scholars but different for others. Still, it can be agreed that auto/biography may be used in instances where autobiographical and biographical practices are blended into the same text as well as in instances where autobiography and biography (as different genres) are being discussed in the same context.

It should be noted here that although autobiography works as an individual genre, there are other forms that share its characteristics, hence the adjective "autobiographical," used to describe narratives which deal with some aspect of the writer's life, whether overtly, unconsciously or implicitly (Saunders 4-5). When speaking about the traditional understanding of autobiography, critic and memoirist Thomas Larson notes the genre's exclusivity: for more than a century, it *was* available only to those who had accomplished something deemed significant by society (11). Autobiography was expected to "promulgate career, heritage, social standing, or fame" (12), meaning that only a few men could attempt such a task and that women in general were banned from the genre (since they could not aspire to achieve such things as career or social standing). However, in Larson's words, "despite the conditions that severely limited who actually wrote an autobiography, American writers have written *autobiographically*" (14). Along the same lines, in an article for *Harper's Magazine* dealing with the similarities and differences among the diary, the journal, and the notebook, William H. Gass reminds us: "None of these . . . is an autobiography, although the character of each is autobiographical." Just because an account is not written in the form of an autobiography, it does not mean that it is not autobiographical. We may then conclude that, while autobiography and biography have traditionally been two distinct genres, there are hybrid narratives that challenge this perspective and therefore call for new theories. This is where memoir comes in.

2.1.3. Memoir

With the basics of life writing established, we can now turn to one of the issues at hand in this study: memoir. This is not, however, an easy task, for although its usage in English can be traced even further back than that of autobiography, it appears that for a long time memoir was relegated to the status of a minor genre and so its study was neglected. In *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market*, a book which explores memoir's place in today's market, Julie Rak explains how autobiography came to supersede memoir for a time. According to Rak, memoirs were originally written by non-professionals who sought to record their lives in relation to others (e.g. family accounts) or in relation to history (e.g. battles or public office holding records), and they were not necessarily meant to be published. This is the way it worked at least from the Classical period up to the 18th century, when "scandalous memoirs" appeared in France. These were, as Rak explains, former courtesans' accounts containing prurient details of their sexual affairs written in the hope that sales would pay for their court cases. It was then when memoir became inevitably associated with the capitalism of the publishing market; from that time on, life narratives were seen as a mere form of entertainment. Memoir's inferiority as a genre was exacerbated when Jean Jacques Rousseau published *The Confessions* in the 1780s, thought of as the first autobiography as such. With this work, Rak states, Rousseau changed the conventions of life writing: it was no longer performed by a non-professional writer, money was not the fundamental reason for its publication, it was concerned with higher issues, and it placed the self in the center of the narrative. Rak therefore concludes: "In a sense, Rousseau contributed to making the form of memoir vanish from public view, as scrutiny turned to autobiography as a literary form" (4-6). So began autobiography's hegemony as the preferred genre for the narration of a life story, resulting in the lives of those who did not belong to the category of preeminent males, as we already saw, sinking into oblivion.

And yet, although it was eclipsed by forms such as biography three centuries ago, as of 2021 memoir seems to have been reinvented and it is now the preferred life-writing form, hence its ubiquitousness. As Helen Buss notes, the genre gained acceptance throughout the 20th century, "as critics began to see the subversive and revisionary possibilities . . . for those who feel excluded from mainstream culture and its generic expressions" (595). People whose narratives would not have been deemed worthy of being written a few centuries ago, now have a space where they can express themselves

freely. Memoir has therefore prevailed because of its accessibility and because of its ability to promote the universal over the particular. According to Buss, as opposed to autobiographers, "it would seem that memoir writers are more concerned with making their lives meaningful in terms of the lives of others and in terms of their communities rather than in terms of individual accomplishments" (595). Besides, the genre is not only inclusive in terms of the stories it allows people to write and the people it brings together, but also in terms of the writing practices that converge in memoirs. A single account becomes historical, narrative, dramatic, and essayistic at the same time (Buss 596). In order to understand the significance of these features, however, we should first examine the fundamentals of the genre.

Regarding the definition of memoir, as a result of its history, different connotations—for the most part derogatory—have been proposed, leading to much confusion about its nature. According to the *OED Online*, memoir, a borrowing from the Middle French *memoire*, means "written account, description, document containing the facts in a case which is to be judged." It seems that the term first entered the English language in the late 15th century with a meaning that is now obsolete: "a note, a memorandum; a record; a brief testimonial or warrant." Strangely enough, of the definitions in use provided by the *OED Online*, the one which perhaps best matches our current understanding is the one that reads: "A biography or autobiography; a biographical notice." What is curious is that we have seen so far that biography and autobiography stand on rather opposite sides of the life writing spectrum, and yet memoir is defined here as being one or the other.

The definitions of the plural form of the noun found in the same entry—i.e. memoirs—are perhaps more accurate for what is nowadays conveyed when referring to memoir: "Records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer, or based on special sources of information" or "Autobiographical observations; reminiscences." The printed version of *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, however, seems to offer the most adequate definition (although, again, it is provided for the plural form): "A person's written account of incidents in his own life, of the persons whom he has known and the transactions or movements in which he has been concerned; an autobiographical record" (1061). This definition is particularly appropriate because, while it has the writer's own life as the main element, it still acknowledges the presence of other elements (i.e. people or events) which are an intrinsic part of life and

thus inevitably enrich the personal story. The definition provided for 'memoirs,' then, seems to be the most fitting for the concept of 'memoir' dealt with in this dissertation. Still, it should be noted that when we speak about someone's memoirs we are not referring to a compilation of different memoirs by the author but rather to a single volume that chronicles an entire life—much like an autobiography, in that sense. When in plural, the term is most often paired with a possessive pronoun (my memoirs, her memoirs), making it easier to distinguish it from the singular form (Couser, *Memoir* 18). What happens, then, when one author has written several memoirs? Are these not her memoirs? Up to this point, memoir remains a somewhat vague concept—no wonder why people hesitate when they encounter this term. This concept, therefore, calls for an in-depth examination that goes beyond a mere defining statement.

As we have seen, more often than not talking about memoir implies talking about biography and/or autobiography. Thomas Couser thus invites us to think of the interrelationship among these three concepts as a continuum in which the stories centered around the author are located at one end and the stories centered around anyone other than the author are located at the other end (*Memoir* 19-20). According to what we have already established, this means that autobiography and biography, correspondingly, would be situated at opposite ends of the continuum. As for memoir, it is somewhere between autobiography and biography, not necessarily being entirely about the author nor entirely about someone else. Depending on its focus, it will be closer to one end or the other. Unlike biography or autobiography, the boundaries of memoir are rather indefinite, providing the form with the flexibility that characterizes it. When one chooses to write autobiography, one is favoring his or her own story, whereas when one chooses to write biography, it is the story of another person that takes precedence. Memoir is precisely the space in which both stories can coexist—alongside multiple other stories.

It therefore follows that memoir may be regarded as a variant of auto/biography (Couser, *Memoir* 18), which was defined above as a form in which the boundaries between the autobiographical and the biographical are not clear. However, it is its similarity with autobiography in particular that causes the greatest confusion. While it is true that memoir encourages the convergence of different narratives, throughout the last two decades it has come to be strongly associated with one's own life story. Readers go to memoir expecting to find some portion of the life of the person writing—as they would expect from autobiography. What, then, differentiates one genre from the other? Scope is

perhaps the element where they diverge the most, with autobiography attempting to cover a life in its entirety and memoir selecting parts of that life instead. Traditional autobiography as we have come to know it usually begins with birth and proceeds more or less chronologically up to the present moment in which the writer finds himself or herself—hence Nancy K. Miller's conception of autobiography as "most literally a curriculum vitae" (xiv). Memoir, on the contrary, "assumes the life and ignores most of it" (Zinsser 21); it tends to focus on a specific period of the writer's life. This alone is a considerable difference, for it has an influence on the kind of content that goes in and the information that gets left out. But there are further implications that result from the history of how autobiography came to be replaced by memoir as the preferred form. In *The Memoir and the Memoirist*, Thomas Larson reveals that it came to a point where autobiography and everything that was associated with it inevitably called for the devising of a new genre. Before the 1980s, autobiography was so closely connected with the idea of a male narrative, that it was almost inconceivable to come across an autobiography as such penned by a female author.[8] This has to do with the fact that autobiographical accounts were initially conceived as records that would celebrate status and accomplishment, features that were unattainable for women at the time (12-14). Memoir thus emerged as the more inclusive alternative which "emphasizes the *who* over the *what*" (Larson 18)—memoir does not require the writer to have accomplished something remarkable as long as she is willing to engage in the task of self-discovery.

2.2. Writing autobiographically: The construction of identity

In constructing an identity through life writing, the author must acknowledge a series of implications which are inherent to the act. She must, for instance, adopt an approach to the matter of truth (whether admitting to memory's inevitable faultiness or presenting the story as unquestionably truthful) that will remain consistent throughout the

[8] In *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Pasts*, Linda Anderson explores the autobiographical accounts of six female authors (Alice James, Virginia Woolf, Vera Brittain, Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich), discussing issues of privacy, gender, or fiction, among others. Women, then, did produce autobiographical works, only at the time these may not have been read as autobiographies in the strict sense. In this respect, Anderson writes: "I have also not felt constrained by definitions of autobiography as a genre, which in any case tend to perpetuate a masculine genealogy of the subject, but have included here different kinds of autobiographical writing—diaries, letters, fiction and theoretical writing—under the general umbrella of autobiography. Part of the point of the book, of course, is precisely to understand the ways in which women's writing may position itself at different or oblique angles to dominant forms, interrogating the division between private and public writing, private and public 'selves'" (12).

narrative and that will allow the reader to take a particular stance on the story. Whether a public figure reconstructing her identity or a "nobody" sharing her story for the first time, in order for the autobiographical account to resonate with the widest audience possible, the writer must be willing to share a process of self-discovery and self-constitution through the act of writing. Ultimately, in writing one's story, one accepts responsibility not only towards the reader, but also to the flesh-and-blood people who end up becoming characters in that story. Save for rare cases of individuals who live in complete isolation, humans normally lead highly relational lives: our stories are made up of the innumerable connections we make with the stories of others. The following issues, then, become fundamental for the construction of an identity.

2.2.1. Truth, memory

First and foremost, the question that lies at the heart of any form under the umbrella of life writing is truth, for it seems to be what most troubles and divides scholars. Is it possible to find out whether an author is being truthful? To what extent is lying acceptable? Can different truths coexist? What is truth, anyway? While there should be no question as to how life writing and the novel are different—theoretically, the former draws upon reality and the latter upon fiction—they are often discussed together. Very often, fiction and nonfiction share so many narrative techniques that it is not easy to distinguish one from the other on a textual level alone. The difference, then, does not lie in the texts themselves but rather in the way readers approach them. This takes us to what Philippe Lejeune so famously named "the autobiographical pact" (*le pacte autobiographique*). Lejeune argues that autobiography—and, by extension, any autobiographical account—is defined less by its formal features and more by an imaginary reading contract established between reader and writer:

> Une autobiographie, ce n'est pas un texte dans lequel quelqu'un dit la vérité sur soi, mais un texte dans lequel quelqu'un de réel dit qu'il la dit. Et cet engagement produit des effets particuliers sur la réception. On ne lit pas un texte de la même manière selon qu'on croit que c'est une autobiographie ou une fiction.[9] (*Écrire sa vie* 17)

According to the autobiographical pact, the writer is committed to tell the truth and the reader is committed to accept the writer's account as truthful; there must be a willing

[9] "An autobiography is not a text in which someone tells the truth about himself or herself, but rather a text in which a real person claims to be telling the truth. This commitment produces particular effects on the reception of the text. We do not read an autobiography or a fictional account the same way" (my trans.).

suspension of disbelief.[10] Along the same lines, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson advocate a reading focused on the intersubjectivity of the writer/reader relationship rather than centered around the (lack of) veracity of a given story. Only in this way can "a shared understanding of the meaning of a life" (13) be found. The matter of truth in life writing would therefore seem to be settled: there has to be a preexisting (hypothetical) agreement between reader and writer which allows for autobiographical accounts to be read as nonfiction. Yet each author approaches the notion of 'truth' from a different angle and the matter is still far from settled.

For some, truth is unattainable in life writing—as it is in life. "There is no truth in the painting of a life, only multiple images of what has been, what could have been, and what now is" (81), writes Norman K. Denzin. Similarly, Carole Angier considers that, however objectively we try to convey the facts (something which can never be successfully achieved), these are modified when put into a story, for we inevitably add layers of (re)interpretation each time we embark on the narrative act (6, 13). Not only that, but narration has its requirements, too—requirements that a life story must meet in order for it to work with an audience. Roy Pascal points out truth's elusiveness, arguing that "one's self-knowledge may be illusory; the more one probes, the further the truth seems to recede" (70). It might seem as if there is no point to life writing—i.e. accounts dealing with the real lives of real people—if there is no way of gaining access to the truth. But, as Bill Roorbach reminds us, life writing is neither history nor journalism: "Information is almost never the first goal of memoir; expression often is. Beauty—of form, of language, of meaning—always takes precedence over mere accuracy, truth over mere facts" (10). Once writers realize that there is no such thing as a thoroughly truthful account, they have to develop strategies that will invest their stories with credibility.

For others, like Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser, verisimilitude is key: one should always attempt to at least offer a plausible version of the events (132). For Maureen Murdock, what counts is "emotional truth," that is, "the author's sincere feelings about an event or experience; the avoidance of distortion or misrepresentation of an event or experience" (164). As long as the author is willing to tell the story as she honestly remembers it and there is no intention on her part to be deceitful, the narrative can be

[10] According to the *OED* Online, suspension of disbelief is "Coleridge's phrase for the voluntary withholding of scepticism on the part of the reader with regard to incredible characters and events. Now frequently in allusive or extended use."

deemed truthful. Thomas Larson goes one step further and invites writers to be aware of the tension between the authentic and the inauthentic, the heroic and the ordinary, fact and memory; instead of disguising such tension, they should admit to it (25). Likewise, Mary Karr, renowned memoirist, believes that the best memoirs "openly confess the nature of their corruption" (38). When a writer has no problem in appearing dubious as to whether something happened the way she remembers it, readers develop a greater sense of trust. Some, like D. K. Levy, do not even expect from life writers the promise of the truth, not even their best attempt at it: "It is the author's judgment of the fruition of her life that autobiography promises and it is not a false promise" (168). The key for life writing to work, then, has to do with memory, but also—and perhaps more importantly, as we will soon examine—with the author's sense of self.

Evidently, the autobiographical act is closely linked to the act of recollection. And even though memory, like any other human faculty, is not infallible—hence the impossibility of obtaining 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'—authors keep engaging in life writing as a way to exercise it. On the one hand, access to memories is what allows writers to tell their stories with accuracy and, on the other hand, setting out to tell their stories helps them improve their ability to remember. This is the case with memoir especially, which finds its etymology in *mémoire*, the French term for "memory." Along these lines, Nancy K. Miller writes:

> One of the meanings of the word "memoir" is memorandum. And this meaning surfaces in another French expression that has passed into English: aide-mémoire. Something that helps memory. I want to propose the notion of memoir as prosthesis—an aid to memory. What helps you remember. In this sense what memoirs do is support you in the act of remembering. (13-14)

In *The Philosophy of Autobiography*, Levy takes this theory one step further and claims that "autobiography functions, if it does, not solely as aides-memoires for remembering moments in life. Rather, the act of autobiography aspires—perhaps *per impossibile*—to give those moments persistent existence" (158). In that same book, Somogy Varga explores how one's current sense of self-identity necessarily impacts autobiographical memories but notices that this impact

> flows in both directions: people's recollections may also help alter their current self-regard. Autobiographical self-reflection thus not only involves the co-construction of what is recollected, establishing a link between the author's current view of himself with a set of past experiences, but also takes place in a loop-like, dynamic way: what is recollected influences his self-concepts, yet the recollected material is itself influenced and altered on the basis of his current self-conception. (150)

So closely linked are autobiographical acts and memory that one inevitably needs the other for life writing to be possible at all.

While authors decide on life writing for diverse reasons, it is undeniable that these accounts are the perfect form for preserving one's memories. Once our memories are put on paper, there is no way of losing them. "Against the dissolution of time, memory asserts permanence and timeless essence" (Sheringham, "Memory" 597). Yet, we have to be cautious when we decide to put our memories in writing and publish them, for "once the thought is reified in text, it acquires a life of its own, and the author can no longer control or correct people's responses to it" (Levy 6). Not only that, but the written story becomes the only possible version of the story and it eventually replaces any other memories we might have of those same events.

In any case, we cannot lose sight of the fact that memory is unreliable and faulty. When an event is encoded in the brain, it has already gone through a process of personal interpretation. As time goes by, whenever we go back to that particular memory we add new layers of meaning to it, for we are not the same person we were at the time of the event and the filter through which we process personal recollections may also have changed. It is no longer a matter of the past alone, but also of our present understanding of it. In *Reading Our Lives*, William L. Randall and A. Elizabeth McKim conclude: "Clearly, then, memory is never just memory. It is no passive repository of impressions of the past, no mere warehouse of dead images" (143). Besides, arranging isolated memories into a cohesive and coherent narrative will demand further reinterpretation. The memory we are left with, then, may be a long way from what actually happened—"it becomes, effectively, a different memory" (Randall and McKim 184). But then again, there is not a single person who can describe what actually happened with absolute certainty or objectivity. And, in any case, as Miller notes, the memoir boom "should be understood not as a proliferation of self-serving representation of individualistic memory but as an aid or a spur to keep cultural memory alive" (14). Life writing's potential, then, resides not in its ability to preserve the particular, but in its ability to make experience universal.

2.2.2. Self, identity, transformation

Up to this point, it seems clear that what counts as truthful is what the writer, with the best of her intentions, is able to remember—however questionable her recollection may seem to others. Ben Yagoda puts it simply: "Memory is an impression, not a transcript. Doing one's 'best' to tell 'a truthful story' involves not conducting interviews or reading dusty clippings but consulting one's heart" (230). And this—"consulting one's

heart"—is precisely at the core of this section, which revolves around the idea that certain forms of life writing, such as memoir, do not seek to portray a stable, unchangeable self but, rather, seek to take part in the (re)construction of the self they are portraying. If there is something that life writing scholars agree on, this is it: memoir is an act of self-reflection, self-discovery and self-constitution. There is no absolute truth about the writer's identity that must be disclosed in the writing of her life; instead, throughout the writing of her life, different truths about her identity are unraveled (to the reader as well as to the writer herself). Relevant to this discussion is philosopher John Stuart Mill's observation that "there are many truths of which the full meaning *cannot* be realized, until personal experience has brought it home" (25). Smith and Watson describe autobiographical acts as "investigations into and processes of self-knowing" (70); Pascal resorts to the German term "Selbstbesinnung, a search for one's inner standing" when he writes about the autobiographical purpose (182); according to Couser, "life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it" (*Memoir* 14); and Larson refers to memoir as a "self-locator" (130). No matter how each of them puts it, the idea stays the same: the self is not only displayed, but also interpreted.

In this process of self-interpretation, life writing necessarily deals with the past, for even when we are writing about our current situation, the very fact that we are able to write about it already indicates that such experience belongs to the past (recent, but past in any case). However, interestingly enough, despite being centered around the past, life writing has actually more to say about the present self. In writing about autobiography, Pascal argues that it is

> an interplay, a collusion, between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past. If this present position is not brought home to us (or only feebly brought home to us, for it can in fact never be hidden), there is a failure. (11)

Life writers narrate their past experiences through the filter of their present understanding, therefore revealing the kind of relationship they have with their stories. That is why the act of life writing is frequently deemed therapeutic: when writers sit to revise and record their stories they have no choice but to make peace with the events that have shaped their identity. As memoirist Patricia Hampl writes, "[o]ur capacity to move forward as developing beings rests on a healthy relation with the past" (33). This, in turn, links life writing not only to past and present, but to future as well, because it helps us move on with our lives in a different way. "Self-accounting . . . becomes a major form . . . of freeing oneself from earlier established modes of responding and or organizing one's response to

the future" (Bruner and Weisser, 136). Pascal states that autobiography "is not simply the narrative of the voyage, but also the voyage itself" (182)—and a transformative one at that. For Larson, "the memoirist is she who sticks with the form long enough to undergo changes in how she sees the past" (113).

As a result of this past/present confluence in life writing, critics often refer to a dual identity when analyzing the work of memoirists or autobiographers, distinguishing between the I-now—or remembering I—as the person who is telling the story and the I-then—or remembered I—as the person whose story is being told. For Smith and Watson, nevertheless, this is not accurate enough. Hence their proposal of four distinct "I"s: (1) the "real" or historical "I," (2) the narrating "I," (3) the narrated "I," and (4) the ideological "I" (59). (1) The historical "I" is the flesh-and-blood person existing in a particular time and place. It is not present in the narrative, but only outside the text as the real author. (2) The narrating "I" is the one whose voice articulates the account, that is, what we traditionally know as the narrator. (3) The narrated "I" would coincide with the main character. Depending on the time span covered in the narrative, this character might have multiple identities (child, teenager and adult, for instance). These are what Professor Dan P. McAdams calls "imagoes": "semi-autonomous agents whose actions and interactions define the plot of the story" (652). Each of these personas belongs to a particular moment in the story and each should be therefore given a different voice. Finally, (4) the ideological "I" concerns the way the narrator is affected by the cultural and historical moment in which he or she now lives. In this sense, McAdams explains that "although a story is constructed by the person whose story it is, the possibilities for story construction . . . are determined by culture" and concludes that, to a certain extent, "the person co-authors identity with culture" (645). The environment ultimately becomes the lens through which the ideological "I" sees himself or herself. Smith and Watson remind readers that "we need to attend to these four 'I's or, rather, to the three that are available in the autobiographical act before us—the narrating, the narrated, and the ideological" (63), for only then can we understand the whole autobiographical act.

Life writing may have further consequences on the way we perceive ourselves and our stories. According to Paul John Eakin,

> [u]se of the first person . . . compounds our sense of being in full command of our knowledge of our selves and stories; it not only conveniently bridges the gaps between who we were once and who we are today, but it tends as well to make our sense of self in any present moment seem more unified and organized than it possibly could be. (ix)

Narrative and identity are therefore closely linked, so much so that Eakin calls attention to the fact that it is almost impossible to think about one without taking the other into consideration: self-experience informs the narrative but, at the same time, the self is constituted in the narrative. Literary critic Sven Birkerts offers a similar approach:

> Each account in some way proposes the idea that a life can be figured out on the page as a destiny, a filling out of a meaningful design by circumstance, and that this happens once events and situations are understood not just in themselves but as stages *en route* to decisive self-recognition. (13).

Life events, taken separately, are just that: isolated episodes. However, once arranged into a narrative, a somewhat coherent succession of events is revealed: as if things were meant to unfold in a particular way for us to be where we are at right now. Life writing, therefore has the ability to provide our life stories (and our whole existence) with meaning whilst contributing to shape our identity. It is true that some scholars believe, like Levy, that "self-understanding cannot be the motive of all autobiography" (171), yet even if it is not its ultimate motive, there has to be at least some achievement of self-understanding.

When this act of self-exploration and self-constitution is performed by a public figure, it becomes more complex, for one is not constructing but reconstructing his or her public image. Through life writing, celebrities claim control of their narratives and proceed to create an identity which sometimes is at odds with the one provided by the media.[11] In fact, the motive behind celebrity life writing might precisely be to discredit previous narratives. Besides, Jonathan D'Amore notes that further tension arises when the life writing act "requires individuals whose public identities are inherently connected to their authorship not only to acknowledge and embrace that position but also to humanize it by writing against their roles as public figures, revealing the private, 'inner' selves" (1). Celebrity life writers, then, find themselves at the crossroads between public

[11] In *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*, Carrie Brownstein addresses this issue in depth: "When I finally saw the issue of *Spin* for myself, it was the first time I felt like I was reading about someone I didn't know. . . . I wasn't reading about myself; I was reading about a character the writer had made up to fit his tendentious point of view about the band, a narrative he was creating that we needed to fit inside. There is the identity you have in a band or as an artist when you exist for no one other than yourself, or for your co-conspirators, your co-collaborators. When you own the sounds and when who you are is whoever you want to be. There are no definitions prescribed by outsiders, strangers; you feel capricious, full of contradictions, and areas of yourself feel frayed or blurred. Other times you feel resolute or whole. But it's all a part of you, it doesn't feel fractured, just mutable. But once your sound exits that room, it is no longer just yours—it belongs to everyone who hears it. And who you are is at the mercy of the audience's opinions and imagination. If you haven't spent any time deliberately and intentionally shaping your narrative, if you're unprepared, like I was, then one will be written for you. And if you already feel like a fractured self, you will start to feel like a broken one" (ch. 9).

and private identity, having to acknowledge a public self while also disregarding it by concentrating on a more private identity. This will presumably result in a more relatable story which universalizes experience and brings author and reader closer.

2.2.3. Universality, relationality

It is now clear that life writing is mainly, but not exclusively, about the self. So far in the literature review concerning autobiographical writing, words and expressions such as 'the other,' 'culture,' or 'inclusiveness' have been repeatedly encountered, already suggesting that there must be something beyond individual identity. In narrating their own experiences, authors write about others and they unconsciously do so influenced at all times by their surrounding environment. This, in Christopher Cowley's view, is rather paradoxical:

> On the one hand, [a] book purports to be about a unique life, and all its details, its particular mix of fate and will, of planning and opportunism, of confidence and diffidence, are designed to emphasize just how unique it is. At the same time, if the book is to be intelligible, let alone interesting, to strangers of very different backgrounds, then it has to appeal to certain general features of what it means to live any human life. (5)

And yet, this somewhat contradictory character is what makes life writing unique as a genre. As Miller suggests, memoir has a way of presenting stories that allows you, as a reader, to "make sense of your past" even when your particular story has nothing to do with the one you are reading (12). Miller is certain that "reading the lives of other people with whom we do *not* identify has as much to tell us (if not more) about our lives as the lives with which we do" (xv). In other words, dissociation is as powerful as identification when it comes to reading autobiographical accounts. In Maureen Murdock's words, "[t]he facts are individual, but the *feelings* are universal" (129), so the greatest challenge for life writers is to tell their story in such a way that can reach the largest audience possible.

The universal character of life writing acts on various levels. To begin with, memoir, for instance, is characterized by an accessibility never seen before with any other genre considered "respectable" by academia. And this is precisely what has attracted readers and writers across the globe: it is open to anybody wishing to tell a personal story (which, today, with the pervasiveness of social media, blogs, and reality shows, is virtually everybody). Back in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Yagoda reveals in *Memoir: A History*, "a common if unspoken understanding was that three sorts of people were entitled and expected to produce memoirs: eminences (whether political, military, literary, religious, or social), the pious, and people with exciting, unusual, or somehow stirring stories to tell" (67). Nowadays, memoir is a form for men and women alike, for

the elderly and the younger, for the celebrities and the "nobodies." It is not only accessible because it has become democratized and it is now deemed acceptable to have memoirs authored by a "nobody," but also because the form does not require major literary skills for the finished product to be more than valid. Yagoda acknowledges that "[m]emoir is to fiction as photography is to painting" (240)—that is, easier to accomplish with favorable results. The fact that it does not inspire as much respect as a work of fiction results in more people trying their luck and attempting to tell their stories in the form of a memoir.

Life writing can also be seen as a universal form for its hybrid character: it is able to blend different genres or subgenres, accounting for the richness of stories classified as autobiographies or memoirs. As Bonnie J. Gunzenhauser writes in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*,

> [u]ltimately, autobiography stands as one of the most democratic forms of writing in Western culture. As literature, autobiography draws from and appears in multiple genres; a single autobiographical text may employ formal strategies from drama, poetry, essay and fiction. (77)

This is also true of memoir, not only at a formal level, but also as far as content is concerned. Since memoir does not attempt to examine a lifespan but rather a specific period of time, it will probably contain subgenres of life writing connected to those specific moments in people's lives. A memoir dealing with an illness or disability, for instance, may be read as an autopathography. That same memoir, however, may also be read as scriptotherapy if the person writing is trying to overcome the trauma of the illness or even as a caregiver's tale if the story is told from the point of view of the person providing care. Memoir therefore becomes a universal genre where a wide range of subgenres may converge.

Life writing is relational on a writer/reader level too, since these come to develop a bond that transcends the mere acts of writing or reading. As we saw with Lejeune's autobiographical pact, there has to be a will to be honest on the writer's side and a will to trust on the reader's side. Miller insists on the writer/reader interdependency in her book *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives*, arguing that "it takes two to perform an autobiographical act" (2), for the life writer fails to succeed unless the reader achieves some personal understanding after reading the story. In Birkert's words, "[s]torytelling fails when the narrative cannot coax sympathetic resonance from the listener" (22). We tend to believe that readers approach the auto/biography section in order to escape from their own lives for a while. They might be, however, trying to escape

a feeling of alienation, trying to make sense of their own lives through the slightest connection with another person's life—which they do when they encounter a story that resonates with them. Murdock notes that "[t]he language of memoir is relational; the narrator is involved in a conversation with the reader" (137) and so the reader finds someone who empathizes with her (as does the writer).

Life writing should be oriented towards the relational not only for individual readers; it needs to be connected to larger realities such as culture, history, or society. This is when relationality becomes universality. And this writer/world connection should be twofold: the autobiographical account must be at all times informed by the realities surrounding the author, but there must also be a resolution on the author's part to make a contribution to those realities. Autobiographical accounts are repeatedly—and understandably—branded as narcissistic: someone who feels the need to put his or her story out there for people to read can be easily stigmatized as a self-important person. This might be related to how we consume life stories nowadays. As Professor Martin A. Danahay indicates,

> [s]ince the late 20th century in particular, American culture has become saturated with confessional accounts on television and radio, accounts viewed entirely in individualist terms, disconnected from the wider social sphere. Both autobiography and biography have become staples of the publishing and entertainment industries. (467)

However, most scholars argue that not all life writers share their stories for the sole purpose of being self-congratulatory—if anything, this is the exception that proves the rule. "True memoir," Murdock argues, "demonstrates a yearning to connect with the whole world. In the act of remembering, we expand beyond ourselves" (28). It has taken a while for the literary community to come to terms with this idea—after all, it is difficult to believe that one's personal story may have any sort of impact on thousands or even millions of people—but it seems to be prevailing now. Karr neatly expresses it in these words: "None of us can ever know the value of our lives, or how our separate and silent scribbling may add to the amenity of the world, if only by how radically it changes us, one by one" (236). The autobiographical act can certainly produce a butterfly effect when performed correctly.

Finally, life writing can be relational on a textual level, meaning that there might be an other who is present in the text and who might be as important as the narrator. In fact, the term 'relational' is most often "used to refer to narrative that arises from, and is primarily concerned with, an intimate relationship" (Couser, *Memoir* 20), whether it be a

relative, a partner, or a friend. The person involved in this relationship with the author is commonly known as the 'proximate other' (Couser, *Memoir* 21, Eakin 86) or as the 'significant other' (Buss 595, Smith and Watson 65). Contrary to the "contingent others who populate the text as actors in the narrator's script of meaning but are not deeply reflected upon," the significant others are "those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation" (Smith and Watson 65). Hence the emphasis on the personal link shared by narrator and other in relational narratives. So important is this bond that Couser notes how certain stories "may take as their subject neither the author nor some proximate other person but rather the relationship between them" (*Memoir* 21). This inevitably challenges the boundaries established among life writing genres, hence the coinage of the term 'auto/biography' mentioned above. An autobiographical account can be about oneself and about an other at the same time—it is actually difficult to imagine a life in which others have had no influence at all. Authors might use their relationships with people for the sake of their journey towards self-knowledge. Nevertheless, life writing can also turn into an act of generosity: one may, for instance, seek to immortalize an other. In any case, regardless of the motive, Jonathan D'Amore notes:

> the recognition that one's private life—and in the case of celebrities, both major and minor, one's public life—involves either a connection or a willful disconnection with others is an act of the most basic self-awareness as well as a complicated acknowledgment of the ethical obligations to others. (3)

Life writing, then, is associated with the concepts of ethics (how morally charged the act can be) and of authority (whether or not one is entitled to perform such act).

2.2.4. Authority, ethics, motivation

Once the matter of truth has been settled, it would now seem that there are no questions concerning morality in life writing. However, the fact that a story is plausible does not prevent readers from questioning it disapprovingly. Besides truth, there are motivation, authority and ethical issues, and these are challenged just as often; so much so that authors sometimes choose to incorporate a prefatory note in which they provide evidence of their intentions in order to spare themselves unnecessary denunciation.[12] As

[12] A clear example may be found in Viv Albertine's introduction to her memoir *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys*: "This is an extremely subjective book, a scrapbook of memories. The experiences documented here left an indelible emotional imprint on me; they shaped and scarred me. And I was present at every one. Let others who were there tell their versions if they want to. This is mine" (ix).

noted above, writing about oneself is never just writing about oneself, hence the concern over who writes the story, why he or she is writing it, and how righteous that is. The responsibility of life writers is therefore not only towards the facts, but also towards the people involved in them. They need to find a balance between the historical and the personal: doing justice to the events without offending the characters because, as opposed to characters in a novel, these are not fictional.

The first issue here concerns authority, that is, the extent to which someone is entitled to write a particular story. When we analyze autobiographical accounts in contrast to biographical accounts, the matter of authority does not seem to pose a problem. As opposed to biographers, autobiographers tell their own story from the inside, acting as both witnesses and participants at once. This is why Levy states that "the autobiographer attests, while the biographer at best asserts" (167). No amount of research carried out by an outsider can ever amount to the insight acquired by the person around whom the story revolves. The autobiographer/memoirist enjoys the so-called "authority of experience" (Smith and Watson 27), which results in the readers privileging the autobiographical text over the biographical. This is the case, too, when someone writes about a significant other. "Readers also accept the authority of the near-and-dear to entwine the biography of a loved one with their own autobiographical reflection, which gets filtered through the account of the loved one" (Smith and Watson 30). While these narratives may be lacking in objectivity, readers favor them because of the closeness between the people involved—and because, again, it contains part of the writer's own story. Most probably, they are not looking for an unbiased story, but rather for an account imbued with affection. We can then agree that autobiographers are the only ones who enjoy an inalienable right to write about their own lives. Yet, as Levy acknowledges, "there is nothing unique the autobiographer offers; she just has more of it than anyone else, more observations" (167), which may not necessarily result in a better story. Besides, the fact that someone has the right to tell a story does not necessarily free his or her work from a controversial reception. Life writing raises further ethical questions.

According to Levy, "[t]he first ethical challenge for autobiography lies in the autobiographical *act* of creating autobiography rather than confronting the autobiographical *content* or self-understanding produced during an autobiography's creation" (156). In other words, before engaging in the act of writing, autobiographers should consider the implications of such a decision. Put rather bluntly, some stories are

better left untold. Certainly, one can choose to make one's life public as long as one is willing to face the consequences. However, airing someone else's dirty laundry, that is a whole different story, for these people may have no choice to offer their own version of the story and yet they have to accept the full consequences of something they are not responsible for. This, however, has not been the main target of criticism. As Yagoda states, "[o]ne of the notable by-products of today's memoir boom, from its beginnings in the early 1990s, has been the anti-memoir screed: periodic complaints about the exhibitionism, unseemliness, and just plain *wrongness* of the genre" (66). Apparently, it is narcissism and vanity that detractors find most unethical—or, at least, inappropriate—in life writing. This, in Cowley's view, is nonetheless one of autobiography's virtues, for the genre is ultimately

> a product of great vanity and great humility: to have the confident urge to tell everyone how wonderful one is, while at the same time offering up one's life (albeit carefully manicured) for judgment and dissection by the masses, many of whom may well buy the book out of fascinated hostility rather than admiration, ready to impute "true" intentions on the author. (6)

Self-writing thus becomes an act of bravery for some. But as admirable as this may be, it does not make it ethical. As with every other thing in life, the dividing line between right and wrong is often blurry and judgment varies from one person to the other. Similar to what happened with truth, we can therefore conclude that, as long as the author is approaching the writing act with the best of intentions she will not be breaking any hypothetical ethical standards.

Closely linked to the idea of ethics in life writing is motivation: the author's rationale, that is, what exactly has driven her to put her life in writing. This will be one of the key elements to determine how honorable her decision is. In *The Philosophy of Autobiography*, both Cowley and Varga distinguish between two kinds of autobiographical narratives on the basis of motivation. On the one hand, Cowley writes about stories with no purpose other than entertaining and stories which, more ambitiously, seek to reveal something meaningful about the author's life (10). On the other hand, Varga contrasts works which display a clear motive (e.g. apology, self-justification) with "unmotivated" works in which the author is just trying "to make sense of her own life" (142). According to Varga, the former inevitably elicit questions regarding the veracity of the events, whereas the latter are rather connected to self-deception: "*we ask ourselves whether the author is deceiving herself*" (142). In that same volume, Levy insists that there must be a motive for autobiography to be "genuine" (158) and he contests the argument that self-understanding must be the imperative motive. Instead, he suggests that

there may be other ulterior motives (e.g. “glorification, leaving record for one’s posterity”) (171). This coincides with Michael Sheringham’s view that

> the disadvantage of seeing [the desire for form and self-unity] as intrinsic is that it fails to fully recognize the actual diversity of motivating factors in autobiography, the way these effectively operate in the process of life writing, and the characteristic hybridity and interaction of autobiography and other forms. (“Motivation” 619)

The act of life writing is approached for many reasons. Sometimes it is more centered around the self, other times the focus is directed to an other. It can be used for redemption, to somehow recover someone who is no longer present, to make things right, as a way of avoiding oblivion—the reasons are endless. But more often than not, the motives behind autobiographical works are legitimate enough for these to be written and published.

3. THE FEMALE ROCK MEMOIR AND THE PERSONAL ESSAY: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Just Kids, M Train, and *Year of the Monkey* are consistently thought of as Patti Smith's memoirs. In bookstores, online or physical, they are normally found among other celebrity memoirs or auto/biographies from the music or entertainment industry, and sometimes they are simply labelled as nonfiction—as are history books, essays, or travel guides. These books, however, are not exactly memoirs, nor are they entirely nonfictional; at least not all of them. It seems that, because of the success enjoyed by *Just Kids*, the only 'memoir-esque' account by Smith, it might have been easier (even strategic) to market Smith's subsequent narratives as memoirs as well. This, however, misleads readers and prejudices their horizon of expectations as well as their implicit pact with the author of an autobiographical account. *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* move away from the genre of memoir and display features of the personal essay, not entirely being one or the other but gradually coming closer to the latter. Before turning to the analysis of Patti Smith's autobiographical prose works, we will proceed to examine the two forms between which her books oscillate: the female rock memoir and the personal essay.

3.1. The female rock memoir

As stated at the beginning of this dissertation, memoir may be approached by the celebrities and the "nobodies," by men and women, by the young and the elderly. When a number of writers sharing certain demographic characteristics (age, race, gender, social class) publish their life stories around the same time period, we may speak of a particular trend leading to a subgenre of memoir. Throughout the last century, as the celebrity autobiography has gained recognition as an established genre, the realm of music has prompted the publication of music-related autobiographies in different forms: those written by musicians themselves, those written in collaboration with literary specialists, and those written by people who are not musicians but are still connected to the scene (Fondebrider 624-5). Patti Smith's autobiographical prose works, written by herself, initially seem to fall into the category of the so-called 'female rock memoir,' which accounts for stories of women who made their way into the early rock industry. Far from being fully recognized as a subgenre in auto/biography theory, the female rock memoir is nevertheless slowly making its way in the literary community. Evidence of this can be found in Geoff Edgers' article on *The Washington Post* on the "Rise of the female rock memoir"; in Abigail Gardner's recently published book *Ageing and Contemporary*

Female Musicians (2020), which incorporates a chapter under the title of "More than music: Female rock memoirs"; or in Professor Tomasz Sawczuk's paper titled "'I've Been Crawling Up So Long on Your Stairway to Heaven': The Rise of the Female Rock Memoir." Sawczuk himself writes in the said article from 2016: "With over a dozen books released in the last few years and a number of titles awaiting publication, the female rock memoir has become the latest craze in the Anglophone publishing market, frequently outnumbering the print funds of its male counterpart" (71). A year before, in 2015, journalist Geoff Edgers had described the genre as "the latest trend in book publishing." Well into the 2021, it seems that this trend is here to stay. Abigail Gardner points to a "mini-boom" of such publications during the second decade of the 21st century (13): only in 2019 five new female rock memoirs made it to the publishing market: Amy Rigby's *Girl to City*, Tegan and Sara's *High School*, Patti Smith's *Year of the Monkey*,[13] Debbie Harry's *Face It*, and Liz Phair's *Horror Stories*.[14]

There seems to be enough proof that a subgenre of memoir is starting to take shape in the hands of female rockers, but the fact that it is not yet firmly established should not surprise us; we must be aware that only recently (during the last decade, to be precise) has it started to pick up. Although Patti Smith is no pioneer in life writing, the publication of her first autobiographical narrative has much to do with the upsurge of this literary phenomenon. In 2010, her memoir *Just Kids* became the winner of the National Book Award for Nonfiction and, from then on, the names of other rockstar women have started to occupy more and more space on the bookstore shelves (Viv Albertine, Chrissie Hynde, Carrie Brownstein, Kim Gordon or Debbie Harry, to name a few). Sawczuk thus refers to Smith as the "trailblazer" of the genre (71) and Couser even praises her in his introductory volume to memoir for carrying off a literary prize despite not being "known primarily as a writer" (*Memoir* 5). Not only did other female rockers follow her example; Patti Smith herself continued to publish two other autobiographical accounts in that same decade.

[13] Even though I will be arguing that *Year of the Monkey* has been wrongly categorized as a memoir, the reading public thinks of it as such and thus counts it among the female rock memoirs.

[14] I am only taking into consideration the anglophone market.

Female rock memoirists tend to fashion their stories in a similar way: theirs are most often chronological accounts embellished with flashbacks or observations from the I-now perspective. Photographs generally include family portraits, pictures from the writers' childhood and teenage years, pictures with friends (usually musicians or people related to the industry), and pictures which directly connect them with the music scene (i.e. pictures of them performing onstage, backstage with their bands, recording in the studio, posing for photoshoots, or even pictures of flyers, set lists for concerts, or fan art). While the narratives revolve, in all cases, around their music careers, these memoirs raise questions of gender, celebrity, and age which, as we will now see, cannot be understood independently of the (re)construction of an identity nor of the issues outlined above (relationality, authority, memory). The very fact that these are women writing already calls for an analysis distinct from that of traditional (male) autobiographical texts, but, in addition, these are women writing about one of the many areas which have been typically monopolized by men.[15] Oftentimes they have been, if possible, doubly excluded. On top of this, female rockers fit in the category of celebrity, which means that their accounts are generally approached with certain skepticism and sometimes the reading public assumes that they will lack literary merit. As for age, the fact that these women are writing in their forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies has implications linked to memory and the way these authors relate to it. But what also concerns us here is age as in "a particular period of time," for these women's experiences are inextricably intertwined with the history and the mythology surrounding the decades they are writing about.

3.1.1. Gender

As we saw earlier, just because people have not written autobiography as such it does not mean that they have not written autobiographically. This is the case especially with women, who are practically absent from the canon of autobiography and yet they have been putting life writing into practice for centuries. The fact is that they have done so either by choosing forms different from autobiography (e.g. diaries, essays, letters)—

[15] Evidence of male hegemony in the rock world may be found precisely in several of the female rock memoirs. Here are a few examples: "I didn't aspire to be a musician—there wasn't that equality at the time, it was inconceivable that a girl could cross over into male territory and be in a band" (Albertine 25); "Women occupied a narrow space in relation to the music I loved. They might be hysterical fans, sobbing and pulling at their hair while the Beatles stood onstage calm and cool, tapping their pointy boots, playing music that could be barely heard over the screams and wails. Women might be singing in rock bands—fronting the band, not playing *in* the band. Or they might be groupies on a mission to be close enough to a rock star to be his love, girlfriend, or muse" (Valentine ix).

and, for the most part, privately—or by presenting their life stories as fiction. In Estelle C. Jelineks's words, "one is struck by the number of women writing diaries, journals, and notebooks, in contrast to the many more men writing autobiographies proper" (19). These "discontinuous forms," she notes, "have been important to women because they are analogous to the fragmented, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives" (19). The ways in which men and women narrate their life stories could not be more opposed. Professor Emerita of Sociology Judy Long puts it simply:

> Where male subjects portray themselves as separated, women represent themselves as connected. Where men's stories are set in the public eye, women chronicle private scenes. Where men prune their lives down to a terse outline, women's accounts remain 'messy.' Where men claim a destination, women record process. Where men universalize their experience, women's narratives remain contextualized. Women's autobiographies differ from those of men in terms of plot, content, and form. (56)

Women's life narratives, thus, cannot fit into an essentially male autobiographical canon, because they constitute the antithesis of what is expected to count as exemplary. Long notes that the difficulties faced by women willing to tell their stories very often discourage them from doing so. The tradition of autobiography is founded on a series of typically masculine premises that put pressure on female subjects because they entail making public assertions women are not comfortable with (14). In the absence of a canon that welcomes women's autobiographical stories, a counter-canon is now beginning to take shape, as former woman-authored texts are rediscovered and new ones are embraced.

Since female autobiography supposedly departs so much from conventional autobiography, Liz Stanley proposes that maybe it should be approached as "an entirely different genre" (253). Women's life writing calls for new narrative forms where women can comfortably express themselves. Judy Long argues that "[w]omen's lives are to be told in narratives that embody complexity, connection, emotion, effort" (54); on the other hand, Françoise Lionnet notes how, in feminist autobiographies, "[c]onventional boundaries between different writing forms are explored, played with, crossed and recrossed" (14). This need to find a form malleable enough to allow for the fusion of different genres as well as for a broader range of stories to be told, thus challenging autobiography's fundamental principles, culminates in the restoration of memoir as an acceptable literary genre. Women's preference for this form as a means of expression is more and more frequent. This can be further rationalized as the need to assert themselves and (re)construct their multiple selves in an attempt to move away from the assumptions and roles that have been imposed upon them for so long. Interestingly, Couser has

described memoir as "a threshold genre in which some previously silent populations have been given a voice for the first time" (*Memoir* 12). Along the same lines, Smith and Watson note that "the form of the Bildungsroman has been taken up more recently by women and other disenfranchised persons to consolidate a sense of emerging identity and an increased place in public life" (189). Hence the rising predilection among women—so often denied the right to speak their minds—for memoir. In Murdock's words, it "has given women the freedom to write about what it means not only to be a woman shaped by the values of contemporary society, but to be a woman shaping the values of contemporary society" (39). Women seem to have thus found in memoir a fitting medium for their voices, one where they are not questioned for meddling in men's business.

The creation of a female life writing tradition has inevitably led to an attempt to lay its foundations. Scholars are now putting together anthologies in which authors seek to compile a set of features normally shared by women's accounts. Some of these characteristics have already been advanced: women's narratives are discontinuous; they are concerned with intimate, daily and ordinary events; and they place a great emphasis on the relationships of self to others (Stanley 92-3). Despite this effort to unify women's approaches to life writing, feminist critics insist on analyzing these works based on difference rather than homogeneity. Lionnet argues that "women are so diverse and live in such varied cultural, racial, and economic circumstances that we cannot possibly pretend to speak in a single voice" (xi), and Stanley stresses the fact that these are "not differences from an assumed exemplary male life, but rather differences from each other" (120) and proposes the term "feminismS" over "feminism" (243). Seeking to group all of women's accounts under a single genre just because they share certain characteristics resulting from the fact that they are written by women would be too reductionist. Male self-narratives also tend to share certain features, yet we do not speak of a single pattern when it comes to analyzing men's accounts. There is no such thing as female autobiography or memoir, then, but rather a multitude of disparate stories which require further categorization.

Female self writing ultimately becomes essential in a literary tradition where women's voices have been silenced. In the past, if women's stories were ever acknowledged at all, they were invariably told from a male perspective. Female writers now have the chance to set the record straight and to share their truth (or, at least, to attempt to find it in the narrative process). As far as the rock memoir is concerned, women

have now taken the reins of a male-dominated genre in order to draw attention to the relevance of female experience in an equally male-dominated world. Specific to female rock memoirs are, for instance: the need for women to justify their presence in the rock scene,[16] the difficulties of balancing home life and career,[17] or the inherent sexualization that comes with being a female rockstar.[18] In Sawczuk's view, the women who are telling these stories "enrich the well-established type of narrative with thus far marginalized accounts of the female rock artists and ensure their rightful place in the history of rock music" (80). Similarly, Abigail Gardner notes that women have been consistently absent from music anthologies but they are now "writing themselves back in" (15). Whatever their story, whatever their stance, by sharing their point of view they are already making a significant contribution to the rock memoir in particular as well as adding up to the visibility of women in auto/biography in general.

3.1.2. Age

Age is necessarily linked with different aspects of life writing, namely memory and the sense of self. The older we grow, the harder it gets to preserve memories from an increasingly distant past. Conversely, the older we grow, the more stable (albeit ever-changing) our identity is. Although memoir now encourages people of all ages with a story to tell to engage in life writing, it is true that it is a task more commonly undertaken during the second half of life (Randall and McKim 6). Once we reach a certain age and realize that the time we have left is suddenly shorter than the time we have already spent here, we find ourselves looking back more often than looking ahead. It is at this point when one aims to make meaning of the life lived. This is linked to what Kathleen Woodward defines as 'life review': "It is a psychological process, undertaken under the pressure of the coming ending of one's life, in which one strives to see one's life as a whole, as if it were a coherent narrative" (2). Age provides us with the distance necessary

[16] Carrie Brownstein, for instance, complains in *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* about "[a] certain kind of exhaustion [that] sets in from having to constantly explain and justify one's existence or participation in an artistic or creative realm" (ch. 1). "What a privilege it must be," she reasons, "to never have had to answer the question 'How does it feel to be a woman playing music?' or 'Why did you choose to be in an all-female band?'" (ch. 1).

[17] In *Girl in a Band*, Kim Gordon acknowledges: "For me, it was hard, working on art projects, running the house, raising a daughter, and having a full-time music career" (ch. 44).

[18] Chrissie Hynde remembers in her memoir: "I wouldn't allow any photos to be taken of me on my own, even though as the singer, which implies 'sex symbol,' it was expected. But I held my ground. The Pretenders were the four of us, and I was pathologically insistent that we be perceived as such" (331).

to reflect on past events from different perspectives, thus enabling us to form a wiser judgment. Female rock memoirists are usually in their forties, fifties or sixties when they publish their memoirs. Patti Smith, for instance, was 63 when she published her first memoir, *Just Kids* (2010), but she was already in her seventies when the last of her life narratives, *Year of the Monkey* (2019), was published. This, of course, has important implications for autobiographical works. As stated above, memories change over time and so does the way we relate to these: our worries, our beliefs, or the ways in which we express ourselves. It is therefore interesting to see how a memoirist's stance may evolve and how this evolution is displayed in the narrative act.

Like gender issues, age issues are not exclusive to the female rock memoirs. These are determining questions in autobiographical acts in general. Nevertheless, female rock memoirs do have an idiosyncrasy concerning age, only not age in the sense of how old the authors are but rather age meaning the period of time the authors are writing about. According to Gardner, these memoirists' "female literary voice is part of a popular cultural nostalgia for the youthful 'age' of punk and post-punk that is mirrored by contemporary cultural reflections on the era from the world of art and media" (14). That is, their memoirs cannot be understood independently of the revival that this particular age is experiencing. Everything that took place in the years spanning from the late sixties to the early eighties, especially in the music world, is coming back in the form of documentaries, posters, anthologies, clothing and, last but not least, memoirs. The female rock memoir, however, is not just the result of a passing fad:

> it is also about a need to reflect on times that are recalled as rebellious and to consider how memoir works to augment this historicising process. These rock memoirs not only focus on different versions of recent cultural history but feed into the mythologies of punk, grunge and indie in complex ways, both mythologising and canonising the period of the late 1970s and early 1980s in punk and post-punk, whilst adding into it rich textural detail of the world behind the band and off stage. (Gardner 14)

And yet, while they contribute to the survival of these mythologies, these women are also demythologizing the public sphere by shedding some light on the private one. "There is, in them, a degree of familiarity as we know their stories already, but the memoir offers us the inside perspective" (Gardner 15). These women's narratives offer the reader a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the offstage of an era where the spotlight fell on what was happening onstage.

3.1.3. Celebrity

The third and last distinctive feature of female rock memoirs concerns celebrity. This, again, is not exclusive to the genre—there are countless memoirs by politicians, actors or sportspeople which deal with their celebrity status—but in the female rock memoir context it does have its particularities. There is a question which is discussed without fail whenever celebrity narrative is examined: ghostwriting. In their volumes on memoir, both Couser and Yagoda mention ghostwriters when examining celebrity, and so do Traci Freeman in her entry on "Celebrity Autobiography" in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* and Katja Lee in her Ph.D. dissertation on *Women's Celebrity in Canada: Contexts and Memoirs*. However, this pejorative label does not seem to apply to the female rock memoir (at least it is rarely brought up in the discussions).

Celebrity accounts are also often discussed alongside the market industry. On the one hand, Lee notes that "there is a strong market for these texts: people, in general, want to know more about the prominent individuals circulating in the public sphere and a great many of these individuals are willing to craft a narrative in response to that demand" (1). She then acknowledges that, as a result, autobiographical celebrity stories have become a powerful tool for marketing purposes (2). On the other hand, however, there is a negative side to the market exerting such an influence on the development of celebrity memoir. First, since the author is already known to a wide audience, readers approach the text with a set of expectations which they wish to see fulfilled (Neuroth 4). Most probably, they want the narrative persona to be a faithful representation of the public persona they are already familiar with. And yet, at the same time, the constructed persona ought to be relatable enough so that the reader can find some common ground (Neuroth 18). Not only that, but the audiences are nowadays asking for a particular type of story, as Traci Freeman indicates:

> in a publishing world ever more populated with self-help and "recovery" books, it could even be said that there is a kind of cultural pressure on celebrities to emphasize those parts of their lives that show them falling prey to psychological, physical, or social stresses . . . At any rate, there seems to be an increasing market for the celebrity-as-victim story, and often an expectation (played up in the marketing by publishers, and leapt on in reviews) of revelations of trauma, waywardness, indiscretion, or illness. (189)

So, while the celebrities find it easier than the "nobodies" to get their stories published, once these narratives are out, the responsibilities are greater (and so is the chance of failure).

As for the female rock memoir, the celebrity aspect is closely linked to issues of gender mentioned before. In his study of rock autobiographies, Thomas Swiss compares musicians to critics "supplying the 'authorised' or 'authentic' version of stories that have previously circulated; they challenge other versions as told in the press or elsewhere by journalists, confidants, academics and others" (289). This is especially true of women involved in rock, whose stories—when deemed worthy of recognition—have been commonly told by men. These women now have the opportunity to claim authority on their narratives. They are so much aware of the empowering potential of a text that their works achieve a higher level of quality (Sawczuk 74). Female rock memoirs are not the average celebrity story written in order to earn the artist an increase in record sales. In fact, there is, as Katja Lee argues, "a marked movement in contemporary celebrity texts to position the celebrity as ordinary and 'normal'" (7). Along these lines, Neuroth suggests that there is an "attempt to disregard their celebrity status and convey to their audience that they are in fact normal women who deal with the issues that regular women face on a day-to-day basis" (14). Women rock stars are willing to disclose aspects of their lives that have been previously ignored. In doing so, they are transcending stardom and the supposed romanticism of the legendary 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll' doctrine, which may or may not be representative of the male experience but it is definitely not essential for the understanding of women in rock.[19] Female memoirists have to deal with issues of authority, credibility and relationality if they want their stories to be taken seriously enough to be welcome in the history of rock.

3.2. The personal essay

In our everyday lives, we tend to think of the essay as a formal text usually produced in the academic sphere, most probably because we associate it to the academic essay. Contrary to this belief, however, the genre of the essay is located precisely towards the other end of the spectrum of nonfiction. In the preface to the *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, Graham Good describes these works as provisional and explanatory, personal rather than collective, addressed to the general reader, and working from the particular

[19] While sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll are present in these female accounts, these aspects are not what define the female rock experience. Drug abuse, for instance, plays an important role in Chrissie Hynde's *Reckless: My Life as a Pretender*, yet the author does not seek to romanticize it, quite the opposite: "I think it's easy to see that the moral of my story is that drugs, including tobacco and alcohol, only cause suffering" (311), she acknowledges in the epilogue.

toward the general (xxx-xxxi). While an essay may become the grounds for a more scholarly approach to a particular subject, this is not its main purpose. An essay may be autobiographical, critical, familiar, humorous, medical, moral, personal, philosophical, satiric, sociological or topical; it may have history, nature, religion, science, or travel as its main subject; it may be around 50 pages or book-length. Be it as it may, Good states that, essentially, "the essay is the voice of the individual. Wherever that is heard and heeded, the essay will flourish" (xxxii). Joseph Epstein, editor of *The Norton Book of Personal Essays*, calls this form "a happy accident of literature": "accident because it seems to have come into the world without anything like a clear line of descent" and "*happy* because it is free, the freest form in all of literature . . . able to take off on any tack it wishes, building its own structure as it moves along, rebuilding and remaking itself—and its author—each time out" (11). Epstein points to Michel de Montaigne (1530-1590) as the first great practitioner of the personal essay, mainly because Montaigne did not seek to be exhaustive or definitive in his writing (11). So does Phillip Lopate in his volume on *The Art of the Personal Essay*, where he refers to Montaigne as "the great innovator and patron saint of personal essayists" (xxiii). In order to understand how the American essay[20] came to be what it is today, however, we must travel from France to the United States and briefly look at the history and evolution of the form.

In *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, Dan Roche and Ned Stuckey-French co-author an entry on the "American Essay" in which they argue that "[i]n its broadest denotation, the essay has existed in America almost from the arrival of the first English settlers in 1607" (28), when nonfictional literature in the form of pamphlets or sermons was produced. According to Roche and Stuckey-French, the earnest beginnings of the American essay as such, however, date back to the early 18th century (29). At the beginning of the 18th century, essays appeared in newspapers, but towards the end of that century and especially in the 19th century, magazines allowed the genre to become "the most clearly defined and popular American literary form" (Roche and Stuckey-French 31). Whether commenting on fashion, education, or social life, the aim was to publish as much as possible and not to distinguish oneself from other essayists. Throughout the 19th century, different essays gained prominence: the familiar essay, concerned with everyday life and "filled with intimate personal observations" (Roche 578); the nature essay; the philosophical or

[20] The adjective "American" here is used to refer to the United States. I refer to this particular form as "American essay" because that is the name it is given in the encyclopedia entry I quote below.

critical essay, especially practiced by transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau; or the humorous essay, with Mark Twain as its leading exponent. With the turn of the century, it was argued that the essay was being replaced by columns or articles. For Roche and Stuckey-French, however, the essay did not die, it only became "increasingly political, revealing, and weighty" (37). In the 1960s, New Journalism began to gain some prominence, which led to more essayistic articles. New Journalists like Tom Wolfe "borrowed techniques from fiction such as the extensive use of dialogue, developed scenes, sensory details, experimental punctuation, colloquialisms, and neologisms" (Roche and Stuckey-French 43). In so doing, they "changed not only the form of creative nonfiction but also broadened its subject matter by reporting as participating observers from the turbulent centers of their times" (Roche and Stuckey-French 43). With the social upheaval that marked the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. the civil rights movement, the second wave of feminism, or the environmental movement), new voices took the form of the essay in order to lay bare realities previously silenced or unknown (Roche and Stuckey-French 44). With the passing of time, the American essay has "been moving inexorably toward subjects that are at once more intimate and more public" (Roche and Stuckey-French 45), and it is now a genre with several practitioners that continue to elevate its status.

Of the multiple forms the essay may take, I will be focusing on the personal essay, which, as Theresa Werner notes, "is what most people mean when they consider the essay as a genre" (1386). According to Werner, both the genre of the essay and the form of the personal essay share the following characteristics: "an informal style, a casual, meandering structure, a conversational tone, the clear imprint of the author's personality, and a tendency toward subjects Phillip Lopate . . . has dubbed 'the familiar and the domestic, the emotional middle of the road'" (1386). The personal essay, however, has its own unique characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of the forms. It may be initially mistaken with the autobiographical essay, defined by Lydia Fakundiny as "a practice at the intersection of autobiography and essay, a movement between the narratively self-centered imperatives of the former and the worldly discursiveness of the latter" ("Autobiographical Essay" 87). For Werner, nevertheless, the difference lies in the way the essayist presents himself in the text:

> the personal essayist does not place himself firmly center stage, as does the autobiographical essayist; the autobiographical element of the personal essay is far less calculated. The writer is not secondary, but his approach is usually humble, and often self-deprecating and wryly humorous. The personal essay is an exploration of self only insofar as it translates into universal experience. (1386)

While there is an autobiographical element inherent to all essays, it is not what defines the personal essay. The writer's personality, her voice, her sense of self, her imprint; these are all inherent elements of the text, but the figure of the writer, albeit present at all times, must not take precedence over the subjects examined.

Whenever discussing any autobiographical account, the matter of truth arises. Particular to the personal essay, however, is the writer's reliability and the relationship of trust she establishes with the reader. Werner, Epstein, and Lopate agree that the narrator cannot be unreliable. On the one hand, Werner notes that "the reader must trust the writer to tell his story as truthfully as possible" and that "the writer sets up a kind of dialogue with the reader, creating an intimate bond of understanding" (1386). On the other hand, Epstein argues that the personal essay is distinguished from fiction because "it is bounded—some might say grounded—by reality . . . in a personal essay an unreliable narrator is just another name for a bad writer" (14). For his part, Lopate adds that "[w]e must also feel secure that the essayist has done a fair amount of introspective homework already, is grounded in reality, and is trying to give us the maximum understanding and intelligence of which he or she is capable" (xxvi). For Epstein, the key ultimately lies in persuasiveness:

> Honesty for a writer is rather different from honesty for others. Honesty, outside literature, means not lying, establishing trust through honorable conduct, absolute reliability in personal and professional dealings. In writing . . . it implies the accurate, altogether truthful, reporting of feelings, for in literature only the truth is finally persuasive and persuasiveness is at the same time the measure of truth. (19)

Thus far, truth, honesty, reliability, and persuasiveness seem to be interconnected, almost synonymous, in the context of personal essay. There is, however, another crucial element in the study of truth: objectivity. According to Epstein, objectivity is normally impossible to attain, regardless of the form. But in the personal essay in particular, "all claims to objectivity are dropped at the outset, all masks removed, and the essayist proceeds with shameless subjectivity" which is what "gives the personal essay both its charm and its intimacy" (18). The personal essayist, then, must remain honest yet acknowledge the futility of attempting to remain objective, for such thing does not exist.

As for the style employed in the personal essay, since it "is no longer a bourgeois, middle-class phenomenon," its tone "is usually light, often nostalgic without being sentimental, gently humorous, rarely didactic" (Werner 1387). Epstein argues that the form is characterized by a familiar style, "natural to conversation, very superior conversation to be sure, and without artifice, pomposity, any bull whatsoever" (19), which

takes us back to Werner's belief that the writer engages in a conversation with the reader. Along the same lines, Lopate considers intimacy to be the personal essay's hallmark: "Through sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies, the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader, a dialogue—a friendship, if you will, based on identification, understanding, testiness, and companionship" (xxiii). This connection is also achieved through the subject matter of the personal essay, which "traditionally concerns common things . . . Human relations with family and friends is a frequent topic, as are childhood reminiscences, and the consideration of pastimes such as travel, walking, and sheer idleness" (Werner 1387)—that is, things that concern us all. Werner therefore defines the genre as a "truly universal experience" (1387).

Universality is precisely at the heart of the personal essay. Given that "the field of subjects available to the essayist is as wide as life itself" (Epstein 17), there are many possibilities for the writer to connect with her readers. Epstein speaks of "true magic" when pointing to the form's ability "to make the particular experience of the essayist part of universal experience" (22). According to him, "[t]he subject of the personal essay—one's self—may be one in which the personal essayist is the world's leading expert, but if that is his only subject of expertise, the essayist won't remain in business long" (22). The personal essay, similar to the memoir, displays a process of self-discovery—hence its "rambling, intuitive and organic" structure (Werner 1387)—which takes place alongside the writing: writer and reader participate in this act. "The personal essayist . . . stumbles into facts as he goes along. He writes out of his experience, seen through the lens of his character, projected onto the page through the filter of his style" (Epstein 21). It is through this exercise that they connect with the reader: "by displaying their individuality, they remind readers of their own individuality" (23), concludes Epstein. For Lopate, the personal essayist must avoid self-righteousness at all costs: "The trick is to realize that one is not important, except insofar as one's example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish" (xxxii). For a personal essayist to produce a truly universal discourse, then, she must be willing to engage in a process of self-discovery that takes place alongside the discussion of other matters, and not in isolation.

Autobiographical texts, as argued in the previous chapter, have been essential in the history of female writers. Once relegated to private life writing, women have, for some time now, been taking up public life writing in its various forms. Memoir, as we saw, is

one of them, but so is the personal essay. According to Professor Isabel Durán, the personal essay is the form women activists have always called for:

> a written form that would resemble spoken language; a form that would invite communication, connection, dialogue; a form, in sum, that would be a direct, comprehensive and vehement form of discourse that would celebrate the use of personal voice and be flexible to adapt to different forms and styles. (47)

Still, in the editor's note to the *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, Tracy Chevalier notes how there are fewer entries on women. There are two main reasons for this, he argues: first, women were never encouraged to share their opinions, much less to write about them; second, whenever they could, women opted for genres that would earn them some money, which was not the case with the essay. Chevalier concedes, however, that "in the 20th century women at last gained both leisure time and an authoritative voice" (vii), which results in greater attention to what she calls "contemporary women writers," such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, or Alice Walker. A rereading of women's autobiographical production (private or public) might reveal pieces written in the form of personal essays that were never considered essays as such.

Far less popular than the now ubiquitous memoir, the essay is a genre equally flexible which may encompass several different forms in itself. The personal essay, which finds itself at the crossroads of the familiar essay and the autobiographical essay, must be studied as an independent form with its own characteristics. The personal essayist seeks to explore her innermost self while also reflecting on broader subjects. In using a conversational tone which helps her establish an intimate bond with the reader, she has to create the most reliable narrator possible yet remain aware of the impossibility of attaining absolute objectivity. As the personal essayist is not concerned with fashioning a logical text, she may reflect on a myriad of subjects but she must, above all, devise a text which offers the reader some knowledge beyond the personal experience.

4. FROM THE FEMALE ROCK MEMOIR TO THE PERSONAL ESSAY: ANALYZING PATTI SMITH'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE WORK

Now that we have examined the theoretical apparatus that frames the study, we can turn to the analysis of Patti Smith's autobiographical works to discuss the two main hypotheses proposed in this dissertation. On the one hand, I have argued that, beginning with *Just Kids*, with each new autobiographical narrative she has published, Smith has gradually transformed her approach to life writing. This has led to the misclassification of her later work, namely *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*, frequently discussed on the same terms as *Just Kids*. On the other hand, I have claimed that, through the self-exploration of the private persona present in these works, Smith has managed to reconstruct her public identity. I therefore will proceed to analyze both the way she negotiates the boundaries of genre from one book to another as well as the extent to which Smith resorts to diverse forms of life writing in order to further explore her private identity.

4.1. *Just Kids*

In January 2010, Patti Smith, 63 years old at the time, published her first autobiographical prose work, *Just Kids*, in the form of a memoir. Ten months later, Marjorie Garber presented Smith with the National Book Award for Nonfiction, declaring: "We agreed at the outset that we valued strong and powerful writing, original research, and a sense that a book would merit rereading in future years both on its own merits and as a marker of the times" ("2010 National" 02:29-02:41). Out of the almost five hundred books considered, *Just Kids* ended up emerging as the winner. In her acceptance speech, Smith, visibly touched, revealed that, as a clerk at Scribner's bookstore, she had dreamed of writing a book of her own, wondering what it would feel like to win a National Book Award. "Thank you for letting me find out" ("2010 National" 05:46-05:49), she concluded, taking the opportunity to urge publishers never to abandon the book: "There is nothing in our material world more beautiful than the book" ("2010 National" 06:11-06:16). So began the decade in which Patti Smith would release her 11th studio album and publish two other memoirs, besides writing other books, giving concerts, debuting in television, exhibiting her work as photographer, and attending several activism events.

Just Kids recounts Patti Smith's relationship with avant-garde photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, as well as her involvement in New York City's burgeoning bohemian downtown scene, from the Bowery to the East Village to the Chelsea Hotel. With Patti and Robert's[21] relationship as the thread of the story, Smith takes us from her uncertain arrival in New York City in 1967 to Robert's devastating death in 1989, all along letting us in on their journey as aspiring artists yearning to make the right connections. On the face of it, Patti Smith's first life narrative might be pigeonholed as just another celebrity memoir in which the gossipy details of an unconventional relationship take precedence over literary merit. After all, *Just Kids* is often seen as the forerunner of the female rock memoir, which, Sawczuk contends, is usually not that different from the typical male rock memoir covering the lurid details of the rock life (72-3). Besides, according to John B. Thompson, in celebrity publishing "the author's platform creates a pre-existing market for a book" and this platform "becomes not just one factor to be taken into account but the overriding factor, indeed the principal reason for publishing the book" (ch. 5). Similarly, Couser argues that "the somebody memoir has a ready-made audience; the author's fame—the literal pre-text of the memoir—usually guarantees publicity and sales" (*Memoir* 144). However, if celebrity autobiographies are those which "often contain common characteristics, such as a tendency towards the sensational confessional, often sexual . . . and often accompanied by a self-aggrandizing tone" (T. Freeman 188), then *Just Kids* eschews the label. It does not focus on Patti Smith's rise to stardom, nor is it characterized by a pretentious narration. Those who approach *Just Kids* expecting to meet the androgynous godmother of punk and the homosexual S&M photographer will be disappointed, for it is precisely "the first book that frees both artists from their respective mystiques as punk goddess and gay provocateur" (Berger). Once we immerse ourselves in the narrative, we realize that there is so much more to it than meets the eye. In an interview at the Louisiana Literature Festival in Denmark in 2012, Patti Smith confessed: "I wasn't really comfortable talking about myself, especially when I started becoming successful. I felt a little uncomfortable . . . to talk about that without seeming conceited or self-preoccupied" ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:36:35-00:36:53). Smith's preoccupation with coming across as a boastful

[21] When alluding to the characters in the story, I will refer to them by their names (e.g. Patti, Robert), as opposed to when alluding to the flesh-and-blood people they are modeled after, in which case I will use their full names or their last names (e.g. Patti Smith or Smith; Robert Mapplethorpe or Mapplethorpe).

rockstar goes in line with female rock memoirs' attempt to portray the female celebrity persona as ordinary as possible.

Just Kids is the story of a young woman who, after being caught in a dilemma for years, wondering whether she was destined to become the mistress or the artist, ended up finding the one person who could help her become "Frida to Diego, both muse and maker" (12). It is the story of New York City, the place where anybody could reach for the stars and eventually become one. It is the story of the 1970s, a decade so often neglected for not measuring up to the revolutionary sixties or the iconic eighties. It is the genuine story of the artist's quest, where struggle is not always met with reward. Julia Watson, professor of comparative studies of literature and culture, defines *Just Kids* as a "relational memoir" and states that Patti Smith

> crafts a voice for navigating seemingly incompatible autobiographical genres—the artist's coming-of-age tale (*Künstlerroman*), the story of grief and mourning (autothanatography), and the socially oriented account of a cultural moment (autoethnography). (132)

This is the starting point for my analysis of Smith's first autobiographical narrative. I will now proceed to deconstruct the work in order to reveal how it lends itself to—in fact, is the result of—the convergence of different genres of life writing, namely relational memoir, *Künstlerroman*, autothanatography, and autoethnography. I will thus evince how this interweaving of genres helps the author devise a narrative with multiple layers of significance and allows her to (re)construct her public persona while she engages (purposefully or not) in matters of truth, authority, or universality, among others.

4.1.1. Relational memoir

"It was as if we were the only two people in the world"
—Patti Smith, *Just Kids*

The relational conception of selfhood was first introduced by the classical American pragmatists (1850-1950), who understood the self "as created within, and constituted by, the webs of relations into which it enters and within which it actually acquires its identity and its content" (Cowley 13). In 1985, Susan Stanford Friedman applied the term "relational" to women's autobiographical writing for the first time in order to describe them as dependent on, and determined by, community, therefore differentiating them from the traditionally individualistic male accounts (qtd. in Smith and Watson 201). This view, however, is rather obsolete, for critics now favor theories like Eakin's, who argues that "[a]ll selfhood . . . is relational despite differences that fall out along gender lines" (50). According to him, relational narratives problematize the

process of establishing boundaries between the genres of biography and autobiography (58); it is nowadays widely accepted that it is not possible to write about oneself without writing about others and that, when writing about someone else, we inevitably invest those accounts with our own perceptions. The concept of relationality, then, is closely linked to that of auto/biography previously discussed, which Smith and Watson define as "a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography, or the converse, a personal narrative within a biography" (184). Likewise, its connection to memoir is inescapable: all memoirs are, indeed, relational to some extent—this is precisely what makes them different from the more conventional biographies or autobiographies. Still, although it is a given that a memoir will be characterized by some form of relationality, this feature can be defining in the analysis of certain stories. This is the case with Patti Smith's first memoir.

In Couser's aforementioned continuum where autobiography is at one end and biography at the other, *Just Kids* would be towards the middle, somewhere in the grayscale, not being entirely about Patti Smith nor entirely about Robert Mapplethorpe but rather about each of them to the same extent. In fact, the story does not revolve so much around the characters themselves as around their relationship. "Texts found near the middle of this continuum may take as their subject neither the author nor some proximate other person but rather the relationship between them" (*Memoir* 21), Couser explains. Throughout the narrative, Patti and Robert share different kinds of relationships: they go from being partners to being sexually involved to being friends, all the while considering each other family. The truth is that this relationality was also something that characterized the twosome outside literature. At times lovers, at times friends, at times artist and muse, at times siblings, at times all of these, Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe came to develop such a strong connection that many of their acquaintances could not conceive of them as separate entities. This may account for Smith's undeniable success in highlighting the relational aspect in this memoir.

Given that the storyline in *Just Kids* is arranged following Patti and Robert's relationship, by looking at how the events unfold we will be able to appreciate the extent to which the memoir can be regarded as relational.[22] Smith begins the narrative with

[22] I am referring here to the fourth form of relationality introduced before: that which happens at textual level when the story involves the strong presence of an other.

"Monday's Children," a chapter that takes its title from the fact that both Patti and Robert were born on a Monday, drawing two parallel lines as she depicts the characters' respective transitions from childhood to their teenage years. Disparate as these accounts may seem, she is actually providing the reader with some context while establishing the first connections that will set the stage for the characters' first encounter. Right at the end of this first chapter, Smith proceeds to join the two independent narrative lines, making a statement which already suggests the magnitude of what is about to happen: "And in the shifting, inhospitable atmosphere, a chance encounter changed the course of my life. It was the summer I met Robert Mapplethorpe" (31). The stories Smith has previously narrated will start falling into place from this point on. Fourteen-year-old Patti "dreamed of meeting an artist to love and support and work with side by side" (12). Six years later, enter Robert Mapplethorpe.

Thus begins the second chapter of the book, "Just Kids," which is actually the first chapter of the protagonists' shared life. As they initially get to know each other, the reader might easily mistake their connection for a trivial, fleeting infatuation. Sharing their first night together, they already seem to have found in one another everything that they have been longing for: "When we awoke he greeted me with his crooked smile, and I knew he was my knight. As if it was the most natural thing in the world we stayed together, not leaving each other's side save to go to work. Nothing was spoken; it was just mutually understood" (42). However, as their bond strengthens, we begin to discern the transcendence that will characterize their relationship. Henceforth, the tone employed by the narrator to refer to Patti's relationship with Robert will shift from loving to admiring, to melancholic, to frustrated, back to loving again, but it will be at all times tinged with a strong sense of devotion. As Patti and Robert attempt to get by on the little money they make in their unstable jobs while living off friends' charity, they begin to experiment with different art forms, developing a trust for one another.

Eventually, Patti notices that both Robert and his artistic drives are turning increasingly obscure, leading to a period of misunderstanding on her part and mistrust on his. Robert starts having second thoughts about his sexuality and Patti longs to explore the world beyond their cocoon, yet neither of them wants to lose their special connection. However, once Robert's homosexuality becomes a reality, they struggle to resume their relationship as lovers:

> He promised we could go back to the way things were, how we used to be . . . A part of me wanted to do just that, yet I feared that we could never reach that place again, but would shuttle back and forth like the ferryman's children, across our river of tears. I longed to travel, to Paris, to Egypt, to Samarkand, far from him, far from us. He too had a path to pursue and would have no choice but to leave me behind. We learned we wanted too much. We could only give from the perspective of who we were and what we had. (80)

This parting, however, far from separating them, leads to a greater commitment if possible: "Apart, we were able to see with greater clarity that we didn't want to be without each other" (80), we read on the same page. After a period of estrangement resulting from Patti and Robert realizing they want different things, their lives are reunited for good. On Patti's return from Paris, she finds Robert in such bad shape that she does not dare leave his side. Indeed, as they venture towards the place that will turn their lives and careers around, the Chelsea Hotel, the narrative comes to its climax with them reaching the most significant agreement in their lives: "We promised that we'd never leave one another again, until we both knew we were ready to stand on our own. And this vow, through everything we were yet to go through, we kept" (88). Even though they will never manage to bring back the innocence that characterized the first nights they shared as lovers, from this moment on, they embark on one of the most thriving stages of their relationship, becoming almost family and creating a bond that will waver at times but will never completely break.

"Hotel Chelsea" is both the name of the third chapter and of the place that marks a turning point for Patti and Robert's lives and careers. From this point forward, Smith will insist on the overwhelming speed at which events unfold in their lives. As they each begin relationships with different partners and assert the paths they wish to pursue, the time they spend together diminishes. As Watson writes, "the narrative of filiality linking the two young artists . . . is challenged when their life choices—in artistic media, sexualities, and lovers—and ways of cultivating fame start to shift" (140). Nevertheless, even when their understanding of life starts to be increasingly opposed, they continue to encourage one another, for they can still count on their common ground, that is, their work. Once again, they manage to make it through: "In the end, we were more alike than not, and gravitated toward each other, however wide the breach" (200). Watson therefore states: "However dissimilar their lifestyles, art forms, and career trajectories, in Smith's narration they remain linked as mirror selves" (141). This give-and-take situation which stretches for years finally seems to end when both Patti and Robert find a certain stability

in their lives, meaning the "expiration" of their pact: "As far as Robert and I were concerned, we had upheld our vow" (207).

In "Separate Ways Together," the fourth chapter, they are still "within walking distance from one another" (213) and "monitoring the progress of each other's work" (214). Nevertheless, Smith gradually separates Patti and Robert's narrative line into two parallel lines again, for their lives no longer take place inseparably. Although this part focuses on their individual achievements, the relationality of the memoir remains present. In fact, a considerable number of events that are important for Smith or Mapplethorpe (the flesh-and-bone people existing outside the text) as individuals but not essential for their story as Patti and Robert (the characters in the book) as life partners are omitted. Janet Maslin notes how the narrative "carries its author to the verge of fame but stops right there on the brink, so that its innocence is never compromised by circumstance too surreal or hagiographic for the reader" ("Bohemian Soul Mates"). As Randall and McKim write, "despite stereotypes of memoir as snooty bragging about one's achievements in the public realm, memoir can be the road to genuine self-discovery and self-creation" (207). We thus return to the idea that *Just Kids* differs from other autobiographical accounts and that it goes against the celebrity memoir tradition: relationality prevails over stardom. Instead of encountering yet another account of how Patti Smith came to be known as the "Godmother of Punk"—a nickname of which she never even entirely approved[23]—we are met with an eight-year gap between the ending of this chapter and the beginning of the following.

"Holding Hands with God" mainly deals with the period in which Robert struggles for survival after being diagnosed with AIDS. Patti is now married and has moved to Detroit, yet Smith writes: "Robert was ever in my consciousness; the blue star in the constellation of my personal cosmology" (263). As Robert's health worsens, his connection with Patti seems to have recovered its initial strength; in Smith's words: "The energy between us was so intense that it seemed to atomize the room, manifesting an incandescence that was our own" (267). In their phone conversations and short encounters they find themselves going over their shared life, wondering if they could have acted

[23] In his article on Patti Smith's *Horses*, music critic Greg Kot remembers how Smith told him in a 2014 interview: "I've been called the 'princess of piss', 'the keeper of the phlegm', 'the wild mustang of rock 'n' roll' . . . But I was not really a punk, and my band was never a punk rock band."

otherwise. Robert's passing ultimately brings the memoir to an end, which Smith closes with these words:

> I have a lock of his hair, a handful of his ashes, a box of his letters, a goatskin tambourine. And in the folds of faded violet tissue a necklace, two violet plaques etched in Arabic, strung with black and silver threads, given to me by the boy who loved Michelangelo. (279)

At first reading, one becomes immediately aware of the significance of Patti and Robert's relationship in the construction of *Just Kids*. Right from the beginning, the characters devise a universe of their own, where they can at last feel safe and comfortable: "I understood that in this small space of time we had mutually surrendered our loneliness and replaced it with trust" (40). Theirs is a world where Patti can escape from the illiterate colleagues who used to bully her at the factory where she worked in New Jersey and Robert can turn the page on his father's disapproval of the life he wished to pursue. What they find in their exchange is so powerful that they do not conceive of a reality in which the other is not present. Towards the end of the book, when Robert is already hospitalized, Smith writes, "I told him he had always been with me, part of who I am," and she adds, "just as he is in this moment" (274). With this last statement, she is informing the reader, from the I-now perspective, that even if Robert is no longer physically present he is still alive in Smith's mind, in her memories of him. Smith's use of pronouns throughout the narrative is also remarkable, for she often employs them to insist on the idea of unity around which the narrative revolves: "I would pray for us" (63); "It's our decade" (131); "There will always be us" (145); "I missed us" (269). For the reader of *Just Kids*, it is inconceivable to think of Patti and Robert as two separate individuals.

The same happens with the people that got to know Smith and Mapplethorpe. On the one hand, in her biography of Robert Mapplethorpe, Patricia Morrisroe states that "[w]hat Mapplethorpe found in Patti Smith was a doppelgänger, someone whose love and intuitive understanding made him feel complete for the first time in his life" and she then concludes: "She was everything to him—wife, mother, sister, patron, and best friend" (ch. 4). In that same book, Smith and Mapplethorpe's lifelong friend photographer Judy Linn is quoted to have said: "It was difficult to tell where Robert began and Patti left off" (ch. 4). On the other hand, Smith herself writes in *Just Kids*: "Robert responded as my beloved twin" (80); "Robert and I were irrevocably entwined, like Paul and Elisabeth, the sister and brother in Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles*. We played similar games, declared the most obscure object treasure, and often puzzled friends and acquaintances by our indefinable devotion" (200); "admiration without envy, our brother-sister language"

(258). When she narrates Patti and Robert's first encounter with Harry Smith,[24] she recalls how one of the first questions he asked them was whether they were twins (93). Through passages like these, Smith and Mapplethorpe's real-life bond is successfully translated into Patti and Robert's narrative.

Essential for the understanding of Patti and Robert's relationship is the way Smith blends the voices belonging to the various "I"s present in the story. As mentioned earlier, in their *Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest the presence of four different "I"s in life writing, of which three are discernible in the narrative (the narrating, the narrated, and the ideological). The voices of the narrating and narrated "I"s are especially relevant in terms of how Patti and Robert's relationship is depicted, for we can see how Patti's attitude, as well as her identity, changes together with her relationship with Robert. Not only are we offered an insight into how the Patti-then coped with the situation, but also into how the Patti-now—referred to in this dissertation as 'Smith' so as to differentiate her from the character—feels about the way she acted back then. This transformation becomes particularly evident with the revelation of Robert's homosexuality. We witness how Patti initially deals with a feeling of uneasiness resulting from her confusion: "I could no longer decipher his moods . . . I felt powerless to penetrate the stoic darkness surrounding him" (71). She confesses how at the time she felt betrayed but admits right away: "in reality it was I who betrayed him" (73). This last acknowledgment clearly results from the perspective she has gained over time. The author shows the reader how narrated-Patti feels betrayed and how narrating-Smith actually thinks she is the betrayer. With the self-awareness acquired with age, Smith is now able to look back on her younger self and shed some light on her behavior:

> My reaction to his admission was more emotional than I had anticipated. Nothing in my experience had prepared me for this. I felt I had failed him. I had thought a man turned homosexual when there was not the right woman to save him, a misconception I had developed from the tragic union of Rimbaud and the poet Paul Verlaine. (74)

The fact that she is able to distance herself from previous experiences, putting them into perspective, shows that she is using memoir as an act of self-reflection, too. Smith can

[24] Harry Smith was a multifaceted artist (visual artist, filmmaker, musicologist) and important figure of the Beat Generation. He is perhaps best known for his *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which Patti Smith mentions in the book: "Harry was revered for his *Anthology of American Folk Music*, and everyone from the most obscure guitar player to Bob Dylan was influenced by it" (94).

now look at the bigger picture and see what she calls "the lowest point of our life together" (86) as a necessary part of the adventure that awaited them.

Patti Smith's use of voice is therefore indispensable for the understanding of the transformation of her identity. We could argue, however, that she is not the only one who is granted a voice in *Just Kids*. Even though the story is told from a first-person point of view, Robert also has a voice of his own which is identifiable not only in dialogue but also through the narrator's words: the degree of relationality is such that we sometimes feel as if we can read Robert's mind. In the first chapter, for instance, Smith relates Robert's experience with acid and she seems to momentarily leave the first-person point of view in order to take on the role of an omniscient narrator with the ability to access other characters' thoughts:

> At first the LSD seemed benign and he was disappointed, as he had ingested more than usual. He had passed through the phase of anticipation and nervous agitation. He loved that feeling. He traced the thrill and fear blossoming in his stomach. He used to experience it as an altar boy as he stood behind the velvet curtains in his small robe holding the processional cross, readying to march . . . A terrible lucidity came over him; a stop-motion force dropping him to his knees. A string of remembrances stretched like taffy—accusing faces of fellow cadets, holy water flooding the latrine, classmates passing like indifferent dogs, his father's disapproval, expulsion from ROTC, and his mother's tears, bleeding with his own loneliness the apocalypse of his world. (21)

Certainly, these are not Robert's words, yet Smith manages to write of his inner world in a way that corresponds with the image of Robert—or, at least, with the way Robert is portrayed throughout the book.

Julia Watson goes as far as to suggest that Mapplethorpe's voice is there "as a co-presence, and it creates a shared 'third' voice" (133)—that is, apart from Patti and Robert's voices as individual characters, there is an intersubjective voice that seems to result from their union. In *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*, Randall and McKim note that lives are coauthored and intertwined: "Between the story of me and the story of thee is the story of us" (55). This is precisely what happens in *Just Kids*, where Patti Smith portrays her intimate bonding with Robert Mapplethorpe in such a way that sometimes one's words seem to flow into the other's. The most illustrative example may be found in the note to the reader, where the lack of quotation marks or em dashes (common devices used when formatting dialogue in a story) in Patti and Robert's last conversation leaves the reader the task of discerning their voices: "Will you write our story? Do you want me to? You have to he said no one but you can write it. I will do it, I promised, though I knew it would be a vow difficult to keep" (287). Just like Smith and

Mapplethorpe sometimes seemed to embody two sides of the same person, Patti and Robert's voices seem to merge into one in the narrative.

In this memoir where relationality plays such an important role and where the story of an other is as relevant as the story of the self, Patti Smith is writing both autobiographically and biographically. Since she is narrating part of Robert's life, she sometimes assumes the role of a biographer—even if only addressing those events which are relevant to the depiction of Patti and Robert's relationship. She does not, however, approach the biographical act as the usual biographer would, since she cannot adopt the point of view of an objective narrator. Admittedly, there is no absolute objectivity in any account, for the person writing always contributes to the shaping of the story in some way—his/her ideological "I" is inevitably present in every single word written. For someone who has been romantically involved with the protagonist of the story, however, it is even more difficult to distance herself from the image she keeps of him.

This is where the question of ethics comes into play: is it more ethical to write about someone from the point of view of adoration or to depict a deceased person in the most objective way possible even if he comes across as a "monster"?[25] In his 1995 article on the controversy following the publication of Patricia Morrisroe's biography of Mapplethorpe, Roger Clarke argued that Patti Smith's condemnation of Morrisroe's book resulted from her mixed feelings of jealousy and guilt. Apparently, she was not content with the depiction of Mapplethorpe and herself "as hustlers who spent more time networking than actually creating anything." The truth is that, jealous or not, Smith was not the only one disappointed with Morrisroe's work. Mapplethorpe's only authorized biography was actually "de-authorized" by his legal heirs, friends, and gay journalists (Clarke). On the contrary, Patti Smith's *Just Kids* is still highly praised a decade after its publication. We thus return to the idea that an audience is more willing to accept a story written by someone who is/was close enough to the subject (the closer, the better). Along these lines, Couser writes: "As distinct from biography, autobiography is often presented as an authoritative 'inside' story, with the implication that the author is somehow uniquely present in the text. Thus, many readers implicitly grant autobiography the authority of the author's privileged viewpoint" ("Authority" 74). Even though *Just Kids* is, strictly

[25] See Clarke, Roger, where Robert Mapplethorpe's biographer, Patricia Morrisroe, is quoted as saying "I did not feel I was painting a monster . . . I'm a little surprised at the strong reactions. But of the 300 interviews I did in the course of my research, nearly all of them were negative."

speaking, a memoir, its nature is, for the most part, autobiographical.[26] Readers therefore favor Smith's candid account over Morrisroe's factual one.

Ultimately, *Just Kids* becomes an act of generosity—towards Mapplethorpe as well as towards the reader—for Smith decides to give preference to a story that revolves around another character too. As Couser notes,

> seeking to immortalize oneself by writing a memoir is not necessarily a noble endeavor. But when memoirs immortalize someone other than the author, a different sort of impulse is involved . . . the conveying of immortality can be an important and generous gift—to a partner, to a parent, to a child, to a colleague or a friend. (*Memoir* 179)

Patti Smith is providing us with a narrative that no biographer could possibly write. In fact, even those who have read about Smith's or Mapplethorpe's lives in the various biographical accounts that have been published throughout the years, will discover in *Just Kids* yet a different story. Perhaps this is why the book garnered such positive reviews and was so readily embraced by the artistic community, thus paving the way for many of the memoirs that were—and are still—to come. As writer Eve Ottenberg states, "*Just Kids* is testimony to Mapplethorpe's continued place in Smith's heart, capturing the strength and sustenance they derived from each other."

We cannot end the discussion of the relational nature of *Just Kids* without mentioning art, an inherent element in Patti and Robert's relationship from day one: "I was attracted to Robert's work because his visual vocabulary was akin to my poetic one" (56), confesses Smith as Patti and Robert are getting to know each other. Art helps them weather all difficulties and always succeeds in reuniting them after periods of alienation. Thanks to the other's support, both Patti and Robert persist in their quest for artistic fulfillment. They work side by side, they supervise each other's production, they exchange handmade gifts, they allude (verbally or visually) to each other in their own work: art and creativity are the cornerstones of their relationship. There are numerous passages that evidence this idea in the book: "We had our work and one another" (45); "He wrote me a letter to say we would create art together and would make it, with or without the rest of the world" (53); "One cannot imagine the mutual happiness we felt when we sat and drew together. We would get lost for hours" (57). Interwoven into the narrative, we find a letter written by Patti and addressed to Robert shortly before his death:

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[26] As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, texts need not be autobiographies as such for them to have an autobiographical character.

> *Dear Robert,*
>
> *. . . You drew me from the darkest period of my young life, sharing with me the sacred mystery of what it is to be an artist. I learned to see through you and never compose a line or draw a curve that does not come from the knowledge I derived in our precious time together. Your work, coming from a fluid source, can be traced to the naked song of your youth. . . .*
>
> *The other afternoon, when you fell asleep on my shoulder, I drifted off, too. But before I did, it occurred to me looking around at all of your hinges and your work and going through years of work in my mind, that of all your work, you are still your most beautiful. The most beautiful work of all.* (276)

Although no allusion is made to this letter in the text—it is embedded in the narrative with no further explanation—it supports the narrative and encapsulates the notion that Patti and Robert's bond largely depends on their shared devotion to art. A thorough analysis of the place art holds in the narrative is precisely the object of the following section.

4.1.2. Künstlerroman

> "Committing to great art is its own reward"
>
> —Patti Smith, *Just Kids*

Since *Just Kids* follows Patti and Robert from childhood up until Robert's death, focusing mainly on their journey towards the fulfillment of their artistic drive, we could say that the story is narrated according to the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman*. Originally coined by the Germans to refer to a subgenre of fiction (the novel of growth), it is now very common to read nonfictional accounts that adhere to this structure "which recounts the protagonist's life from childhood to some moment of stasis in early adulthood" (Couser, *Memoir* 41). According to Smith and Watson, the *Bildungsroman* "unfolds as a narrative of education through encounters with mentors, apprenticeship, renunciation of youthful folly, and eventual integration into society" (70). Mentors and apprenticeship abound in *Just Kids*, as Smith reveals when she writes: "Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs were all my teachers, each one passing through the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel, my new university" (138). Other than the Beat poets, Patti has mentors whom she has never met in person, such as William Blake or Jim Morrison, fictional mentors, such as *Little Women's* Jo March, and mentors with whom she

eventually becomes very close, such as Bobby Neuwirth,[27] Sandy Pearlman,[28] or Sam Shepard[29]—"Sam taught me the secret of improvisation, one that I have accessed my whole life" (185), writes Smith of the latter.

Robert's entrance into the art world is also characterized by the presence of people guiding his learning process. Fashion designer Bruce Rudow and filmmaker and photographer Sandy Daley are two of his first instructors, with Rudow introducing him to the world of fashion and Daley to the art of photography. As Robert confidently makes his way into photography, he begins making connections. Some of these people will teach him technique and others will sponsor his work. The most important of these relations, however, will undoubtedly be art curator and collector Sam Wagstaff, "the man who was to become his lover, his patron, and his lifelong friend" (204). Needless to say, Patti and Robert are certainly indispensable in one another's apprenticeship, too. At one point, Smith confesses: "He never seemed to question his artistic drives, and by his example, I understood that what matters is the work" (65). Art will play, nonetheless, a much more relevant role in Patti and Robert's relationship.

In their definition of the *Bildungsroman,* Smith and Watson also make reference, as stated above, to the "renunciation of youthful folly, and eventual integration into society" (70). These are also present in Patti and Robert's journey towards public recognition. For the most part, Patti and Robert are portrayed as eternal children, but there comes a time when they both start realizing that they need to be seen as focused adults if they want to make a name for themselves. This is clearly exemplified when the characters get new haircuts. Something as trivial as a haircut becomes in *Just Kids* the prelude to a series of changes in Patti and Robert's public personas. In both cases, this decision comes

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[27] Bob Neuwirth is an American folk singer-songwriter probably best known for his collaborations with other artists. In *Just Kids*, Smith describes him as "Bob Dylan's alter ego. He was a painter, singer-songwriter, and risk taker. He was a trusted confidant to many of the great minds and musicians of his generation, which was just a beat before mine" (141-2).

[28] Sandy Pearlman was an American music producer, manager, professor and songwriter who founded and produced the rock band Blue Öyster Cult, also writing songs for them. In *Just Kids*, Smith recalls: "He saw me as fronting a rock and roll band, something that had not occurred to me, or that I had even thought possible" (196). She will mention this episode again in her 2019 memoir *Year of the Monkey,* partly dedicated to her friendship with Pearlman: "he told me I should front a rock 'n' roll band but I just laughed and told him I already had a good job working in a bookstore" (24).

[29] Sam Shepard was an American playwright, author, screenwriter, director and actor, especially acclaimed for his work in theatre. In *Just Kids,* Patti Smith speaks about their brief relationship as lovers and their co-written play, *Cowboy Mouth.* Shepard will also be present in Smith's *M Train* as a cowboy constantly emerging in her dreams and in *Year of the Monkey* as he struggles with ALS towards the end of his life.

from a rejection of the image they project. On the one hand, Robert complains that he's tired of looking like a shepherd boy, and asks Patti to cut his hair like a fifties rock star (138). On the other hand, Patti realizes that she has not changed her haircut since her teenage years. When she chooses to style it after Keith Richards, all of a sudden her social status elevates and opportunities arise (140). Not only that, but it becomes an inherent part of her iconic look: "with just a haircut, I miraculously turned androgynous overnight" (140). Patti and Robert's haircuts, then, mark a transition in their lives and careers, as if these were part of a rite of passage. From this moment on, albeit not solely as a result of their makeovers, the protagonists seem to come closer to their goals. Robert starts "blossoming socially" (149) and people finally begin to appreciate his work. For her part, Patti is officially admitted into the fraternity of artists after her performance for the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church: "I was bombarded with offers stemming from my poetry reading" (182). This way, Patti and Robert gradually learn to stay on the right path.

In line with the idea that *Just Kids* might be read as a *Bildungsroman*, Watson argues in her paper that Smith's use of voice is reminiscent of the fairy tale. To illustrate this, she points to the narrator's allusion to one of the Grimm Brothers' tales in the note to the reader (136): "We were as Hansel and Gretel and we ventured out into the black forest of the world. There were temptations and witches and demons we never dreamed of and there was splendor we only partially imagined" (288). This is not, however, the only tale Smith makes reference to. Unwilling to face the fact that she is about to become a "young lady," as her mother warns her, eleven-year-old Patti claims that she belongs to the clan of Peter Pan and will never grow up (10). Though a childish outburst at the time, this is something that has stayed with Smith, as she revealed at the Louisiana Literature Festival in Denmark in 2012: "When I was very small I decided I didn't want to grow up, that I would stay ten or eleven, and that was good enough for me. . . . But I've never let go of that feeling. I've never really felt that I've grown up" ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:11:55-00:12:27). Throughout the text, we find two other references to J. M. Barrie's work. When Patti is showing her new friends from the Chelsea Hotel her sketches while telling them stories about the drawings, Smith compares her to "Wendy entertaining the lost children of Neverland" (57-8). Later in the narrative, she describes John McKendry in the following terms: "In *Peter Pan,* one of the Lost Boys is named John. Sometimes he seemed so to me, a pale and wispy Victorian boy ever chasing after Pan's shadow" (191).

Despite the fact that Patti and Robert make a transition for the world to look at them differently, they nonetheless stay forever young at heart. In addition to the title of the memoir, which stands as the main evidence, the protagonists are referred to as children on several occasions: "We gathered our colored pencils and sheets of paper and drew like wild, feral children into the night, until, exhausted, we fell into bed" (60); "Robert and I hardly fought, but we would bicker like children" (63); "We had ventured out like Maeterlinck's children seeking the bluebird and were caught in the twisted briars of our new experiences" (79); "I feared that we could never reach that place again, but would shuttle back and forth like the ferryman's children, across our river of tears" (80); "The goodwill that surrounded us was proof that the Fates were conspiring to help their enthusiastic children" (99). Only when Robert is dying, Smith concedes: "He was now a man; yet in his presence I still felt like a girl" (274). A few pages later, after the end of the book and before the note the reader, Smith writes a few words about the last time she saw Robert, where we read: "I stood there and looked at him. So peaceful, like an ancient child" (283). The contradictory image of an ancient child points to Smith's insistence on thinking of Robert as a perpetual kid. Having said this, while the memoir unquestionably mirrors the structure of the *Bildungsroman* to a great extent, Watson proposes a more appropriate form for the analysis of *Just Kids*: the *Künstlerroman*.

Often considered a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, this narrative form "traces an artist's growth from an awakening sense of vocation into an artistic fulfilment" (Gunzenhauser 562). Since Patti and Robert's wish to "create art together . . . with or without the rest of the world" (53) monopolizes the story, their personal growth goes hand in hand with their growth as artists. Art is, undoubtedly, one of the driving forces behind the relationality in *Just Kids*. The idea of a narrative of artistic growth or *Künstlerroman* proposed by Watson is almost inseparable from that of the relational story—"our work was our children" (274), says Patti looking back on her relationship with Robert as the end of his life approaches. Throughout the story, each character experiments individually with different art forms until they each find the medium which best fits their quest for self-expression. It is their shared commitment to art, however, that enables them to keep working through the difficult times while blossoming hand in hand with their creations. "I was attracted to Robert's work because his visual vocabulary was akin to my poetic one," writes Smith (56).

What is more, not only do they work side by side, but they also become an inspiration for one another, constantly interchanging the roles of artist and muse. In *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership* (1993), Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron seek to question the misconception that "creativity [is] an extraordinary (usually male) individual's solitary struggle for artistic self-expression" (7) and to show how "gendered roles are often blurred, and the partners are called upon to reinvent, to refigure the myths into new realities" (12). Like the twosomes explored by Chadwick and de Courtivron, Patti and Robert challenge both the traditional understanding of artistic accomplishment as an individual endeavor and the stereotypical image of heterosexual arrangement, devising instead more flexible models that suit them better at artistic and affective levels. This allows them to build a strong relationship that never fails to weather the storm. In 2012, Smith acknowledged: "the thing that we had transcended everything, and that was that we bonded through our work, and both of us felt magnified by the other" ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:29:41–00:29:54). After reading *Just Kids*, readers get a sense of the indispensable role art played in Smith's and Mapplethorpe's relationship.

The Chelsea Hotel period, probably the most fruitful period of their lives, proves to be particularly crucial for the strengthening of Patti and Robert's relationship as artist and muse. On the one hand, Smith writes of the pride she feels whenever Robert involves her in his artistic process: "I felt, as always, a rising pleasure when he used a reference to me in a work, as if through him I would be remembered" (120). On the other hand, she also admits that Robert's presence is fundamental to the development of her creativity: "Without his arranging hand, I lived in a state of heightened chaos" (152). Despite Robert's increasing interest in the S&M world, Patti remains the subject with whom he feels the most comfortable. As with every other facet of their relationship, they each assume their role without much negotiation. Smith thus writes: "Observing his swift progress was rewarding, as I felt part of his process. The creed we developed as artist and model was simple. I trust you, I trust in myself" (189). Robert, for his part, tells her: "With you, I can't miss" (192). *Just Kids* can be therefore read as the coming-of-age tale of two struggling artists who unfailingly trust in each other's vision.

Their collaboration reaches its climax with the *Horses* photograph, shot by Robert Mapplethorpe for Patti Smith's debut album and still considered by many to be the ultimate proof of their intimate understanding. According to Victor Bockris and Roberta

Bayley, authors of Patti Smith's *Unauthorized Biography*, "[t]he cover of *Horses* completely captured the essence of Patti and of the moment" (131). In her analysis of the portrait, Elizabeth Wolfson highlights "how essential the closeness of Smith and Mapplethorpe's relationship and their empathy for each other's creative vision was to the formation of the particular image" (7). And that is precisely what Smith conveys in her narration: "We never talked about what we would do, or what it would look like. He would shoot it. I would be shot. I had my look in mind. He had his light in mind. That is all" (250). The image, like the book, does not speak of one or the other, but of both—hence Smith's observation from the present perspective: "When I look at it now, I never see me. I see us" (251). Against all odds, this picture of a female rocker taken by an amateur photographer for her first album would eventually end up ranking twenty-sixth in *Rolling Stone*'s list of "The 100 Greatest Album Covers of all Time" years later (Morrisroe ch. 12). All in all, this proves how tangible the intimate connection Smith describes in *Just Kids* was, and how this led to an equally rewarding creative partnership.

On a different level, however much united Patti and Robert may have been in their commitment to art, they each have their own approach to success and fulfillment. Throughout the narrative, Robert is portrayed as being more preoccupied with social approval than Patti, who seems to have "a more romantic view of the artist's life and sacrifices" (57). Of course, he is concerned about the quality of his work, but people's response seems to trouble him as much. "High art and high society; he aspired to them both" (57), Smith writes early in the story. The back room of Max's[30] is "Robert's objective, and the definitive target [is] the legendary round table that still harbor[s] the rose-colored aura of the absent silver king" (117)—the "absent silver king" being Andy Warhol—because it is where the most influential people gather. Later in the story, when Patti and Robert meet John McKendry and his wife, Maxime de la Falaise,[31] Smith notes how the couple end up "provid[ing] Robert with an entrance into a world that [is] as

[30] "Max's Kansas City was the place to be. It quickly became the new drug of the late sixties and early seventies counterculture scene and its effects were lasting. The legendary restaurant/bar opened its doors in December of 1965 at 213 Park Avenue South, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets off Union Square, just as popular culture was poised on the brink of a remarkable shift" (Sewall-Ruskin 1). In her memoir *Face It*, Debbie Harry (lead singer of American rock band Blondie) also describes it as "the place to be seen," adding: "That was another fabulous time in New York, no end of creativity and characters, and most of downtown seemed to wind up in Max's" (ch. 3).

[31] John McKendry was, at the time, the curator of photography at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whereas Maxime de la Falaise was an English model and actress, described in *Just Kids* as "a leading figure in New York's high society" (189).

glamorous as he could have wished for" (189). Smith thus insists on Robert's wish to be accepted among New York's high society. Patti, for her part, does not care so much about external approval, but Smith occasionally recalls how, from a very young age, she wished to leave a mark. As a child, Patti already dreams of either becoming an artist or, at least, joining one. After an excursion to the Museum of Art in Philadelphia, twelve-year-old Patti is immediately transformed: "I had no proof that I had the stuff to be an artist, though I hungered to be one. I imagined that I felt the calling and prayed that it be so" (11). When her mother gives her *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* for her sixteenth birthday, Patti is even more confident of the path she is to pursue:

> I longed to enter the fraternity of the artist: the hunger, their manner of dress, their process and prayers. I'd brag that I was going to be an artist's mistress one day. Nothing seemed more romantic in my life . . . I dreamed of meeting an artist to love and support and work with side by side. (12)

The difference between Patti and Robert's approach, far from resulting in a breach between them, actually helps them weather difficulties. While Patti eases Robert's worries over money, taking on the job as breadwinner, he makes sure that they are both productive at all times, supporting Patti during her bouts of insecurity: "We were both dreamers, but Robert was the one who got things done. I made the money but he had the drive and focus. He had plans for himself but for me as well" (127). Far from posing a threat to their relationship, their disparate points of view help them complement each other.

The contrast in Patti and Robert's approach may stem from the fact that their artistic self-confidence is quite different, too. Throughout the story, there are countless references to Robert's acknowledgement that his is an authentic vocation, from his childhood up to his last moments fighting AIDS: "He was an artist, and he knew it. It was not a childish notion. He merely acknowledged what was his" (13); "But he was certain of one thing. He was an artist. And for that he would never apologize" (22); "He did not have to ask for greatness, for the ability to be an artist, because he believed he already had that" (63); "He never seemed to question his artistic drives" (65). It is not that Robert wants to succeed at any price, it is that he is aware that his work is worthy of recognition and he just wants the world to acknowledge it too. Patti, however, often wonders if she really deserves to be part of the community she looks up to, at times even questioning the pursuit of art itself:

> In my lowest periods, I wondered what was the point of creating art. For whom? Are we animating God? Are we talking to ourselves? And what was the ultimate goal? To have one's work caged in art's great zoos—the Modern, the Met, the Louvre?

> I craved honesty, yet found dishonesty in myself. Why commit to art? For self-realization, or for itself? It seemed indulgent to add to the glut unless one offered illumination. (65)

What Patti wants, above all things, is to produce a body of work that matters, preferring "an artist who transform[s] his time, not mirror[s] it" (69). She seeks to make an impact on all levels—personal, social and artistic—and she is not willing to accept half measures.

Even though teamwork is essential to the protagonists' relationship with art and with one another, the analysis of their individual experiences is equally relevant to this section. Chapter one opens with a scene in which a very young Patti sees a swan for the first time and is mesmerized by its magnificence: "The sight of it generated an urge I had no words for, a desire to speak of the swan, to say something of its whiteness, the explosive nature of its movement, and the slow beating of its wings" (3). This moment which seems to have little to do with the rest of the story, is actually the first of many in which Patti will struggle to find the right words to speak of an issue that touches her. What is more, it attests to her precocious ability to look beyond the surface. Raised as a Jehovah's Witness,[32] religion is one of the pillars of her upbringing. Art, however, will prove to have a transformative power that religion lacks—although Patti will never dismiss the latter, she will always resort to the former above all things: "My love of prayer was gradually rivaled by my love for the book" (6). Literature, music, and painting provide her from a very early age with the assurance that there is a world where she is not a misfit, or better yet, a world where being a misfit is the key to success—after all, as Smith writes, "to be an artist was to see what others could not" (11). "It seems that from the very beginning," writes memoirist Edmund White, "she was alert to influences that would help her to explore and to firm up her peculiar sensibility, which was at once edgy and lyrical, both demotic and hieratic." In the first pages of chapter one, Smith moves through Patti's childhood to adolescence using the character's encounters with art as the common thread. In Watson's words, "the stages of Patti's childhood are consistently presented as moments of awakening to the power of art" (138). From Louisa May Alcott to Picasso to John Lennon, Patti is inadvertently infused with innumerable perspectives that will slowly shape her artistic persona.

Books seem to be Patti's first love: "I longed to read them all, and all the things I read of produced new yearnings" (6). Yet she soon finds in painting as well a new

[32] "Beverly Smith was a devout Jehovah's Witness, and that was always a part of her daughter's spiritual landscape" (D. Thompson 9).

universe of possibilities which helps her to slowly come to terms with her physical appearance: “I felt a sense of physical identification with the long, languorous Modiglianis” (11). As she grows up, Patti also immerses herself in rock and roll, “the adolescent salvation of 1961” (12), but it is not until she watches Jim Morrison performing with The Doors, when already living in New York, that she considers the idea that she might be able to attempt something similar one day (59). However, during her first years in the city, it will be poetry and drawing that will help her deal with her feelings—even if, at times, she will relive what she experienced when watching the swan: “It seemed whenever I wanted to express injustice I never had the right lines” (66). Once settled into the Chelsea Hotel, opportunities arise for Patti to experiment with other creative disciplines.

On the one hand, encouraged by Bobby Neuwirth, she begins to alternate writing poetry with writing songs. When Gerard Malanga agrees to let Patti open for him at his poetry reading at St. Mark’s Church, instead of reading her poems, she performs them, “infus[ing] the written word with the immediacy of rock and roll” (180). After this performance with guitarist Lenny Kaye as her right-hand man, she is offered the chance to publish her poems on various occasions. Not only that, but friends insist on trying to persuade Patti to lead a rock and roll band. When it seems that Patti is perfectly content with her situation—“I felt that I had found my niche, my drawings and poems appreciated” (223)—she is reunited with Lenny Kaye on the anniversary of the death of Rimbaud, in a performance “consist[ing] of poems and songs revolving around [her] love of Rimbaud” and, for the first time, she toys with the idea of this becoming something beyond a “onetime event” (232). Hereafter, Lenny and Patti concentrate on looking for some musicians with whom to put their “three chords merged with the power of the word” (238) into practice. Thus is born the Patti Smith Group and their first studio album, *Horses*. The same woman who had claimed that she wanted to be a poet and not a singer is now overcome with “the pride of being the leader of a rock and roll band” (248). Patti thus finds a discipline that is physical enough but that does not imply the abandonment of poetry. On the other hand, her stay at the Chelsea opens the door to a whole new world: theater. Although Patti soon realizes that she is not “acting material” (165), taking part in different plays contributes to the awareness of the enormous pleasure that performing brings her. “I found myself at home onstage. I was no actress; I drew no line between life and art. I was the same on- as offstage” (186), confesses Smith. Eventually, the stages

that would allow Patti to be herself would be those in which she would first read her poems and later sing her songs.

As for Robert, he also explores several media until he finally discovers the one that best suits his personality as well as his approach to art. As a kid, he devotes his time to his coloring book and his jewelry kit. While religion is an important part of his upbringing, it will be the imagery rather than the teachings that will leave a mark on him: "He didn't have a religious or pious relationship with the church: it was aesthetic" (16). When Patti sees his work for the first time, she is impressed both by its complexity and its profoundness:

> There were drawings, etchings, and he unrolled some paintings that reminded me of Richard Pousette-Dart and Henri Michaux. Multifarious energies radiated through interweaving words and calligraphic line. Energy fields built with layers of word. Paintings and drawings that seemed to emerge from the subconscious. (40)

Without totally abandoning drawing, Robert begins to incorporate representative pieces of his visual Catholic imaginary—the lamb, the Virgin, the Christ—into collages. But these are quickly replaced by the much darker image of Lucifer (62), which, in turn, soon makes way for male subject matter (124). From this point on, the evolution of his art will go hand in hand with the evolution of his self: "He explored the vocabulary of his work, and as his components shifted and morphed, he was in effect creating a diary of his internal evolution, heralding the emergence of a suppressed sexual identity" (77). Smith often describes Robert in terms of his relationship to art, as if this was a natural extension of his body, starting right where his upper limbs end. He seems to be unable to draw a line between life and art, for they both mean the same for him.

While Robert feels guilty for a time and struggles to express his concerns, once he is able to make peace with his feelings, his sexual interests start crystallizing in his work:

> Robert took areas of dark human consent and made them into art. He worked without apology, investing the homosexual with grandeur, masculinity, and enviable nobility. Without affectation, he created a presence that was wholly male without sacrificing the feminine grace. He was not trying to make a political statement or an announcement of his evolving sexual persuasion. He was presenting something new, something not seen or explored as he saw and explored it. Robert sought to elevate aspects of male experience, to imbue homosexuality with mysticism. (199)

Thus, through art he finds a way out of his emotional instability. Besides, in making his art a reflection of himself, he is able to create something never seen before, something that no one else could have made—his work is as much a part of himself as his body.

Robert's connection to art becomes even more evident when photography enters his world: "The Polaroid camera in Robert's hands. The physical act, a jerk of the wrist. The snapping sound when pulling the shot and the anticipation, sixty seconds to see what he got. The immediacy of the process suited his temperament" (154). However, even though Robert has got both talent and drive, he does not enjoy an income which allows him to exclusively devote himself to a single pursuit: "He shot film when he could afford it, made necklaces when he had the available components, and created constructions with found materials. But there was no question that he was gravitating toward photography" (188). Yet, the lack of resources, while being a major setback at first, ultimately becomes the key to Robert's artistic process: obliged to obtain the desired result with the least shots possible in order not to waste material, he quickly develops an eye (189). This will remain his modus operandi even when provided with unlimited resources; a few shots will always be enough for him to be satisfied with the outcome.

Photography not only helps Robert upgrade his collages, but it also brings him closer to an equally important goal of his: "He began to branch out, photographing those he met through his complex social life, the infamous and the famous, from Marianne Faithfull[33] to a young tattooed hustler" (192). This artistic discipline opens new doors for him that would have otherwise remained closed under lock and key. Although his work is repeatedly rejected on the pretext of being dangerous—albeit good—he firmly believes in what he is doing and never seems to waver in his determination: "His mission was not to reveal, but to document an aspect of sexuality as art, as it had never been done before. What excited Robert the most as an artist was to produce something that no one else had done" (236). Photography allows him to achieve his aim in a way that every other medium falls short.

Just Kids also serves as a tribute to many of the artists and friends that Smith admires and wishes to pay homage to. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, these were either mentors, patrons, or, at the very least, supporters. Therefore, to a certain extent, they are also connected with Patti's growth as an artist and thus to the idea that Smith's memoir can be read as an example of a *Künstlerroman*. In this sense, White

[33] Marianne Faithfull is an English singer-songwriter and actress who rose to fame when her relationship with The Rolling Stones' vocalist, Mick Jagger, was made public. For more information see Pearson, Tanya. *Why Marianne Faithfull Matters*. U of Texas P, 2021.

writes: “This genuine devotion to her private artistic saints and to her old friends characterizes the entire book. It is her own *Lives of Saints*, and it is thoroughly imbued with faith in her own artistic mission.” If there is one person that really makes a lasting impression on Patti as a teenager, that is Arthur Rimbaud, whom she embraces “as compatriot, kin, and even secret love” (23). She is so infatuated with his image and his language—even if she does not completely understand it—that she writes: “It was for him that I wrote and dreamed. He became my archangel, delivering me from the mundane horrors of factory life. His hands had chiseled a manual of heaven and I held them fast” (23). In her article “Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance,” Professor Carrie J. Noland refers to the seventies as “the decade of Rimbaud” (581), revealing how influential Arthur Rimbaud’s rebellious image was in the seventies, especially among the punk rock community. Patti Smith, as we have just seen, is no stranger to his influence. However, hers is not mere fanaticism of his countercultural hero style; her interest is also in his poetic skills. Such is her admiration, that her lyrics are often read as a reworking of Rimbaud’s texts. As Noland notes:

> punk rocker Patti Smith’s assimilation of Rimbaud into her work presents a particularly clear case of cultural cross-fertilization, one in which the writings of a canonized (and foreign) high-cultural figure enter into and influence a popular and, in this case, countercultural discourse. (582)

Smith’s adoration of artists like Rimbaud, then, not only enriches her perspective and influences her production, but also makes high culture accessible to a wider audience. Although Smith does not make reference to this aspect in *Just Kids*, the fact that she mentions Rimbaud several times throughout the narrative points to the impact he has had on her life.

Rimbaud is not the only one whom Patti admires, though. All over the memoir, we find countless references to poets, novelists, playwrights, musicians, singers, actors and actresses, visual artists, filmmakers, and many others, dead or alive, who have never ceased to inspire her. Patti’s sense of worship is such that she often finds herself mourning the deaths of people she never got to know but who nonetheless made a significant impact on her life. When she learns of Coltrane’s death, for instance, Smith writes: “It was as if a saint had died, one who had offered up healing music yet was not permitted to heal himself. Along with many strangers, I experienced a deep sense of loss for a man I had not known save through his music” (30). The same happens when Hendrix or Morrison pass away. Some of these influences are shared with Robert, as is the case with William Blake:

> Our most prized books were on William Blake. I had a very pretty facsimile of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and I often read it to Robert before we went to sleep. I also had a vellum edition of Blake's collected writings, and he had the Trianon Press edition of Blake's *Milton*. . . . We adopted Blake's palette as our own, shades of rose, cadmium, and moss, colors that seemed to generate light. (49)

Robert, however, also has his own idols to admire, with Andy Warhol in the lead: "It was as close to hero worship as he ever got. He respected artists like Cocteau and Pasolini, who merged life and art, but for Robert, the most interesting of them was Andy Warhol, documenting the human mise-en-scène in his silver-lined Factory" (69). He aspired to be as good as—even better than—Warhol and longed to be appreciated by his own devotees.

Apart from Smith's desire to praise the great artists she never really got to know, she also takes the time to speak highly of those who did end up belonging to her circle of friends and who helped her and Robert find their artistic paths. "He would always speak trouble and might even wreak havoc, yet he gave us a body of work pure as a newborn fawn" (155), she writes of Beat poet Gregory Corso. Similarly, she speaks with gratitude of filmmaker Sandy Daley—"Possibly the most influential person we met at the Chelsea was Sandy Daley" (101)—singer-songwriter Bobby Neuwirth—"I was a colt, but he appreciated and encouraged my awkward attempts at writing songs. I wanted to do things that affirmed his belief in me" (157)—visual artist Harry Smith—"Harry would regale us with this precious information that regrettably none of us would grasp, as we were so mesmerized by his sleight of hand" (115)—or Beat poet Allen Ginsberg—"Sometime later Allen became my good friend and teacher" (123).

Partners and lovers in Patti and Robert's lives are also key in the development of their careers. In Robert's case, both John McKendry and Sam Wagstaff will provide him with the necessary tools to take his work a step further. It will be Sam's presence, however, that will finally content Robert both personally and professionally: "Robert and Sam were as close to blood as two men could be. The father sought the heir, the son the father. Sam, as the quintessential patron, had the resources, the vision, and the desire to magnify the artist. Robert was the artist he sought" (234). As for Patti, despite her affair with playwright Sam Shepard or her relationship with musician Allen Lanier, her husband Fred "Sonic" Smith would be the one to collaborate with her in her music. Then again, in spite of these and other connections that become crucial in the protagonists' paths, *Just Kids* revolves around the idea that Patti and Robert themselves are the ones who influence one another the most.

4.1.3. Autothanatography

"Why can't I write something that would awake the dead?"

—Patti Smith, *Just Kids*

The third form that Watson mentions in her analysis of *Just Kids* is autothanatography, a narrative that usually deals with illness and death. Although the particle "auto" in this concept sounds conflicting, for one cannot relate his/her own death, there are narratives in which its use is justified. Literary scholar A. O. J. Cockshut, for instance, does not contemplate the possibility of death being part of an autobiography but contends that it may be an essential part of a biography (78). Since Patti Smith's memoir blends techniques of both biography and autobiography, there is room for a narrative of death. Death is present on different levels in *Just Kids*. First and foremost, the memoir revolves around the relationship that Patti Smith had with someone who is no longer alive, and his passing is indeed an important part of the story. On another level, Smith also mourns the deaths of artists who made an impact on her life as well as on the popular culture of her time. The book also functions, on a deeper level, as an elegy for a whole generation—its people, its places, its atmosphere—no longer traceable. In this regard, at times it is not necessarily death but loss in some other form that inevitably affects Patti and her sense of wholeness. Finally, reminiscences of autothanatography can be found in the attempt of escaping mortality (often through art).

The idea of autothanatography is inseparable from the concept of 'relationality' already discussed. Since the subject of the story in *Just Kids* is not Patti or Robert, but Patti and Robert as a whole, we can argue that there is a partial death of the subject, for there is no longer an "us" when Robert dies. Besides, given their strong sense of attachment, Robert's passing also implies that Patti loses a part of herself ("he had always been with me, part of who I am" [274]), therefore accounting for the reading of *Just Kids* as proper autothanatography. In her book on *Navigating Loss in Women's Contemporary Memoir*, Amy-Katerini Prodromou explains:

> The loss of a beloved other results in the loss of a vital understanding of our selves in relation to that other—the whole concept of self must be reworked and revisited when we attempt to define ourselves within the literal (geographical) and physically altered space that results from this new absence. (6)

Even if it is not Smith herself who dies, the fact that someone so close has died inevitably leads to the need to reconstruct her self and renegotiate the roles she has assumed so far. Bob Barrett, an acquaintance of the couple, recalls how devastating it was for

Mapplethorpe when Smith told him she would be moving out of their apartment on Hall Street: "It was really gut-wrenching, because it was like he was losing a part of himself" (qtd. in Morrisroe ch. 5). In some way, he was actually losing a part of himself, just like Smith at the moment of his death. However, even when there comes a time in the story when Patti and Robert do grow apart, with him immersed in the world of S&M and her spending more and more time with her band, the essence of their relationship remains intact up until his death—and even beyond.

Particularly significant to the understanding of *Just Kids* as autothanatography is the fact that the foreword opens with Patti waking up to the news that Robert has died. Although the narrative is not focused on Robert's passing—quite the opposite, it is a celebration of his life, particularly of his younger years—the story is inevitably tinged with an undertone of lament. The fact that death is present right from the beginning has an influence on the way the reader approaches the narrative. Throughout the story, Smith refers to Robert's passing, often using flashforwards as a device to anticipate the moment that will actually close the story. In the second chapter she confesses:

> Sometimes I would awaken and find him in the dim light of votive candles. Adding touches to a drawing, turning the work this way and that, he would examine it from every angle. Pensive, preoccupied, he'd look up and see me watching him and he'd smile. That smile broke through anything else he was feeling or experiencing—even later, when he was dying in mortal pain. (61)

Again, a few pages later, she recalls:

> One night at Hall Street I stood at the entrance of our bedroom while Robert slept and had a vision of him stretched on a rack, his white shirt crumbling as he turned to dust before my eyes. He woke up and felt my horror. "What did you see?" he cried.
>
> "Nothing," I answered, turning away, choosing not to accept what I had seen. Though I would someday hold his ashes in my hand. (63)

Intentionally or not, these act as reminders of the fate that awaits the characters, which does not come as a surprise to the reader at the end of the narrative.

Devices such as flashbacks or flashforwards allow Smith's narrating voice to construct a more coherent narrative, establishing connections between different moments. Later in the book, for instance, there is a reference to the excerpt quoted above:

> Every fear I had once harbored seemed to materialize with the suddenness of a bright sail bursting into flames. My youthful premonition of Robert crumbling into dust returned with pitiless clarity. I saw his impatience to achieve recognition in another light, as if he had the predisposed lifeline of a young pharaoh. (266)

Similarly, when Sam Wagstaff dies, Patti tries to comfort Robert writing a song, "Paths that Cross," in memory of Sam, but she immediately realizes: "Though Robert was grateful for the song, I knew one day I might seek out these same words for myself. *Paths*

that cross will cross again" (269). At this point, Robert has already been diagnosed with AIDS and, as the story approaches its end, we return to the scene with which the foreword opens: Patti learning that Robert has died. We are therefore left with a circular narrative that ends right where it began. In fact, Smith phrases it in such a way that it could be considered the postface of this memoir: "*So my last image was as the first. A sleeping youth cloaked in light, who opened his eyes with a smile of recognition for someone who had never been a stranger*" (283). In some way, we are taken back to the beginning of the memoir and, rather than experiencing this as the end of an imaginary straight line, we experience it as the completion of a cycle.

When Smith no longer has the shoulder of her "beloved twin" (80) to lean on, she has no choice but to carry on with her own story—which she does while also taking over the task of keeping Mapplethorpe's story alive. Evidently, writing about a loved one after his or her passing is not an easy task. When *Just Kids* was published, twenty-one years after Robert Mapplethorpe's passing, Patti Smith was repeatedly asked in interviews about the writing process, which, as she revealed, is so dependent on the grieving process. At the Louisiana Literature Festival, she told interviewer Christian Lund:

> a lot of things happened in my life that made it difficult to write. First, just grieving for him, and then, the loss of my pianist, my husband, my mother, my father. I suffered so much loss—and also raising my young children—that I didn't have the emotional energy to write it. And I kept shelving it. I'd write it and put it back, and write it and put it back. And then sometimes I'd throw it away and start it over. But, finally, I got to a point where I felt that if I didn't get it done I'd never do it. ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:34:06-00:34:53)

According to Ann Pearson, the experience of bereavement might be recorded right after the loss, but it usually takes longer for the writer to come to terms with the mourning act: "to write at such a moment may seem inappropriate and self-indulgent, or futile in the face of death" (569). Losing a close friend is painful as it is, but Smith had to cope, in a span of less than fifteen years, with the deaths of relatives, band members, friends, and fellow poets, which naturally delayed the writing process. In the note to the reader, Smith confesses: "I wrote *The Coral Sea*[34] and made drawings in remembrance of him but our

[34] *The Coral Sea* is a collection of short pieces dedicated to Robert Mapplethorpe and published in 1996, seven years after his death. In the introduction to a new edition published in 2012 and containing photographs by Lynn Davis, Mapplethorpe, and Smith herself, the author explains how the book came into being: "Several hours before Robert died I asked him how I might best serve him in his absence. . . . Robert asked me to write a preface for *Flowers*, his forthcoming book. . . . He asked me if I would write our story. . . . After his death I wrote *A Final Flower* for the Bullfinch edition of his color photographs of flowers. I also wrote the poem 'Reflecting Robert' for his memorial booklet entitled *Mirrors*. But it took a long time to find it within myself to write our story. Instead I wrote *The Coral Sea*. A season in grief. All that I knew of him encrypted within a small suite of prose poems. They speak of his love for art, his patron Sam

story was obliged to wait until I could find the right voice" (288). This wait, however, far from having a prejudicial effect on the outcome of the publication, resulted in Smith winning a National Book Award and led her to become the forerunner of the female rock memoirists. "I had hopes that it may be received kindly but the reception far surpassed any modest wishes" (xiii), she writes in the Illustrated Edition of *Just Kids* published on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Robert's passing. Had she written the account twenty years earlier, immediately after Mapplethorpe's death, the story would have been a completely different one.

In *Just Kids,* Patti Smith is also mourning a whole generation that is gradually dissipating before her eyes. This is the generation with which she feels identified and to which she ends up belonging, so, again, the concept of autothanatography surfaces when the people and the places that define this era start to vanish. One of the places that marks this generation is Max's Kansas City. It used to be the rendezvous for Andy Warhol and his crew and is still "the place to go" when Patti arrives in the city (117-18). When Smith first mentions it in the memoir, she recalls: "The back room was the haven for those desiring the keys to Andy's second silver kingdom, often described more as a place of commerce than of art" (118). At this point, Patti has not been accepted among the privileged regulars, and she sees it as something unattainable and almost mythical. However, once she and Robert are welcomed into Max's world, she soon realizes that behind its legendary façade hides a rather bittersweet reality. Less than ten pages later, Smith admits: "Disbanded by Andy, banded by us, no doubt to be disbanded again to accommodate the next scene" (127). She quickly understands, so it seems, the ephemeral nature inherent to a generation and to all that it entails: the glamor, the greatness, the glory—it is all just a mirage. She therefore concludes: "No one in the back room was slated to die in Vietnam, though few would survive the cruel plagues of a generation" (127). From her I-now perspective, she is able to understand a reality that at the time she so naively idealized.

Very often, change is synonymous with loss for Patti, because she acknowledges that some things change forever. This, however, is something that Smith knows as

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Wagstaff, and his caring for me. But most importantly his resolute will to live, that could not be contained, even in death" (11-2).

narrator, not as character. When Robert and Patti finally decide it is time to leave their apartment and go their separate ways, we read:

> We were leaving the swirl of our post-Brooklyn existence, which had been dominated by the vibrating arena of the Chelsea Hotel.
>
> The merry-go-round was slowing down. As I packed even the most insignificant of things accumulated in the past few years, they were accompanied by a slide show of faces, some of which I would never see again. (208)

In writing "some of which I would never see again," she is anticipating something that she did not know at the time. In the preface to the Illustrated Edition, she also reflects on the changes seventies New York has undergone using the I-now perspective:

> Back then I was the young poet, and all my friends were alive. Today the city is populated with benevolent ghosts. Change seems inevitable, whether within the architecture, the atmosphere of certain streets, or the present economic structure that is redefining survival for newcomers. One may easily mourn one's familiar territory, yet New York remains a great city, a uniquely diversified city, of countless trials and countless possibilities. New generations will compose the stories of their time, but the book I have written contains ours. (xii)

This mourning for a whole generation is something that will be further explained in the section devoted to autoethnography, for Smith's connection to the cultural has wider implications. Relevant for this section is the fact that, because change implies some form of loss, it can also be discussed as part autothanatography.

Also related to autothanatography is Patti's strong sense of devotion for the dead, which was already mentioned in the discussion on *Künstlerroman*. However, she does more than just mourn the sudden deaths of artists she admires. The dead are constantly present in her mind, as she herself admits: "I would pray for the dead, whom I seemed to love as much as the living" (63); "I lived in my own world, dreaming about the dead and their vanished centuries" (64). When asked in an interview on CBC about her pilgrimages to the gravesites of artists and writers, Smith explains: "For me, to go visit the grave of somebody I admire is like going to visit my family . . . Sometimes I just go and stand there for a few minutes and thank the person for the work they've given us" ("Patti Smith says" 07:14-07:55). However, in *Just Kids* Patti not only honors Brian Jones by writing poems paying homage to him after his death (83) or Jim Morrison by taking flowers to his grave (230-1); she also points to her use of music to pay tribute to those who have made an impact on her. According to Smith, *Horses* is, to a great extent, "a salute to those who paved the way before us" (249):

> In "Birdland," we embarked with young Peter Reich as he waited for his father, Wilhelm Reich, to descend from the sky and deliver him. In "Break it Up," Tom Verlaine and I wrote of a dream in which Jim Morrison, bound like Prometheus, suddenly broke free. In "Land," wild-boy imagery

> fused with the stages of Hendrix's death. In "Elegie," remembering them all, past, present, and future, those we had lost, were losing, and would ultimately lose.[35] (249)

These people that Smith mentions throughout the memoir have contributed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the shaping of her persona. With them gone, she feels that something bigger is being lost. Smith thus seeks to continue their legacy through her work as a way of avoiding their complete vanishing.

This last statement is connected to the idea of art as a way of escaping mortality. Music is not the only means Smith uses to celebrate people, dead or alive. In the memoir, a frustrated Patti wonders: "Why can't I write something that would awake the dead?" (279). *Just Kids* ultimately becomes that "something" that will awake the dead—if only momentarily—every time someone reads its pages. In addition to looking back on past generations and crediting them for their contribution, the book constitutes a piece of work that will outlive its author and will stand as evidence of the life she and her contemporaries led. Throughout the story, Patti is constantly reminded of her own mortality:

> I was due at the studio when Robert called in great distress to tell me that Andy Warhol was dead.
>
> "He wasn't supposed to die," he cried out, somewhat desperately, petulantly, like a spoiled child. But I could hear other thoughts racing between us.
>
> Neither are you.
>
> Neither am I. (270)

Leaving a body of autobiographical work, in addition to her musical legacy, contributes to the creation of an immortal persona devised according to her own image of herself. This, nevertheless, is not her main interest, for she is rather concerned with the image she crafts of Robert.

It is important for readers to understand the author's intention—i.e. the motivation—behind a biographical account, for it will determine the way they approach the work. As Couser writes, "each action involves a different stance toward past experience and the audience; therefore, reading involves identifying the author's stance" (*Memoir* 177). In this case, Smith lets the reader know that she aims to be true to her word and seeks to write the story that Mapplethorpe would have liked her to tell. Hence her remarks on the note to the reader:

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[35] Smith sings in "Elegie": "Trumpets, violins, I hear them in the distance / And my skin emits a ray / But I think it's sad, it's much too bad / That all our friends can't be with us today" (Smith, *Patti Smith Collected Lyrics*).

> There are many stories I could yet write about Robert, about us. But this is the story I have told. It is the one he wished me to tell and I have kept my promise . . . No one could speak of these two young people nor tell with any truth of their days and nights together. Only Robert and I could tell it. Our story, as he called it. And, having gone, he left the task to me to tell it to you. (288)

Here, she is also addressing the controversial issues of authority and ethics introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. By openly stating her purpose, Smith establishes a relationship of trust with the reader thus eschewing the possibility that her narrative might be questioned on the grounds of its truthfulness, while at the same time justifying the writing and publication of such a personal story. With Mapplethorpe gone, she is left with the task of telling their story. In writing this memoir that focuses on Patti and Robert's bond, Smith is able to successfully accomplish the main purpose behind the work: *Just Kids* is, first and foremost, the fulfillment of Patti Smith's promise to Robert Mapplethorpe.

There is, however, a second motive behind the publication of *Just Kids*, which is somewhat related to Smith's aforementioned disapproval of Morrisroe's work. In his article on the matter, Clarke contended: "For [Smith], at least, Mapplethorpe will always be the young, sexy boy full of energy and hope, with that slight Queens accent he was always trying to hide from his new acquaintances." The memoir enables Smith to share this image of Robert with the rest of the world; it allows her to set the record straight (or, at least, her record). She therefore writes in a paragraph that precedes the story:

> *Much has been said about Robert, and more will be added. Young men will adopt his gait. Young girls will wear white dresses and mourn his curls. He will be condemned and adored. His excesses damned or romanticized. In the end, truth will be found in his work, the corporeal body of the artist. It will not fall away. Man cannot judge it. For art sings of God, and ultimately belongs to him*. (ix)

After so much debate, Smith now seeks to portray Robert the way she wishes him to be remembered. In an interview at the National Portrait Gallery, she openly admits: "I promised him that I would do as I always did: magnify his name" ("Patti Smith Discusses" 7:13-7:17). She therefore has no qualms about disclosing her intentions of portraying Robert in a certain way. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define autothanatography as "a text that outlives the lives" (188) and this is precisely one of the matters that Smith resolves with her memoir. Towards the end of the book, she expresses her concern for not being able to write a song that would somehow make Robert live forever. Yet in *Just Kids* she provides the reader with an undying image of Robert, immortalizing his "tousled shepherd's hair" and his "Michelangelo hands." As Eve Ottenberg notes in her review of *Just Kids*, the story

> brings him back to life, not just the Mapplethorpe of the obscenity scandals or the world-famous photographer of homoerotic subjects, but Mapplethorpe the young, whimsical yet driven, aspiring, and impoverished artist, who yearned for fame.

Smith thus fulfills what she has repeatedly confessed to be her other task with *Just Kids*: offering the reader the image of Robert as nothing more (and nothing less) than a holistic human being—an image that the media often forgot to include in their lurid accounts.

It is worth mentioning here that, very often, memoirists whose narratives deal with loss fall into the trap of excessive nostalgia and fail to convey anything beyond a yearning for the past. In her book *Writing the Memoir*, Judith Barrington warns:

> The tone may be serious, ironic, angry, sad, or almost anything except whiny. There must be no hidden plea for help—no subtle seeking of sympathy. The writer must have done her work, make her peace with the facts, and be telling the story for the story's sake. (73)

Admittedly, there is something inevitably nostalgic in looking back on the past: with Robert deceased and a whole era vanished, there is an undertone of lament and helplessness which results from Patti Smith's frustrated wish to recover those years. Yet Smith manages to write with a well-balanced blend of melancholic contemplation and narrative action. According to Sarah Mesle, "for most of the memoir's almost two hundred pages, its tone is less elegy and more picaresque fairytale." Similarly, Ottenberg notes how "[e]vocations of time past need not be sentimental or even sad; some merely attempt to retrieve, however briefly, a lost treasure"—which, for her, is the case with Smith's first memoir. Smith's meditative narration does not prevent the action from progressing; quite the opposite, it provides the story with emotion, stirring within the readers a feeling of closeness to the writer that would be difficult to achieve with the facts alone.

In this respect, at the National Portrait Gallery interview, curator and historian David C. Ward observes how much death (both public and private) there is in this memoir and tells Smith: "it's a remarkable achievement: the way that you fold those into this narrative" ("Patti Smith Discusses" 10:21-10:28). This is probably explained by Smith's approach to the subject of death, which becomes crucial in her treatment of the thanatographical. In an interview on *Democracy Now!*, she confesses how hard it is for her to use the past tense to talk about Robert, since she still considers he is somehow with her ("Legendary Patti Smith" 05:11-05:20). And she then goes on to say:

> I feel that I walk with the people that I've lost and I would be sad not to have them with me. I would rather feel the sorrow of . . . not having my husband, or my brother, or Robert, or other friends, than not feeling them at all. But I found that writing is almost like you make these people flesh again, you bring them back in a way that people can know them, and know them as a human being. ("Legendary Patti Smith" 06:02-06:39)

Similarly, at the Louisiana Literature Festival, when discussing the role Robert played in her life, she claims: "if I falter, if I feel lacking in confidence, I can access that part of him that believes in me and I feel stronger" ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:30:12-00:30:24). This feeling is captured on various occasions in *Just Kids*, especially towards the end of the narrative. Sometimes, ambiguity arises—intentionally or not—when Smith uses present simple: the reader cannot be certain whether she is still referring to the past. When talking about a picture that Robert took of her, for instance, she writes: "It was a simple photograph. My hair is braided like Frida Kahlo's. The sun is in my eyes. And I am looking at Robert and he is alive" (271). For a moment, we get the feeling that she might be referring to the present moment. The same happens a few pages later, when she mentions their last conversation over the phone and writes:

> I followed the stages of his passing until close to eleven, when I heard him for the last time, breathing with such force that it obscured the voice of his brother on the phone. For some reason, this sound filled me with a strange happiness as I climbed the stairs to go to sleep. He is still alive, I was thinking. He is still alive. (277)

The fact that she repeats "he is still alive" makes it sound as if she is trying to reassure herself that Robert is now alive—after all, she does feel that he is still present in some form.

Besides the reasonable difficulty Smith had to overcome in order to tell the story of a dearly departed, she was also worried about the need for accountability she would face as memoirist:

> I had a lot of responsibility: how I would portray other people, both living and dead. I wanted to make sure I was fair to everyone, and also was able to provide an atmosphere of the city. There's a lot of responsibility. I think people write memoirs or autobiographies really overly concerned with themselves and don't realize how they impact other people's lives by writing about them. ("Patti Smith Interview" 00:34:54-00:35:28)

This, moreover, is linked to questions of authority and ethics. When writing the book, Smith was aware that her role as memoirist differed from her role as performer, visual artist, or poet, for she was now making assertions about other people. Not only that, but she was also concerned about providing the reader with an accurate representation of New York City and its cultural atmosphere, for the story cannot be understood independently of the place which made it possible. In addition to remaining as precise as possible, Smith revealed at the National Portrait Gallery that she wanted to write something that people like Mapplethorpe, who was not exactly a bibliophile, would enjoy:

> I wanted to write a book that had a certain level of craftsmanship that anyone could appreciate but also a non-reader would be happy to breeze through. And that was my task. I was writing to the people. When I'm writing poetry I don't think of anybody. It's more narcissistic. I'm just writing

> to please myself. But I wrote the book really with the reader in mind and trying to create almost like a film for the people, like a little movie. ("Patti Smith Discusses" 00:09:10-00:09:43)

These revelations, together with the feeling one gets when one reads the book, prove that life writing is no trifle for Patti Smith and that she has considerable respect for such a task, being aware at all times of the possible consequences.

Although *Just Kids* deals with the story of a deceased person who cannot take a stance on the veracity of the events recounted, it is precisely the very same person who placed his trust in Smith for the writing of the story. Besides, this is, to a great extent, a public story that can be easily corroborated by the people who were around at the time or, at least, by their auto/biographical accounts. If we read Patricia Morrisroe's biography of Robert Mapplethorpe, for instance, save nuances in tone and personal appreciations (those which seemed to bother Smith), there is no discrepancy regarding the objective facts. In a way, the prefatory paragraph mentioned above where Smith informs us that "*truth will be found in his work, the corporeal body of the artist*" (ix), works as a sort of disclaimer, warning us that, no matter how faithful Smith tries to remain to the actual story, it will always be tinged with her point of view. Besides, in the end, there is no such thing as an 'actual' story but, instead, as many stories as people involved.

4.1.4. Autoethnography

> "Few would survive the cruel plagues of a generation"
>
> —Patti Smith, *Just Kids*

Autoethnography, defined by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (739), is the last form mentioned by Julia Watson in her analysis of *Just Kids*. This loose conceptualization of the term, Ellis and Bochner argue, allows for a wide variety of studies to be placed under this category, from narratives of the self to native ethnography. In the same vein, drawing on Deborah Reed-Danahay, they note that "autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphs), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)" (740). As for *Just Kids*, its narrative is clearly focused on the self (or selves), yet this is intricately intertwined with the cultural context that frames the story. Smith's multiple selves—the child, the teenager, the adult—are at all times influenced by the surrounding culture. Indeed, so important is the cultural subtext in *Just Kids* that at times the reader might think of Patti as a sort of chronicler. Even though autoethnography is normally concerned with

postcolonial literature and people who have been subject to some form of acculturation (Smith and Watson 185-6), it may be understood here as the result of the author's attempt to highlight the significance of the cultural atmosphere in Patti and Robert's lives.

Just Kids is not only the story of Patti and Robert, but also of the places they frequented, the people they met, and the events that marked them all. On the one hand, focusing first on Smith's depiction of New York City, what stands out is its contrast with New Jersey. She describes the latter as "hardly pro-artist" (23) and complains about the illiterate women with whom she works at the factory: "It was within this atmosphere that I seethed" (23). However, at her arrival in New York City, she is greeted by an "open atmosphere" that she "had never experienced, simple freedom that did not seem to be oppressive to anyone" (27). This new city provides her with a sense of hope and opportunity: "I can't say I fit in, but I felt safe. No one noticed me. I could move freely. . . . I had faith. I sensed no danger in the city, and I never encountered any. . . . Time to move along. Time to move along" (30-1). Shortly after Patti meets Robert and other friends in the city, we read: "These were nights like none I had experienced in South Jersey, whimsical and filled with love" (58). Patti finds in New York City what she is lacking in New Jersey. This also evidences how the cultural affects the personal: Patti's attitude shifts when she is greeted by more amicable surroundings—the *auto* is seldom independent of the *ethnos*.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note the way in which Smith describes everything that her senses perceive as she strolls around this city still unfamiliar to her:

> The city was a real city, shifty and sexual. I was lightly jostled by small herds of flushed young sailors looking for action on Forty-second Street, with its rows of X-rated movie houses, brassy women, glittering souvenir shops, and hot-dog vendors. I wandered through Kino parlors and peered through the windows of the magnificent sprawling Grant's Raw Bar filled with men in black coats scooping up piles of fresh oysters.
>
> . . .
>
> I walked for hours from park to park. In Washington Square, one could still feel the characters of Henry James and the presence of the author himself. Entering the perimeters of the white arch, one was greeted by the sounds of bongos and acoustic guitars, protest singers, political arguments, activists leafleting, older chess players challenged by the young. (26-7)

Smith traces Patti's route making reference to the act of sauntering ('I wandered,' 'I walked'), which immediately reminds us of the figure of the *flâneur*[36]—or, in this case,

[36] The French verb *flâner* probably finds its origin in *flana*, the Old Scandinavian word to say 'to run giddily here and there' (Coverley 153). It has entered our social imaginary, however, through the figure of the *flâneur*. It was Walter Benjamin who, drawing on Charles Baudelaire's oeuvre, coined this name and

of its feminine counterpart: the *flâneuse.*[37] Patti explores New York City taking in all the details that surround her. She walks with no other purpose than to revel in the act of walking. Contrary to the traditional *flâneur*, who enjoys a privileged position from which he can afford to spend his time leisurely strolling through the streets, Patti has little money and no place to stay, yet she still idly saunters devoting all her attention to her surroundings. Along these lines, author and critic Tom Carson adds the following: "What's sure to make her account a cornucopia for cultural historians . . . is that the atmosphere, personalities and mores of the time are so astutely observed"—it is not merely about the content of Smith's narration, but rather how she is conveying it. Indeed, her descriptions are so vivid that the reader feels as if he or she was wandering alongside.

Patti Smith's portrayal of New York City is focused not so much on the city itself, but rather on the people and the atmosphere they create, which is what grants the city its character. Especially remarkable is the way Smith evokes the ambiance throughout the story:

> It was the summer Coltrane died. The summer of 'Crystal Ship.' Flower children raised the empty hands and China exploded the H-bomb. Jimi Hendrix set his guitar in flames in Monterey. AM radio played 'Ode to Billy Joe.' There were riots in Newark, Milwaukee, and Detroit. It was the summer of *Elvira Madigan*, the summer of love. (31)

Through these apparently unrelated historical facts, she is able to portray the dichotomous reality of the late 1960s and early 1970s or, in her words, "the duality of the summer of 1969, Woodstock and the Manson cult, our masked ball of confusion" (108). A retrospective narration of both the richness and the decadence that the sex-drugs-and-rock'n'roll creed resulted in ultimately turns *Just Kids* into the memoir of a whole generation. Along these lines, Watson notes how "Smith's narration incorporates the dialogism of the jarring voices that texture the urban scene" (143). Evidence of this can be found on various occasions: "Everyone coexisted within the continuous drone of verbal diatribes, bongos, and barking dogs" (47); "We made quite a crew, all talking at once, contradicting and sparring, a cacophony of affectionate arguing" (111); "Screaming catfights erupted between frustrated actresses and indignant drag queens" (126); "As the

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introduced the *flâneur* as a man who promenades around the city with no other purpose than to rejoice in the observation of his surroundings.

[37] I am using here the word *flâneuse* only because I am referring to a woman, but I will not be making any distinctions between her role and that of a *flâneur*. For a more detailed discussion on the subject of the female *flâneur*, see: Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*. Farrar, Srtraus & Giroux, 2016.

band played on, you could hear the whack of the pool cue hitting the balls, the saluki barking, bottles clinking, the sounds of a scene emerging" (240). One can almost hear all of these voices and noises when reading the book.

Julia Watson describes Smith as "an autoethnographer, serving as an insider-outsider observer, a historian of a moment who is on, but not fully of, the scene, chronicling memorable artists and places in rich sensory detail" (143). Smith does appear to be both inside and outside the reality she is portraying, for she sometimes speaks as an objective spectator, yet other times her narrative is deeply personal. As the story evolves, we witness how Patti gradually becomes part of the scene in New York City, turning from spectator to participant. Even though she initially struggles to develop a real sense of belonging, New York City ultimately provides her with the people that understand her and that allow her to reveal the artist in her, something that was inexistent back home. As we saw in the analysis of *Just Kids* as *Künstlerroman*, throughout the story Smith never ceases to credit those artists who have inspired her from a very young age. Some of them, she never gets to meet, but others end up belonging to her circle of close friends. These are also part of the autoethnographic character of the memoir because they not only have an impact on Patti Smith and her work, but on countless other contemporaries of her, as she records in the narrative. She speaks favorably of Gregory Corso: "I took a great liking to him, to say nothing that I felt he was one of our greatest poets" (137). But there is also room for people like Bobby Neuwirth or Jimi Hendrix. The first "was a trusted confidant to many of the great minds and musicians of his generation" (142), "a catalyst for action" (157), and the latter "never came back to create his new musical language, but . . . left behind a studio that resonated all his hopes for the future of our cultural voice" (249). These are only a few examples of the diversity of characters one encounters in *Just Kids*. The sixties and the seventies in New York City cannot be referred to without naming its artists.

Patti and Robert's quest for artistic realization is also necessarily linked with the places where the cultural scene is flourishing. Places are essential in the process of building a sense of community, ultimately becoming representative of those communities too. Key in the autoethnographical reading of Patti Smith's memoir is the Chelsea Hotel, the setting of the story *par excellence* (so much so that it gives its name to one of the chapters). According to Edmund White, "this book brings together all the elements that made New York so exciting in the 1970s—the danger and poverty, the artistic seriousness

and optimism, the sense that one was still connected to a whole history of great artists in the past." The Chelsea Hotel, a breeding ground for chance encounters, is certainly the place that best encapsulates all of this. In what is probably the most self-explanatory passage in terms of how Patti feels about this place, Smith writes:

> I loved this place, its shabby elegance, and this history it held so possessively. There were rumors of Oscar Wilde's trunks languishing in the hull of the oft-flooded basement. Here Dylan Thomas, submerged in poetry and alcohol, spent his last hours. Thomas Wolfe plowed through hundreds of pages of manuscript that formed *You Can't Go Home Again*. Bob Dylan composed "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" on our floor, and a speeding Edie Sedgwick was said to have set her room on fire while gluing on her thick false eyelashes by candlelight.
>
> So many had written, conversed, and convulsed in these Victorian dollhouse rooms. So many skirts had swished these worn marble stairs. So many transient souls had espoused, made a mark, and succumbed here. I sniffled out their spirits as I silently scurried from floor to floor, longing for discourse with a gone procession of smoking caterpillars. (112-3)

Present in the text are countless examples of Patti's wish to become one not only with the people who spend their time there but even with the foundations of the building itself. Setting foot in the lobby, she quickly becomes aware of the fact that the hotel will be the cornerstone of their artistic growth:

> I had no concept of what life at the Chelsea Hotel would be like when we checked in, but I soon realized it was a tremendous stroke of luck to wind up there. We could have had a fair-sized railroad flat in the East Village for what we were paying, but to dwell in this eccentric and damned hotel provided a sense of security as well as a stellar education. (99)

Later in the narrative, when Patti and Robert's careers begin to take off, the Chelsea entourage will still be there to support them even if they no longer live at the hotel.

Although the Chelsea is the main pillar of the thriving community of artists in the sixties, there are other places in New York City that are a must for those on the road to stardom. Daniel Lieberfeld notes how Smith "highlights the importance in her career of artistic community, and of New York as a space of artistic incubation and cross-fertilization" (192). In this sense, the ethnographical approach is particularly remarkable in the second and third chapters, where Patti's attempts to become part of the artistic subculture of the city are narrated. El Quixote[38] is the first place out of the Chelsea Hotel—though not really outside, for it is connected to the hotel by a door—where Patti and Robert mingle with the likes of Janis Joplin, Grace Slick or Jimi Hendrix. Nonetheless, they soon set out to pursue a place at Max's Kansas City. Max's is a restaurant, but it is better known for its customers than for its meals. It used to be "the

[38] El Quijote (spelled by Smith 'Quixote') was a restaurant next door to the Chelsea Hotel that David Bard, owner of the Chelsea at the time, had leased to "a clan of refugees from Franco's Spain" (Tippins 125).

social hub of the subterranean universe, when Andy Warhol passively reigned over the round table with his charismatic ermine queen, Edie Sedgwick. . . . It was a darkly glamorous as one could wish for" (117). Though the club has seen better days, it is still the place for the artists-to-be.

There comes a time when Max's regulars turn from "frustrated actresses and indignant drag queens" (126) to "the new guardians of rock and roll" (179) and it ends up becoming the unforeseen cradle of punk, with Patti Smith giving her first performances on the same stage that the Velvet Underground had taken over years before. As Max's popularity starts waning, however, the punk subculture migrates to CBGB,[39] where it truly prospers. Smith recalls: "The absence of glamour made it seem all the more familiar, a place that we would call our own" (240).[40] CBGB seems to be the place for Patti, Lenny, Richard and Ivan, the Patti Smith Group, to make a name for themselves. It is, at least, the place where they finally envision the possibility of playing professionally: "it had become apparent to us all that we were evolving under own terms into a rock and roll band" (247). Although Patti and her friends have it in them to create something special, initially they need the right place to make them shine.

In addition to the description of remarkable people and places, the memoir provides powerful social—and sometimes political—commentary on the times, though not always explicitly. Even when Smith writes about her family, she is actually shedding light on a larger reality. Chapter one is full of such references. Especially noteworthy is the scene in which eleven-year-old Patti is already finding it difficult to follow in her mother's footsteps. Smith recalls how, after being scolded for not wearing a shirt while playing outside, she abhorred the thought of her mother perpetuating an image that she so clearly despised:

> My mother won the argument and I put on a shirt, but I cannot exaggerate the betrayal I felt at that moment. I ruefully watched my mother performing her female tasks, noting her well-endowed female body. It all seemed against my nature. The heavy scent of perfume and the red slashes of lipstick, so strong in the fifties, revolted me. For a time I resented her. She was the messenger and also the message. (10)

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[39] CBGB was a club founded by Hilly Kristal in 1973 whose name stood for country (C), bluegrass (BG), and blues (B). Although these were the genres originally welcomed by Kristal, he soon changed the venue's name to CBGB OMFUG, this last acronym sequence standing for "Other Music For Uplifting Gourmandizers." Today, it is recalled for its contribution to the punk scene (Beeber 77-85).

[40] In *Face It*, Debbie Harry similarly describes CBGB's as "a dive bar on the ground floor of one of the many flophouses that lined the avenue" and she then admits: "CBGB's was still a pit, but it was our pit" (ch. 5).

By way of a personal experience from her childhood, she is providing information about a social reality as well as anticipating a motif that will repeatedly appear further in the narrative. Her remarks, albeit succinct, are to the point; it is everything the reader needs to know to understand Patti's stance. In this sense, Ellis and Bochner note:

> Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and moved through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (739)

Smith writes of a reality she is not content with and she wants the reader to notice, for it is crucial in the understanding of her private persona. Gender roles and gender stereotypes will be very present in the memoir from this moment on.

Occasionally, Smith does not provide analyses of the situations; she just presents a scene and lets readers judge for themselves. These scenes, although incorporated as mere parts of the plot, are also essential to the subtext in the story. When the family visits the Museum of Art in Philadelphia, Smith writes: "My father admired the draftsmanship and symbolism in the work of Salvador Dalí, yet he found no merit in Picasso, which led to our first serious disagreement" (11). Immediately after, she adds: "My mother busied herself rounding up my siblings, who were sliding the slick surfaces of the marble floors" (11). Though nothing else seems to be implied, she has just established a contrast between her father's role as a man, who is able to appreciate and discuss art, and her mother's role as a woman, which is merely that of a caregiver. Scattered all over the first chapter are observations that, taken together, serve as a portrait of the times: "I was raised at a time when sex and marriage were absolutely synonymous" (17); "My father was concerned that I was not attractive enough to find a husband and thought that the teaching profession would afford me security" (17). We therefore realize that these scenes not only add up to a bigger picture of the late fifties and early sixties, but they also illustrate one of the major themes in the book. Autoethnography and social commentary, then, seem to go hand in hand in *Just Kids*.

At times, however, social commentary may be more appropriately called 'generational.' In his article "Generational Theory and Collective Autobiography," Professor John Downton Hazlett notes:

> The generational concept of the self . . . recurs in autobiographies written by people who came of age between 1960 and 1975. Its emergence there is significant enough to constitute a virtually new autobiographical subgenre—a narrative of the generation as told by one who defines the self in terms of generational identity. (85)

Hazlett thus coins the term "generational autobiography" and further defines it in his book *My Generation: Collective Autobiography and Identity Politics*, where he seeks to debunk the myth of the individualized self in the autobiographical genre. Although he argues that once the coming-of-age period is over autobiographers tend to distance themselves from the generational experience, he contemplates the possibility of a generational autobiography that views this experience retrospectively, which is the case of *Just Kids*. Patti Smith came of age during the time span mentioned above (between 1960 and 1975) and this is the period she actually covers in the memoir. Hazlett observes that this "was a time when many members of the young generation felt that the institutions they were about to inherit from their 'fathers' were outmoded, inadequate, or immoral" (*My Generation* 38). This is clearly illustrated in the already quoted passage where a very young Patti argues with her mother: "The heavy scent of perfume and the red slashes of lipstick, so strong in the fifties, revolted me. For a time I resented her. She was the messenger and also the message" (10). With these remarks, Smith is not only rejecting a set of values of a previous generation, but also anticipating changes in the ethics of the upcoming generation.

Hazlett also reminds us that American culture in the 1960s "was politicized along generational lines" (*My Generation* 38), so it comes as no surprise that accounts from this period are openly engaged in identity politics, as is the case of *Just Kids*. According to him,

> [a]ll the generational writers of this period, cite specific incidents that shaped their sense of the collective self. The selection of those incidents, of course, is never an innocent one, for invariably they are chosen as illustrations of a generational plot that confirms specific political assumptions and ideas. (*My Generation* 39)

Smith writes of Martin Luther King (66) and Robert Kennedy's (70) assassinations, not without overtly taking a stance: "I saw Kennedy's candidacy as a way in which idealism could be converted into meaningful political action, that something might be achieved to truly help those in need" (69). Similarly, when she alludes to the Patty Hearst kidnapping,[41] she has no qualms about letting the reader know how she feels. After hearing Hearst's words when caught robbing a bank with her captors, Patti writes a reinterpretation of Jimi Hendrix's "Hey Joe," merging his lyrics with her thoughts on the

[41] In 1974, Patricia Hearst was kidnapped in her Berkeley apartment by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a criminal organization with which she became involved until her arrest in 1975. For more information see Toobin, Jeffrey. *American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst.* Doubleday, 2016.

matter: “Something in these words, magnified by our shared first name, drew me to respond to her complicated plight” (241). She is by no means oblivious to the outside world, although she does give preference to certain events over others: in the narrative, for instance, the 1969 moon landing is secondary to the deaths of Brian Jones (1969), Jimi Hendrix (1970), Janis Joplin (1970), and Jim Morrison (1971), which all took place in the span of three years.

The episodes Smith chooses to portray are not arbitrary at all. There is an underlying theme running through the narrative which involves the ending of an era. Despite the decadence and the squalor that characterize the atmosphere of the late sixties in *Just Kids*, there is an undertone of nostalgia stemming from the impossibility of recovering those years—maybe even nostalgia for what could have occurred but did not. Patti leaves New Jersey for New York in search of a more hopeful reality and, while she does find part of what she is looking for, she is also met with a devastating picture. When Patti and Robert wind up at the Hotel Allerton (before they move to the Chelsea), she is overwhelmed by the conditions the residents live in. There, Patti meets “a somewhat battered beauty wrapped in ragged chiffon sitting on the edge of a bed,” formerly a ballet dancer, now a morphine addict (87). When she learns about these neighbors, some of whom have sacrificed their careers for alcohol and drugs, we read: “Never had I seen so much collective misery and lost hopes, forlorn souls who had fouled their lives” (87). As she comes to terms with the existence of this subculture, Patti feels more at ease. Walking through Forty-second Street with Robert, they stroll confidently alongside “[b]oys on shore leave, prostitutes, runaways, abused tourists, and assorted victims of alien abduction” (107). However, there comes a time when things take a turn for the worse: “The Chelsea was changing, and the atmosphere on Twenty-third Street had a manic feel, as if something had gone awry” (205-7). Not only the Chelsea, but the whole of the East Village, Manhattan, New York—everything seems to be changing as the seventies approach.

What Hazlett calls the *Vietnam War Generation*, came of age “amid the upheavals of the civil rights movement, the growth of the ‘multiversity,’ anxiety about nuclear war, the assassination of three greatly admired political leaders, and an increasing scarcity of economic opportunities” (*My Generation* 6). No wonder 1969 is “the year that almost all obituary writers of this age group mark as the end of the generational heyday” (Hazlett, *My Generation* 201)—“Later people would say that the murder at the Altamont Stones

concert[42] in December marked the end of the idealism of the sixties" (108), acknowledges Smith. Patti Smith belongs to the category of autobiographers who write about the coming-of-age experience with a eulogistic tone, employing death tropes to imply the end of an era—and with that era, the death of one's former self. In this respect, Hazlett writes: "The authors of elegiac narratives believe that those who survived the death of the sixties have suffered a diminution of collective focus and identity. . . . Nostalgia is often a primary sentiment in such narratives, as is a wistfulness about and an idealization of the earlier self" (*My Generation* 153). This is clearly illustrated in the last paragraphs of the third chapter in *Just Kids*:

> Many would not make it. Candy Darling died of cancer. Tinkerbelle and Andrea Whips took their lives. Others sacrificed themselves to drugs and misadventure. Taken down, the stardom they so desired just out of reach, tarnished stars falling from the sky.
>
> I feel no sense of vindication as one of the handfuls of survivors. I would rather have seen them all succeed, catch the brass ring. As it turned out, it was I who got one of the best horses. (209)

These lines are connected to the discussion of autothanatography, where I introduced the idea that *Just Kids* can be read as an elegy to a whole generation. Yet, far from offering a fatalistic account, in the face of so much misery Smith remains self-assured throughout the narrative: "We too would take up arms, the arms of our generation, the electric guitar and the microphone" (245). Patti Smith and Lenny Kaye did take up those arms in 1971 at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church and have not stopped using them ever since.

Various scholars, such as Heewon Chang, prefer to distinguish between proper autoethnographies (those following the anthropological approach) and highly descriptive memoirs. Chang argues that "autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self" (48-9). From Chang's perspective, Patti Smith's work would probably fall into the category of "highly descriptive memoirs." However, although in *Just Kids* the focus is on the personal, it is at all times informed by the cultural. The *auto* in "autoethnography" is explained in this case by the fact that the unfolding cultural and historical events are constantly criss-crossing Patti's personal story. Her individuality cannot be understood apart from the broader context of the surrounding cultural scenario. Indeed, she prefaces the Illustrated

[42] On December 6, 1969, 18-year-old Meredith Hunter was murdered by the members of the Hells Angels motorcycle club during the Rolling Stones performance at the Altamont Speedway Free Festival. For more information, see Selvin, Joel. *Altamont: The Rolling Stones, the Hells Angels and the Inside Story of Rock's Darkest Day.* HarperCollins, 2016.

Edition of *Just Kids* with a paragraph dedicated to the city to which she arrived as a foreigner:

> Time passes unnoticed, until that moment when we suddenly turn and all seems transformed, even the earth beneath our feet. Sometimes I walk alone, up and down the streets of the city, feeling somewhat estranged. Many of the places I have known are gone. The city I once shared with Robert was a whole other wonderland, albeit a far grittier one. Forty-second Street with its sailors, hustlers, and night girls. Art houses offering Fellini and Bergman movies throughout the afternoon for fifty cents. Pawnshop windows filled with transient treasure, depression-era guitars, and turquoise jewelry, and the glittering Kino parlors and the quarter photo booths.
>
> The psychedelic circus of the East Village is buried deep in the archeology of continuous change, irrevocably altered. Gone are the revolutionaries, nomadic squatters, jazz clubs, and the cheapest rents imaginable. Skid Row is unrecognizable, and alone in memory are the burgeoning musicians mingling with homeless men in long overcoats, lighting fires in oilcans, along the Bowery. New fires of prosperity burn, and new stories will be written. (xi)

Decades have gone by and Patti Smith still walks the streets of New York City. Although perfectly acquainted with its geography, it seems as though Smith is once again a stranger in the city, for it only faintly resembles the place where her story with Robert Mapplethorpe and company took place.

Just Kids is the relational narrative of two people who could not envision a life without the presence of the other. It is the story of artistic apprenticeship and subsequent accomplishment (*Künstlerroman*). It is the story of the loss of a loved one resulting in the loss of a part of oneself (autothanatography). It is the story of a historical and cultural atmosphere which not only informed all of the above, but also enriched each of them (autoethnography). Given that the female rock memoir is commonly defined as any autobiographical account written by a female rock musician, *Just Kids* would fit into that category. To a certain extent, the book does follow Patti along the road to "celebrity" (always in the context of Patti and Robert's relationship), making stops at certain historic moments such as her reading at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church or the release of her first ever album, *Horses*, and the making of its legendary sleeve photograph. Besides, it tackles the already mythological age of the birth of punk and further feeds into that mythologizing process. Not only that, but Smith writes about Sam Shepard, Janis Joplin, Jim Carroll, Allen Ginsberg, and many other famous people, for which she has actually been accused of name dropping. She explains, however, that at the time these were just "regular people," some on the rise, some still completely unknown: "We were just living our lives" (qtd. in Rodulfo). Indeed, many moments which were important in Patti Smith's career as a poet and performer are omitted, this not being primarily a story about her rise to stardom. Furthermore, there is, beyond the autobiographical account, a deep reflection—on culture, history, society; on the coming of age; on love in its various

forms—which already denotes a tendency to self-examination and the exploration of the surrounding circumstances. Out of the three books explored in this dissertation, *Just Kids* may be Patti Smith's only true female rock memoir and, even so, nuances are necessary.

In writing this memoir which blends apparently discordant subgenres of life writing, Patti Smith produces a narrative that is far from dissonant—quite the opposite, she succeeds in merging these forms in such a way that they all complement each other and result in a coherent story of the self. Back in the 1970s, Smith decided to blur the boundaries between poetry and music. It now seems that she has opted for the same approach with her autobiographical prose work, for *Just Kids* is only the beginning of her experimentation with life writing.

4.2. *M Train*

After the considerable success of *Just Kids*, Patti Smith's fanbase—both musical and literary—thirsted for a sequel in which the author would reminisce about her life following Robert Mapplethorpe's passing. A second autobiographical prose work, *M Train*, did arrive in 2015, five years after the publication of Smith's first life narrative. This, however, was not the work most were anticipating; indeed, virtually every reviewer of the book remarks on how different this account is from the previous one.[43] While readers were most probably expecting a follow-up memoir that would pick up where *Just Kids* had left off, i.e. right after Robert Mapplethorpe's passing in 1989, *M Train* opens twenty-three years later, as the year 2011 is coming to an end. Patti Smith, now a 66-year-old widow living alone in New York, goes about her daily life while reflecting on loss, self-awareness, and the passing of time. Where *Just Kids* moved away from the conventions of celebrity memoir, *M Train* abandons whatever trace of the genre altogether. For writer and journalist Alice O'Keeffe, this is "certainly literature rather than a celebrity memoir" and she praises the narrative as "subtly controlled and compelling." She is not the only one, however, who points to the work's sublime writing: Michiko Kakutani notes that "her prose here is both lyrical and radiantly pictorial," Elizabeth Hand finds it "[a]s perceptive and beautifully written as its predecessor," and

[43] "If 'Just Kids' was about starting out as an artist and setting forth in the world, 'M Train' feels more like a look at the past through a rearview mirror" (Kakutani); "Where 'Just Kids,' her 2010 memoir, charted her path from childhood to celebrity, 'M Train' does not move in a simple arc from one destination to another. . . . 'M Train' is less about achieving success than surviving it" (Lord); "Unlike *Just Kids*, whose linear plot was all about the thrill of 'becoming,' *M Train* is about enduring erosion" (Corrigan).

Fiona Sturges highlights "the singular elegance, poeticism and deft observation with which Smith writes." *M Train* might have initially disappointed those looking for a story in the style of *Just Kids*, yet it must have enraptured those looking for an autobiographical work by Patti Smith. Ultimately, *M Train* became the book with which Smith gained definitive recognition for her work as a life-writer.

In *M Train*, Patti Smith approaches life writing in a rather experimental way, bordering on stream-of-consciousness. Present and past are intermingled, and so are dreams and reality. Chapters are replaced with what Smith calls "stations"[44]—those of the M Train. Objects acquire the magnitude of living things—to such an extent that Patti has no trouble starting up a conversation with them. And yet, while everything initially seems to be out of place, it all ends up falling into place. With loss as the common thread, Patti[45] goes about her daily life in New York: reading at her favorite cafés, feeding her cats, watching crime shows. This routine, however, is intermittently interrupted by her memories: a memento, a conversation, or her own thoughts automatically take her back to a moment long gone. She thus finds herself mourning distinct losses—in particular that of her late husband, Fred "Sonic" Smith—and seeking comfort in her recollections of the past.

Up to this point, *M Train* seems to share very little with *Just Kids*, not only plotwise but also in terms of linearity and factuality. This, however, should come as no surprise to the reader, for the circumstances under which these autobiographical prose works were written necessarily call for different approaches. *Just Kids*, as discussed in the previous chapter, was written essentially with the purpose of honoring a promise to the late Robert Mapplethorpe, making it imperative to create as accurate an account as possible. Whenever Smith discusses *Just Kids* and *M Train* together, she reminds us of the great responsibility the writing of the first book entailed, as opposed to the freedom she experienced with the second. In an interview with Jim Cuno, president of the art institution J. Paul Getty Trust, he notes how these two works are driven by different elements—the former by story and the latter by tone—to which Smith replies:

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[44] To avoid possible misunderstandings, I will still refer to these as 'chapters' in my analysis.

[45] Whereas in the discussion of *Just Kids* I referred to the narrator as "Smith" and to the character as "Patti," in the discussion of *M Train* I will use them interchangeably, for the narrative is set in the present time and thus there is no distinction between character and narrator.

> *M Train* . . . was propelled by the wish to write but be unfettered by expectations, destination, chronology, plot. Because when I wrote *Just Kids*, of course, I was fulfilling a vow. I don't believe I would have ever written it had Robert not specifically asked me to write it the day before he died. . . . In *M Train* I was completely free. I just wrote what I wanted. ("Patti Smith on *M Train*" 24:52-26:24)

Besides, whereas more than two decades elapsed since the death of Robert Mapplethorpe and the publication of *Just Kids*, in the case of *M Train* there is a brief two-year margin between the events recorded in the book and its actual publication. The former tackles a narrative of the past, whereas the latter is set mainly in the present time—which further explains the change in tone.

Despite the obvious contrast, as we delve into the narrative, motifs from the first memoir reappear and we realize that there is some underlying connection between these books. As a result, although some point out the disparities between *Just Kids* and *M Train*, many also acknowledge that there are common denominators that link the narratives. In his review of *M Train*, writer Charles Finch argues that both books are "full of the same gangly but lovely writing, the same resolute faith in the consolations of art, the same odd flashes of humor, the same rawness to memory and experience." Similarly, journalist Fiona Sturges asserts: "Common to both books . . . is the singular elegance, poeticism and deft observation with which Smith writes." Patti Smith's voice—the narrative voice she created for herself in the first memoir—therefore resonates in this second autobiographical prose work.

On a different level, something that *M Train* shares with its predecessor is the fact that it can also be approached as a crossroads of different life writing forms. Following Julia Watson's argument that *Just Kids* "navigat[es] seemingly incompatible autobiographical genres" (132), I now propose a similar analysis for Smith's second autobiographical account. To a great extent, *M Train* is written in the fashion of a journal, with Smith recording her everyday life while reflecting on loss, self-awareness, and the passing of time. Since the loss of a loved one permeates the story, we return to the idea of a narrative connected to mourning. This time, however, given the nature of her relationship with Fred, the term "grief memoir" will prove to be more accurate here than that of "autothanatography." *M Train* is also closely related to the concept of "autotopography," coined by Jennifer González in 1995 and concerned with the idea that certain objects may constitute "museums of the self" (134). As will be revealed below, these objects not only encapsulate autobiographical information, but they also very often act as the trigger for Smith's memories. Finally, the book may be read as a travel memoir,

travel being key not only because of the various trips Smith either takes or remembers, but also because of the mental journey she makes throughout the narrative (hence the *M Train*).

4.2.1. Journal

"I offer my world on a platter filled with allusions"
—Patti Smith, *M Train*

One of the first things readers notice about *M Train* is its reminiscences of the diary, especially at a time when journaling is the order of the day.[46] Since the text is not addressed to a "dear diary" nor are there any dates at the head of each page—both of these defining features of the diary as we know it—referring to Smith's work as a journal seems to be more appropriate. It is true that, in their study of autobiographical forms, most scholars choose to disregard the distinction between 'diary' and 'journal' on the grounds that both forms involve the recording of daily life. More often than not, the difference between these terms is not even addressed and authors use them interchangeably. What is more, the entry for 'diary' in the *OED Online* reads: "A daily record of events or transactions, a journal." According to Smith and Watson, "[s]ome critics distinguish diary from journal by noting that the journal tends to be more a public record and thus less intimate than the diary" (193). Judy Simons, on the contrary, in her study of *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women*, states that "strictly speaking 'diary' can be used as a generic term to cover both a daily record of engagements and more intimate writing, while 'journal' tends to refer more specifically to a personal chronicle" (7). Either way, although these definitions contradict one another, in both works 'diary' and 'journal' end up being used interchangeably.

Similar as diary and journal may be, there are nevertheless a few differences which are pertinent for our analysis. As writer William Gass explains in his essay "The Art of Self," the diary is "staccato" in style: it relies solely upon facts, and it requires meticulousness in its day-by-day recording, hence its distinctive dated entries. According to Gass, while the journal also respects a chronological principle, it is more flexible and leaves room for a more introspective narration. Here, the focus is not so much on what happened but rather on how what happened affected the person writing, thus allowing

[46] "Once the domain of teenage girls and the literati, journaling has become a hallmark of the so-called self-care movement, right up there with meditation" (Phelan).

disruptions in the narrative linearity. The journal's cadence would therefore be, to borrow from Gass's metaphor, legato. The pages of *M Train* are filled with images of Patti feeding her cats, watching her favorite TV shows, writing at her cherished cafés or taking short trips—that is, with images of her everyday life—thus making it possible to relate it to either diary or journal. Nevertheless, the contrast in narrative scope and rhythm presented by Gass makes the term 'journal' more accurate when referring to Smith's second autobiographical prose work. In fact, critics describe *M Train* as "visual stream-of-consciousness" (Lord), a "kaleidoscopic ballad" (Kakutani), or "a memoir with a wavelike rhythm" (Heyward), highlighting the more introspective character which Gass associates to journal. Such is the meditative character of the book, that it occasionally moves away from the genre of the journal, still chronologically arranged, and closer to a more contemplative genre like the personal essay or even the self-portrait. A preliminary examination of these two forms therefore proves critical for the analysis of *M Train* as journal.

We shall first explore the personal essay, which was thoroughly analyzed in the previous chapter. This time, I would like to focus on different definitions provided for the form. Smith and Watson define the personal essay as a "mode of writing that is literally a self-trying-out, . . . a testing ('assay') of one's own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic" (200). In her entry on "Autobiography and the Essay" in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Lydia Fakundiny states that "it is the projection of the writer's point of view—the reflective and often reflexive gaze provisionally shaping observation and experience—that directs the essay" (80), as opposed to autobiography, which tends to be, for the most part, culturally and historically informed. Also in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Helen M. Buss observes how memoir often borrows certain devices typical of the personal essay, notably the "considerable editorial commentary on the nature of a particular ideological moment and the effect of that moment on individual lives" (596). It therefore follows, from this last remark, that just because a text displays certain essay-like features does not necessarily mean that it is a proper essay. As a matter of fact, one of the main lines of argument in this paper is precisely memoir's flexibility to encompass different forms of life writing. Still, an analysis of those sections which lend themselves to be read as personal essay will further support the idea that there are nuances that separate diary from journal and that *M Train* is rather an example of the latter.

Picking up Smith and Watson's definition of the personal essay again, I would like to stress the idea of assessing "one's own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic" (200), since self-analysis permeates Smith's *M Train*. Far from merely presenting us with the trivialities of her rather mundane life, Smith delights us with an introspective (even soul-searching) exercise. In the book, Patti is far from oblivious to the things that happen either to her or around her and rarely does she let go easily of a situation which has triggered a reaction in her. Upon her arrival at the airport when leaving for Mexico, for instance, she finds out that boarding passes are no longer delivered at the counters and one now has to get them from a self-service kiosk. Patti, who stubbornly asks for a person to provide her with a boarding pass, becomes upset when she clumsily fails to obtain hers. Once on the plane she starts questioning herself: "Why did I get so steamed up at check-in? Why did I want the girl to give me a boarding pass? Why couldn't I just get into the swing of things and get my own?" (117). She then concludes: "It's the twenty-first century; they do things differently now" (117-8). As we move forward in the narrative, we begin to connect the dots and we realize that it is not the kiosk in itself that bothers Patti but rather the fact that everything seems to be changing and that she is unable to keep pace with a new reality. *M Train* thus reveals itself as a deep reflection—a personal essay—on aging and the passing of time.

Smith overtly addresses the subject of age on the arrival of her sixty-sixth birthday: "I considered what it meant to be sixty-six. . . . Sixty-six, I thought, what the hell. I could feel my chronology mounting" (156). At first thought, she optimistically writes: "I noticed the threads of my dungarees straining across my protruding knees. I'm still the same person, I thought, with all my flaws intact, same old bony knees, thanks be to God" (156-7). However, she then admits: "I realized I missed that particular version of me, the one who was feverish, impious. She has flown, that's for sure" (157). Again, later in the book, she makes another reference to aging. This time, however, it is not so much a fleeting thought as a contemplative meditation on age and its inevitable result: death. In a chapter that deals to a great extent with the irrecoverable past, Smith writes:

> I believe in life, which one day each of us shall lose. When we are young we think we won't, that we are different. As a child I thought I would never grow up, that I could will it so. And then I realized, quite recently, that I had crossed some line, unconsciously cloaked in the truth of my chronology. How did we get so damn old? I say to my joints, my iron-colored hair. Now I am older than my love, my departed friends. (249-51)

This short passage encapsulates three of the major motifs in *M Train* (and in Smith's literature in general): time, death, and loss. On a different level, it is also interesting to

note the reference to her childhood wish to never grow up, because it establishes an unequivocal connection with eleven-year-old Patti's tantrum in *Just Kids* when she was forced to put on a t-shirt: "I protested vehemently and announced that I was never going to become anything but myself, that I was of the clan of Peter Pan and we did not grow up" (10), Smith writes in *Just Kids*. "I believe I am still the same person; no amount of change in the world can change that" (249), she writes in *M Train*. Age may gray her hair and wrinkle her hands, but her soul seems to remain ageless.

The fact that Smith overtly addresses the subject of age must not be overlooked as an isolated case. Within the broader context of life writing, Age Studies have gradually become the object of critical attention. For instance, in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, there are two entries devoted to the subject: "Age and Life Writing" and "Old Age and Life Writing." In the former, Margaret Morganroth Gullette observes how age no longer necessarily implies a narrative of deterioration: "Some contemporary American writers (many of them women allied with the positive-aging movement) rebut this decline by writing about conquering an age or stage that is felt to be particularly challenging" (66). In the latter, Barbara Frey Waxman seems to concur with Gullette: "Challenging negative stereotypes of senescence as stagnation and passivity, these life writings often portray later life as a time of self-discovery, for spiritual and emotional growth" (673). With her meditation on aging and its effects, Smith is therefore making a contribution to the positive-aging movement, which seeks to draw attention to those narratives where aging is not necessarily (or, at least, not exclusively) linked to deterioration or the loss of cognitive and/or physical functions.

Aging goes hand in hand with the passing of time, something that seems to deeply trouble Smith in this work—"the tyranny of so-called time" (215), she writes. On the first page of the chapter entitled "Clock with No Hands" we find an extensive reflection on the nature of time:

> I closed my notebook and sat in the café thinking about real time. Is it time uninterrupted? Only the present comprehended? Are our thoughts nothing but passing trains, no stops, devoid of dimension, whizzing by massive posters with repeating images? Catching a fragment from a window seat, yet another fragment from the next identical frame? If I write in the present yet digress, is that still real time? Real time, I reasoned, cannot be divided into sections like numbers on the face of a clock. If I write about the past as I simultaneously dwell in the present, am I still in real time? Perhaps there is no past or future, only the perpetual present that contains this trinity of memory. (84-5)

Smith refers to real time as if there was another way of understanding it: a time when Fred or Todd were still alive, for instance, is somehow more conceivable—or at least

more bearable—for her. Behind Smith's countless references to time in this narrative there is both a yearning for things as they were in a not-so-distant past as well as a conscious attempt to actively engage in what for her are "modern times": "We seek to stay present, even as the ghosts attempt to draw us away" (247). The way in which Smith approaches this subject does nothing but reinforce the idea that *M Train* is notably essayistic in tone.

As previously mentioned, apart from the personal essay, there is another autobiographical form which surfaces when reading *M Train* as journal: the self-portrait.[47] According to Smith and Watson, while this term has traditionally been used "for an artist's painted, photographed, drawn, or printed portrait of him- or herself"—i.e. for visual representations of the author—"in literary studies, self-portrait has been used to distinguish the present-oriented from the retrospectively oriented autobiographical accounts" (202-3). As a literary text, *M Train*, albeit much connected to the past, is present-oriented. The first chapter opens: "Four ceiling fans spinning overhead. The Café 'Ino is empty save for the Mexican cook and a kid named Zak who sets me up with my usual order of brown toast, a small dish of olive oil, and black coffee" (7). Thus begins the narration of Patti Smith's present life as a sixty-five-year-old woman living in New York City. Now a widow with her kids already grown up, Smith lives in what seems to be a willed state of semi-isolation. Smith begins the second chapter again using the present tense ("I climb the stairs to my room" [27], "I skip Thanksgiving" [28]) but, without explanation, shifts to a past tense ("It was after midnight when I walked home" [28]). While she is still referring to the present moment of the story's timeline, she is now using the past simple. From this point on, she will alternate between the present simple and the past simple when referring to the present, while also using the past simple when referring to the past. The reader is thus left with the additional task of having to pause before determining if the author is writing about the present or the past. This way, Smith manages to indirectly convey the subjective and relative character of time.

[47] Although we will now be focusing on the literary aspect, we cannot overlook the fact that *M Train*—as well as the other two autobiographical prose works analyzed in this paper—contains photographs either of the writer herself or of people, places or objects that somehow represent her. This is something we will come back to later on in the chapter dedicated to the study of Patti Smith's narratives as photobiographies.

Even though not every present-oriented narrative is necessarily a self-portrait, Smith's second autobiographical prose work shares more than that with the act of self-portraiture. In the conclusion to *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, Michel Beaujour affirms that no self-portraitist begins a self-portrait with the aim of portraying himself or herself—instead, one realizes what one is doing only halfway through or when the task is over, if at all. He therefore suggests: "Would it not be more correct to say that self-portrayal is the post-facto recentering, deployment, and reworking of one's idle and formless writing that initially wandered aimlessly into the vague field of fantasies, glosses, and jottings?" (336). Patti Smith herself admitted in an interview that she had no particular agenda when she started writing her second autobiographical account: "I just wanted to mosey through a book with no particular place to go, as the song says, and just see where I went" ("Patti Smith says" 01:42-01:52). Not only that, but in *M Train* itself there are references to the writing of the book which reveal how the narrative started as "moments relived, sprawled in notebooks and on paper napkins, punctuated by quantities of black coffee" (255); that is, it did not start as a narrative in the strict sense. Beaujour's description of self-portrayal seems to perfectly fit *M Train*, since neither writer nor reader is able to anticipate the portrayal of a self from the beginning, yet they are both left with the feeling that it is as close a self-portrait as it can be. In her review of Smith's book, Sturges begins by acknowledging that it "has the feel both of a personal diary and a portrait of an artist trying to make sense of the thoughts, images and dreams that forever crowd her consciousness" [48] and concludes that "it offers the most rounded portrait you could hope for a life lived intensely, truthfully and on a never-ending quest for artistic enrichment." Smith herself admits in an interview: "I have to say of anything I've ever read it's really the most like me as who I am . . . the book pretty much tells you the kind of person I am" ("Patti Smith says" 02:12-02:29).

M Train's connections to forms like the personal essay or the literary self-portrait further support the argument that the narrative is more journal than diary, both of them (essay and self-portrait) favoring the thematically logical over the chronological. In my analysis of *M Train* as journal, however, I shall also resort to works dealing with the study

[48] Note that Sturges uses the expression "personal diary" but is referring to what I have decided to call "journal." She argues that Smith is "trying to make sense of" thoughts, images, or dreams, therefore accounting for a literary form that seeks not the mere recording of events typical of the diary, but a more introspective analysis in the fashion of a journal.

of diary. As happened with autobiography and memoir, much of the available theory on diary is also applicable to journal—after all, in spite of the differences noted by Gass, these forms still share a common nature: that of recording the continuity of a life. Lejeune's remarks on diary's quality of "unfinishable" as opposed to autobiography's requirement to reach an endpoint, for instance, are pertinent to journal:

> An autobiography is virtually finished as soon as it begins, since the story that you begin must end at the moment that you are writing it. You know the end point of the story, because you have reached it, and everything that you write will lead up to this point, explaining how you got there. An autobiography is turned towards the past. (*On Diary* 191)

Diary, journal, or even notebook, on the contrary, presuppose that there will be another entry (whether it be tomorrow, next week or in two years time). An ending is inconceivable unless one intentionally decides to stop writing. Otherwise, only death can end the task of diary writing. Diary and journal are rather turned towards the future: one writes of one's present situation or concerns as a form of documenting an evolution. One is normally aware of the fact that the future will bring changes and is oftentimes expectant of what these changes will involve. This is particularly applicable to the paperback edition of *M Train*, where Smith adds a postscript to the narrative because she is unable to accept the fact that the book has to end:

> There was something so appealing about writing directly to the projected reader, it was hard to let it all go, and like an actor haunted by the wisp of a cast-off character, I found myself unable to completely break from the world of its continuum.
>
> A few loose ends fluttered like errant hair ribbons; I still felt compelled to report on my daily goings-on. I took to composing long passages in my head that dissipated within a deluge of yet newer passages. Some of these things I wrote down, amounting to a few more pages on what happened next. (255)

This is the way Smith introduces a score of twenty additional pages in which she keeps track of her life following the end of the narrative, still marked by loss, traveling, and the significance of certain objects.

Clearly, journals as well as diaries are meant to be private and one does not approach these as one would approach a narrative which is meant to be published. *M Train*, nonetheless, while being a published account, does display a number of features which are characteristic of private life-writing forms like the journal. In fact, this work is probably the result of a two-step process involving a phase of unrestricted, creative writing first, and an editing phase second. However, while its first drafts might have been closer to what we understand as a private narrative, an editing process unavoidably obliterates the improvisational and spontaneous character of forms such as the diary or the journal. Still, in her article celebrating Patti Smith as the winner of the 2020 *Wall*

Street Journal Literature Innovator's Award, Amanda Fortini states that both *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* (Patti Smith's third autobiographical prose work) "have the feel of tightly crafted journals." As Smith herself reveals in her interview on radio show *q*, she did not have a book contract when she began ("Patti Smith says" 20:58-21:05). One of the results of this lack of parameters was the creative freedom that allowed Smith to ride her M Train, which she defines as "mental train," "mind train," or "continual train of thought" ("Legendary Patti Smith" 0:27-0:40). This takes us back to the book's stream-of-consciousness quality; as we read through its pages, we almost feel as if we were eavesdropping on Patti Smith's internal dialogue—on her dreams, on her memories, on her confessions—as she comes to terms with her sense of self. We witness a negotiation between the writer and her innermost self; we walk with Smith along her progressive (re)discovery of the self. This further humanizes the Godmother of Punk, restoring her identity as Patti Smith alone. Journalist M. G. Lord therefore makes the point that *M Train* is, on some level, a plea to acknowledge Smith as a regular person. Where biographers tend to praise and magnify Patti Smith's achievements, Smith herself rather focuses on the everyday and sees herself in relation to other people, other objects and other places, once again moving away from the celebrity memoir stereotype.

Above all, *M Train* seems to be the journal of a writer as well as of a voracious reader. Patti Smith reflects on books, writers, and the act of writing while offering the reader an insight into her literary universe—often more real for her than the universe of flesh-and-blood people. The book says much of the kind of writer Patti Smith is. Seldom does she leave home without her Moleskine, let alone when traveling: "I shoved a notebook, a Bic pen, an ink-stained copy of Artaud's *Anthology*, and a small Minox camera into a linen knapsack and left the rest of my stuff in a locker" (111); "I boarded the plane with nothing but my passport, white pen, toothbrush, traveler tube of Weleda salt toothpaste, and midsized Moleskine" (195). Although she loves writing at cafés, something that becomes very clear from the start, her home (where she keeps all of her writing tools) is the place which ultimately reveals the kind of writer she is:

> Occasionally I write directly into my small laptop, sheepishly glancing over to the shelf where my typewriter with its antiquated ribbon sits next to an obsolete Brother word processor. . . . Then there are the scores of notebooks, their contents calling—confession, revelation, endless variations of the same paragraph—and piles of napkins scrawled with incomprehensible rants. Dried-out ink bottles, encrusted nibs, cartridges for pens long gone, mechanical pencils emptied of lead. Writer's debris. (28)

From this excerpt we may infer that she is a nostalgic as well as somewhat chaotic writer who keeps antiquated machines and remnants of written soliloquies. We can also see that she does not hesitate to call herself a writer, which is not the case when she is requested to define her role as musician. In an interview at *PBS NewsHour*, when journalist Jeffrey Brown asks her whether she thinks of herself as an established writer and musician, Smith answers:

> I always hesitate when people call me a musician. I've had no musical training, I can't play anything. . . . It's really been writing for me. I evolved with my band in rock'n'roll through poetry, not through music. I feel, at this point, I've spent at least 60 years writing. I guess I can at last call myself a writer. ("In 'M Train'" 6:03-6:30)

Although Smith has published several poetry and prose-poetry collections, it is certainly her memoirs (as they are commonly referred to) that have brought her "renewed iconic status" (Masschelein 6). Her National Book Award for Nonfiction (2010) for *Just Kids* and her *Wall Street Journal* Literature Innovator's Award (2020) unquestionably assert her prestige as a writer.

Patti Smith's writing vocation results from her love of reading and it seems to have been inspired by Jo, one of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.[49] Reading permeates Smith's everyday life as well as all of her autobiographical prose works. In *M Train* in particular she examines books as potential portals to the past, to the unknown, or to the imaginary. Whenever she approaches one of her beloved books, she has to try "not to be sidetracked nor lured into another dimension," to the point where she tells them "Sorry, . . . I can't revisit you now, it's time to reel myself in" (66). Such is the case with W. G. Sebald's *After Nature*:

> At one time the three lengthy poems in this slim volume had such a profound effect on me that I could hardly bear to read them. Scarcely would I enter their world before I'd be transported to a myriad of other worlds . . . What a drug this little book is; to imbibe it is to find oneself presuming his process. I read and feel that same compulsion; the desire to possess what he has written, which can only be subdued by writing something myself. It is not mere envy but a delusional quickening in the blood. (66-7)

Books therefore belong to the category of sacred objects owned by Patti (this will be later discussed as part of *M Train*'s autotopographical nature): "Oh, to be reborn within the pages of a book" (93), she wishes.

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[49] Smith writes in *Just Kids*: "Jo, the tomboy of the four March sisters in *Little Women*, writes to help support her family, struggling to make ends meet during the Civil War. She fills page after page with her rebellious sprawl, later published in the literary pages of the local newspaper. She gave me the courage of a new goal, and soon I was crafting little stories and spinning long yarns for my brother and sister. From that time on, I cherished the idea that one day I would write a book" (10-1).

Of the numerous literary works mentioned by Patti Smith, Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* holds a special place both in her heart and in the narrative. It is the main subject in the chapter titled "The Well," which actually takes its name from the novel's "obsolescent well" (95), as well as an important element in the story as a whole. After plunging into some of Murakami's best known works (*Sheep Chase, Dance Dance Dance* and *Kafka on the Shore),* Patti begins reading *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* which captivates her the most: "That was the one that did me in, setting in motion an unstoppable trajectory, like a meteor hurtling toward a barren and entirely innocent sector of earth" (94). The book is instantly added to Smith's list of literary masterpieces and, in line with the notion that books have the ability to take her someplace else, she writes: "I finished it and was immediately obliged to reread it. For one thing I did not wish to exit its atmosphere" (95). After discussing her concern with the plot's open ending, she compares loose ends to "a lone sheet on a clothesline before a vague storm, left to flap in the wind until that same wind carries it away to become the skin of a ghost or a child's tent" (96). On some level, then, *M Train* becomes the journal of a bibliophile, where she keeps a record of the works she has read and comments on them.

Besides being a meditation on the various issues that preoccupy as well as fascinate Smith, *M Train* also acts as a mood tracker: a place where she can keep track of her emotional state in order to identify patterns, explanations and/or repercussions. There is a growing uneasiness which permeates the whole narrative, beginning at the end of the first chapter: "Without noticing, I slip into a light yet lingering malaise. Not a depression, more like a fascination for melancholia, which I turn in my hand as if it were a small planet, streaked in shadow, impossibly blue" (25). This sense of despair brings about a willed isolation which accompanies Smith for quite a while: "I skip Thanksgiving, dragging my malaise through December, with a prolonged period of enforced solitude, though sadly without crystalline effect. . . . I avoid social commitments and aggressively arrange to spend the holidays alone" (28). Patti drags herself through her present existence while constantly seeking to access her past in whatever way possible. At a given point in the story, when she realizes she has absent-mindedly left some of her belongings on a plane back home, she laments: "My penance for barely being present in the world, not the world between the pages of books, or the layered atmosphere of my own mind, but the world that is real to others" (203). Patti ultimately understands that if she keeps continuously looking back, life—actual life and not the life inside a book or the life from

a distant past—will escape her. Literary tradition has taught us that looking back takes its toll: in the Bible, Lot's wife looks back against God's warning and becomes a pillar of salt[50] (Gen. 19.26); in Greek mythology, Orpheus, breaking his pact with Hades, looks behind him only to lose Eurydice forever (Ovid 269-73). Patti, too, is suffering the consequences of constantly looking back. And yet, how not to look back when everything (and everyone) that is familiar belongs to the past and the present fails to offer solace?

4.2.2. Grief memoir

"My yearning for him permeated everything"
—Patti Smith, *M Train*

Having outlived her brother, her husband, and many of her closest friends, one could say that Patti Smith is very well acquainted with loss. While it is an inevitable part of anyone's life, loss seems to pervade Smith's existence as well as her work. Of the multiple losses experienced by Patti, her husband's passing is at the core of *M Train*. This may lead us to think of this account as autothanatography. We nevertheless encounter again the problem of a contradictory term (one cannot relate one's death), this time accentuated by the fact that this is not a relational memoir in the style of its predecessor. Given that *Just Kids* has Patti and Robert's relationship as its main subject, the narrative can be analyzed in terms of autothanatography, for this relationship inevitably comes to an end with Robert's death. Even though Patti and Fred's marriage is certainly one of strong relationality, *M Train* does not revolve around their relationship but rather around Patti's life almost two decades after Fred's passing, as she copes with the memories of her late husband.

With the story set in Smith's present, the character of Fred only appears insofar as Patti revisits her memories of him. Although the idea of Patti losing a part of her self is still present, this is not the story of Patti and Fred, but rather the story of how Patti copes with Fred's death (among other issues). There is, however, an autobiographical form, now the focus of much scholarly attention, that is well suited for the analysis of *M Train*: grief

[50] Smith herself is acquainted with this episode, as she reveals in *M Train*. Having lost some prized pictures she had taken of Sylvia Plath's grave, she decides to go back and take new shots. This time, however, weather conditions are less than ideal and the pictures fail to please her. "It was only as I approached the car," she writes, "that the sun appeared and now with a vengeance. I turned just as a voice whispered: — Don't look back, don't look back. It was as if Lot's wife, a pillar of salt, had toppled on the snow-covered ground and spread a lengthening heat melting all in its path. The warmth drew life, drawing out tufts of green and a slow procession of souls. Sylvia, in a cream-colored sweater and straight skirt, shading her eyes from the mischievous sun, walking on into the great return" (200).

memoir. Ever since the publication of Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*[51] in 2005, a considerable number of books have been placed under this category, making it possible to speak of grief memoir in terms of a sub-genre of life writing. According to journalist and historian Frances Stonor Saunders, the publication of Didion's memoir (which she calls "a major cultural event") generated an appetite for grief, resulting in the grief memoir featuring "as plat du jour on many a publisher's menu." For scholars Katarzyna A. Malecka and Jamison S. Bottomley, the memoir of loss, which may also be called "bereavement memoir," can now be considered "a prominent literary genre" superseding "its famous cousin the elegy" (1). Malecka and Bottomley argue that the grief memoir combines features of the didactic literature (e.g. self-help books) and the imaginative literature (e.g. fiction, poetry) (2), making it a more comprehensive and relatable genre. Besides, Ann Pearson notes that "[s]elf-exploration is as much the goal here as memorialization of the dead" (569). Grief memoir, then, becomes a biographical as well as an autobiographical exercise.

Of the many situations we may grieve over, it seems that spousal loss has become a consistent topic among memoirists.[52] In *M Train*, with Fred gone Patti is left in a world where she feels like she does not belong and she repeatedly tries to seek comfort in the memories they shared. Although Fred's passing and the publication of *M Train* are separated by two decades, Patti is still revisiting fragments of her life with Fred which fill her both with ache and comfort. According to Pearson, the experience of bereavement can be recorded immediately but also "retrospectively as a show long past yet felt to have reverberated through life" (568). Indeed, Smith acknowledges: "Images have their way of dissolving and then abruptly returning, pulling along the joy and pain attached to them like tin cans rattling from the back of an old-fashioned wedding vehicle" (232). And, while the loss of her husband is not the only loss she has had to cope with, it seems to be at the center of her grief, even if, as she explains in her interview on *Democracy Now!*, she never intended for this book to be about Fred in the first place ("Legendary Patti Smith" 11:15-11:55). Smith's *M Train* is certainly not comparable to *The Year of Magical*

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[51] *The Year of Magical Thinking* follows Joan Didion during the course of a year which starts when her husband, writer John Gregory Dunne, dies of a heart attack. Throughout the year, Didion does research on illness, death, and the process of grieving while she learns to cope with her loss and keeps vigil over her ill daughter.

[52] In a *New York Times* review of Joyce Carol Oates' *A Widow's Story: A Memoir*, Janet Maslin refers to this phenomenon as the "increasingly lucrative loss-of-spouse market" ("The Shock").

Thinking in the way it deals with the subject of spousal loss, because it does not revolve around the details of her husband's passing and its immediate outcome but rather around her life years after the event. For an account to be considered a grief memoir, however, recollecting the story of death is not the only way of commemorating the dead. Interweaving memories of life before and after such loss, as Smith does, is also a way of dealing with grief (Malecka and Bottomley 2) and healing, as we shall now see.

We are introduced to Fred in the first chapter, as Smith reminisces about the time when she resolved to open her dream café:

> Two years before, I had met musician Fred Sonic Smith in Detroit. It was an unexpected encounter that slowly altered the course of my life. My yearning for him permeated everything—my poems, my songs, my heart. We endured a parallel existence, shuttling back and forth between New York and Detroit, brief rendezvous that always ended in wrenching separations. Just as I was mapping out where to install a sink and a coffee machine, Fred implored me to come and live with him in Detroit. Nothing seemed more vital than to join my love, whom I was destined to marry. Saying good-bye to New York City and the aspirations it contained, I packed what was most precious and left all else behind—in the wake, forfeiting my deposit and my café. I didn't mind. The solitary hours I'd spent drinking coffee at the card table, awash in the radiance of my café dream, were enough for me. (10)

If one is not acquainted with Patti Smith or Fred "Sonic" Smith's lives, one may not be able to anticipate that Fred is already dead in the present of *M Train*'s narrative timeline. Right after this introduction to the character of Fred, Smith recounts their adventures together in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, again with no allusion whatsoever to the fact that Fred no longer lives. The only possible reference in this first chapter may be found at the end, when Smith describes her state of melancholia as "impossibly blue" (25), which we might associate with Fred's previously mentioned "pale blue eyes"[53] (20). This, however, can be easily overlooked at first reading.

The second reference to Fred's death, albeit still slightly obscure, appears in the second chapter, where Smith evokes her "time spent fishing with Fred in a rowboat on Lake Ann in northern Michigan" and concludes the story by writing "*The king is dead, no fishing today*" (37). Likewise, in the third chapter she writes: "How wonderful it would be to meet an angel, I mused, but then I immediately realized I already had. Not an archangel like Saint Michael, but my human angel from Detroit" (45). Smith repeatedly tells stories of a past spent with Fred and there comes a time when she does not even have

[53] The idea that this might be an allusion to Fred is reinforced by further references to his blue eyes: "lank brown hair and eyes the color of water" (45); "I saw his pale eyes looking intently into mine" (236); "his droopy pale-blue eyes" (275).

to mention his name for the reader to know that she is referring to such memories. "Michigan" or "Detroit," for instance, ultimately become synonymous with "Fred," as when she writes: "Michigan. Those were mystical times. An era of small pleasures" (72). There is no explicit reference to Fred, yet the reader already knows that Smith is referring to a time spent with him. It is not until the sixth chapter, however, that she actually mentions the fact that Fred is dead: "Looking back, long after his death, our way of living seems a miracle, one that could only be achieved by the silent synchronization of the jewels and gears of a common mind" (87). Although at this point in the narrative not much has been revealed about Fred's death, it is now clear that he has passed away.

In chapter ten, Smith finally overtly addresses the subject and sheds some light on the story of Fred's death. She first writes:

> I awoke late, feeling apprehensive, an uneasiness that I willed myself to shake. I told myself it was just the coming storm. But in my heart I knew it was also something else, the time of year, one of emotional duality. A happy time for children, marking Fred's passing. (146-7)

In an attempt to avoid the images of such a difficult time, Smith tries to escape to Rockaway Beach, but Hurricane Sandy thwarts her plan and she is left with no option but to stay at home only to remember Fred and the stormy day in which he left:

> A multitude of converging forces seemed to bring these memories entirely present. Halloween. All Saints' Day. All Souls' Day. Fred's passing day. Racing through Detroit on Mischief Morning with Fred in the back of an ambulance to the same hospital where our children were born. Returning home alone after midnight in a raging thunderstorm. . . . Fred, fighting for his life, could be felt in the howling wind. A great branch from our oak tree fell across the driveway, a message from him, my quiet man. (148-9)

Smith concludes this episode coming back to the present hurricane hitting New York: "The storm's energy drew out every memory of these days, a dark autumn journey. I could feel Fred closer than ever. His rage and sorrow for being torn away" (149). The reader therefore comes to have a better understanding of Fred's passing and what it means for Patti towards the middle of the book.

From this moment on, we start learning about the way Fred's death still has an impact on Smith's everyday life. In an attempt to find a missing black coat, for instance, she goes to the basement and finds some laundry from her Michigan days, "some of Fred's flannel shirts, slightly musty" (170), which she takes upstairs to wash. While rinsing them, she is reminded of a time when she encountered Katharine Hepburn while working at Scribner's Bookstore: "She wore the late Spencer Tracy's leather jacket, held in place by a green silk headscarf. I stood back and watched as she turned the pages, pondering aloud whether Spence would have liked it. I was a young girl then, not wholly

comprehending her ways"[54] (170). As Smith hangs Fred's shirts to dry, she comes to the conclusion that "[i]n time we often become one with those we once failed to understand" (170). And just as she becomes one with Hepburn, she becomes one with Joan Didion. In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Didion recounts how, for a while after her husband's passing, she was unable to put away his shoes in case he ever came back and needed them. Watching the movie *Master and Commander* on a plane to Tokyo, Patti finds herself summoning her late husband: "Captain Jack Aubrey reminded me so much of Fred that I watched it twice. Midflight I began to weep. Just come back, I was thinking. You've been gone long enough. Just come back. I will stop traveling; I will wash your clothes" (171). Like Didion, Smith contemplates the possibility of a world in which her husband might somehow return. This, however, does not imply that the experience of grief is identical for all women, nor that their narratives follow a fixed structure. Yet it does account for grief memoir as a relational form of life writing with the ability to universalize a rather intimate experience. As literary critic Bernadette Brennan writes of Virginia Lloyd's *The Young Widow's Book of Home Improvement*, grief memoirs open up "a space for contemplation and dialogue, a space in which readers may find affirmation of their experience and come to more fully understand the experience of others." Such is the case with *M Train* or *The Year of Magical Thinking.*

Despite some common denominators shared by the ever-growing number of grief memoirs, in *Navigating Loss in Women's Contemporary Memoir* Amy-Katerini Prodromou coins the expression "memoirs of textured recovery" to refer to a sub-genre of grief memoir in which, rather than offering a categorical definition of what loss should mean, narratives advocate a multi-layered understanding of recovery in which healing is not necessarily immediate nor unattainable (4); sometimes it is both, sometimes it is none. According to Prodromou, the term 'grief memoir' feels too reductive when referring to certain texts, because the act of mourning often involves much more than simply grieving. In her own words, "the way the women—in performing complex, 'recovered' selves—show that 'recovery,' ambiguous and shifting in nature, calls for more complicated theories of mourning" (4). Perhaps no one puts it as straightforwardly as Didion when she writes: "Grief, when it comes, is nothing we expect it to be" (26).

[54] In 1941, actor Spencer Tracy (who had been married for almost twenty years) and actress Katharine Hepburn began an affair that would last up until his death in 1967.

As for Patti, she finds herself oscillating between the sense of helplessness that results from the futility of trying to recover what's lost—"nothing can be truly replicated. Not a love, not a jewel, not a single line" (202)—and the certainty that our loved ones, although long gone, still accompany us in some way—"we can't draw flesh from reverie . . . but we can gather the dream itself and bring it back uniquely whole" (251). In *M Train,* there are several moments in which Patti is overcome with the sadness and pain that come with the loss of one's life partner: "The world seemed drained of wonder. I did not write poems in a fever. I did not see the spirit of Fred before me or feel the spinning trajectory of his journey" (235); "I saw his pale eyes looking intently into mine, trying to trap my walleye in his unfaltering gaze. That alone took up several pages that filled me with such painful longing that I fed them into the fire in my heart" (236); "I suddenly felt very sad. We live in the time frame of *AF*—After Fred, bound by love and irreplaceable loss" (273). And yet, whenever Smith feels like the image of her husband is fading, she brings him back through an act of recollection:

> I sought but could not feel his presence and sank back into the vestiges of memory until I found him. Dressed in khaki, his long hair shorn, standing alone in the undergrowth of tall grass and spreading palms. I saw his hand and his wristwatch. I saw his wedding ring and his brown leather shoes. (227)

M Train, then, as a memoir of textured recovery, offers an insight into the complexities of mourning, a feeling which is exacerbated by the numerous other losses that surround Patti.

Besides Fred, there are three other relatives whose loss Smith laments in the narrative of *M Train*: her mother's, her brother's, and her father's. We first learn about them when Patti, sitting before Brecht's grave and humming a lullaby from his play *Mother Courage and Her Children*, is reminded of her own mother and her son (that is, Patti's brother): "My mother was real and her son was real. When he died she buried him. Now she is dead. Mother Courage and her children, my mother and her son. They are all stories now" (56). There are two other references to Smith's mother in *M Train*, both of them related to specific objects. While making coffee in a pot given to her by her mother, Patti remembers her mother in a similar scene: "My mother, sitting at the kitchen table, the steam rising from her cup entwining with the smoke curling from her cigarette resting on an invariably chipped ashtray. My mother in her blue flowered housecoat, no slippers on her long bare feet identical to my own" (71). Some twenty pages ahead, in a more poignant passage, Patti reaches for *The Little Lame Prince*, an old birthday gift from her mother, and looks at her inscription: "Her familiar writing filled me with longing that was

also comforting. Mommy, I said aloud, and I thought of her suddenly stopping what she was doing, often in the center of the kitchen, and invoking her own mother whom she lost when she was eleven years old." She then ponders: "How is it that we never completely comprehend our love for someone until they're gone?" (92). But then again Patti does not feel that she has completely lost her mother nor does she feel that her mother rests in her grave: "she is with me where I am; in my daughter's smile, in the whispers that soothe me when I'm off track" (275). As Malecka writes, "[w]ith death, the bonds between the living and the dead do not necessarily become weaker" (157)—in Smith's case, they may become even stronger. Patti's loss therefore results in mixed feelings of longing, regret and alleviation.

As for her brother Todd, he is much more present in the narrative, most probably because his death was totally unexpected and because the event took place one month after her husband's passing, as Smith herself reveals in the story:

> [E]xactly a month later he had a massive stroke while wrapping Christmas presents for his daughter. The sudden death of Todd, so soon after Fred's passing, seemed unbearable. The shock left me numb. I spent hours sitting in Fred's favorite chair, dreading my own imagination. I rose and performed small tasks with the mute concentration of one imprisoned in ice. (235)

Todd, however, is evoked in the narrative as a catalyst for action: instead of focusing on the sorrow that such a loss naturally brings, Smith celebrates the fact that he still keeps her company: "I soon recognized Todd's humorous spirit, and as I continued my walk I slowly reclaimed an aspect of him that was also myself—a natural optimism" (236). As Smith reveals in her interview for the Chicago Humanities Festival, her philosophy allows her to overcome nostalgia by focusing on the good: "I try to allow myself to feel happy in the face of all the strife in the world" ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:38:34-00:39:25). While there is much she could be sad about, Smith chooses celebration over lament when it comes to remembering the loss of her loved ones.

Such is the case with the memories of her father: instead of making reference to him in terms of loss, Smith writes affectionately about the time when her father was alive and uses the narrative to praise him: "I admired my father from a distance. . . . He was kind and open-minded, having an inner elegance that set him apart from our neighbors. Yet he never placed himself above them. He was a decent man who did his job" (33-4); "My father's mind was beautiful. He seemed to see all philosophies with equal weight and wonder" (247). Patti vividly remembers her father's "soft pack of Camel straights" as she runs her finger over a "cigarette burn scarring the seat [which] gives the chair a

feel of life" (35), just as she is able to "hear the tones of his sonorous voice melding with the snowflakes" (89) on Saint Patrick's Day 1954. Smith surely misses him, but *M Train* is not the place to mourn his death; it is the place to celebrate the fact that he lived.

Just as she did in *Just Kids*, in *M Train* Patti Smith mourns the deaths of various artists, some of whom were close friends of hers. The motif of art is again crucial in the narrative, and so are the people Smith admires for their artistic contribution. Among those whom she reveres are the Beats, fathers of the generation in which Patti Smith came of age. She refers to them as "our Beat apostles" (221) or "our great teachers" (222) and thinks of Lenny Kaye, Paul Shanahan (both of them members of her band) and herself as "the gone Beats' orphaned children" (222). In this book in particular, William Burroughs and Paul Bowles hold a very special place in Smith's heart. She writes of Burroughs:

> I wonder how William would decipher the language of my current disposition. There was a time when I could simply pick up the phone and ask him, but now I must summon him in other ways. . . . Thinking to write something of William I open my notebook, but a pageant of scenes and the faces that inhabited them is quietly paralyzing; couriers of wisdom I was privileged to break bread with. Gone Beats that once ushered my generation into a cultural revolution, though it is William's distinctive voice that speaks to me now. (64)

As for Paul Bowles, when Smith is invited to participate in a conference in Tangier to commemorate "the Beat writers who had once made it their port of call" (217),[55] she is reminded of Bowles' connection to Tangier. Smith is therefore mentally transported back to 1967, when she first learned about him and set out to read everything he had written. She then recalls how, thirty years later, she was asked to interview Bowles in Tangier. By that time, he was already quite ill and no longer writing. "Now he is gone" (219), Smith writes returning to the present of the narrative.

Smith also expresses her grief over the loss of writer Roberto Bolaño and musician Lou Reed. Bolaño is actually the first artist whose death Smith mourns in *M Train.* In trying to write a poem paying homage to the Chilean author, she reflects:

> If only he could have been given special dispensation, been allowed to live. . . . Such a sad portion of injustice served to beautiful Bolaño, to die at the height of his powers at fifty years old. The loss of him and his unwritten denying us at least one secret of the world. (29)

It is not only the loss of the writer that Smith laments, but of his work, too. On the other hand, Reed is the last artist whose death Smith mourns. This time, however, it is not a

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[55] Although Paul Bowles did not consider himself part of the Beat Generation and he "is not generally known as a Beat writer, his influence on the Beats and his personal relationships with them were significant" (Stephenson 25). Indeed, many of the Beat writers "viewed him as a mentor and precursor" (Stephenson 26).

past event that Smith recalls; it takes place in the present of *M Train*'s narrative. Besides, this time it is not just an artist, but a lifelong friend that Patti is losing. Smith first writes: "It was hard to imagine New York without Lou, the brilliant, willful prince of the city" (257). She then recalls how two weeks before she had run into him and he had told her that he loved her, which made her realize: "in the forty-two years we had known each other, those words, however felt, were never spoken" (258). Although she is not initially overcome with sorrow, "more a sense of wonder" (258), it ultimately dawns on her that she will never see him again: "That is death. A disappearing act" (259).

The subject of death itself appears on various occasions in the narrative: "The dead regard us with curiosity. Ash, bits of bone, a handful of sand, the quiescence of organic material, waiting. We lay our flowers yet cannot sleep. We are wooed, then mocked, plagued like Amfortas, king of the Grail Knights, by a wound refusing to heal" (186-7); "It occurred to me that I was on a run of suicides. Akutagawa. Dazai. Plath. Death by water, barbiturates, and carbon monoxide poisoning; three fingers of oblivion, outplaying everything" (196); "I wondered if death is merely the same deal—life interrupted then rebooted as some Kafkaesque journey with several checkpoints" (261). Death seems to both trouble and fascinate Smith with its elusive nature.

For Smith, however, death is not the only source of grief; change (even the slightest change in her daily routine) is also often synonymous with loss and is equally capable of destabilizing her. Indeed, according to psychiatrist Collin Murray Parkes and Professor Holly G. Prigerson, resistance to change or the reluctance to give up possessions are also components of grief (9). As a woman who finds comfort in the simplest of routines, Patti feels slightly adrift whenever something changes around her. One morning, for instance, as Patti is headed to her usual café, "looking forward to sitting at [her] corner table and receiving [her] black coffee, brown toast, and olive oil without asking for it" (204), she realizes Café 'Ino is closing down. Once inside, Jason, the owner, makes her one last coffee: "I was too stunned to speak. He was closing up shop and that was it. I looked at my corner. I saw myself sitting there on countless mornings through countless years" (204). She decides to spend the morning there and asks a regular to take her picture: "The first and last picture at my corner table in 'Ino. . . . the picture of woebegone" (204), she writes. While one can easily empathize with Patti's sadness over the close-down of a café where she has spent precious time, she takes it one step further and goes as far as to preserve the table and chair where she used to sit. For Smith, however, it is not only Café

'Ino that is changing, but the whole of New York City—the New York City which she got to know during her younger years, the New York City from *Just Kids*. After Lou Reed's passing, she reflects:

> Gone like the young sailors on leave that once swarmed Forty-second Street, dressed in immaculate white, drawn by the possibilities reflected on that gritty thoroughfare, sniffing around for action. Glimpses of flesh and glitter, cheap liquor strong enough to blot out the faces of paid pleasures. Gone the long vista of grindhouse theaters and red lights. Gone those sailors and hustlers and prostitutes and chicken hawks all blue-eyed black-eyed brown-eyed gone. A whole system of gone. (259)

Smith's resistance to change, as well as her heavy reliance on routine, make her feel uneasy in the face of a new reality.

Something similar happens when she finds out that her favorite crime show is over: "It is not long before I am confronted with the cruelest of all spoilers: there will be no episode 39" (238). This is a moment Smith has been fearing since the beginning of the narrative; she had already mentioned the protagonist of this show in the third chapter: "as a character in a television series she is dearer to me than most people. I wait for her every week, quietly fearing the day when *The Killing* will come to a finish and I will never see her again" (46). Complaining about such a situation may not be seen as out of the ordinary, but Patti goes as far as to ask herself:

> What do we do with those that can be accessed and dismissed by a channel changer, that we love no less than a nineteenth-century poet or an admired stranger or a character from the pen of Emily Brontë? What do we do when one of them commingles with our own sense of self, only to be transferred into a finite space within an on-demand portal? (239)

She then concludes that "[a]ll is in limbo" (239), and sets out to envision her own spin-off of the show, being unable to move on. The truth is that, as Malecka notes in her article on forming identity in bereavement memoirs, we sometimes fail to understand "how vital for our well-being and integrity all kinds, even the most insignificant, of attachments are" (158). This account, while written as an elegy for Fred, also laments losses such as that of her brother Todd, that of her mother, and even that of a coat or an envelope containing pictures of Sylvia Plath's grave. Losing a cherished object is, for Patti, synonymous with losing part of oneself, for there are material things which ultimately become an expression of her identity, something that will be further developed below, in the section devoted to autotopography.

We may therefore conclude that the benefits of publishing a grief account like *M Train* are twofold: as Malecka notes, "[t]he act of narrating steadily keeps the mourner company in her loneliness and, as a published account, provides company for other bereaved selves who seek understanding" (172). Moreover, besides helping Smith cope

with her feelings, the narrative also helps her re-inscribe the dead into the world. In the same way that she brings them back to life every day in her imagination, now, in recalling them in her narrative, they come alive to a wider audience. In the interview at the Chicago Humanities Festival, she points to the fact that many of the people she lost died young (her husband, her brother, her pianist), and she concludes: "I love that in the context of the memoir, you can make flesh some people that might have been somewhat forgotten or never known had you not given them another life through writing" ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:15:58-00:17:29). Journalists reviewing *M Train* insist on the matters of loss and mourning: "There is an indelible sadness to 'M Train,' borne of bereavement, aging, and isolation" (Crawford); "a dark melody of loss threads its way through this volume" (Kakutani); "*M Train* is shot through with grief" (O'Keeffe). The truth is, loss is alluded to on many different levels, as we have seen. Sometimes, Patti is nostalgic even about the present: "I packed my small suitcase in a haze of nostalgia for the present stream I was just about to divert, a handful of days in a world of my own making, fragile as a temple constructed with wooden matchsticks" (187). In spite of this, Smith, so it seems, seeks to convey that she understands loss, nostalgia, or melancholia as necessary parts of life that she ultimately embraces. Hence Elizabeth Hand's remark that "despite all of these losses, there is extraordinary joy here, too." In fact, the ending of the paperback edition, in which Smith writes "I will most likely rise . . . open my notebook, and begin to write something new" (275) may be read as a toast for new beginnings.

4.2.3. Autotopography

"The things I touched were living"
—Patti Smith, *M Train*

Autotopography, a much less studied concept in the field of literature, is key in the analysis of *M Train* as a work of memory. In her definition of this term, Jennifer A. González argues that "just as written autobiography is a series of narrated events, fantasies, and identifications, so too an autotopography forms a spatial representation of important relations, emotional ties, and past events" (134). According to González, objects such as photographs, souvenirs or heirlooms act like "physical extensions of the psyche" in that they represent different intangible memories of our past experiences and, thus, they can ultimately be seen as autobiographical objects. This is also the case, González argues, for more utilitarian objects which no longer serve a useful purpose but

have become so attached to one's psyche that end up becoming representative of oneself (133). Likewise, Joanne B. Karpinski notes that "any personal possession can be considered an auto/biographical artifact" (55) and she also acknowledges two categories of artifacts: "objects that physically encode auto/biographical information"—among which she distinguishes between those that are literally part of the subject's life and those that are merely representative of that life in a pictorial or graphical way—"and objects that have been preserved due to their auto/biographical associations" (55). When any of these objects are arranged or gathered into a collection, however neat or messy, we can then speak of an autotopography. Although *M Train* is chiefly understood as a narration in which Smith writes about herself (as in an autobiography or memoir), it is also a space in which she "displays"—both in writing and through the pictures that accompany the text—many of the objects that link her present self to the past by means of the memories they evoke (as in an autotopography).

Objects have always been significant in the construction of an identity—sometimes even beyond death as is the case with grave goods[56]—as proof of the kind of person one has been. In *M Train*, Smith makes reference to two kinds of objects which are central to her self-representation: the sacred and the ordinary. Among the items which, for her, are imbued with a certain holiness, we find a handkerchief sack containing stones from the Saint-Laurent prison which "manifest[s] a sacredness second only to [her] wedding ring" (20), an antiquated typewriter to which she claims to owe "a nagging allegiance" (27), or stacks of Polaroids that she "sometimes spread out like tarots or baseball cards of an imagined celestial team" (120). Such is the devotion with which Smith speaks about her possessions that writer and editor Anna Heyward goes as far as to suggest that "the many magical objects of Patti Smith" (as she titles her article in *The New York Times*) ultimately belong to the category of "hagiography," a writing practice which is concerned with the writing of the lives of saints but is also used, according to the *OED* Online, when referring to "a biography which idealize or idolizes its subject."

The more ordinary objects, however, also play an important role in Smith's everyday life—beyond that of their inherent utility—to the extent that she holds conversations with a channel changer ("I changed your batteries, I say pleadingly, so change the damn channel" [32]), a fishing hook ("Hello, Curly, I whisper, and am

[56] Items buried along with someone's body for him or her to use in the afterlife.

instantly gladdened" [37]), or a bedspread ("Can you imagine the odds of such an encounter? I say to my floral bedspread" [60]), among many others. Smith herself admits: "Perhaps I should be concerned as to why I have conversations with inanimate objects" (32). The reader, however, soon gets accustomed to such eccentricities in this story where dream sometimes eclipses reality. Besides conversing with them, Smith also weighs the ordinariness of certain possessions against the extraordinariness of others:

> I saunter past my coffeemaker that sits like a huddled monk on a small mental cabinet storing my porcelain cups. Patting its head, avoiding eye contact with the typewriter and channel changer, I reflect on how some inanimate objects are so much nicer than others. (36)

Ordinariness, however, does not prevent her from becoming attached to things, even if these things do not belong to her. "My table in the corner was taken and a petulant possessiveness provoked me to go into the bathroom and wait it out" (45), Smith writes when she is unable to enjoy the table she normally occupies in her favorite café. Even when she is not speaking of her belongings, she uses the possessive adjective 'my' to convey her sense of attachment to these things. The same happens when a stranger asks her for book recommendations and, when writing a few titles on a napkin, she forgets (or rather refuses) to include the books she is carrying with herself at that moment: "A childish possessiveness—I had staked them as my territory, their atmosphere particular and concurrent to my own" (261).

In the category of ordinary things we also find a black coat. Unexceptional as a piece of clothing may be, the fact that there is a whole chapter in *M Train* dedicated to it is rather striking. "Vecchia Zimarra," titled after an aria from Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*, opens with Smith narrating what seems to be a dream. All of a sudden, there is a shift in tone and Smith introduces the said coat: "I had a black coat. A poet gave it to me some years ago on my fifty-seventh birthday" (160). From the moment she first mentions it, one expects the coat to be part of Patti Smith's sanctuary:

> Every time I put it on I felt like myself. The moths liked it as well and it was riddled with small holes along the hem, but I didn't mind. The pockets had come unstitched at the seam and I lost everything I absentmindedly slipped into their holy caves. Every morning I got up, put on my coat and watch cap, grabbed my pen and notebook, and headed across Sixth Avenue to my café. I loved my coat and the café and my morning routine. It was the clearest and simplest expression of my solitary identity. (160)

This last statement conveys, once again, the idea that certain objects take on a new significance when they become autobiographical possessions: the coat becomes synonymous with the pleasant moments Patti has enjoyed while wearing it.

What cannot be anticipated is the relevance the coat will acquire throughout the remaining chapters—or, rather, we should say that it is the absence of the coat that becomes relevant. When Patti loses her beloved black coat, it inevitably enters what she calls the "Valley of the Lost" (164), together with the many belongings she no longer possesses. "Lost things," she writes, "[t]hey claw through the membranes, attempting to summon our attention through an indecipherable mayday" (161). In the following chapter, Smith is still lamenting the loss of her coat, "such a small thing in the grand scheme" (164), she reasons. Again, towards the end of the book, in the chapter titled "Valley of the Lost," she brings up the coat in a meditation on the nature of loss:

> Do our lost possessions mourn us? Do electric sheep dream of Roy Batty?[57] Will my coat, riddled with holes, remember the rich hours of our companionship? Asleep on buses from Vienna to Prague, nights at the opera, walks by the sea, the grave of Swinburne in the Isle of Wight, the arcades of Paris, the caverns of Luray, the cafés of Buenos Aires. Human experience bound in its threads. How many poems bleeding from its ragged sleeves? I averted my eyes just for a moment, drawn by another coat that was warmer and softer, but that I did not love. Why is it that we lose the things we love, and things cavalier cling to us and will be the measure of our worth after we're gone? (242).

This way, *M Train* becomes, as Smith reveals at the end of the book, the "aria to a coat" (253) she wished to write. Ultimately, the coat is not simply a coat and writing about it means, in this case, addressing issues like attachment or loss.

In her definition of autotopography, Jennifer González employs two other expressions which prove useful for the autotopographical analysis in *M Train*: "museum of the self" and "memory landscape" (134). Smith's narrative works as a museum of her self on two levels. To begin with, embedded in the text are references to countless objects which display autobiographical information. Whether only mentioned or extensively described, they all provide valuable information about Patti Smith. But there is also a different kind of personal museum made up of more than fifty Polaroids taken by Smith herself which complement the narrative. Instead of solely offering the reader a text, she supplements the written account with pictures not of herself—which would be the usual thing to do in an autobiographical account—but of places and objects: the book ultimately becomes a museum *à la* Orhan Pamuk.[58]

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[57] This is a reference to Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

[58] Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk created, alongside his novel *The Museum of Innocence*, an actual museum which exhibits many of the protagonists' personal objects. In a way, Patti Smith's *M Train* is comparable in that it also arranges many of the objects mentioned in her memoir—the only difference being that, in Smith's case, it is via photography.

The second expression used by González, "memory landscape" (134), is key in our analysis of *M Train* in the sense that objects and memory are inextricably intertwined in the narrative (as they are in life). Most of the time, Smith's cherished possessions act as carriers of memories and operate as portals to people and places no longer traceable in the present. This is closely linked to what Professor Sherry Turkle calls "evocative objects," possessions with which we come to develop an emotional tie because of their power to take us back to a personal past experience (5). Evocative objects may be found among mementos which have been devised precisely with the aim of "encapsulating" a particular event (such as photographs, videos or artwork) or among everyday objects which have acquired the category of tokens as a result of the time or emotion invested in them by the owner (Petrelli et al. 56). Whatever the case, evocative objects become inseparable from the stories they are connected with.

Particularly interesting is the fact that Patti holds on to certain belongings that she seldom dusts off but does not bear to lose:

> I slowly advance toward my desk and lift the top. I don't open it very often, as some precious things hold memories too painful to revisit. Thankfully, I need not look inside, as my hand knows the size, texture, and location of each object it contains. Reaching beneath my one childhood dress, I remove a small metal box with tiny perforated holes in the cover. I take a deep breath before I open it, as I harbor the irrational fear that the sacred contents may dissipate when confronted with a sudden onrush of air. But no, everything is intact. . . . I feel the warmth of recognition, memories of time spent fishing with Fred in a rowboat on Lake Ann in northern Michigan. (37)

Smith is mentioning here stored-away objects that, for Richard Heersmink, would fall into the category of passive evocative objects (as opposed to active evocative objects which are openly displayed or easily reachable) (1843). These possessions which she keeps inside her desk ultimately become "time capsules": objects which are not reached for on a regular basis and therefore manifest a greater contrast between past and present, prompting a more emotional response from the owner than any active object in sight (Petrelli et al. 59-60). This explains why Patti avoids glancing at these possessions yet at the same time is comforted by the mere knowledge that they remain where she last placed them. The angst she is met with at the thought of losing these objects, reminders of her loved ones that are now gone, may be comparable, to a certain extent, to the feeling she experienced when she lost these people. After all, losing these objects would be tantamount to being deprived of the memories they contain and, as a result, losing all that is left of these loved ones.

Patti's strong emotional attachment to certain objects can be further explained by what Heersmink defines as "autobiographical dependency": one's inability to remember a past experience save through the interaction with an evocative object (1839). "How could I have forgotten our hours of sweet divination?" (37), Smith protests right after opening the metal box mentioned above and (re)discovering its contents. But we may also borrow the term of "autobiographical dependency" to refer to a different need: Patti's efforts to cling to her evocative objects show that she is not able to conceive her present without a constant connection to her past. Not only that, but she sometimes admits to experiencing "a longing for the way things were" (164). Smith's difficulty in cutting loose from the memory of missing things and missing people, a running theme in *M Train*, is probably best illustrated in the following excerpt:

> We want things we cannot have. We seek to reclaim a certain moment, sound, sensation. I want to hear my mother's voice. I want to see my children as children. Hands small, feet swift. Everything changes. Boy grown, father dead, daughter taller than me, weeping from a bad dream. Please stay forever, I say to the things I know. Don't go. Don't grow. (209)

Here lies the key to her dependence on those possessions that bring back her most precious memories: they come to be the only way to revive what has been lost. So prized is recollection for Patti that she compares the feeling of being unable to recall the face of an acquaintance to "the same uneasiness one might experience if questioned by the authorities about one's whereabouts on a specific day and having no substantial alibi" (116). While Patti may still be able to recall a considerable amount of events (especially having kept track of these in diaries and notebooks and in her artwork), evocative objects are the shortcut to her past—a past that she does not wish to part with.

Jennifer González distinguishes between 'remembering' and 'memory' as the two ways in which one may access the stories objects bring to mind. The main difference, González states, lies in voluntariness: whereas remembering results from a "retrogressive movement from the present into a reconstruction of the past" (i.e. voluntary), memory is "an intrusion of the past into the present" (i.e. involuntary) (136). Professor of Psychology Dorthe Berntsen further develops this idea by arguing that some memories are generated through an active search process which is goal-oriented while others result from an associative process that most often occurs when the individual is not focused on anything in particular (21). The concepts of autotopography and recollection are thus intertwined in *M Train* and cannot be explained independently. As we shall now see, this book, as a work which reflects the mind's responses to the evocations of the past, contains examples of both voluntary and involuntary acts of recollection.

More often than not, Smith readily accepts the manifestation of past souvenirs. What is more, she sometimes intentionally seeks reminiscence, deriving pleasure from the ability to revisit the past. At the beginning of the story, as it has already been stated, Smith confesses: "Without noticing I slip into a light yet lingering malaise. Not a depression, more like a fascination for melancholia" (25). The fact that she calls it a "fascination for melancholia" already points to something that seems to be self-willed. In fact, a few pages later she writes: "Sighing, I meander around my room scanning for cherished things to make certain they haven't been drawn into the half-dimensional place where things disappear" (32). She thus confirms her wish to be in contact with the objects that elicit her recollections, while at the same time hinting at a fear of losing them. As Smith wanders across her room contemplating her belongings, she notices her father's chair. Immediately thereafter, the narrative tense changes from present to past and she takes us with her to a time in which her father was still alive. After devoting a few paragraphs to the description of her father, she then makes reference to the moment when she inherited his chair, adding: "We were never allowed to sit at my father's desk, so I don't use his chair, just keep it near" (35). In this case, the chair's value goes beyond its use, for it no longer serves its original purpose; it is only kept because it reminds Smith of a person who is no longer present. Interestingly, González notes that remembering is closely related to the idea of nostalgia. She describes it as "one way in which the past is produced from a present yearning" and argues that it is "the longing for an imaginary place, time, or event that, by definition, cannot be satisfied because it is the longing itself that structures this desire" (137). In other words, we immerse ourselves in nostalgia precisely because we wish to experience the feeling of longing for something that cannot be recovered; that is, we wallow in our nostalgia. This connects with the aforementioned idea that Smith is afraid of losing the things that link her to moments long gone. Her father's chair, in this case, might be the closest she will ever get to experiencing the presence of her father.

There are times, however, when Smith is caught by surprise by the images that start to appear at the back of her mind. This is when memory (as opposed to remembering) comes into play. When Patti tries to visualize her copy of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, for instance, she is met with a different—yet connected—image. In an attempt to voluntarily remember something, she is stricken with an involuntary memory: "As I fixed on the first lines, impish forces projected multiple images of a white envelope, flickering at the

corners of my eyes, thwarting my efforts to read them. This agitating visitation produced a pang, for I knew the envelope well" (197). As we can see, Smith is not always so enthusiastic about revisiting the past. In this case, the envelope that materializes in her thoughts is one that used to contain a handful of Polaroids she had once shot of Sylvia Plath's grave and which ended up getting lost. Smith remembers: "Heartsick, I went over my every move but never found them. They simply vanished. I mourned the loss, magnified by the memory of joy I'd felt in the taking of them in a strangely joyless time" (198). We thus realize that her sorrow results not from being reminded of the pictures themselves but rather of their loss, for they become the only evidence of a treasured moment. She then recalls two other visits to Plath's grave and her failed attempts to take similar pictures, concluding: "Nothing can be truly replicated. Not a love, not a jewel, not a line" (202). As Heersmink notes, "[o]nly *that* specific object with those properties can evoke *that* specific memory" (1835), hence the significance of memorabilia.

In her study of autobiographical memory, Dorthe Berntsen distinguishes between the immediate situation, i.e. the specific moment in which a memory is triggered, and the life situation, the understanding one has of one's recent past and close future at a particular stage in one's life. Focusing on involuntary autobiographical memories, Berntsen argues that even if these are cued in the immediate situation, it is the life situation that will determine the manifestation of such recollections (102). In other words, we are constantly surrounded by potential cues, but these are only effective insofar as the life situation allows it. Smith, for instance, confesses in various interviews that she did not really mean for *M Train* to be about Fred since, up to that moment, she had not been able to write about him. However, in the end she could not help but welcome his presence: his image kept breaking through her thoughts ("Legendary Patti Smith" 11:93-12:16). Interestingly enough, Smith also brings up the fact that, when writing her second autobiographical prose work, she was considering what reaching the age of 66 meant ("Patti Smith says" 1:53-2:08). This suggests that her life situation at that time inevitably increased her receptiveness to the immediate situations in which the memory of her husband—or, more specifically, his absence—was evoked. According to Berntsen, "after the death of a significant other, even very vague cues may be able to activate memories related to this particular person" (104). Although Fred has been gone for about two decades, it seems that Smith is in a state that makes her sensitive to the slightest sign of her husband's existence. This last idea may be easily connected to the aforementioned

concept of "memoirs of textured recovery" coined by Prodromou: no one can anticipate the things that will bring back the mourning.

In *M Train* objects are not the only things that act as carriers of memories; conversations or thoughts also have the ability to prompt Smith's reminiscences. For instance, the book opens with Zak, a friend of Smith's, telling her that he is opening a beach café, a remark that makes Patti remember multiple things: the moment she first arrived in New York City longing to write poetry at a Greenwich Village café; Mohamed Mrabet's *The Beach Café*; her lifelong dream of owning a beach café and the moment she almost fulfilled it; and the time when she found the ideal spot for her coveted beach café in Cayenne. The beach café thus becomes the common thread that allows Smith to go from present to past and back to present, shuttling back and forth from one memory to another without it sounding incoherent. The whole first chapter, indeed, is constructed based on what Zak's announcement awakens in Patti's mind.

Something similar happens in "Covered Ground," towards the end of the book, where Smith, while contemplating the clouds, becomes aware that Memorial Day is approaching, and follows those clouds "back to northern Michigan on another Memorial Day in Traverse City" (231). This is her way of letting the reader know that she is about to dwell on the past—at this point in the story, one is probably already acquainted with the fact that Michigan is synonymous with her late husband. She recalls a day spent with Fred and their son Jackson, while acknowledging from the I-now perspective: "Even now, his father dead for some twenty years, and Jackson a man anticipating the arrival of his own son, I can picture that afternoon" (232). She then momentarily returns to the present time and, while contemplating the "memorial clouds" again, is taken back to the day they were to hold Fred's memorial. She particularly remembers how supportive her brother Todd was throughout the whole process and how, shortly after her husband's passing, she also lost Todd. Smith concludes this chapter writing about a day when, once resettled in New York after losing her husband and her brother, she found herself thinking about them, and she mentions again the "*skies of blue, clouds of white*" (236). Recollection can therefore be, following Berntsen's theory (88), internally cued, that is, it is not always an item present in the physical world that takes Patti back in time; it may be Patti herself who, by means of her thoughts, triggers certain memories.

Finally, one cannot speak of the autobiographical objects in *M Train* and overlook the fact that *M Train* itself, as the material book in the readers' hands, is one of the objects that make up Patti Smith's autotopography. We could even argue that the book itself is the autotopography, a museum of the self (Patti's self) where a myriad of other autobiographical objects are encompassed. Analyzing *M Train* as partly autotopography allows us to determine the extent to which objects are significant in the construction of the narrative. The stories Patti Smith's possessions evoke not only account for a significant portion of the book, but they also reveal how, by revisiting her past memories, Smith is able to make sense of her present—even of her future—self. Autotopography, then, helps to shed light on the way memory works in the writing of a life. Not only that, but in the case of *M Train,* objects help create a coherent narrative: their presence is not arbitrary, quite the opposite, they help establish connections among the different leitmotifs. In Professor Anneleen Masschelein's words, "lost and found objects . . . link up past, present and future. The meandering narrative movement in *M Train* turns out to be circular: every place or object that is evoked in the narrative returns and materialises" (8). Patti Smith's *M Train* thus turns out to be, on some level, her Museum Train.

4.2.4. Travel narrative

"All I needed for the mind was to be led to new stations"
—Patti Smith, *M Train*

When thinking about travel writing, one usually pictures exotic lands, foreign languages and intriguing customs. However, whereas the genre is instinctively associated with adventure, exploring, and risk, travel can adopt many forms and may begin from the moment one exits the comfort and familiarity of one's home. Besides, whenever we approach travel literature, we tend to focus on the information provided about the act of traveling itself when, in reality, valuable information about the narrator (i.e. the person who is traveling) is also being disclosed. In *M Train* there is much traveling, yet Smith's journey is focused inwards. As Carl Thompson explains, while travel writing is "most obviously, of course, a report on the wider world, an account of an unfamiliar people or place . . . it is also revelatory to a greater or lesser degree of the traveller who produced that report, and of his or her values, preoccupations and assumptions" (10). In the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, A. B. Apana also notes that traveling may be thought of as "a therapeutic exercise, and travellers are often drawn to places that have a personal significance for them. In this way, many travel narratives involve a coming together of

the personal and the impersonal" (889). While *M Train* might lack the indigenous wildlife or the unconventional means of transport typically associated with travel accounts, Smith presents us not only with various trips around the world (some of them work related, others for mere pleasure), but also with trips to the past and to the parallel universe of dreams, all of these going hand in hand with an inner soul-searching journey.

In travel narrative, as in memoir, tension normally arises between fiction and non-fiction—more so in the case of travel narrative because it supposedly deals with the outside world on a greater scale than autobiographical writing. Thompson therefore makes the point that travel writers have to navigate the roles of reporter and storyteller, as they are expected to accurately describe whatever has been encountered along the journey, yet they are also expected to do so in the most entertaining way (27). Smith, however, does not seem to be concerned with either of these roles, for she seeks neither to remain completely objective[59] nor to please the reader. Patti visits several places throughout the narrative of *M Train*, such as London, Mexico, Japan or Tangier, to name a few. Smith has, however, two ways of traveling: she either physically travels to these places or she mentally revisits places she has already been to. As Smith begins to narrate the various trips she makes around the world, the book becomes part life writing, part travelogue. The first trip we learn about is probably the one Smith describes with greater detail. Right after introducing Fred to the reader, she recounts how he promised to take her to any place of her choice provided that she agreed to have a child with him. That place was Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, where they visited the remains of the French prison described by Jean Genet in *The Thief's Journal.* Patti sought to pick up some stones with the idea of taking them to Genet, since he had not been, as he had wished, incarcerated there.[60] Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni is therefore the first place Smith mentally travels back to, but it will not be the last time she follows the memory of Fred.

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[59] In an interview for the Chicago Humanities Festival in which Patti Smith discusses *Year of the Monkey*, she reveals how *M Train* is much less fact-based than *Just Kids*. While she acknowledges that *Just Kids* has a cinematic flow because she had to tell a certain story which she vividly remembered, she admits: "*M Train* was 80 percent true or 90 percent true, with some fantasy woven in, and this is sort of questionable. I mean, there's a lot of true stuff, but sometimes I see it in nonfiction and I go 'whoops.' But they don't really know where to put it, so they stock it in nonfiction" ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:15:14-00:15:36).

[60] As revealed much later in the narrative, in the end Patti deposits those stones before Genet's grave, for she is not able to deliver them before his death.

Berlin is the first city Patti actually visits in the present of the story's narrative timeline. At the beginning of "Changing Channels," the second chapter in *M Train*, Smith resolves that she should get "out of the city" (31), referring to New York City. "But where would I go that I would not drag my seemingly incurable lethargy along with me, like the worn canvas sack of an angst-driven teenage hockey player?" (31-2), she asks herself. As fate would have it, before the chapter ends, she is invited to Berlin as part of her Continental Drift Club (CDC)[61] membership. Immediately overcome with "a wealth of excitement" (38), as Patti attempts to write a list of items to carry with her on the journey, she is taken back to a previous trip with the CDC to Reykjavík. Smith recalls how, when in Iceland, she was unable to go on an expedition in search of a cross placed in Alfred Wegener's memory. Though saddened at the thought that she would not be able to photograph such a special object, she was nevertheless asked to monitor a chess match and was rewarded in exchange with permission to photograph an equally extraordinary object: "the table used in the 1972 chess match between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky . . . the holy grail of modern chess" (40). This was followed by a rather mysterious call from Bobby Fischer's bodyguard trying to arrange a meeting between Smith and Fischer. "It occurred to me . . . that without a doubt we sometimes eclipse our own dreams with reality" (43), concludes Smith before returning to the present tense and her forthcoming trip to Berlin.

Once in Germany, besides attending the CDC conference, Patti spends her days "revisiting places where [she has] already been, taking pictures [she has] already shot" (54). As she reluctantly flies to London to make her connection back home, she learns that her flight has been delayed and impulsively decides to stay, checking into a hotel to watch detective shows. Far from being an exciting stay, it fills Patti with a certain sense of calm: "No one knew where I was. No one was expecting me. I didn't mind slowly crawling through the fog in an English cab" (60). In the end, even though her wish of escaping New York City is granted, she seems to be unable to get rid of her growing apathy.

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[61] Smith explains in *M Train*: "Formed in the early 1980s by a Danish meteorologist, the CDC is an obscure society serving as an independent branch of the earth-science community. Twenty-seven members, scattered across the hemispheres, have pledged their dedication to *the perpetuation of remembrance*, specifically in regard to Alfred Wegener, who pioneered the theory of continental drift" (38).

In subsequent chapters, Smith mentions two other trips taken in the past: one to King's College inspired by the reading of *Wittgenstein's Poker*, a book which deals with a confrontation between philosophers Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein (100), and another to Jena with the members of the CDC to celebrate Alfred Wegener's "right-hand man," Fritz Loewe[62] (102). Her second actual trip, however, takes place in "Wheel of Fortune," the eighth chapter. This time, Patti is invited by the director of Casa Azul to give a talk on Frida Kahlo's life and work (110). Mexico is therefore her next destination, but before getting ready for her trip, she is reminded of her younger self trying to enter Kahlo's home and resting place in 1971: "Time to travel, to acquiesce to fate. For although I craved solitude, I decided I could not pass on an opportunity to speak in the same garden that I had longed to enter as a young girl" (110). Thus begins the story of how Patti traveled to Coyoacán in a frustrated attempt to enter Casa Azul, the museum being closed for renovation, and found instead the perfect cup of coffee: "Coffee distilled from beans highland grown, entwined with wild orchids and dusted with their pollen; an elixir marrying nature's extremes" (114).

Back to her present life, Patti is again in Mexico, this time with the certainty that she will enter Casa Azul. Although she becomes slightly sick, she is able to make it to the museum: "When the director welcomed me I thought of my young self, standing before the blue door that did not open" (122), she recalls. While taking pictures of Frida Kahlo's dresses and other belongings, she feels sick again and she is taken to Diego Rivera's bedroom to rest. Smith then writes:

> I lay thinking of Frida. I could feel her proximity, sense her resilient suffering coupled with her revolutionary enthusiasm. She and Diego had been my secret guides at sixteen. I braided my hair like Frida, wore a straw hat like Diego, and now I had touched her dresses and was lying in Diego's bed. (122)

We are immediately taken back to *Just Kids* and the Patti who "imagined [her]self as Frida to Diego, both muse and maker" (12), the Patti who "emulated Frida Kahlo, creating a suite of self-portraits, each containing a shard of poetry that tracked [her] fragmented emotional state" (75), the Patti whose "hair is braided like Frida Kahlo's" (271). The chapter ends with Patti closing her eyes and seeing "a green train with an M in a circle; a faded green like the back of a praying mantis" (123). This inevitably makes us think of the book title and the fact that the narrative works like a train going back to the departure

[62] As Smith reveals in the narrative, Fritz Loewe accompanied Alfred Wegener in his expedition to Greenland in 1930.

station in an act of closure: Smith can at last close a chapter of her life, tick Casa Azul off the list, so to speak.

Patti spends the summer of 2012 traveling in order to make enough money to buy a bungalow at Rockaway Beach, a place which has captivated her. Some of the places she visits are Brighton, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Vienna, Berlin, Lausanne, Barcelona, Brussels, Bilbao, Bologna, Gothenburg and Monterrey. By early September, after her itinerary of readings, performances, concerts, and lectures, she has accomplished her mission. In this case, Patti does not travel for the sake of it; travel becomes a means to an end. In fact, she tells the reader nothing about her trips except for an anecdote in an airport in Mexico. Most often, however, travel is a form of escape for Smith, as she sometimes confesses: "In mid-November I flew to Madrid, escaping the suffocating aspects of Sandy's aftermath, to visit friends with problems of their own" (150). As the new year begins, Patti feels again the urge to travel, this time encouraged by some droplets of *sake* which "eerily [form] the shape of an elongated island, perhaps a sign" (165). Tokyo is the place she chooses to "set aside [her] impatient woes, be of service, and possibly add a few images to [her] Polaroid rosary" (168). As she maps out her journey, she is reminded of a previous visit to Japan, in which she washed the headstone of Yukio Mishima's grave. This time, however, she does not dwell on the past for long, as she is too excited at the prospect of her forthcoming adventure: "I was glad to be going somewhere else. All I needed for the mind was to be led to new stations. All I needed for the heart was to visit a place of greater storms" (168). Smith's words are again tinged with a longing to escape. When in Japan, Patti spends the first few days basically inside her hotel room "with no design other than the hope of filling a few pages with something of worth" (177). She tells us about her dreams, about her inability to fully concentrate or even to stay present (presumably the result of jet lag) and about her frustrated attempts to write. Nevertheless, she is soon joined by some friends and plans are arranged for dinners, pilgrimages to graves and visits to temples. "My solitude could not have been served in a more fortuitous way" (180), Smith writes and thus sets out to narrate her adventures in Japan.

On her way back to New York, she decides to stay a few days at Venice Beach, in an attempt to avoid home and the resumption of her tasks: "I couldn't bring myself to open my suitcase or computer. I lived out of a black cotton sack. I slept to the sound of the waves and spent a lot of time reading discarded newspapers" (195). Once she finds

herself at home again, however, she takes delight in the ordinariness of her everyday life: "I was glad to be home, sleeping in my own bed, with my little television and all my books. I had only been gone a few weeks but it somehow felt stretched into months" (203), she admits. As much as she loves traveling, she also appreciates her routine and her familiar environment.

A few months later, she prepares for "yet another journey" (217) with mixed feelings: on the one hand, she would rather stay at her Rockaway Beach bungalow; on the other hand, the idea of traveling to Tangier to honor the Beats together with some friends rather pleases her. Besides, the trip is a good excuse for Patti to finally deliver the stones from Saint-Laurent Prison to Genet's grave. Although this is the last journey in the narrative of the hardback edition, in the postscript added to the paperback Smith visits two other places. She is first invited to Vancouver for a cameo role in the return of the television show *The Killing*, which she readily accepts. A month later, she finds herself back in Reykjavík, protesting industrial infiltration of the country's highlands. "Bobby Fischer had passed away since my last visit so there would be no clandestine meeting with the hooded chess genius" (266), Smith writes in reference to the trip with the CDC described earlier in the narrative. Iceland is therefore the last place Patti visits in *M Train*, but these are not the only journeys we can read about in Smith's book.

Even though travel is normally associated with long distances, in this section we may examine Patti's strolls around New York City as a form of travel. To that end, we will look again into the concept of *flânerie* introduced in the discussion of *Just Kids* as autoethnography. While there are fewer descriptions of the city in *M Train* in comparison with Smith's first memoir, these descriptions seem to tally better with the idea of Patti as a *flâneuse*. In *Just Kids* Patti walked around New York City because she had no job (nor a place to stay) and had just arrived. In *M Train*, on the contrary, she can now enjoy the city from the privileged position of someone who idly saunters with no obligations awaiting her, which is actually what defines a *flâneur/euse*. Smith thus writes about her walks: "On Christmas Eve I present the cats with catnip-enhanced mice toys and exit aimlessly into the vacant night, finally landing near the Chelsea Hotel at a movie theater offering a late showing of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*" (28); "Roaming around for a few hours looking for landmarks no longer there" (76); "I began a meandering afternoon, spending a while in a bookstore specializing in children's literature" (272). The use of expressions like "exit aimlessly," "roaming around," or "meandering

afternoon" explicitly indicate that she is strolling purposelessly and that her life is devoid of responsibilities or ties. In his study of the personal essay, Lopate notes how, "[a]s part of their ironic modesty, personal essayists frequently represent themselves as loafers or retirees, inactive and tangential to the marketplace" (xxxiii). Besides, he also argues that essayists are "fascinated with perception, which provides a never-ending source of speculative material" (xxxv). Although Smith confesses "I'm not the observant type. My eyes seem to roll within" (211), she does offer the reader very detailed descriptions of the city such as the following:

> There were a lot of people in a hurry on the street, as if last-minute shoppers on Christmas Eve. I hadn't noticed at first and it seemed they were steadily multiplying. A young woman brushed past me with an armful of flowers. A dizzying perfume lingered, then dispelled, replaced by a vertiginous refrain. I felt conscious of everything: a beating heart, the scent of a song wafting in a conflict of breezes, and the human current heading home. (141)

Contrary to the idea that Smith has of herself as not being observant, she does seem to be alert to whatever she may see, smell, or feel.

As previously stated, travel memoir is as much about traveling as it is about travelers. In writer Chuck Sambuchino's words, "it is a delicate mixture of recollection and reflection that reveals how a journey, or a series of journeys, transformed the writer. . . . A notable memoir is an artful depiction of how interaction with an exterior landscape reveals or redefines the interior one." In Patti's case, traveling tells us much about the person she is, not only when she is abroad, but also before she leaves. Whenever she learns that she will be traveling, for instance, she reminisces about journeys she has made in the past. The fact that she is automatically taken back to the past instead of focusing on the present organization or the future schedule of the trip denotes her nostalgic character. For Patti, travel is also associated with routine and ritual. Every time she is about to travel, she writes a packing list: "It was the same list I always make; yet I was still compelled to write it. Bee socks, underwear, hoodie, six Electric Lady Studio tee shirts, camera, dungarees, my Ethiopian cross, and balm for joint pain" (169). And, as she completes her list, she usually draws a card from her tarot deck, "a little habit before traveling" (115). Moreover, if Patti is traveling somewhere she has already been to, she tends to stay at the same hotels and visit the same buildings and cafés. Cemeteries, in particular, are always part of Patti Smith's travel itinerary. Just as young Patti did in *Just Kids*, the more mature Patti in *M Train* still makes pilgrimages to the graves of artists she admires, often more than once. Bertolt Brecht (56), Yukio Mishima (166), Ozu (183), Akutagawa (186), Sylvia Plath (196-8) and Genet (227) are some of the artists she honors

in this book. The fact that Smith creates a sort of routine while traveling shows how, even when venturing into the unknown, she continually seeks reassurance in "the known."

As mentioned earlier in this section, Patti Smith has a particular way of traveling which involves nothing but the mind. In the same way that Smith is reminded of former trips whenever she is about to embark on a new adventure, her surroundings (mementos she keeps, conversations she has, books she reads) constantly make her revisit the past—particularly the time when Fred was still alive—as we saw in the discussions of grief memoir and autotopography. Continuity is therefore interrupted by interspersed memories of the past which propel Smith to travel in time, if only in her mind. There is, however, another place which Patti's mind frequently visits: the world of dreams. Smith's book actually begins with a dream that precedes the first chapter and that seems to catalyze the writing of *M Train*. "It's not so easy writing about nothing. That's what a cowpoke[63] was saying as I entered the frame of a dream" (3), opens the narrative. After describing the dream, Smith writes: "I wandered off, leaving him [the cowpoke] to expound on the twisting track of the mind's convolutions. Words that lingered then fell away as I boarded a train of my own that dropped me off fully clothed in my rumpled bed" (4). That "train of her own" is the M Train, her mental or mind train, her train of thought; it is the train the reader boards when opening the pages of the book. In the last section of the postscript, Smith finally reveals: "It all began with a dream, one I have already recounted. A cowpoke throws out a line, a turn of a lariat. *It's not so easy writing about nothing,* he said, and it set me off. It was my kind of challenge and so I started writing" (274). This is only the first of many dreams that Smith shares with the reader in *M Train*.

Patti takes pleasure in dreaming and even gets slightly annoyed when she fails to conjure up scenarios in her sleep. "I remember a comforting darkness, as when a night maid enters a hotel room and turns down the bedding and closes the drapes" (73), she

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[63] Patti Smith acknowledged in her interview for the Chicago Humanities Festival that the cowpoke is actually Sam Shepard ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:11:30-00:11:40). Besides, although it is not explicitly revealed in the narrative, there are clues that inevitably lead us to conclude that this cowpoke is modeled after Sam Shepard. The definite sign that makes us think of Shepard is that he has "a crescent moon tattooed in the space between his thumb and forefinger" (207), a detail that Smith mentions both in *Just Kids* and in *Year of the Monkey*. In *Just Kids,* we learn that Sam gets a tattoo together with Patti. On the day she gets her lightning bolt on her knee, Sam has his left hand tattooed too: "She [Vali Myers] repeatedly pierced the web of skin between his thumb and forefinger until a crescent moon appeared" (183). In *Year of the Monkey*, we read: "The moon was a waning crescent, like the tattoo between Sam's thumb and forefinger" (90).

writes about the moment she closes her eyes and starts dreaming. This may be explained by her desire to escape the real world and access parts of her life which she cannot enjoy while awake. Throughout the narrative, she dreams again of the cowpoke (108, 207), but she also dreams about writing (173-4) and about Fred (243-4). The dream about Fred accounts for half of a chapter in "Valley of the Lost." Patti sees Fred in a highway running after a clock with no hands when she suddenly wakes up. She is quickly able to reenter the dream, but she now finds herself at the edge of a cliff on the verge of falling off when, all of a sudden, she is on the ground before a blue door and she is told that Fred has saved her. She then finds herself back on the highway watching Fred and the clock. The chapter ends with the clock colliding with an assemblage of lost things: "It fell on its side, and Fred knelt and placed his hand on it. He flashed a huge smile, one of absolute joy, from a place with no beginning or end" (245). Interesting here is the fact that Patti does not set dream apart from reality: when she sees Fred running, she is surprised because, as she reasons, "he seldom ran" (243); and when she is told that it is Fred who has saved her, she wonders "He is dead . . . How is it possible?" (243). Also worth mentioning is the fact that in this "redeeming dream of Fred" (255) in which he saves her, she finds a blue door, once again associating this color to Fred's eyes. Moreover, there is a reference to a "clock with no hands" which is also the title of the sixth chapter. Through these subtle connections, Patti Smith creates a narrative that, while filled with seemingly unrelated vignettes, ultimately feels coherent.

Smith is so used to living in the world of dreams that she does not need to be lying down for her subconscious to divert her attention from the real world. It gets to the point where she finds herself daydreaming and losing track of her actions: "A few days later I was walking aimlessly and found myself in Chinatown. I suppose I had been daydreaming, for I was surprised as I passed a window display of duck carcasses hanging to dry" (134). Amidst so much dreaming, even the reader starts questioning whether what is on the page belongs to Smith's reality or to her imagination. When she arrives in Tokyo, we read:

> Entering the modernist lobby of the Hotel Okura, I had the sensation that my movements were somehow being monitored and that the viewers were hysterical with laughter. I decided to play along and reinforce their amusement by channeling my inner Mr. Magoo, prolonging registration, then shuffling beneath the string of high hexagonal lanterns straight toward the elevator. (171)

There is a certain surrealism in the narrative which makes some situations look more like dream than reality. In *M Train*, the reader travels with Patti to a world that only exists in

her mind but that is sometimes more plausible for her than the world she shares with the other humans.

Also related to the journeys of the mind is "the concept of portal hopping" (104), which is mentioned several times throughout the narrative whenever Patti is taken either back to the past or to a different place. Smith's portal hopping is akin to Joan Didion's "vortex effect" (107) in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, defined by Professor Marta Bladek as "a place's ability to set forward a series of memorial associations" (937)—except that in Patti's case it is mostly objects that trigger those mental connections. For Smith, portals are ways of traveling to existing or imaginary places. Books, as we saw, take her to the fictional worlds created by writers: "I place *After Nature* back on the shelf, safely among the many portals of the world. They float through these pages often without explanation" (68). Objects such as the table and chair at Café 'Ino act as portals because there she reads about the worlds of others and writes about hers: "My portal to where" (206), Smith calls it. The fact that Smith seems to be surrounded by portals, whether in her dreams or in her real life, might be again explained by her need to escape.

When approaching *M* Train, a book whose title contains the word "train" and whose chapters are called "stations," one might understandably expect to encounter a journey of some kind. Those who had read *Just Kids*, however, might not have initially expected such a ride with *M Train*. In this story, Patti Smith turns out to be a *flâneuse* of the city as well as of the mind. She gets easily—and willingly—carried away by whatever thought or dream emerges in her subconscious and does not hesitate to take us with her. *M Train* is a journey through the different stations in Patti Smith's mind. Once you board her train, you are likely to get lost in a world of solitude which nevertheless is in constant connection with objects and people mostly from the past; a world in which anything is possible, if only in the mind. Reading *M Train* means witnessing the transformative journey that Smith goes through as she comes to terms with her malaise. Travel is certainly present in its regular form, with Smith flying to Mexico or Iceland, but it is her inner journey that guides the narrative and helps the reader piece together the different events.

M Train is a journal where the mundane becomes extraordinary. It is a silent weep for a husband that has been gone for too long now. Both a catalog of items which represent memories, people, or feelings and a journey into and outside the soul, this book is a world away from *Just Kids*; it denotes an evolution not only in Patti Smith's way of

understanding life but also in her narrative. Where *Just Kids* could not be referred to as a female rock memoir without certain clarifications, *M Train* can only be seen as a female rock memoir because of its author and no longer because of its content. Its meditative nature, especially (but not exclusively) in those passages which have been analyzed as partly journal, clearly points to a shift in tone and style closer to the personal essay. While something of the Patti who had just arrived in New York City still remains, this book sets the trend for Smith's subsequent autobiographical work.

4.3. *Year of the Monkey*

In 2019, Patti Smith's third autobiographical prose work, *Year of the Monkey*, was released. The publication of yet another autobiographical prose work must not have come as a surprise to the reading public, for Smith has repeatedly claimed in interviews that she intends to keep writing for as long as possible. By the time *Year of the Monkey* came out, Patti Smith was already a recognized figure in the literary world, but after its publication Smith's name was more present than ever. As it happens, in 2020 she was named the Literature Innovator at the Wall Street Journal Magazine Innovator Awards and she received the PEN/Audible Literary Service Award. On the one hand, *WSJ. Magazine* (*Wall Street Journal*'s news and lifestyle magazine) celebrated Smith for leaving "an indelible mark on American letters" (Fortini). On the other hand, in the PEN American Gala (held virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions), film executive Franklin Leonard presented Patti Smith with the award counting her among the "artists who have forever altered our culture, bringing forms and influences together in ways that challenge and change everything that follows them" and described her as "a cultural luminary whose work helps us understand the human condition in powerful and original ways" ("2020 PEN" 00:03-00:55). While music and poetry initially provided Patti Smith with a medium to express herself and touch people around the world, writing, specifically *life* writing, has provided her with a new path for this stage of her life.

Year of the Monkey opens at the start of 2016, a year Patti Smith[64] was supposed to enjoy alongside her lifelong friend Sandy Pearlman. Instead, she finds herself alone in Santa Cruz, California, Sandy being in a coma in Marin County. Thus begins the story of a year of vigil over two ailing friends (producer and journalist Sandy Pearlman and

[64] In the discussion of *M Train* I used "Patti" and "Smith" interchangeably to refer to the narrator and the character. Since *Year of the Monkey* is also set in the present time, I will follow the same procedure.

playwright Sam Shepard), in which Patti criss-crosses the country as she reflects on writing, the passing of time, or the political climate. This, however, is not an average memoir in the vein of *Just Kids* or even *M Train*. It seems that, as Smith gets more and more comfortable with the genre, her narratives tend to be less and less fact-based, which is not to say that there is no fact in her more recent autobiographical prose works, only that fiction acquires a major role in them. In a talk delivered for Family Action Network, Smith explained:

> The book is really a mix of actual fact, total fiction and dream. And the idea when I started writing it was to weave these things so seamlessly that it wouldn't really matter what was true or untrue, and that you would find affection for people, whether they were real or not real. ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey: An Evening" 00:10:00-00:10:24)

Not knowing whether the people she meets or the circumstances she finds herself in are entirely real or not, however, does not prevent the reader from following the story and grasping the underlying messages.

As with *Just Kids* and *M Train*, it is possible to identify in *Year of the Monkey* various life writing forms which come together in an autobiographical narrative that is commonly catalogued as a memoir. The genre that stands out the most is probably autofiction, for it is at odds with the autobiographical nature of life writing: although they share the same prefix ('auto') these two forms, autofiction and autobiography, usually contradict one another, the former acknowledging the presence of fictional elements in the story and the latter attempting to offer as truthful a story as possible. Still, there is room in *Year of the Monkey* for these two supposedly incompatible forms to coexist. Smith resorts to autofiction in ways that actually complement the autobiographical component in the narrative, that is, the fictional characters or situations she uses are revealing of the factual account. We can also read the narrative as a caregiver's tale, a form or subgenre which has not received much academic attention. Even if Patti is not the one providing her two friends with medical care, she is keeping them company whenever she can and "keeping an open channel" (9) to any signals they wish to send her. In a way that might not be the most conventional, she is taking care of them and going through a process of negotiation with herself as she witnesses the changes in her friends' lives. *Year of the Monkey* is again reminiscent of the journal, but it is more pertinent this time to speak of the personal essay, for the author is much more explicit in her concern about public matters such as global warming or the political climate. Finally, there is a form that this book shares with *M Train*: the travel narrative. Only four years separate *M Train*'s storyline (set mainly in 2012) from *Year of the Monkey*'s (set in 2016), which

leads us to assume that her life has not changed much, and neither have her interests or concerns. We therefore find Patti constantly traveling as she did in *M Train*, perhaps even more frequently, all the while going through an inner journey.

4.3.1. Autofiction

"The trouble with dreaming is that we eventually wake up"
—Patti Smith, *Year of the Monkey*

In the process of reading *Year of the Monkey*, one gradually realizes that Smith goes beyond the mere narration of autobiographical episodes. The Patti Smith we encounter in this story reminds us strongly of the Patti Smith in *M Train*: she is again the author, narrator and protagonist of a narrative driven by Patti's everyday life throughout the course of a year—only 2016 is not that ordinary a year and *Year of the Monkey* is not that ordinary an autobiographical account. Where I argued, in the two previous chapters, that *Just Kids* and *M Train* move away from the usual conventions of celebrity memoir—the latter to a greater extent than the former—*Year of the Monkey* can hardly be called a memoir. In *M Train* Smith subtly toyed with the idea of introducing dreams into a narrative that was for the most part nonfictional, but in *Year of the Monkey* she does not hesitate to interweave dreams and reality in such a way that the reader is left wondering whether any of the events actually happened; the line between fiction and nonfiction is intentionally blurred. According to book editor and critic David L. Ulin, this book is closer in nature to Smith's poetry or to her more impressionistic prose works, such as *Woolgathering*,[65] than to her nonfiction work. Even so, it is still listed as memoir, which is why it is discussed alongside *Just Kids* and *M Train* in this dissertation.

In spite of its proximity to fiction, *Year of the Monkey* is still life writing at its core. There is indeed a genre of life writing which allows for a certain degree of fictionality to penetrate a real account: autofiction. Patti Smith herself has described her third autobiographical prose work as "fictional autobiography" or "autofiction," acknowledging in an interview with Pablo Gil for the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* that

[65] Sometimes catalogued as memoir or autobiography, other times as poetry or poetic prose, *Woolgathering* contains in its updated edition (it was first published in 1992 and reissued in 2011) thirteen short autobiographical pieces preceded by a note to the reader and accompanied by a score of twenty photographs. The book, mostly written in the form of autobiographical prose but incorporating some poetry as well, contains sketches of childhood, the making of an artist and the workings of the mind.

"quizá un 40 por ciento del texto es ficción, sueños y proyecciones."[66] Nevertheless, notwithstanding Smith's acquaintance with this genre, there is a certain controversy (and a resulting confusion) surrounding the concepts of autofiction, fictional autobiography, and autobiographical fiction. If we drew from the premise that all life writing is necessarily fictional,[67] all autobiographical writing would therefore be, to a greater or lesser extent, an instance of autofiction. Our starting point, however, is to generally consider life writing as factual (as opposed to fictional), save for those cases in which the author intentionally blends fiction into fact, that is, save for works of autofiction.

Ever since *autofiction* was coined by French writer Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, the term has been open to slightly different interpretations depending on the prevailing critical and cultural contexts. Originally, Doubrovsky intended to distinguish his novel *Fils* "from other forms of creative writing, on the one hand, and from straightforward forms of autobiography on the other" (1), as Hywel Dix states in his introduction to *Autofiction in English*. The truth, however, as Dix reveals, is that "Doubrovsky himself constantly updated and amended his understanding of the term" (2) and, to this day, there seems to be a lack of agreement as to what really counts as autofiction. According to Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers, both autofiction and autobiography deal with characters that really existed, but while the former deliberately fictionalizes them, the latter attempts to describe them as accurately as possible ("Autobiography and Autofiction" 205). Although Professor Marjorie Worthington points to the fact that subjects of memoirs or autobiographies may be likewise thought of as fictionalized—in that they are narrativized versions of the authors—she acknowledges that "[w]hile an autobiography or memoir is meant to be read as a true story, autofiction is meant to be read primarily as a novel" (3). Worthington reminds us, however, that autofiction should not be mistaken for an autobiographical novel either, this last form "featur[ing] characters who resemble their authors but do not have an onomastic relationship with them" (4).

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[66] "Maybe 40 percent of the text might actually be fiction, dreams, and projections" (my trans.).

[67] "The writer of autobiography uses the techniques of prose fiction, and imposes upon the confusing crosscurrents of a life a discernible pattern—a life made sense of. There is, to be sure, a relationship between the life described in the autobiography and the life that the subject of it actually lived, but it is often an uneasy relationship, for life is less tidy than literature. By imposing theme upon his life, the autobiographer applies the disciplines of imaginative literature rather than those of absolute historical veracity" (Tracy 275-6).

Autofiction should therefore be regarded as distinct from autobiography or the autobiographical novel despite the fact that these forms all share common features.

In addition to these differentiated genres, we must examine two other terms which are sometimes—but not always—used synonymously with autofiction: fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction. Fictional autobiographies are defined in the United States Library of Congress as "[w]orks that present themselves as autobiographies but whose narrators and events are fictional," as opposed to autobiographical fictions, which are "based on events in the author's life, but [employ] fictional characters intermixed with fictional events" ("Fictional Autobiographies"). According to this entry, then, the main difference between fictional autobiographies and autobiographical fictions lies in the factuality of the story narrated, the former being an entirely fictional narrative and the latter being mainly based on reality but allowing for certain fictional elements to be blended in. In Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography*, however, autofiction is defined as "the French term for autobiographical fiction, or fictional narrative in the first-person mode" (186). That is, for Smith and Watson, autofiction may stand for either form (fictional autobiography or autobiographical fiction), the focus not being on whether fact prevails over fiction or vice versa, but rather on the "deliberate, often ironic, interplay between the two modes" (186). We should therefore address the way writers of autofiction engage in this interplay, evincing the futility of any attempt to set clear boundaries between fact and fiction (which is not to say that these boundaries do not exist, only that they cannot be accurately demarcated).

Autofiction, then, may be understood as a form of life writing in which authors draw from their real lives as well as from their imagination to produce their texts. Whether fictive discourse prevails over nonfictive discourse or the other way around is of lesser importance than the writer's ability to combine fact and fabrication to tell a relevant story. In Siddharth Srikanth's words,

> it is not that we are asked to read a narrative as simultaneously being fictional and nonfictional . . . but that we are asked to put off the question with the promise the narrative will use both fictionality and nonfictionality to reach some complex truths about the author and his or her world. (351)

For this reading act to succeed, an author-reader pact different from Lejeune's aforementioned autobiographical pact is needed. Ferreira-Meyers thus proposes an autofictional pact whereby the reader accepts "that the author is not honest, but sincere; s/he will lie, but in an attempt to reflect the world with justice" ("Does Autofiction" 28).

For Ferreira-Meyers, autofiction can only be conceived of as a separate genre when it exemplifies hybridity ("Autobiography and Autofiction" 206), that is, when "the blend is so strong that it becomes impossible to decide what is fictional and what is autobiographical" ("Does Autofiction" 30). Along these lines, Professor Robert Tracy states:

> It is easy, perhaps even necessary, to blur the distinctions between them [autobiography and autobiographical fiction], for we are dealing not with truth versus fiction but rather with two closely related forms of prose narrative which employ the same literary strategies to transform experience into art. (276)

The key to reading and understanding autofiction thus lies in the acknowledgment that the writer has chosen to combine fact and fiction in a narrative that is ultimately as revealing of the world as a nonfictive account.

Patti Smith's *Year of the Monkey* can be read as a hybrid autofictional account in which the dividing line between fiction and nonfiction is sometimes so blurred that the reader loses track of what is real and what is not. In writer and journalist Gabino Iglesias' words, the book "walks a fine line between fiction and nonfiction. [Smith] is aware of the difference between what happens outside her head and what only goes on inside it, but she happily walks that fine line and allows her writing to obliterate the dividing line." Smith has actually two ways of blending fiction into her life narrative: either through dreams (which are fictional in content yet not in form) or through passages which are seamlessly integrated into the autobiographical narrative but which are altogether fictitious. These fictional passages are normally presented as a series of surrealist events which are not likely to have taken place, yet Smith does not make it clear whether these are a product of her imagination while awake or asleep nor does she reveal the extent to which they might be true. It is in this second instance when the readers struggle to tell fact from fiction, that we may speak of autofiction.

Patti Smith is no stranger to dreams: in *Just Kids* she introduces herself as "a dreamy somnambulant child" who "daydreamed way too much" (9) and *M Train* opens with one of her recurring cowpoke dreams. In *Year of the Monkey*, however, dreams acquire a new dimension: "Dreams dominate Smith's third and last memoir," writes Ken Tucker in the *New York Times*; "Patti Smith's 'Year of the Monkey' is a book of dreaming," concurs David L. Ulin in the *Los Angeles Times*. Smith thinks of herself as having a "dual-self" which allows her to be awake and asleep at the same time: "My dual-

self continued to dream, even under my own watchful eye" (11).[68] [69] It often gets to the point, however, where she herself can no longer tell whether she is dreaming or not: "The borders of reality had reconfigured in such a way that it seemed necessary to map out the patchwork topography" (12). *Year of the Monkey* therefore becomes a dreamlike narrative in which fantasy and reality coexist and ultimately coalesce.

The first sentence in *Year of the Monkey* reads: "It was well past midnight when we pulled up in front of the Dream Motel" (3). From the moment Patti sets foot in this motel, her every move seems to be wrapped in an aura of surrealism. The first indication that Patti's reality may be twofold—unfolding both outside and inside her head—may be found when, the following morning, after absent-mindedly thanking the motel's sign ("Thank you, Dream Motel, I said, half to the air, half to the sign"), she receives an answer from none other than the sign itself: "It's the Dream Inn!" (5). Thus begins an argument between Patti and the sign in which she admittedly feels "like Alice interrogated by the hookah-smoking caterpillar" (5), acknowledging the absurdity of it all. And in case this was not enough delusion, Smith continues:

> my departure was derailed by a sudden popping-up of animated Tenniel: The upright Mock Turtle. The fish and frog servants. The Dodo decked in his one grand jacket sleeve, the horrid Duchess and the cook, and Alice herself, glumly presiding over an endless tea party, where, pardon us all, no tea was being served. (5-6)

This is the reader's first (but by no means last) encounter with Patti Smith's dreamlike world in *Year of the Monkey* and, whereas the reader might be left befuddled before such an opening, Smith herself is left "wonder[ing] if the sudden bombardment was self-induced or courtesy of the magnetic charge of the Dream Inn sign" (6). However, she admits right away: "In truth, being somewhat wall-eyed, I often witness such leaping about, most often to the right. Besides, once fully roused, the brain is receptive to all kinds of signals" (6). This first passage is significant because it prepares the ground for an account in which Smith will be "skat[ing] along the fringe of dream" (11). Fiona Sturges

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[68] Unless otherwise specified, I will be quoting from the hardback edition published by Alfred A. Knopf.

[69] This idea of a dual self is again presented in a scene where Patti is watching Aurore Clément in *Apocalypse Now Redux* half asleep and she pictures the actress talking to her:

> — There are two of you, she says, drawing closer to Martin Sheen, one who kills and one who doesn't.
>
> — There are two of you, she repeats, slipping out of the frame. One walks in the world, one walks in dream. (110)

thus notes how "the narrative moves constantly between reverie and memory; it's invariably left up to us to work out which is which."

From this point on, the Dream Inn sign will appear unannounced on various occasions and engage in the narrative almost like a character. In the fashion of a Jiminy Cricket, the sign seems to have assumed the role of Patti's conscience, questioning her moves and decisions and giving voice to the thoughts gathered at the back of her mind:

> Somehow that darn sign was aware of everything, my comings and goings, the contents of my pockets, including the wrappers, my 1922 silver dollar and a fragment of the red skin of Ayers Rock, that I had not yet found, on a walking path in Uluru, where I had not yet walked. (19)

And just as Smith is complaining about this inanimate object's constant interference in her thoughts, the sign makes a sudden appearance again:

> —When are you leaving? It's a very long flight, you know.
>
> —Wherever do you mean? I'm not going anywhere, I said smugly, attempting to conceal any thoughts of future travel, but the great monolith stubbornly crowned, surfacing in my mental sea like a drunken submarine.
>
> —You're going! I see it! The writing is on the wall. Red dust everywhere. One need only read the signs.
>
> —How can you possibly know that? I demanded, completely exasperated.
>
> —Uncommon sense, replied the sign. And please! Uluru! It's the dream capital of the world. Naturally you're going! (19-20)

Patti is visibly annoyed at the sign most probably because it often lays bare the thoughts that she herself tries to disregard. Despite Patti's initial reservations about the presence of the sign in her life, she nonetheless ultimately takes account of its remarks: "the sign had gleaned my all-too-real desire to journey to the center of the Australian wilderness to see Ayers Rock . . . I wondered if destiny, in the voice of the sign, was suggesting the possibility that I might yet see the great red monolith" (20-1). Rather than acting as Patti's conscience, then, we could argue that the sign represents her subconscious, that is, it speaks for the thoughts Patti herself is not yet fully aware of.

Apart from her beloved friends Lenny Kaye, Sam Shepard or Sandy Pearlman, whom we know are real people, there are a number of characters in this story that may be thought of as living at the crossroads between reality and imagination, just like the sign. The first such character is Cammy, the daughter of a gas station security guard Patti meets when the couple giving her a ride to San Diego leave her behind without warning. While there is nothing unusual about Cammy herself, she mentions certain episodes which have apparently never taken place, as we gradually realize. On the one hand, when Patti asks her about an incident involving candy wrappers littering part of a beach in San Diego,

Cammy answers affirmatively: "No kidding . . . that's so weird, they had the same thing happen in Redondo Beach, but not on the beach, actually in the back of the gasworks. Hundreds, maybe thousands of them. Crazy, right?" (27). The strange thing about Cammy's reply is that Patti has actually learned about the candy-wrapper story in one of her dreams. Besides, when Patti arrives at the beach in question, she finds "no signs of a siege of wrappers, nothing unusual" (29). At this point, readers might start suspecting something: either the incident did take place despite the lack of evidence or Smith made up the conversation (and maybe even the character of Cammy).

On the other hand, when Patti comes across her on a different occasion, Cammy tells her about a story of missing kids: "It turned out the boy was returned unharmed with a tag pinned to his shirt saying that he had a heart murmur. Never diagnosed but swiftly confirmed. He cried all night, wanting to go back, refusing to tell them anything" (49). Again, there is nothing apparently wrong with this story, but Patti is immediately reminded of "the story of the crippled boy who was sent back home after a brief taste of paradise in the tale of the Pied Piper" (49). Strangely enough, when Patti bumps into Cammy sometime later, she tells her again about certain missing children, adding: "Nothing was posted, nothing was demanded. It was like they were just spirited away by the Pied Piper himself" (50). When Patti is unable to find information about the missing kids in the papers, she reasons: "I was having my doubts about the whole thing, though it was hard to believe Cammy would make up such a story" (54). In the end, Smith resolves: "Kids and candy wrappers. They had to be related, though maybe not in the same proximity" (54), implying that the stories may come from a place in her mind.

The second character whose nature gradually becomes questionable is Ernest. Patti meets him, Jesús and Muriel at the WOW Café in San Diego. To begin with, Ernest's eyes apparently keep changing "like a mood ring, from pure gray to the color of chocolate" (30). Moreover, when Patti meets these characters, they happen to be discussing Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, which is noteworthy because Bolaño is one of the writers Smith worships in *M Train*, where she also refers to *2666* as "his masterpiece" (29). Not only that, but they are specifically referring to the dreams of one of Bolaño's characters and the fact that the writer is able to access them (31), which is one of the underlying key concepts in *Year of the Monkey*: "But does the writer create their dreams or does he channel the actual dreams of his characters?" (32), asks Jesús. Up to this point, everything could have a logical explanation: Smith's description of Ernest's eyes could

be metaphorical and the fact that Ernest and company are discussing *2666* and the matter of dreams could be merely coincidental. However, from this moment on things around Ernest only get more surreal.

Right after her first encounter with Ernest, Smith writes: "I had the oddest feeling that Ernest wasn't really a stranger but I couldn't place him" (34). Stranger or not, Ernest keeps crossing her path and surprising her with how much they have in common. When Patti tells Ernest about her dreams and the incident of the candy wrappers, he reassures her: "Some dreams aren't dreams at all, just another angle of physical reality . . . The thing about dreams . . . is that equations are solved in an entirely unique way, laundry stiffens in the wind, and our dead mothers appear with their backs turned" (36). Once more, this leaves Patti wondering who Ernest reminds her of. Actually, the more Ernest speaks, the more he reminds us of Patti herself. "[A]s the book proceeds," notes Tucker, this enigmatic character "proves a speaker of sentiments that invariably dovetail with Smith's musings," an argument I will further develop below. When Smith writes about Ernest's admiration for Bolaño ("His love of Roberto Bolaño was something one could almost touch" [42]), for instance, we are instead reminded of Smith and her love for the Chilean author.

Patti and Ernest keep bumping into each other and exchanging thoughts on dreams and books. "You're not a hologram, are you?" (67), Patti asks Ernest when she runs into him in San Francisco (they had met in San Diego and that is where she had last seen him). When he invites her to get in his pickup and drive through the desert, a sense of familiarity invades her again: "dream or no dream, we had already crisscrossed some curious territory" (67). Throughout the trip, Ernest entertains Patti with stories (some more realistic than others) and they stop for some *huevos rancheros*—nothing out of the ordinary. There is, however, a sentence that Ernest begins to formulate, "The trouble with dreaming" (72), which takes us back to two previous moments in the narrative. During one of Smith's conversations with the Dream Inn sign towards the beginning of the story, we read: "The trouble with dreaming, I was thinking, is that one can be drawn into a mystery that is no mystery at all, occasioning absurd observations and discourse leading to not a single reality-based conclusion" (20). "The trouble with dreaming, a familiar voice trailed" (52), she writes again when she spots a wrapper caught up in the waves of Venice Beach. No particular attention is paid to the fact that Ernest is echoing one of Patti's thoughts, but it certainly adds to his uncanny resemblance to the author.

Nevertheless, Smith does notice something remarkable during that exchange. The whole passage reads:

> —The trouble with dreaming, he was saying, but I was a world away tramping the red earth in the heart of the Northern Territory.
>
> —You need to go there, he said adamantly. (72)

She is referring here to Ayers Rock, previously mentioned in a conversation with the sign. Moments later, she finds herself "mulling over the fact that Ernest somehow knew [she] was thinking about Ayers Rock" (72-3). Like the sign, Ernest also knows about Uluru, even though Patti has never mentioned it out loud. It is as if Ernest was also playing the role of Patti's conscience, which would explain his resemblance to her.

In the last chapter of the book, Patti spots Ernest in a café bar, this time in Virginia. She had last seen him in the Californian desert, where he had abandoned her for no reason. However, no allusion whatsoever is made to this episode during their conversation. When she approaches him, he starts talking about *Apocalypse Now*, a film which, oddly enough, Smith has mentioned in a previous chapter. It is during this encounter that Patti realizes how little she actually knows about Ernest. "But it's like that sometimes," she reasons, "[y]ou know an imperfect stranger like no one else. No last names, no birthdates, no country of origin. Only eyes. Strange tics. Small indications of a state of mind" (159). Shortly after exiting the café, Patti spots Ernest again and they share their last exchange:

> —You see, there's a saying carved in Old English on a wooden plank on one of the oldest structures built in America. *This is Tangier Island. As it goes, so do we.*
>
> —Have you actually seen it? I asked.
>
> —You don't see things like that. You feel them, as in all important things; they arrive, they come into your dreams. For instance, he added slyly, you're dreaming now.
>
> I whirled around. We were standing in front of that same third-rate café.
>
> —See, he said in a voice oddly reminiscent of some other voice.
>
> —You're the Dream Motel sign, I suddenly blurted.
>
> —It's the Dream Inn, he said, fading. (163)

Thus ends the story in *Year of the Monkey*, with the revelation that Ernest and the sign come from the same place (i.e. Smith's mind) and that Smith has probably been daydreaming most of the time.

This denouement may come as no surprise to the reader, for Smith herself admits towards the end of the narrative: "Cammy and Ernest and Jesús and the blonde, all characters in an alternative reality, black-and-white cutouts in a Technicolor world. Even the sign and the security guards on the beach" (122). Every one of the characters which

has been surrounded by rather surrealist circumstances turns out to be a product of Patti's imagination. Still, as Smith remarks, this Technicolor world of fictional characters is one that, despite being nothing in itself, "seem[s] to contain an answer for every unutterable question in early winter's impossible play" (122). Ultimately, it seems to be a world which Smith has unconsciously conjured up in order to retrieve the thoughts which may have gathered in the recesses of her mind.

At this point, the matter of fictionality thus seems to be solved. However, there is an element which complicates the task of differentiating reality from fiction: photography. The story in *Year of the Monkey*, like the ones in *Just Kids* and *M Train*, is complemented with pictures. Although there are no actual pictures of Cammy or Ernest in the book, there are references to some of the photographs Patti has taken throughout this unconventional Year of the Monkey, among which we find "a bad angle of Ernest's truck" or "[a]n action shot of a charm bracelet sliding off the dashboard of a Lexus; the many charms of Cammy" (122). Smith's allusion to these photographs is at odds with her suggestion that these people only exist in a world of her own. However, there is no trace of these pictures in the book. The opposite happens when she agrees to go on a spontaneous trip to the desert with Ernest. In addition to the fictionality surrounding Ernest as a character, the adventure itself remains mysterious too: Ernest abandons Patti in the surroundings of the Salton Sea[70] with no explanation and she rather serenely opts to play a mental game as she attempts to retrace her steps (73-74). While this could easily be one of Patti's fantasies, following this scene there is actually a picture of her in what could plausibly be Salton Sea (75). This leaves us readers wondering whether Ernest is really a made-up character or whether he actually exists but Smith has decided to present him through the filter of her own imagination. She might have even traveled to Salton Sea with someone else but eventually might have chosen to give the story a touch of surrealism. Nothing seems to be certain in *Year of the Monkey*; the possibilities are endless—"*Nothing is ever solved. Solving is an illusion*" (95), we read in the chapter titled "Intermission."

Given that *Year of the Monkey* is a hybrid narrative in which the task of separating fiction from autobiography becomes impossible, one should perhaps avoid such intricacies. The aim should be, as stated at the beginning of this section, "to reach some

[70] Body of saline water located in the Californian desert.

complex truths about the author and his or her world" (Srikanth 351). The way Smith resorts to autofiction is indeed quite revealing. On the one hand, the fact that she repeatedly meets characters that either look or sound familiar to her or make her feel instantly comfortable, even when they are complete strangers, is already quite remarkable. We may interpret this as Smith's attempt to create characters which can keep her company and with whom she can share her musings, since she cannot do it with the people she would have liked to.[71] On the other hand, some of the characters share certain physical features—"He had dark wavy hair, his right eye slightly wandering, somewhat like my own" (15), she writes about a kid she crosses paths with—or ways of thinking with Patti, as we saw with Ernest and his irrepressible love for Roberto Bolaño or his continuous references to Patti's thoughts. Each of these characters, fictional or not, ultimately becomes a sort of Patti Smith alter ego, displaying parts of herself which may not be exposed very often.

"There are many truths and there are many worlds" (23), the sign tells Patti on one occasion. This statement, however reductionist, is one of the keys to understanding *Year of the Monkey*. The book is a reflection of Patti Smith's truth and Patti Smith's world, both the one inside and outside her mind. Even if there is fiction woven into it, it is the world she has chosen to present us with. As Iglesias suggests, "[i]t counts as true if it happened, if she imagined it, and if she felt it." This story which is not entirely dream nor entirely reality ultimately encapsulates grander truths which can only be revealed when we switch our focus from the autofictional interplay to the underlying message. In his study of writers Norman Mailer, John Edgar Wideman, and Dave Eggers' autobiographical narratives, Jonathan D'Amore writes:

> The blurred distinction between fiction and nonfiction has opened up literary forms of expression for those who work and tread in what might be called the 'upper floors' of the institution of literature. The experiments and manipulations of 'conventional' autobiography that Mailer, Wideman, and Eggers have variously employed are but a small sample of the multitude of literary projects that would not fit clearly into the category of 'literary memoir.' In this way, the personal lives of authors circulate in the public literary sphere without the consistent, clear marks of 'autobiographical fiction' or expressively nonfiction memoir. (10-1)

[71] I am referring here to Sandy Pearlman, who was supposed to start the year with Patti but is instead unconscious at the hospital, and Sam Shepard, who has been stricken with sclerosis and can no longer follow Patti on her adventures.

Such is the case with Patti Smith, who, not being content with the boundaries separating fact and fiction in autobiographical storytelling, draws from both worlds creating a unique portrait of a complex self in constant evolution.

4.3.2. Caregiver's tale

"Stable silence requiring patience and prayer"
—Patti Smith, *Year of the Monkey*

In the analysis of *Just Kids* and *M Train* I have explored two life-writing forms which revolve around the death of a loved one: autothanatography and grief memoir respectively. But what happens when the loved one has not yet passed away and is instead suffering from the illness that will probably terminate his or her life? As Smith and Watson note in the second edition of their *Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives,* "[i]ncreasingly, people are chronicling their journeys through illness, diagnosis, treatment, and survival as stories of self-reinvention" (141). The resulting first-person narratives of illness and/or disability (known as *autopathographies*) which normally tell stories of recovery also "function as a call for increased funding for research, new modes of treatment, and more visibility for those who have been assigned the cultural status of the unwhole, the grotesque, the uncanny" (Smith and Watson 142). These, however, are stories told from the perspective of the one who is ill. Scant attention has been paid to the life narratives of those who take care of the ill or the disabled. These people, who are indispensable for the potential recovery and well-being of those who become ill, also have a story of their own (even if it inevitably revolves, to a great extent, around the person they are nursing). In 2006, Ann Burack-Weiss published a volume in which she analyzed this life-writing form which she called 'the caregiver's tale.' After reading over one hundred memoirs, published between 1961 and 2005, she found enough commonalities to speak of an individual genre and was able to categorize them according to the relationship between the caregiver and the 'care-receiver' (child-parent, parent-child, siblings, friends, life partners) as well as according to the illness (HIV/AIDS, cancer, dementia, mental illness, chemical dependency). Often classified as self-help books or guides, caregivers' tales do impart a certain wisdom on the key aspects of such a delicate situation, but they do more than that: they tell a personal story which is necessarily different from the one told by the sick person.

Following the publication of Burack-Weiss' study, caregivers' tales have continued to be published. Here is a corpus of eight books, all of them published in the United States in the decade of the 2010s, which would fall under the category of the caregiver's tale: Shirley A. Knight's *A Journey Through Fire (ALS—Memoir of a Caregiver*) (2011), Jane Gross' *A Bittersweet Season: Caring for Our Aging Parents—and Ourselves* (2012), Cynthia Young's *Memoirs of a Caregiver: A Caregiver's Story of Assisting Four Family Members with Alzheimer's Disease* (2013), Judith Henry's *The Dutiful Daughter's Guide to Caregiving: A Practical Memoir* (2015), Allan Ament's *Learning to Float: Memoir of a Caregiver-Husband* (2017), Lynda Strahorn's *We Laughed 'Til We Cried: Living, Loving and Laughing with ALS* (2017), Patricia Williams' *While They're Still Here: A Memoir* (2017), and Keith Livingston's *This Beautiful Thing Called Church: The Autobiography of an Alzheimer's Caregiver* (2019). These are not the stories of professional caregivers; these are the stories of spouses, sons or daughters whose lives have taken a turn as their relatives have been diagnosed with illnesses such as Alzheimer's or ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). Oscillating between religion, self-help and guidance, these books are ultimately relational memoirs (or, at the very least, 'memoir-esque' accounts) which deal as much with the authors' lives as with their relatives'. As the subtitle in Jane Gross' book (*Caring for Our Aging Parents—and Ourselves*) points out, caring for another human being implies caring for oneself in new ways.

So far, we have argued that all memoirs are relational to a greater or lesser extent, for one normally does not live in complete isolation and the presence of others inevitably exerts some kind of influence on one's life. *Just Kids* was analyzed as being relational on two levels: on the one hand, Patti's life was only narrated insofar as it was connected to Robert's; on the other hand, Robert's death was understood as resulting in the loss of some part of Patti's self. *M Train*, though more centered on Smith's solitary life, is still imbued with the grief caused by the memory of her late husband Fred. *Year of the Monkey*, like *M Train*, follows Patti Smith as she navigates life mostly on her own. Smith is nearing the age of seventy and her life narratives ultimately become a place in which to revive her loved ones, if only on paper. This time, however, although there are references to Robert Mapplethorpe and Fred "Sonic" Smith, as well as to other deceased friends, Patti Smith centers on Sandy Pearlman, who is battling between life and death after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage, and Sam Shepard, who has been diagnosed with

ALS. Even though Patti is far from being their caregiver—Sandy is unconscious and does not require any care outside that provided by the hospital and Sam has family who can take care of him—during the Year of the Monkey Patti decides to keep vigil over her two lifelong friends. Sometimes she does so physically, by staying with either of them, but most of the time her vigil is rather spiritual—almost metaphysical—with Patti constantly trying to mentally communicate with her ill friends while going about her business.

It all begins when Patti finds herself sitting on the little patio of a hotel room assessing her current situation. It is January 1 and she is alone in Santa Cruz when, instead, she should have been with Sandy:

> We were going to meet in San Francisco before the band's run at the Fillmore and do our usual things . . . Sandy Pearlman, the fellow I had known for over four decades . . . was always there when we played the Fillmore . . . We had intended to break rank after the New Year's Eve concert and drive late that night through the seething mist to Santa Cruz. (8)

Sandy, however, has not made it to Santa Cruz nor to the Fillmore, for he was found unconscious in a parking lot on the eve of the first concert, having suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. The morning of their first concert, Lenny and Patti visit Sandy at the ICU in Marin County. "We stood on either side of him, promising to mentally hold on to him, keep an open channel, ready to intercept and accept any signal. Not just shards of love, as Sandy would say, but the whole goblet" (8-9), writes Smith. This mental vigil is something the author will insist on throughout the narrative, trying, for instance, to "sonically reach" Sandy during the first of their three performances at the Fillmore (9).

Despite the heartbreak, Lenny and Patti have to move on with their lives: "We stood by Sandy's bed and, despite the impossibility, vowed not to leave him. Lenny and I found each other's eyes, knowing we couldn't really stay. There was work to be done, concerts to perform, lives to live, however carelessly" (9). Still, these lives will be at all times marked by their friend's health condition. "We were condemned to celebrate my sixty-ninth birthday at the Fillmore without him," regrets Smith, "[t]hat night, momentarily turning my back on the crowd during the breakdown of *If 6 was 9,* I held back tears as streams of words superimposed over other streams, overlapping with images of Sandy, still unconscious, just a Golden Gate away" (9-10). Thus begins a year which will be enveloped in an atmosphere of constant alarm, as if tragedy were to strike at any minute: "I had the distinct feeling that something was going to happen. I feared it would be a piercing event, a right-out-of-the-blue thing or worse, a profound nonevent. I shuddered thinking of Sandy" (17).

In this first chapter, in which we learn about Patti and Sandy's frustrated plans, we also learn about their first exchange ever:

> We met in 1971 after my first poetry performance, Lenny accompanying me on electric guitar. Sandy Pearlman was sitting cross-legged on the floor in St. Mark's Church, dressed in leather, Jim Morrison style. I had read his *Excerpts from the History of Los Angeles,* one of the greatest pieces written about rock music. After the performance, he told me I should front a rock 'n' roll band, but I just laughed and told him I already had a good job working in a bookstore. Then he went on to reference Cerberus, the dog of Hades, recommending I delve into its history. . . . I thought him arrogant, though in an appealing way, but his suggestion that I should front a rock band, though improbable, was also intriguing. (23-4)[72]

Patti now has to proceed with her solitary life in the West Coast while memories of Sandy keep flooding back. Smith remembers his sports car and how they used to drive through Central Park. She remembers how Sandy then started driving a white van which had taken them to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and how they had considered composing an opera based on *Medea*: "Our *Medea*. I wondered if we would ever write it. Though I guess in a way we had, in that van, under the stars shifting overhead" (33).

Among the many feelings experienced by those who are close to someone who is ill, guilt seems to be one of the most common.[73] Even though Patti can do nothing to help Sandy, at a given moment she feels guilty about leaving him at the ICU: "Why did I leave? I thought to stay near the hospital, keep vigil, coax a miracle, but didn't, dreading the deceptively antiseptic corridors and invisible bacterial zones, that trigger an instinct for self-survival and the overriding desire to flee" (31). Still, she realizes she can always count on their spiritual connection:

> It suddenly occurred to me that it wasn't really necessary that I be at the hospital with Sandy. For the past twenty years we have lived on opposite coasts, keeping channels open, trusting in the power of the mind to transcend a thousand miles. Why should anything be different? I could keep vigil wherever I may be, composing another kind of lullaby, one that would permeate sleep, one that would wake him up. (44)

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[72] The story of this first encounter is also told in *Just Kids*: "Sandy Pearlman, in particular, had a vision of what I should be doing. Although I wasn't ready to fulfill his particular take on my future, I was always interested in his perception of things, for Sandy's mind contained a repertoire of references from Pythagorean mathematics to St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. His opinions were backed with considerable knowledge on any imaginable subject. In the center of his arcane sensibility was a fervor for Jim Morrison, who placed so high in his mythos that he modeled himself after him, wearing a black leather shirt and leather pants fastened by a large silver concho belt, the signature raiment of the lizard king. Sandy had a sense of humor and a speedy way of talking, and he always wore dark glasses, shielding his ice blue eyes. He saw me as fronting a rock and roll band, something that had not occurred to me, or that I had even thought possible" (196).

[73] "[A]uthors experience an uncomfortable emotional mix: anger at one's own isolation mingled with guilt, and compassion for the worse condition of the partner" (Burack-Weiss 66).

Even so, whenever she is nearby, she shuttles back and forth from the hospital, still attempting to establish some form of contact with Sandy: "I sat beside desperately searching for a way in, some connecting channel. . . . I found myself projecting constellations of words onto his white sheets, an endless jumble of phrases streaming from the mouths of miraculous totems lining an inaccessible horizon" (59). It gets to the point where Smith can feel "Sandy slipping in and out of consciousness . . . [She] can hear him thinking. [She] can hear the walls breathing" (97). Patti has mixed feelings of helplessness and hope, but she still harbors the belief that Sandy may survive.

One day, however, just as she is tracing the words "*Sandy open your eyes*" on the window, in an attempt to produce some kind of spell, Sandy dies: "The prelude ended, Parsifal knelt before the mortally wounded and Sandy Pearlman left the earth. . . . Sandy, with the thinking heart, . . . was now seeking his kingdom of Imaginos,[74] captain of his own charmed ship" (113-4). The most common ending to caregivers' tales is the death of the person the narrator is taking care of, since the illness in question is generally either chronic or fatal. With the passing of this loved one naturally comes a grieving period. On August 5, Sandy's birthday, Patti opens a package sent by Sandy some time before which had remained unopened: "It was a CD of *Grayfolded*, an experimental Grateful Dead recording, difficult to find and much coveted. He had promised me that he would find it and he did" (115). "Happy birthday, Sandy . . . thank you for the present," she says aloud, feeling "calm, even lighthearted" (115). A different feeling, however, soon takes over as she sits on her porch:

> I sat motionless, did not rise, or gather my tools, or hack or weed. I suddenly felt dead—no, not dead, more otherworldly, a grateful kind of dead. . . . I could not bring myself to move, and let myself be transported elsewhere, long before I knew Sandy, long before I listened to Wagner, to another summer at the Electric Circus, where a young girl slow-danced with an equally young boy, awkwardly in love. (115)

She is referring here to herself and Robert Mapplethorpe,[75] which means that Sandy's passing makes her think of a time when neither Sandy nor Robert (nor any of her closest relatives and friends) were dead.

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[74] *Imaginos* is a 1988 Blue Öyster Cult album whose lyrics are adaptations from scripts and poems by Sandy Pearlman (also producer of the album).

[75] We can easily deduce this from the fact that the Electric Circus, a New York City nightclub, was open between 1967 and 1971, which coincides with Patti Smith's arrival in New York City in 1969 and the beginning of her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, whom he met that summer. Besides, there is a reference to the nightclub in *Just Kids*: "After work, I would meet him [Robert Mapplethorpe] downtown

The following reference to Sandy comes with his memorial. "Sandy left a hole," Smith writes, "and with his unexpected departure, his devotion to Wagner, Arthur Lee, Jim Morrison, Benjamin Britten, *Coriolanus, The Matrix* and a revolutionary vision of Medea meant to unhinge then reframe the theatrical world" (127). As friends speak of Sandy, Patti is mentally transported to a specific moment in which her friend was still alive: "I found myself on a long-ago drive with Sandy to the Cloisters. He still had his sports car then and wanted to show me the majestic tapestries called *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, canonical works created in the sixteenth century by unknown hands on behalf of unknown royalty" (127-8). Smith then remembers how, standing before *The Unicorn in Captivity,*[76] Sandy had told her: "The unicorn . . . is a metaphor for the terrible power of love. . . . The unicorn . . . is as alive as you and me" (128). As Patti and Lenny perform "Pale Blue Eyes" and "Eight Miles High" in honor of Sandy, Patti feels "distraughtly distant" (128). The worst, however, comes when Albert Bouchard, Blue Öyster Cult's drummer, performs *Astronomy*, one of Sandy's masterpieces, and Patti is again hit by a past memory: "Years ago, I had watched with Sandy, both transported, as the Blue Öyster Cult performed the same song with Albert at the helm in an arena for eighteen thousand people. Albert, now alone, delivered *Astronomy* with a pathos that broke all stoic barriers, and all wept" (129). Two days later, the Patti Smith Group pays homage to Sandy at the Fillmore:

> I sang for Sandy, and the poetry that spewed was for him. I beheld his flashing smile, those ice-blue eyes, and felt for a moment that joyful arrogance that spread its mantle on the altar of opera, mythology and rock 'n' roll. I was exactly where he was, and we stood, each sensing the other, on the precipice of irredeemable tragedy. (130)

Sandy Pearlman and Patti Smith therefore remain connected only spiritually and *Year of the Monkey* ultimately becomes the place to celebrate that connection.

As for Sam Shepard, he is a character we are well acquainted with by this point. We are first introduced to him in *Just Kids,* where we learn about his brief love affair with

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and we would walk through the yellow filtered light of the East Village, past the Fillmore East and the Electric Circus, the places we had past on out first walk together" (48).

[76] *The Unicorn in Captivity* is the last of seven individual hangings known as "The Unicorn Tapestries," which "vividly depict scenes associated with a hunt for the elusive, magical unicorn." In this particular tapestry, "the unicorn probably represents the beloved tamed" ("The Unicorn Rests in Garden"). According to Art Historian Margaret B. Freeman, "[t]his scene cannot be interpreted in terms of an actual hunt, but rather as the finale of an allegorical hunt such as those set forth by poets and writers of romance. . . . In the seventh tapestry, the climax of the hunt, the quarry is not caught in a net but is entrapped within a fence and held captive by a *chaine d'amour* fixed to a tree" (107).

Patti[77] and he is somehow present in *M Train* too, for the cowpoke that constantly appears in Patti's dreams is modeled after him. Over forty years have elapsed since their liaison and a lifelong friendship remains. Sam Shepard, however, is now suffering from a neurodegenerative disease. We find out about Sam's condition when Patti is brooding over the sign's prediction about her wish to travel to Ayers Rock: "Sam Shepard often spoke of his solitary trek to Uluru, and how one day we might go together . . . But Sam had been stricken with ALS, and as his physical challenges mounted, all loosely woven plans unraveled" (20). She then ponders: "I wondered if destiny, in the voice of the sign, was suggesting the possibility that I might yet see the great red monolith on my own, surely taking Sam along, secured in some uncharted sector of my being" (20-1). Although Patti is well aware of the impossibility of physically taking Sam with her, she knows she can count on her spiritual connection with him.

In May, Patti travels to Kentucky to visit Sam and help him with his manuscript, for he can no longer write with ease. Waiting for Sam and his sister Roxanne to pick her up, she spots their pickup and notices something unusual: "I noted with a pang that Sam wasn't driving. Last Thanksgiving, Sam had picked me up at the airport in his truck, with some effort, using his elbows to guide the steering wheel. He did the things he could, and when he couldn't he adjusted" (87-8). Patti becomes aware that Sam's health is worsening, but he remains optimistic and attempts to alleviate her concern: "Everybody dies, he had said, looking down at the hands that were slowly losing their strength, though I never saw this coming. But I'm alright with it. I've lived my life the way I wanted" (88). Every now and then Patti points to Sam's admirable resilient character: "Some time ago he told me one must write in absolute solitude, but necessity has shifted his process. Sam adjusts and seems invigorated by the prospect of focusing on something new" (117-8);

> Sam sits stoically in his wheelchair, his hands resting on the table. His old Gibson rests in a corner, a guitar he can no longer play. And the reality of the present hits hard, no banging on the typewriter keys, no roping cattle, no more struggling with his cowboy boots. Still I say nothing of these things and neither does Sam. He fills in the silence with the written word, seeking a perfection he alone can dictate. (118)

Despite Sam's constant reassurances and the fact that Patti still holds on to the idea that Sam will survive—"I still harbored the hope that I would not be destined to grow old

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[77] When Patti is taken to hear the Holy Modal Rounders, she meets the drummer, who introduces himself as Slim Shadow. "He had an infectious laugh and was rugged, smart, and intuitive" (171), Smith writes in *Just Kids*. Shortly after they begin a love affair, Patti learns that his real name is Sam Shepard and that "[h]e's the biggest playwright off-Broadway" (173). Together, Patti and Sam write the play *Cowboy Mouth*, but their affair ends when Sam disappears three nights after the play's opening.

without him" (146)—deep down she contemplates the possibility of losing him. She therefore chooses to celebrate him and to make the most of their time together. "Aware that their days together are numbered, authors concentrate their efforts on celebrating what remains" (66), notes Burack-Weiss in her study of caregivers' tales.

Whenever Patti is in Kentucky visiting Sam, she has to hide her apprehension and focus on the task confronting them: "Our days centered on his manuscript, destined to be his last, an unsentimental love letter to life. Every once in a while, our eyes would meet. No masks, no stances, only the present, the work being the principal thing and we its servant" (146-7). When they go out for a walk, Sam in his wheelchair, Smith cannot help but experience "a sense of bygone days hanging on to Sam's arm as [they] tripped down Greenwich Village streets" (147), which is a reference to *Just Kids*' time frame.[78] According to Burack-Weiss, "[r]everies are often used as segues from an incident in the present to its antecedent in the past" (43). In this case, however, the present situation is somewhat different from its antecedent—Patti and Sam still go for walks together, only this time he has to do so in a wheelchair—something that inevitably accentuates the pathos.

It is not until the epilogue that we learn about Sam Shepard's passing. After mentioning some of the hardships endured across the world, Smith writes:

> And what of existence only a reach away? What of the stoic writer who held a miniature of the world in the palm of his tattooed hand?[79] What will happen to him? I had asked myself, shuttling back and forth to Kentucky. When I first wrote these words, I didn't yet know, and one could fast-forward or move backwards but time has a way of still going, ticking away, new things one cannot alter, cannot get down fast enough. We used to laugh, me and Sam, about this disconnect . . . I can tell you this, the last time I saw Sam, his manuscript was all but done. What would happen to the writer? The answer is now encased in an epilogue that wasn't meant to be an epilogue but has turned into one since all one can do is try to keep up as Hermes races before us with his chiseled ankles. . . . Sam Shepard would not physically climb the steps of a Mayan pyramid or ascend the arched back of a sacred mountain. Instead he would skillfully slide into the great sleep . . . This is what I know. Sam is dead. (167-8)

[78] "In the following evenings he [Sam] would appear late at night at my door with his shy and appealing grin and I would grab my coat and we would take a walk. We never stayed far from the Chelsea yet it seemed as if the city had dissolved into sagebrush and the stray debris rolling in the wind transformed as tumbleweeds" (171-2), Smith writes in *Just Kids*.

[79] Just by mentioning the writer's "tattooed hand" we know that she is referring to Sam Shepard. This is also, as we saw, one of the signs in *M Train* that leads us to conclude that the cowpoke is none other than Sam Shepard (see note 63).

Just like that, Sam is forever gone, but only physically, for he lives in Patti's conscience as well as in her dreams—and now in her books. In fact, in the epilogue to the paperback edition,[80] Sam is still present:

> Sam and I used to commiserate on being dogged by the incessant urge to write, whether it got anywhere or not. It strikes me how blessed I have been to have had him to talk to for the good part of my life. We were human buoys, sustaining each other's work, even through his most difficult struggle, one that he won spiritually but lost as a human on earth.
>
> I am on my own now, but I guess I can still talk to Sam, just as I do with other beloved souls that don't seem dead at all. (201-2)

Now that Sam has been gone for some years and that Smith has come to terms with her loss, she can write about him in a different way.

The caregiver's tale is naturally reminiscent of the grief memoir, precisely because it often ends with the death of a loved one. When Sandy and Sam pass away, Smith is inevitably overcome with grief. Although *Year of the Monkey* is rather focused on the living days of these two friends, death is still constantly looming on the horizon: "I felt momentarily nauseous, as if I'd inhaled the smoke of the dead" (37); "It's the way of the world. Cycles of death and resurrection, but not always in the way we imagine" (41); "That night I used the hotel phone and called everyone I thought I should call. Not one person was in, or rather, not one person answered. . . . There was something funereal about the whole episode. Four people, four dead phones" (49); "It [a stone ledge] was covered with black butterflies, scores of them, one on top of another, in a fluttering frenzy in the half-light. There was a faint whistling sound, their mortal song perhaps, dark wings their mourning coats" (117); "It was the Day of the Dead. The side streets were dressed in sugar skulls and a kind of stale madness hung in the air" (137). Having lost so many cherished people around her, Smith seems by now accustomed to writing about death—to such an extent it ultimately becomes a leitmotif in her narrative.

In *Year of the Monkey*, as in its predecessors, Smith takes the opportunity to memorialize those who are gone. "The ghosts of those she has lost—her mother, her husband, her brother—remain close," notes Sturges. As the writer has repeatedly claimed in interviews, these people "walk" with her and are part of herself and her everyday life.[81]

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[80] In 2020, the paperback edition of *Year of the Monkey* was published with an additional epilogue, titled "Epilogue of an Epilogue" (173-205), in which Smith addresses the reality of the incipient new decade. It consists of about thirty pages divided into short sections with different titles and it is illustrated with ten additional Polaroids.

[81] "I miss my mother but . . . my memory is so present that I have my mother around all the time" ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:25:37-00:25:46)

It should not surprise us, then, that deceased friends or relatives keep making an appearance work after work. In the book, Smith speaks "of friends gone yet animated through . . . sentiment" (64). One of those friends is Allen Ginsberg. The first time she mentions Ginsberg, she celebrates his poems as "an expansive hydrogen jukebox, containing all the nuances of his voice" (98). However, she does not evoke him only for his merit as an accomplished poet, she also speaks of his active engagement in matters affecting humans: "He would not have disengaged from the current political atmosphere but would have jumped right in, using his voice in its full capacity, encouraging all to be vigilant, to mobilize, to vote, and if need be, hauled into a paddy wagon, peacefully disobedient" (98-101). When in Lisbon, Patti reaches for a book of Ginsberg's poems she has taken with her and visualizes him in different moments of his life (and death):

> I picture him cross-legged on the floor next to his record player singing along with Ma Rainey. Expounding on Milton and Blake and the lyrics of *Eleanor Rigby*. Bathing the forehead of my young son, suffering a migraine. Allen chanting, dancing, howling. Allen in his death sleep with a portrait of Walt Whitman hanging above and his life companion, Peter Orlofsky [sic], kneeling by his side, covering him in a swathe of white petals. (105)

Flashing images of Allen pile up in Smith's mind as she thinks of the time spent with him. He was an outstanding poet and a committed activist, but he was first and foremost a loving friend.

William Burroughs is another one of Smith's departed friends who makes his appearance in the epilogue to the paperback edition of *Year of the Monkey*. As the "Epilogue of an Epilogue" begins, we learn that it is now 2020, the Year of the Rat, which makes Smith revisit Burroughs' *Exterminator!* That same night, William appears in one of her dreams telling her to "[l]ook into this Denton thing" (183). Patti wakes up wondering what that could mean, when she notices the date: "February 5. William's birthday" (184). She therefore decides to read something of his to honor him and is suddenly hit with "an overkill of memories . . . [feeling] the pang of separation, missing his supportive warmth, even from great distances" (184). As she reads a galley of *Queer*, Burroughs' short novel, she realizes that the Beat writer is referring to the spiritual connection he felt with the writer Denton Welch. "I had a feeling that William was not merely giving me a suggested reading list in the perimeters of a dream. It was surely something else," she reasons, "We had many discussions about this kind of connection and the phantasmagorical landscape we move through daily but don't mention out loud" (184-5). In the end, she concludes: "I would like to think William was reminding me that we are never alone. Just as Denton was with William, someone out there is with me,

spurring me on toward a network of possibilities in the guise of thousands of small unifying electrical currents" (185). Once again, Smith relies on her metaphysical connections with her friends in order to decipher her dream, which she believes to be a message of some sort.

Apart from her beloved friends, Patti's relatives also make their way into the narrative—as they do into her life. Her late husband Fred is the first one she evokes:

> I stare at the number 29 on the daily calendar, then reluctantly tear off the page. March first. My wedding anniversary, twenty years without him, which prompts me to pull an oblong box from under the bed, opening the lid long enough to smooth the folds of a Victorian dress partially obscured by a fragile veil. Sliding the box back into its place I feel strangely off-center, a moment of sorrow's vertigo. (79-80)

Every now and then, she makes references to her husband and to the fact that he no longer lives: "When my husband was alive we also would gather around the TV at his parents' to watch the Derby" (90), she remembers as she watches the Derby with Sam and his sister Roxanne; "I did not ask the sign how my husband fared in whatever space was allotted to him in the universe" (104), she writes when in Lisbon; "Lenny was wearing a black jacket that had belonged to my husband" (129), she observes during Sandy's memorial. Fred is not the protagonist in *Year of the Monkey,* but he is still one of the protagonists of Patti's thoughts, as she constantly reminds us.

Her parents also appear in this account, albeit more briefly. "My mother. How I sometimes longed to hear her voice" (82), she laments. The only way she hears her mother's voice is in dreams, once calling her name (83) and another time reciting Robert Louis Stevenson's "Requiem," whose lines give the chapter its title: "Home is the sailor." Likewise, she hears her father's voice as she wanders around the streets of Lisbon: "On a twilight walk a strain of music drifts through the old city, evoking the low, sonorous voice of my father. Yes, *Lisbon Antigua*, a favorite of his" (102). And then his whistle: "My father making a pot of coffee, whistling *Lisbon Antigua*. I can almost hear the notes melding with the sound of the percolator" (105). She also thinks of him when she is about to bet on the Derby: "I studied *The Morning Telegraph*, as I had done as a young girl mimicking my father, a meditative handicapper. Maybe it was in my blood, for I was usually pretty good at picking horses" (87). Finally, she also finds the space to talk about her late brother Todd, whom we already know from *M Train*. When Patti finds herself in Virginia Beach, she contemplates:

> I had come on an impulse. Pure nostalgia. A bus to Richmond just to look at the James River where I had once stood with my brother Todd . . . Todd looked like Paul Newman. The same ice-blue eyes. The same self-effacing confidence. You could count on him for anything. Anything except staying alive. (160)

Shortly after, she is reminded of Todd's favorite movie, which triggers a set of scenes in her memory: "Todd smiling in the sun of the plot of land where he would build a house for his wife and daughter. Todd leaning over a pool table with a cigarette dangling. Driving across Pennsylvania in a truck with no heat and small clouds forming as we sang along to oldies on the radio" (162).

The fact that Smith is nearing her seventieth birthday, together with the fact that two of her closest friends are going through delicate health conditions (and indeed end up passing away), makes Smith think about the dead, her dead: "Sam is dead. My brother is dead. My mother is dead. My father is dead. My husband is dead. My cat is dead. And my dog who was dead in 1957 is still dead" (168). However, Smith, the eternal optimist, adds: "Yet I still keep thinking that something wonderful is about to happen. Maybe tomorrow. A tomorrow following a whole succession of tomorrows" (168-9). Even though her friends, Sandy and Sam, pass away, Smith assures in her interview for the Chicago Humanities Festival that *Year of the Monkey* is not about loss:

> It's about two great friends who I knew almost half a century, both of them: one in a coma, struggling for his life, and one suffering ALS and the finality of this particular disease. And so it's really about that struggle. It's not about loss. It's more about negotiating the struggles of your beloved human beings. ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:41:30-00:42:09)

The struggles of our loved ones inevitably become our struggles too, and struggle may change us as much as loss.

4.3.3. Personal essay

> "What if one could telescope the future?"
>
> —Patti Smith, *Year of the Monkey*

Even if there is fiction woven into it, *Year of the Monkey* is, above all things, an autobiographical account naturally focused on the author and everything that surrounds her. However, Smith not only addresses matters that concern her or her loved ones. In this third autobiographical account, she engages in issues that affect human beings on a more global scale. Often referred to as a fervent activist for various causes, Patti Smith is rather hesitant about such a label—or any other labels, for that matter. When asked in an interview for the *Los Angeles Times* in 2018 about her daughter Jesse's initiative Pathway

to Paris,[82] she claimed to be a "simple humanist" and explained: "I do things because I know they're right. I know it's important. I don't have all the language. I don't know all the political implications. But I do know I believe in what they're doing, and I believe in our young. We have to have their backs" (qtd. in Roberts). In recent years, Patti Smith has performed her 1988 song "People Have the Power" as an anthem for environmental awareness as well as for encouraging voter turnout during the 2020 United States presidential election. On her Instagram account, she frequently shares pictures of figures who, throughout history, have been activists for social change, such as Greta Thunberg or Martin Luther King. Prior to the publication of *Year of the Monkey*, however, she had not overtly addressed such activist concerns in her autobiographical prose works.

In *Year of the Monkey*, Patti Smith reflects on literature, the passing of time, and the inevitability of death, all of which are topics reminiscent of her previous autobiographical narratives (particularly *M Train*). This time, however, she also addresses social as well as political and environmental issues. In Iglesias' words, "[t]he process is a deep conversation with art, politics, a variety of places and books, and some of the people who have influenced her . . . The result is a hybrid narrative that's . . . part reflexive essay on our times, and part meditation on existence at the edge of a new decade of life." Similarly, Sturges describes *Year of the Monkey* as "a reflection on mortality and of the times in which Smith finds herself." The terms employed by these critics in their reviews ('deep conversation,' 'reflexive essay,' 'meditation,' 'reflection') already point to an essay-like genre similar to the one mentioned in the discussion of *M Train*. The personal essay, as we saw, may be defined as a "mode of life writing that is literally a self-trying out, . . . a testing ('assay') of one's own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic" (Smith and Watson 200). In *Year of the Monkey*, there are actually various topics—from books and the passing of time to politics and climate change—triggering different reactions in Smith that ultimately lead to a shift in tone, from meditative to critical.

In her article "The Personal Essay as Autobiography: A Gender and Genre Approach," Professor Isabel Durán explores four books (Rosa Montero's *La loca de la casa*, Margaret Atwood's *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, Richard

[82] Pathway to Paris, co-founded by Jesse Paris Smith and Rebecca Foon, "is a nonprofit organization dedicated to turning the Paris Agreement into reality through offering innovative and ambitious solutions for combating global climate change" ("Mission").

Rodriguez's *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* and George Steiner's *Errata: An Examined Life*) which, according to her, "belong to that very open and comprehensive 'genre' situated at the crossroads between intellectual life-writing, the autobiographical or personal essay, personal criticism and scholarly memoir" (45). She then argues that

> their hybrid texts deal not so much with an eventful life, but with the life/development/progression of the mind; of their thoughts and ideas; of their writing and that of others; of their cultural and intellectual influences; of their sense of identity; of their ideological views and opinions (45)

and that "they are *using* the essay mode to explore their inner selves" (47). This could easily be the description of *Year of the Monkey*, a text that is repeatedly marketed as a memoir, yet presents a hybrid narrative that stands closer to the personal essay. We are dealing not with the work of a celebrity, but with the work of an intellectual, a *littérateuse*, capable of seamlessly combining different autobiographical forms while interweaving fictional elements that constantly remind the audience that the line between fiction and nonfiction is rather fine. *Year of the Monkey* is a book that verges on the postmodernist literary tradition characterized by self-reflexiveness, metafiction, and the rejection of the distinction between high art and popular culture.

It is clear at this stage that Smith is extremely interested in literature and everything that surrounds it: books and the processes involved in writing them, authors and their lives. She is a declared admirer of writers ranging from Arthur Rimbaud and William Blake to Haruki Murakami and Roberto Bolaño. Most of all, however, she is interested in the practice of writing: its intricacies, its inner workings, its secrets. In her 2017 book *Devotion*,[83] part of the *Why I Write* series published by Yale University, she reflects on the nature of writing, asking herself about the ulterior motive behind such an endeavor:

> What is the task? To compose a work that communicates on several levels, as in a parable, devoid of the stain of cleverness.
>
> What is the dream? To write something fine, that would be better than I am, and that would justify my trials and indiscretions. To offer proof, through a scramble of words, that God exists.
>
> Why do I write? My finger, as a stylus, traces the question in the blank air. A familiar riddle posed since youth, withdrawing from play, comrades and the valley of love, girded with words, a beat outside.
>
> Why do we write? A chorus erupts.
>
> Because we cannot simply live. (93)

[83] A hybrid narrative containing two autobiographical chapters ("How the Mind Works" and "A Dream Is Not a Dream") and a fictional short story ("Devotion").

In *Year of the Monkey*, Smith further develops her thoughts on this matter. She first touches on topics such as "the dried-up poet syndrome" (7) or the prospect that awaits those "characters in books whose fates are left dangling by dying writers" (31). Writing often comes up in Patti's conversations with Ernest too: the key to become a successful writer, they both agree, lies in "[t]he daily practice" (42). But Smith's preoccupation with the nature of writing goes beyond a chance conversation with a character whose existence is dubious. She reflects on how, when one is writing, one decides to use a certain set of words at the expense of a whole other set of words, meaning that something is always sacrificed in a story. "*You don't follow plots you negotiate them*" (58), she resolves.

While visiting the Casa Fernando Pessoa in Lisbon, Patti is invited into the writer's personal library and comes to the realization that the books Pessoa owned are much more revealing of the type of person he was than the books he himself wrote:

> His books seem a more intimate window into Pessoa than his own writing, for he had many personas who wrote under their given names, but it was Pessoa himself who acquired and loved these books. . . . The writer develops independent characters who live their own life and write under their own names . . . So how can we know the true Pessoa? The answer lies in front of us, his own books, an idiosyncratic library perfectly preserved" (101-2).

This reasoning in itself may be understood as one of Smith's many reflections on books and writers. However, it also makes us think of Smith's autobiographical prose works as an alternative access to her personal library and therefore as an alternative way of understanding the type of person she is.[84] Readers get to know Patti Smith not only through her words but also through her readings. It is in the epilogue to the paperback edition, however, that we find her most insightful reflection on the subject of literature, particularly on writing:

> The act of writing in real time in order to deflect, escape, or slow it down is obviously futile yet not entirely fruitless. Even as I write this epilogue to an epilogue, I am aware that it will be obsolete by the time you read it. Yet, as always, I am compelled to write, with or without true destination, lacing fact, fiction, and dream with fervent hopes, then returning home to sit at the desk that was my father's and transcribing what I have written. (201)

This excerpt, which is highly reminiscent of the one from *Devotion*, reveals that, for Smith, writing and time are inextricably intertwined. In the end, however, it is writing that immortalizes what time cannot.

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[84] In her narratives, there are countless references to books she has read and loved. In *Year of the Monkey* alone we learn about a score of books Patti has read, from the ones she used to borrow from the library as a child (*The Tik-Tok Man of Oz*, *Half Magic*, *A Dog of Flanders*) (133) to the ones presently lying on her night table (*The Children's Crusade*, *The Colossus*, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*) (78).

Aging, mortality, and the passing of time, topics Smith reflected on in *M Train*, are again present in *Year of the Monkey*. When Patti looks at her reflection on the surface of the toaster, she notices she looks "young and old simultaneously" and she desperately seeks for "some small sign of life, an army of ants dragging crumbs dislodged from the cracks of the kitchen tiles . . . buds sprouting, doves cooing, darkness lifting, spring returning" (78). Patti is turning seventy, and the feeling that death only gets closer, along with the fact that she has already lost many of her loved ones, prompts the need to surround herself with whatever form of life is at hand. She then delves into the matter of aging in greater detail:

> Marcus Aurelius asks us to note the passing of time with open eyes. Ten thousand years or ten thousand days, nothing can stop time, or change the fact that I would be turning seventy in the Year of the Monkey. Seventy. Merely a number but one indicating the passing of a significant percentage of the allotted sand in an egg timer, with oneself the darn egg. The grains pour and I find myself missing the dead more than usual. I notice that I cry more when watching television, triggered by romance, a retiring detective shot in the back while staring into the sea, a weary father lifting his infant from a crib. I notice that my own tears burn my eyes, that I am no longer a fast runner and that my sense of time seems to be accelerating. (78-9)

The passing of time not only reminds her of her own mounting chronology, but also of the people who have left: each year that goes by is a year more that separates her from the memory of her loved ones. As February comes to an end, for instance, she has to confront the loss of her husband: "March first. My wedding anniversary, twenty years without him. . . . I feel strangely off-center, a moment of sorrow's vertigo" (79-80). Later in the narrative, as the Year of the Monkey comes to an end, Smith concludes: "time is running and not a single rabbit can keep up with it" (141). And again the passing of time acts as a marker of loss: "One year to the day when Sandy Pearlman was still alive. One year to the day when Sam was still able to make a cup of coffee, and write with his own hand" (141). These are matters which have been considered by Smith in her previous autobiographical accounts, but there are other issues that particularly preoccupy her in this atypical Year of the Monkey.

Climate change is one of the subjects she undertakes for the first time in her narrative. The first reference to the situation is so subtle that one may easily overlook it. In fact, it may not even be considered an actual reference to the subject. When Patti meets Cammy, besides the stories of the candy wrappers and the missing children, her new acquaintance also tells her about two other seemingly unrelated incidents:

> I was in Queens last spring and my sister's azalea bushes bloomed weeks ahead of time. Then out of nowhere there was a frost and they all died. . . . And the squirrels in Central Park—did you hear about that? It was so warm they came out of hibernation, totally confused, and then it went ahead and snowed in April, on Easter no less. Snowing on Easter! Ten days later, the guys that gather

> trash with those long picks found them. Scores of them, baby squirrels and their mothers, frozen to death. (27-9)

We now know that we cannot be certain of what Cammy says—for all we know, she could be a made-up character with a made-up dialogue. Regardless of the veracity of the stories, the fact that Smith has decided to incorporate them is not arbitrary at all. When one continues reading, one realizes that Smith is pointing to the changes the world is undergoing because of climate change. "The world is going nuts" (29), Cammy concludes, as if warning us about what is about to come later in the story. A more explicit reference to the issue is found later in the narrative, when Smith admits: "It is the unprecedented heat and the dying reef and the arctic shelf breaking apart that haunts me" (97). Finally, in the "epilogue of an epilogue" added to the paperback edition, Smith complains:

> *I had hoped for a more enlightened scenario for our new decade, imagining ceremonial panels opening, as the wings of great altarpieces on feast days, revealing 2020 as the year of perfect vision. Perhaps these expectations were naïve and yet were truly felt, just as the anguish of inequity is felt, a dark blot that will not go away*. (175)

Four years separate the two editions of the book, yet nothing seems to have changed—if anything, things seem to have changed for the worse.

Also related to the environmental crisis is the political climate or, more precisely, the looming menace that Donald Trump—a man who does not shy away from showing his skepticism towards climate change—might be elected as president. 2016, the Year of the Monkey, was a year of presidential elections in the United States, something which does not go unnoticed in Smith's account. The first reference to Donald Trump comes with the arrival of April Fool's Day: "minds raced to make sense of the campaign of a candidate compounding lies at such a speed that one could not keep up, or break down. The world twisted at his liking" (85). Although no explicit allusion is made to Trump—this "candidate" is not given a name—as the narrative evolves it becomes clear (if there ever was a doubt)[85] that it is him Smith speaks of. Later in the narrative Smith complains again about the political climate, this time without mentioning any particular candidate:

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[85] Patti Smith has publicly shared her impression of Trump on several occasions. When asked about it by journalist Nina Nannar in an interview for ITV, Smith answered: "Well, it bothers me that a person representing our country, also representing us, is such an uneducated man lacking empathy, compassion, a sense of history, a sense of the importance of allies, the importance of opening up one's doors to people who are experiencing strife . . . All in all, what he's done to our environment, his lack of comprehension of the importance of the global conversation about our environment… And the way he conducts himself; he's not very honorable, he's very narcissistic. So it's like every single day one could be angry, humiliated or shocked at the things that he does" ("ITV News" 16:43-18:20).

> No matter which way I stepped or whatever plane I was on, it was still the Year of the Monkey. I was still moving within an atmosphere of artificial brightness with corrosive edges, the hyperreality of a polarizing pre-election mudslide, an avalanche of toxicity infiltrating every outpost. (126)

She is visibly bothered by the atmosphere surrounding the elections, so much so that even her sleep gets disturbed. Still, the worst is yet to come.

The Day of the Dead arrives and Patti cannot help but fear the outcome of election night, only a week away:

> I had bad feelings about an election in the Year of the Monkey. Don't worry, everyone said, the majority rules. Not so, I retaliated, the silent rule and it will be decided by them, those who do not vote. And who can blame them, when it's all a pack of lies, a tainted election lined in waste? Millions poured down a hole lined with plasma, spent on endless contentious television commercials. A true darkening of days. All of the resources that could be used to scrape away lead from the walls of crumbling schools, to shelter the homeless, or to clean a foul river. Instead, one candidate desperately shovels money down a pit, and the other builds empty edifices in his own name, another kind of immoral waste. (137)

It gets to the point where Smith seems to be equally disappointed with both candidates, neither of them diverting campaign resources into social policies. Even so, there is no doubt about her preference when it comes to choosing between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. She thus decides to vote and joins some friends on election night to watch "the terrible soap opera called the American election" (138)—perhaps still hopeful that her gut instinct might be wrong or perhaps merely resigned to accept the inevitability of such an injustice. In the end, "[t]he bully bellowed. Silence ruled. Twenty-four percent of the population had elected the worst of ourselves to represent the other seventy-six percent" (138). At this point, readers might feel as if Smith had been preparing us for this situation: right from the beginning, the Year of the Monkey seems to be marked by a surrealism in which things rarely turn out for the best. "All hail our American apathy, all hail the twisted wisdom of the Electoral College" (138), sarcastically declares Smith. "Anything is possible . . . After all, it's the Year of the Monkey" (72), Ernest had told Patti—and yet, not in her wildest dreams could she have imagined that Donald Trump would end up being elected President of the United States.

Following election night, there seems to be little hope for the remaining weeks of the Year of the Monkey. In the streets, it seems as if people refuse to acknowledge the dawn of a new day, as if the results could still be reversed: "It's still yesterday, the debris called out, there's still a chance in hell" (138). On the radio, "New York I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down" is playing (139). "What will happen to us . . . Us being America, us being humanity in general" (145), Smith wonders. But there is no going back:

Inauguration Day arrives and it all becomes too realistic: "It was the last day of the Year of the Monkey and the golden cockerel was crowing, for the insufferable yellow-haired confidence man had been sworn in, with a Bible no less, and Moses and Jesus and Buddha and Mohammed seemed somewhere else entirely" (149-50). Thus begins the Year of the Rooster, thwarting any attempts to save the Year of the Monkey. "The cock of the new year had arrived, a hideous thing with puffed chest and feathers the color of the sun" (150), writes Smith as if also referring to the newly elected president. After all, 2017 is about to become his year too.

Such is Patti's indignation over Trump's presidency and the measures he seeks to implement, that even her dreams are tinged with hopelessness. A few days after the beginning of the new lunar year, Smith dreams

> of a long train of migrants walking from one end of the earth to another, far beyond the ruins of what had once been home. . . . They walked dragging their banners behind, clothed in the fabric of lamentations, seeking the extended hand of humankind, shelter where none was offered. . . . The air within was dry, yet all doors, windows and wells were hermetically sealed as if in anticipation of their coming. (151-2)

This allegorical scenario is clearly reminiscent of the situation surrounding Trump's immigration policies.[86] Yet the president is not the only one Smith denounces, for she also alludes to those who decide to turn a blind eye: "And I dreamed that all their hardships were viewed on global screens, personal tablets and two-way wristwatches, becoming a popular form of reality-based entertainment. All watched dispassionately as they tread unforgiving ground, hope bleeding into hopelessness" (152). In this case, fiction (in the form of a dream) is used to reinforce the reality of a set of circumstances which must not be ignored.

The "Epilogue of an Epilogue" appended to the 2020 paperback edition of *Year of the Monkey* opens precisely at the beginning of 2020. Three years have elapsed since the infamous Year of the Monkey ended and things have taken a turn for the worse. First of all, the United States has been under President Donald Trump's governance for three years, which is enough time for his measures to have led to distressing environmental and social consequences. Smith therefore denounces:

[86] During Donald Trump's campaign and presidency, proposals for his immigration policy included banning travel from certain Muslim-majority countries, the construction of a Mexico-United States border wall, or the mass deportation of illegal immigrants, among other measures.

> *We greet 2020 as our constitutional moral center is being redesigned in an increasingly immoral way, governed by those professing to have a hold on Christian values yet sidestepping the core of Christianity—to love one another. Their necks turn from the suffering as they willingly follow one lacking an authentic responsiveness to a waning human condition.*
>
> *Where is brightness? Where is prudent justice? we ask, standing our ground with mental plow, burdened with the task to stay balanced in these unbalanced times.* (175)

Despite the bleak situation, Smith, ever the optimist, finds the strength to keep going on: "It is after all the Year of the Rat . . . we must don the best of the resilient rat's qualities, maintaining the enthusiasm to be productive, the courage to face our adversaries, and the will to set things right" (185). According to Werner, "[w]hile the personal essayist often has a serious point to make, it is rare that the essay's subject will be overtly political" (1387). Patti Smith's evolution, from *Just Kids* to *Year of the Monkey*, does display a much more overt political subtext which is at all times interweaved with the personal.

In this new epilogue, climate change continues to be an issue concerning Smith—more so under Trump's presidency, for he fails to understand the urgency of such a monumental problem. "February temperatures rise and fall like the temperament of the two queens in the chessboard world of Wonderland. Unseasonably warm rain confuses insects and birds. . . . April showers in February" (187), observes Smith. There is, on top of that, "an unforeseen twist, a sudden threat of a global pandemic fram[ing] the Metal Rat's entrance, dampening spirits, definitely raining on the parade" (180). COVID-19 is casting a shadow over the beginning of the Year of the Rat. As it crosses Asian borders and severely hits the streets of Italy, a feeling of uncertainty starts creeping over the whole world. Though deeply concerned for people's safety, Smith directs her attention to a lesser-known consequence of the pandemic, giving priority to the more vulnerable, those who do not have a voice:

> In a desperate search for a vaccine, no less than twenty-five hundred macaques were purposely infected with a deadly strain of coronavirus. These macaques were identified as laboratory monkeys, as if a species of their own, coming into being solely to be in service to humankind. Their sickly faces were not those of the bright, mischievous monkeys who reigned in the lunar year of 2016. . . . One day we may be judged for their sacrifice, which can hardly be called consensual. I try to block the image of their sad eyes peering through wire cages as they wonder what will become of them, and us all for that matter. (201)

Smith is once again exposing a situation of injustice which she feels does not represent the majority of the population. Taken together, all of Smith's denunciations end up pointing towards an abuse of power by those who make decisions without regard for other people's opinions.

Although not written in the form of an essay, *Year of the Monkey* still works as a reflection on society, even bordering on social criticism. The fact that Smith is telling a story (with its characters and a narrative structure) should not prevent us from reading the account as partly essay. In Lopate's words, "[t]he essayist must be a good storyteller. . . . All good essayists make use at times of storytelling devices: descriptions of character and place, incident, dialogue, conflict. . . . Even a 'pure' meditation, the track of one's thoughts, has to be shaped" (xxxviii). Patti Smith does not merely present a set of events (as a storyteller would do) but also comments on them, assessing the implications on a personal as well as on a global scale and drawing attention to matters that need to be addressed. "That is the decisive power of a singular work: a call to action" (92), she writes in her 2017 work *Devotion*. In 2005, when Smith was named Commander of the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, French Minister of Culture Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres praised her work precisely for being a call to action: "Votre œuvre tout entière résonne comme un appel à se mettre en marche. . . . Chère Patti Smith, vous ne nous appelez pas seulement à rêver le monde. Mais à le changer. Vous nous appelez à la responsabilité, à l'action, qui est le sel de la vie"[87] ("Remise des insignes"). It therefore seems that her desire to raise awareness and encourage people to act has continued to permeate her work. *Year of the Monkey* ultimately becomes her call to action on issues such as climate change, immigration or the need to vote. In the epilogue, Smith alludes to other distressing events in a desperate wake-up call for humanity:

> A lot of rough things happened, begetting things even more terrible, and then there was the future that came and went, and here we are still watching the same human movie, a long chain of deprivation playing out in real time on massive perpetual screens. Heart-wrenching injustices constituting the new facts of life. The Year of the Monkey. The death of the last white rhinoceros. The ravaging of Puerto Rico. The massacre of schoolchildren. The disparaging words and actions against our immigrants. The orphaned Gaza Strip. (167)

Thus ends *Year of the Monkey*, with Patti Smith asking herself if there is any hope left in the years to come.

[87] "Your work resonates as a call to action. Dear Patti Smith, you not only urge us to dream about the world. But to change it. You urge us to take responsibility, to act, which is the spice of life" (my trans.).

4.3.4. Travel narrative

"*You will step in the soul of many countries*"
—Patti Smith, *Year of the Monkey*

According to writer Robin Hemley, travel narrative is, alongside memoir and journalism, a form of immersion writing. In order to be considered forms of immersion writing, however, these must be "as much forward-looking as backward" and "the writer [must be] a part of the story being told" (8). This means that not all travel narratives, memoirs or journalistic pieces are examples of immersion writing. In the case of a travel narrative, for instance, a guidebook would not be thought of as a piece of immersion writing. Travel writing, according to Hemley, must be a combination of immersion memoir and immersion journalism, that is, "the travel writer writing about herself in the world and in a sense the world in herself" (9). *Year of the Monkey*, like *M Train*, follows Patti Smith on a series of trips she makes throughout the year—only this time she travels mostly across the United States—and, like its predecessor, this book also reveals a journey of the soul as well as of the body. As Smith crisscrosses the country, she constantly assesses the routes followed by her inner journey, especially marked, as in her previous autobiographical account, by loss, age, and the passing of time. In order to analyze the journey her mind and heart make, we first must focus on the trips Smith actually makes around the country, for these are the ones that will determine the places to which her inner journey will take her.

"It was well past midnight when we pulled up in front of the Dream Motel" (3), opens the narrative, with Smith already in her first destination: Santa Cruz. Even though it is not the trip she had in mind—she was supposed to be there with Sandy—she accommodates herself to the situation and, though unable to cancel Sandy's room, she carries on with the plan by herself. In Santa Cruz, unknown people and places look strangely familiar to her, although not enough to bring her the comfort of the people and places she once knew. One day, while sitting at a café, she realizes she is "beginning to feel irrationally attached to the Dream Motel perimeter" (21). She therefore resolves to leave: "I better get out of here, I was thinking, lest I wind up like the soldier in *The Magic Mountain* who goes up a hill and never comes down" (21). Shortly after, she meets a couple who is driving to San Diego, which she decides to take "as an auspicious sign"

(23). This trip, however, is no less surreal than her stay in Santa Cruz:[88] the couple turns out to be "nothing if not unfriendly" and the car "pretty beat up" (25) and there is a no-talking rule which Patti accidentally breaks and which almost gets her expelled from the trip. When they stop for gas on the way, Patti goes to the bathroom and, to her surprise, when she returns the couple has left. Luckily, the security guard's daughter-in-law is driving to San Diego. This is when we meet Cammy and her surrealistic stories.

Smith's stay in San Diego is rather short, for when she runs into Cammy and learns that she is now riding to Los Angeles, Patti impulsively decides to join her and go to Venice Beach. In Venice Beach, a fortune cookie prompts Patti to travel again:

> Back in my room I opened the cookie and unwound the fortune. *You will step in the soul of many countries*. I'll be careful, I said under my breath, but upon second glance I realized it actually said *soil*. In the morning, I decided to retrace my steps, go back to the beginning, return to the same city to the same hotel in Japantown steps away from the same Peace Tower. (55)

She is referring here to San Francisco, the place where she was before traveling on her own to Santa Cruz, the place where she and her band had played the last concerts of 2015, the place where Sandy is resting, unconscious. After a few days in San Francisco, however, Patti is overcome with homesickness: "I could feel the gravitational pull of home, which when I'm home too long becomes the gravitational pull of somewhere else" (61), she concedes. Still, she decides to make one more trip before going back home to New York. Smith then proceeds to list the few possessions she is taking with her— "my camera with crushed bellows, identity card, notebook, pen, dead phone and some money" (62)—which inevitably reminds the reader of her travel lists in *M Train*.

Her forthcoming trip also seems to be connected to *M Train*. "I used the hotel phone and called the poet who'd given me a black coat, a beloved coat that I had lost" (63). This is, unmistakably, the black coat whose loss Smith mourns in her previous book.[89] Patti thus catches a flight to Tucson to spend a few days with her friend Ray.[90] While in Tucson, she remembers the many journeys she has shared with Ray, as well as some travel-related anecdotes:

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[88] It is in Santa Cruz where Smith speaks for the first time with the motel sign and where dreams start melding with reality.

[89] "I had a black coat. A poet gave it to me some years ago on my fifty-seventh birthday" (160), we read in *M Train*.

[90] While Smith does not provide his full name, she is most probably referring to Oliver Ray, poet and singer-songwriter, to whom she makes reference in a *WSJ.* article where she shares a few of her favorite things: "On the far left is a 1927 Martin parlor guitar. It was given to me by the poet Oliver Ray, who played in our band for several years" ("Patti Smith's Favorite Things").

> I thought back to the places we had traveled to: Havana, Kingston, Cambodia, Christmas Island, Vietnam. We had found Lenin Stream, where Ho Chi Minh washed. In Phnom Penh, leeches covered me when we were trapped in the flooding streets. I stood by the sink in the hotel bathroom and shuddered while Ray calmly picked them off. I remembered a baby elephant decorated with flowers emerging from the dense jungle in Angkor Wat. I had my camera and slipped away to follow it on my own. When I returned I found him sitting on the wide veranda of a temple, surrounded by children. He was singing to them, the sun a halo around his long hair. . . . He looked up at me and smiled. I heard laughter, tinkling bells, bare feet on the temple stairs. (65)

And, while Smith writes affectionately of these precious moments, there is, as in her previous autobiographical prose works, a sense of nostalgia reigning over the memories of the past: "It was all so close, the rays of the sun, the sweetness, a sense of time lost forever" (65), she concludes. Soon, Smith is on the road again. When she leaves Ray's house and starts walking with the hopes of hitching a ride, she suddenly spots Ernest, who invites her to drive with him through the desert. Like the couple driving her to San Diego, however, Ernest abandons Patti when she goes in search of a place to urinate, only this time she is in the middle of nowhere and Cammy is not there to drive her back. We never get to know how she manages to get home, but the following scene takes place in New York, with Patti already home. Just as the boundaries between dream and reality become rather permeable, so do the geographical ones.

Patti does not stay long in New York either, not because she feels "the gravitational pull of somewhere else" but rather because she feels Sam Shepard's gravitational pull. "Come to Kentucky" (87), he asks her. Two days later, Patti buys a ticket to Cincinnati and makes it to Sam's house, where she stays for a few days before going back home. Work, however, requires Patti to travel again, this time outside the United States: a lecture tour which will take her to Warsaw, Lucerne and Zurich. "[F]ree by day to disappear down side streets, some familiar and some strange, leading me to unexpected discoveries. A bit of passive wandering, a small respite from the clamoring, the cries of the world" (98), rejoices Smith. Traveling overseas naturally involves one of her packing lists: "[t]he same drill," Smith writes, "six Electric Lady T-shirts, six pair of underwear, six of bee socks, two notebooks, herbal cough remedies, my camera, the last packs of slightly expired Polaroid film and one book, *Collected Poems* of Allen Ginsberg" (98). When the tour is over, Smith takes the opportunity to travel to Lisbon. "It is in the city of Pessoa that I linger, though I could hardly say what exactly I am doing," she admits, "Lisbon is a good city to get lost in" (102). There, she spends mornings in cafés writing and evenings strolling around while summoning up her father's voice singing *Lisbon Antigua*.

Back in the United States, Patti keeps traveling west: San Francisco for Sandy's memorial (127), Seattle for work (131) and a town near Santa Ana to visit Sam, who is staying there for the winter (143). The narrative, nevertheless, ends in the East, more precisely in Virginia Beach: Patti is driven by an impulse to be somewhere that may remind her of her brother Todd. This is the case, at least, with the hardback edition. The paperback edition published one year later still contains one more journey, this time to Ghent. Reading the Sunday paper at home, Patti learns that the newly restored *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, part of Jan Van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*, will be exhibited for a limited period of time at St. Bavo's Cathedral. Smith actually mentions the Ghent Altarpiece in a chapter precisely titled "The Mystic Lamb" where she shows her admiration for such a work of art. When flying to Santa Ana to visit Sam, she takes with her an illustrated book on Van Eyck's work, "a long-favored preoccupation" (143), she admits. She then proceeds to describe the altarpiece in great detail, as she reminisces: "Once I touched the surface of the exterior panel and was filled with awe, not in the religious sense, but for the artists who realized it, sensing their turbulent spirits and their majestic concentrative calm" (144). Now, presented with the possibility of seeing all nine panels of the restored altarpiece, she does not think twice:

> In a moment of ecstatic desperation, I am seized with the desire to view it for myself. Looking at the calendar, I find that in spite of many obligations, I do have a five-day window, enough time to make the journey. . . . I trade all my frequent flyer miles for a ticket to Brussels, pack lightly, arrange for the cat to be fed, and set up a driver to get me to Ghent. Just like that, though momentarily affected with an independent trembling, I'm off again. (189)

Patti thus embarks on a journey as news of a global pandemic start spreading around the world. Yet she refuses to let the state of the world ruin her journey: "I smooth my invisible armor, vowing that for a few days nothing will break this traveler's heart" (191). In Ghent, she feels no rush and remains open to whatever signs the universe wishes to send. "[M]y step was lighter, pen more fluid, and my traveler heart alert to the many chambers of the world" (194), she writes.

In Smith's narratives, traveling always implies staying at hotels, some of which are second homes to her. Hotels have always fascinated Patti, especially when they have a connection with any of her admired artists. In *Year of the Monkey*, she repeatedly describes the hotel rooms she stays in and she often makes reference to the views from her window as well: "My room was on the lowest floor, facing the long pier. I opened the sliding glass door and could hear the sound of the waves accompanied by the faint barking of sea lions sprawled out on the planks beneath the wharf" (3); "I checked in at a small

hotel near Ozone Avenue, not far from the boardwalk. From my window, I could see the young palms and the back entrance of the On the Waterfront Café" (51); "I imagined I was in Kyoto, which wasn't hard as the hotel bed was close to the floor next to a rice-paper lamp and a tableau of gray-scale pebbles studiously arranged in a bamboo sandbox" (58). Perhaps the most detailed description is the one of her "provisional home" in Lisbon, as she calls it:

> My room is an enchanting mix of simplicity and uncommon detail. There is a carved wooden bed with a linen coverlet and a small desk with a white lattice paperweight and a stained ivory letter opener. The meager supply of stationary, enough for a sole missive, is nonetheless of a finely burnished parchment. The bathroom floor is a gleaming mosaic pieced with tiny blue and white tiles like the base of a Roman bath. (104-5)

Although no hotel will ever bring back the fondness she feels for the Chelsea Hotel, her home during her first years in New York, some of these nonetheless hold a special place in her heart, for they are temporary refuges in her traveling life.

Travel is such a big part of *Year of the Monkey*—and of Smith's life—that it even permeates her dreams. "Smith zigzags around the country . . . snapping photos that head up each chapter here. But nearly every time her travelogue gets up a head of steam, the narrative momentum is halted for Smith to describe another one of her damn dreams," complains Tucker in his review of the book. What Tucker fails to grasp is that dreaming is actually another form of travel for Patti and it often provides greater "narrative momentum." Besides, Professor Carl Thompson discusses in his book *Travel Writing* "a much more digressive, wide-ranging form of travelogue, in which the narrative focus often wanders far away from the actual scenes in front of the traveller" thus allowing for "a more detailed portrayal of the interior world of the traveller" (112). "Consciousness," he explains, "is not bound by space and time in the same way as the body, and the traveller's physical presence at a site will often be a spur of memories, reflections and imaginings that lead far away from their immediate surroundings" (112). Smith sometimes dreams of actual places, such as the Miyako Hotel in San Francisco (83), and sometimes goes on imaginary journeys. She imagines herself, for instance, "a sailor in the time of the great whaling ships on a lengthy voyage" (108) and goes on to narrate a whole story involving a humble sailor who saves the captain's son. There is, however, a dream she wishes would come true, "one that seem[s] more gift than dream, medicinal and pure like untainted arctic stream" (91). In the dream, Sam is telling Patti about his journey to Ayers Rock, Australia. He then asks her to disengage his oxygen—"I am no longer in need of it" (92), he assures her—and takes her to drink some sort of medicinal

broth. A stardust path suddenly appears before Patti and, after days of traveling, Sam is able to use his hands again (93), as he was before being diagnosed with ALS. Smith's dreams are an extension of her waking mind (her fears, her hopes, her worries) and thus can be as revealing as any of her real journeys.

Ayers Rock, also known as Uluru, is actually a place Patti wishes to travel to and it regularly appears in her dreams as well as in her conversations with other characters (real or imagined). I have already mentioned two conversations where this rock formation is brought up: both the motel sign and Ernest predict that Patti wishes to go to Uluru, and both of them actually encourage her (18-21; 72-73). Sometime later, as fate would have it, Patti is offered a tour with the Patti Smith Group in Australia for the following year, which makes her think of Ayers Rock: "It was quite a trek and a long time away, but I knew exactly what I would do, perform nine concerts and then, with the band gone home, hop on a prop plane to Alice Springs and hire a driver to take me to Uluru" (86). This, in turn, makes her remember her previous conversations: "The sign at the Dream Motel inexplicably gleaned that I longed to see Ayers Rock, as did Ernest" (86). And just as she had once pocketed "a fragment of the red skin of Ayers Rock, that [she] had not yet found, on a walking path in Uluru, where [she] had not yet walked" (20), she now looks at her boots, "their soles curiously embedded with the red soil of a place [she] had never been" (86). "The soles of your shoes are already red" (104), observes the sign in a different conversation. As Robert Hemley aptly states, "[a]ll journeys begin first in the imagination" (117). Fortunately for Smith, they do not remain in the imagination for long, for she actually ends up fulfilling her dream of going to Uluru.[91]

Though the travel writer's immersion in the places she visits may be duly acknowledged, Hemley states that "the country of yourself has to be conveyed as sharply

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[91] We know for a fact that she ended up going to Uluru, not only because there is a picture of the rock formation illustrating the narrative, but because we are provided with such information in articles reviewing her 2017 concerts in Australia: "The day of her appearance in Sydney, she said, she ticked off two items on her bucket list: her childhood dream to be an opera singer and seeing Uluru. . . . just that morning she had woken up at 5am to do her fourth Uluru tour in two days . . . She said she still had clumps of red earth in her hair and mud on her boots" (Israel). Besides, on her Instagram profile, there are several pictures of her visit to Uluru. On April 22, 2020, she posted a succession of pictures whose caption reads: "This is in search of the red earth, the great monolith in Uluru. It was Earth Day 2017, and I fulfilled the dream to see the sun rise and set upon it. It is the sacred harborer of dreams, and venturing alone to see it gave me a great sense of oneness with the earth, with our most ancient peoples, and the secret language of the subconscious. Happy Earth Day to everyone, and a salute to the red earth, that I dream to touch again" ("This is in search"). Pictures include a cup of coffee on the ground, some branches, part of the landscape in motion (as if taken from a vehicle), the rock formation itself, her hand on the red earth, rests of reddish earth on her hand, and a phone screenshot including the date and time these pictures were taken (April 22, 2017, 4:50 AM).

and honestly as possible for the reader to care about it" (108). According to him, "[t]he country of yourself can be explored as fruitfully as any country outside of yourself. . . . Writing is transformative in the same way that travel is" (108). Smith, if anything, is an avid explorer of the self, always attentive to whatever thought or feeling is catalyzed by a stimulus, whether inner or outer. In his review of *Year of the Monkey*, Iglesias remarks that, "[e]ffortlessly weaving together fiction and nonfiction, Smith takes readers on two unique journeys: one that can be traced on a map and one, infinitely richer and more complex, that takes place inside her head and heart." Patti's inner journey makes her realize that, although dreaming can be a safe refuge from reality, one has to make the effort to remain anchored in the present because, after all, "the trouble with dreaming is that we eventually wake up" (171). Waking up, in this case, means coming to terms with illness, loss, and an unstable political climate, which is also part of her journey. On the one hand, as her two dear friends, Sandy and Sam, struggle with their health conditions, Patti has to find ways in which she can stay connected to them whenever she cannot physically be with them. On the other hand, she has to learn to cope with the frustration provoked by a presidential election that utterly upsets her.

Travel is sacred for Patti; she seems to need it as much as she needs the stability of her home. She travels to visit the unknown as well as to revisit the already known. She travels for work, for pleasure, and out of a necessity to escape routine or discomfort. Turbulence, for Patti, is not as unpleasant as the state of things during the Year of the Monkey: "just disruptive weather patterns harboring no personal intentions" (143), she writes. With her "well-traveled boots" (141) and her "traveler heart" (194; paperback ed.) Smith is always ready for a new adventure. When she's not traveling, she can still count on her restless mind to take her somewhere far away in time or space, or on the many souvenirs she has kept from her trips. When going over her Polaroids, for instance, she writes: "There were various shots of the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the fifties-style lobby of the beach hotel in Blanes. Images that I had obviously favored and set apart. . . . One after another, each a talisman on a necklace of continuous travels" (122-3). Ultimately, the places she travels to throughout the year become synonymous with the people she is visiting there: San Francisco means Sandy, Kentucky means Sam, and Virginia Beach means Todd. In the end, travel is often a medium for Patti to connect with other people and other parts of herself. *Year of the Monkey*, then, is not travel writing per se, but "travel writing being put to explicitly autobiographical use" (114), as Carl Thompson calls it; in

other words, it functions as a medium to articulate the narrative of a (portion of) life. Traveling out of her home implies for Patti traveling into her own self; no outward journey comes without an inward one. Thus, every time she gets on a car or on a plane, the odds are that the reader will be rewarded with an insightful account of Patti's self.

This book in which nothing is as it seems and enigmas are often left unsolved also provides us with a number of certainties: one can take care of her loved ones even in the distance, self-analysis is a never-ending process, and travel can also take place in the mind. *Year of the Monkey* ultimately becomes a gateway for Smith to fully immerse herself in a world of dreams in which she is mostly accompanied by her thoughts. The personal essay is no longer a form that subtly surfaces in certain passages of the book; it is now one of the subgenres shaping the whole narrative. Even though *Year of the Monkey* (willingly) fails to offer a reliable narration, which is an indispensable feature of the personal essay, it still manages to offer an honest account about life and a mode of being. Just as *Just Kids* could not be entirely read as female rock memoir, *Year of the Monkey* is not a personal essay as such. Patti Smith's narratives seem to be in a constant state of flux, oscillating between fact and fiction, storytelling and meditation, nostalgia for the past and hope for the future. Text is not, however, the only medium Smith uses to communicate these and other matters to the reader; photography and its interplay with the written narrative, as discussed below, has much to reveal about the way in which Patti Smith understands the world.

5. FROM PHOTOBIOGRAPHY TO THE LITERARY SELF-PORTRAIT: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN TEXT AND IMAGE

Photography is increasingly shaping the world we live in: we are constantly bombarded with images (still or moving) whether through devices like our smartphones, our televisions, and our computers, or simply while walking on the street. The ubiquitousness of images has even permeated into our everyday reading lives. Newspapers, textbooks, children's books, or manuals are nowadays almost invariably illustrated and readers increasingly expect auto/biographical accounts to be complemented with visual evidence too. As writer Liz Stanley notes, "we are accustomed, we surrender to, the power of visual representation, photographs in particular, of auto/biographical subjects" (20). In the last few decades, photography has adopted a significant role in life narratives and we now speak of 'photobiographies' when referring to illustrated auto/biographies. "This neologism was used for the first time in French by Gilles Mora in his *Manifeste photobiographique* in 1983 and co-written with Claude Nori. But in this book, the term has a narrow meaning, referring only to a diary illustrated by photographs" (Arribert-Narce 48). The term 'photobiography' now accounts for a wider range of narratives combining photography and auto/biographical text. There are three ways in which, according to Fabien Arribert-Narce, photography may be present in auto/biography: (1) a photograph can be simply evoked; (2) it can be described in greater or lesser detail; and/or (3) it "can be materially reproduced in an autobiographical work and then co-present with a certain number of texts, be they captions, descriptions or narratives" (49). Photographs, however, may also be present and not alluded to, only tangentially related to the text and not necessarily as supporting evidence. Hence Akane Kawakami's more inclusive use of photobiography "to describe texts in which the photographic—in a metaphorical, analogically, or actual sense—interacts with forms of self-writing to offer a hybrid representation of the creator's self" (7). Photographs will therefore have different meanings depending on the way authors incorporate them into their texts.

Juxtaposing text and photography in life writing frequently results in the narrative being infused with a greater sense of veracity.[92] Very often, pictures authenticate what

[92] I would like to highlight here the adverb 'frequently,' for we shall see in due course that this notion of veracity may be intentionally challenged in order to achieve the opposite effect, that is, using photography to emphasize the fictionality of an account.

words can, at best, suggest. Put simply, pictures fulfill the promise words make. This, at least, is what most critics agree about: "Photography seduces us with . . . its high standard of accuracy" (Liu 524); "Photography furnishes evidence" (Sontag 3); "Since its invention, photography has been understood as *truer* than other representative images" (Rugg 12). And yet, pictures alone usually struggle to tell a coherent story and therefore call for an accompanying written narrative. As Liz Stanley notes, however powerful images may be, they are not all-powerful: "they require interpretation and this interpretation may be mediated by words which surround, literally, particular photographs" (25). Text and photography, then, complement each other and result in an enhanced product. Timothy Dow Adams thus notes:

> The common sense view would be that photography operates as a visual supplement (illustration) and a corroboration (verification) of the text—that photographs may help to establish, or at least reinforce, autobiography's referential dimension. In the wake of poststructuralism, however, I argue that the role of photography in autobiography is far from simple or one-dimensional. Both media are increasingly self-conscious, and combining them may intensify rather than reduce the complexity and ambiguity of each taken separately. (xxi)

Photobiography thus becomes a product whose complexities can only be understood through the combined interpretation of text and photography; it is in the relationship between the two that the meaning of the work reveals itself.

Throughout the years, photography has become an essential component of Patti Smith's written works, regardless of their genre—something that should not surprise us, given that it has always been present in her life.[93] The most recent editions of her poetry collections (*The Coral Sea* or *Woolgathering*, both republished in 2012) as well as other works such as *Collected Lyrics, 1970-2015* (a revised and updated collection of Smith's lyrics published to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of her debut studio album *Horses*) or *Devotion* (a short book that combines a fictional piece with autobiographical reflections on her life as an artist and writer), incorporate pictures alongside the text. It is also the case with the three autobiographical prose works which have been analyzed thus far.

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[93] In her interview for the Chicago Humanities Festival, Smith explains: "I've always loved photography. I loved it since I was very young. . . . When I was a teenager, I read *Nadja* by André Breton, and what really interested me was not just the text, it was all these obscure photographs within the text that were taken by Man Ray. And I loved this genre of work, not even directly illustrated . . . just sometimes obscure pictures that somehow resonate the text. So when I did my first book, *Babel*, in 77, I did something similar. And I've pretty much had photographs in all of my books" ("Patti Smith: Year of the Monkey [CC]" 00:47:21-00:49:33).

Just Kids, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* all display a total of 145 photographs (some of which are documentary evidence, such as letters or manuscripts). If we take the Illustrated Edition of *Just Kids* into account, the pictures add up to 203.[94] Smith's autobiographical prose works, then, apart from being analyzed as partly autothanatography, travel narrative, or autofiction, can be analyzed as partly photobiographies. Apparently, it would be not only anticipated but also expected that an autobiographical work by the 'Godmother of Punk' be supplemented with photographs of herself and her family, friends, and entourage. According to Katja Lee, "it is now expected that either authorized or unauthorized representations of the private sphere be accompanied by visual evidence" (16). Similarly, Professor Linda Haverty Rugg refers to "the 'naive' use of photographs as illustrations in popular autobiography . . . [which] appear as a 'natural' and expected supplement to the autobiographical self" (2). Although, in theory, Smith's autobiographical accounts would fall under the category of the 'celebrity memoir,' so far we have seen that, on a textual level, they share little with the standard celebrity memoir. The following analysis will demonstrate that Smith's use of photography in these books also differentiates her from her counterparts.

5.1. *Just Kids*

Both the hardback and paperback editions of Patti Smith's *Just Kids* contain photographs, but the latter includes a note to the reader displaying a dozen additional pictures. Other than that, the images remain the same except for the ones on the cover (which, in any case, are both pictures of Patti and Robert together). As argued above, the fact that *Just Kids* incorporates photographs within the narrative is not what makes it stand out from other female rock memoirs. It is Smith's choice of pictures what makes the book stand out and what, in turn, becomes relevant to our analysis. Viv Albertine's *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys*; Debbie Harry's *Face It*; or Chrissie Hynde's *Reckless: My Life as a Pretender* all display the usual celebrity memoir pictures: childhood, teenage and family photographs, photographs onstage, backstage and/or on tour, and photographs of flyers, fan art or album covers. This, however, is not the case with Patti Smith's *Just Kids* (nor with her other autobiographical prose works).

[94] The actual number of photographs would be 233, but there are 27 pictures in the Illustrated Edition of *Just Kids* that already appear in its first edition, so I am only counting the additional 61 images.

Photographs, as well as text, may serve the purpose of demythologizing the celebrity persona. In her analysis of actresses Tina Fey and Mindy Kaling's memoirs, Sarah Neuroth observes:

> In order to better counteract the persona of celebrity that readers have already designated for each woman, each writer included visual representations of a more relatable persona. This was done to complement the themes that arise from the writing itself: rather than simply write about relatable issues of womanhood or writing styles, the writers included visual representations of themselves as children, teenagers, or in their workplace, in order to give the reader an actual image of the writer, to prevent the reader from projecting any other kind of persona onto the writer. (68)

Something similar happens in Patti Smith's *Just Kids*, where images ranging from her childhood Bible School days through her early twenties trying to prosper in the big city to her motherhood days accompany the narrative, portraying her as an ordinary woman making her way through life. In fact, there are no pictures of Patti onstage, backstage or in the studio, scenarios typically associated with a rockstar. Instead, Smith favors photographs of her private life. However, photographs in *Just Kids* do not serve the sole purpose of demythologizing Smith's public persona. Despite Thomas Swiss's argument that in most cases rock autobiographies only resort to photography as a "supplement to the text" (290), I will now analyze how photography complements rather than supplements the text in Smith's memoir, illustrating what words alone fail to convey or, at the very least, further elucidating what words already convey. In order to do so, instead of approaching photographs in the order in which they appear in the book, I categorize them according to their content: (1) pictures of Patti, (2) pictures of Robert, (3) pictures of Patti and Robert, (4) pictures of items connected to Patti and Robert, (5) pictures of Patti and Robert's artwork, and (6) pictures of places Patti and Robert frequented.

Given that it is the most conventional memoir of all three books on a textual level, *Just Kids* contains images more typical of the genre than *M Train* or *Year of the Monkey*, that is, photographs of the writer herself and of the people around her. Still, given that the text is not focused on Patti Smith and her rise to fame but on her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe, there are only a handful of pictures which are not strictly representative of this relationality. Of the forty-five pictures in *Just Kids*, only eleven show Patti[95] without Robert's company. Seven of these pictures, however, are credited to Robert, meaning that he was the one who took the photographs and therefore the pictures still reflect the

[95] I still refer to these people as Patti and Robert instead of Smith and Mapplethorpe because, even though in the photographs we see the flesh-and-blood artists, they are still part of the narrative and I therefore speak of them as characters.

connection between Patti and Robert. Not only that but, in taking these pictures, Robert, who was to become a professional photographer, is making statements about his perception and his preferences as to framing, angles, or lighting, among many others. According to Professor and writer Timothy Dow Adams, "[i]n one sense all photographs are self-portraits, particularly in the case of professional photographers, in that they tell us something about the photographer's eye—his or her way of framing the world . . . [is] particularly telling" (227). Similarly, Susan Sontag argues that "photographs are evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees" (68). These photographs of Patti shot by Robert act as visual evidence of the understanding Smith repeatedly declares they shared: "As artist and subject we were suited for each other" (125); "I was Robert's first model. He was comfortable with me" (154); "He saw in me more than I could see in myself" (192); "Even as Robert and I parted as a couple, our photographs became more intimate, for they spoke of nothing but our common trust" (223). As Elizabeth Wolfson reminds us, "upon [Mapplethorpe's] death in 1989, [Smith] stood as his most photographed subject besides himself" (5), which explains the relationship of trust and compatibility they built around the act of photography. Ultimately, this relationship created through photography is also tied to the idea of autothanatography. The idea of Smith losing a part of herself following Mapplethorpe's death is further reinforced by the fact that Mapplethorpe took so many pictures of her: to a certain extent, Smith got used to seeing herself through Mapplethorpe's eyes, something that ceased to be possible when he died.

Such is the trust they share for one another, that Patti counts on Robert for the cover photograph of a book of poems, *Witt* (see fig. 1), as well as for the cover of her debut album, *Horses* (see fig. 2). "When we shot the cover for *Witt*," Smith writes, "I had it in mind that the cover would have a saintly look, like a holy card. Although Robert did not like direction, he was sure he could satisfy us both. Robert took a handful of pictures and said he had the photograph he needed for the cover" (223). If there is a picture, however, which has made history, that is the one shot by Robert for the cover of *Horses.* "We never talked about what we would do, or what it would look like. He would shoot it. I would be shot. I had my look in mind. He had his light in mind. That is all" (250),

explains Smith. The resulting photograph now "occupies the archives of both rock history and fine art" (17), notes Wolfson.

Fig. 1 *Just Kids* 224

Fig. 2 *Just Kids* 251

"When I look at it now, I never see me. I see us" (251). This quote from *Just Kids* is probably what best explains the story behind this picture and, ultimately, behind Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe. "Smith, while needing Mapplethorpe's photographic abilities to capture the image she envisioned, did not just use him to snap the shutter—she respected and valued his artistic vision as much as her own" (Wolfson 6), which is the creed which guided their relationship from beginning to end.

Of the four remaining pictures of Patti which were not shot by Robert, three were still taken during the time Patti and Robert shared a relationship (whether as lovers or as close friends) and the other one is a picture of Patti as a child in Bible School (see fig. 3) which is nonetheless counterbalanced by a picture of Robert at his First Holy Communion (see fig. 4) with his "huge Baudelairean bow and an armband identical to the one worn by a very defiant Arthur Rimbaud" (16). As we read in the captions, these two photographs show Patti in Philadelphia and Robert on Long Island, but they are presented in consecutive pages, one next to the other, as if showing that one needs the other for the story to make sense.

Fig. 3 *Just Kids* 14

Fig. 4 *Just Kids* 15

Displaying photographs of Patti and Robert at similar stages of their lives and in similar contexts is indeed significant for the reading of *Just Kids* as a relational memoir, not only because of the similarities on a visual level, but also because they complement a narrative in which Patti and Robert already seem to have much in common.

As for pictures of Robert alone, there are eight, one of which is the picture of Robert's First Holy Communion. Four of the other seven are credited on the copyright page to Judy Linn, a close friend of Patti and Robert's mentioned in the book: "A new friend entered my life. Robert introduced me to Judy Linn, a fellow graphic student, and we liked each other right away" (58). We know that all of the photographs shot by Linn belong to the period when Patti and Robert were living together because they are often referenced in the text. The three remaining pictures are one of Robert's hands sewing taken by Patti, one photo-booth picture of Robert from the time he was dating Patti, and one of Robert, age fourteen (as the caption reads), courtesy of the Edward Mapplethorpe Archive. We should bear in mind that Robert is quite young (not even thirty) in all of the pictures displayed in *Just Kids*, something that might be initially explained by the fact that these were the years in which Patti and Robert shared most of their time together, as well as the time in which their relationship was at its strongest. It can also be analyzed, however, in the context of autothanatography. Robert Mapplethorpe died at the age of 42, so there are no photographs of him growing old to show. Still, the author chooses not to include pictures of Robert during the last decade of his life, perhaps because she does not consider them relevant for the story but also because, most likely, she wishes to preserve

a certain image of Robert, still young, when she best knew him, still a "mischievous little boy" (13), still "the boy who loved Michelangelo" (279), still "a sleeping youth" (283) (see fig. 5). Smith therefore chooses to immortalize a particular image of Robert: not Robert Mapplethorpe, the photographer/provocateur who died of AIDS, just Robert. According to Professor Catherine Liu, "[p]hotography has become one way in which selves are demarcated in space and time" (535). In this sense, Smith has decided to demarcate Robert as a young man sharing life in New York with her.

Fig. 5 *Just Kids* 281

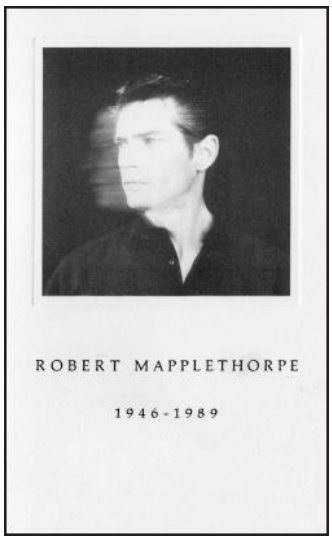

Fig. 6 *Just Kids* 292

Also related to autothanatography is the fact that Smith is giving Robert some form of life through those pictures. "The seeing eye is always a living eye, a living I. When the seeing eye gazes on photographs with which it has a direct subject-relation, its gaze infuses the photograph and everything therein with life, even if only a kind" (53), Liz Stanley notes. Not only does she immortalize him through text but Smith also brings Robert, her Robert, back to life through photography. Nevertheless, Stanley also concedes: "Of course this is not to banish death" (53). This is made evident not only in the story, in which we are told about Robert's passing, but also because there is a picture of Robert's memorial card (see fig. 6) at the end of the book, in a section appended after the note to the reader. Its caption reads "*Memorial card, May 22, 1989*" and on the card itself we read "Robert Mapplethorpe 1946-1989." Death, indeed, is inevitable, but there are ways to momentarily revive our lost loved ones, if only on the page.

The fact that the individual pictures of Patti and Robert are almost invariably presented in the context of their relationship helps emphasize the relational aspect of the

memoir. Still, the degree of relationality between Patti and Robert is further illustrated by the nine photographs of the two of them together. These pictures, taken between 1968 and 1974, show Patti and Robert in different stages of their relationship, mostly during the Chelsea Hotel period, and they visually reinforce the relational nature found in the text. The first such picture may be found on the cover of the book[96] (see fig. 7). No reference to it is made in the story, but it appears again in the Illustrated Edition, embedded in the text towards the end of the narrative, and its caption reads: "*Last photo booth, 1974*" (see fig. 8).

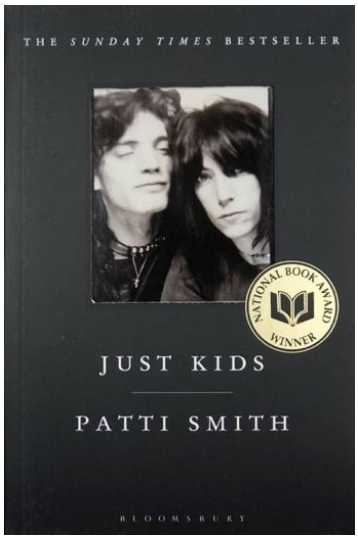

Fig. 7 *Just Kids* cover

Fig. 8 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 316

Having this picture as the front cover works as a sort of declaration of intent, already informing the reader that this is the story of two people and not just one. By taking a look at other female rock memoirs, we see that it is always the protagonist, the female rocker writing about her life, that appears on the front cover.[97] As we open *Just Kids*, we find yet another photograph of Patti and Robert on the frontispiece (see fig. 9), which is actually the picture on the cover of the hardback edition published by Ecco (see fig. 10). This picture has no caption either, but there is a passage in the book in which we can easily identify a reference to the photograph:

[96] I am working with the Bloomsbury paperback edition.

[97] Such is the case, for instance, with Viv Albertine's *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys*; Chrissie Hynde's *Reckless*; Carrie Brownstein's *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl: A Memoir*; Kim Gordon's *Girl in a Band*; Liz Phair's *Horror Stories*; or Debbie Harry's *Face It*.

> I had sold the Faulkner book and, along with a week's rent, was able to buy Robert a Borsalino hat at the JJ Hat Center on Fifth Avenue. It was a fedora . . . He put the book I was reading, my sweater, his cigarettes, and a bottle of cream soda in a white sack. He didn't mind carrying it, because it lent him a sailor's air. We boarded the F train and rode to the end of the line. I always loved the ride to Coney Island. (108-9)

Up to this point, the fact that Robert is wearing a hat and carrying a sack in the picture already matches the description. Besides, in the background we can see what could plausibly be an amusement park, that is, Coney Island. On top of that, Smith also makes reference to the fact that a picture was taken on that very day: "We strolled the boardwalk and got our picture taken by an old man with a box camera" (109). Finally, the same picture is found in the Illustrated Edition above the caption "*Coney Island, September 1, 1969*" (132). We therefore realize that not all visual evidence is placed near its textual reference; the task of identifying the relationship between text and image is left to the reader.

Fig. 9 *Just Kids*
(Bloomsbury ed.) frontispiece

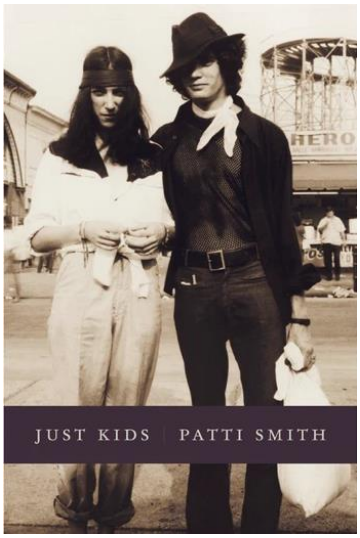

Fig. 10 *Just Kids*
(Ecco ed.) cover

We then find two pictures of Patti and Robert in their apartment on Hall Street, both credited to Lloyd Ziff, a classmate of Robert's at the time, and probably taken on the same day[98] (see figs. 11 and 12).

[98] Although slightly blurred in the first picture, the background is the same in both photographs.

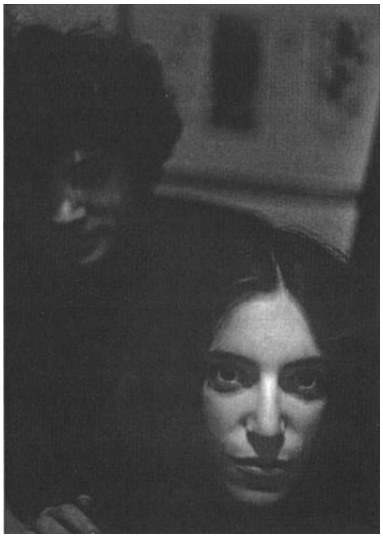

Fig. 11 *Just Kids* 46

Fig. 12 *Just Kids* 54

No particular reference is made to the photographs, but we learn, from one of the captions—"*First portrait, Brooklyn*" (46)—that these are their first pictures together. It is interesting, however, to compare them to the pictures included later in the narrative (see figs. 13 and 14), for we are able to appreciate how, the more time Patti and Robert spend together, the more they look alike. Such is the case with the photographs on pages 147 or 201, both taken before they went their separate ways. It is in pictures like these two that we begin to understand why people are so confused when they first meet Patti and Robert: "are you twins" (93), Harry Smith asks them on their first encounter. The photographs provide evidence of Patti and Robert's look-alike physique (both of them slender, dark-haired, wearing similar clothes). This, together with the nature of their relationship, might have bewildered anyone.

Fig. 13 *Just Kids* 147

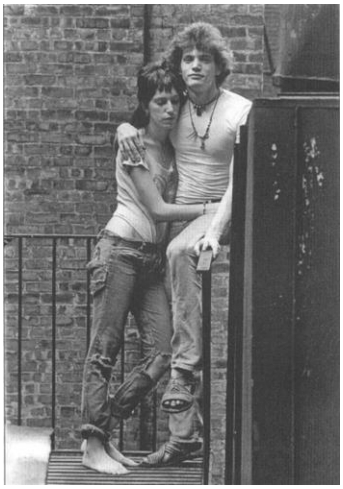

Fig. 14 *Just Kids* 201

In *Just Kids* we also find five pictures of items (one of which is the already mentioned memorial card) that have a connection to Robert himself or to his relationship with Patti. There is a picture of a postcard Patti sent to Robert in 1969, when she left for Paris with her sister Linda. On pages 296 and 297 we can appreciate the front and back of it, with the text almost intact. "*Target / Letter, Paris. 7.7.69*" (296), reads the caption. Two pages later, we find a picture of a camera above the caption "*Robert's last camera, 1988*" (299). Finally, there is a short piece appended to the narrative titled "The Desk" in which Smith tells the story of Robert's desk and how it was auctioned after he passed away:

> In mid-July, as I was assembling these pages, I received a message from my friend the photographer Lynn Goldsmith. She had met a young girl of fifteen named Delilah, who read my book and had given it to her mother to read. Her mother told her that years ago, after the birth of her first child, she took a trip with him on the Concord. Robert was sitting next to her and had a loving connection with the infant. This did not surprise me, as Robert was always tender and caring with children.
>
> When Robert passed away, remembering his kindness, Delilah's mother obtained his desk at auction. Lynn assured me that if it was the desk that I had written of, that it was in good hands. When I opened the attachment I burst into tears. It was indeed his desk, as glowing as I remembered.
>
> Seeing the photograph of Delilah, working so diligently, as I had dreamed I might, filled me with great happiness. I used to close my eyes and picture Robert showing it to me, saying, I thought of you when I got it because you always loved desks. Now I am at peace. I imagine Delilah writing at the desk, perhaps stopping for a moment, to give us both a good thought. (302)

This piece is followed by a picture of "*Delilah at Robert's desk, 2010*" (see fig. 15).

Fig. 15 *Just Kids* 303

In the Illustrated Edition of *Just Kids*, there is a photograph of a room which occupies two whole pages (see fig. 16) in which we can spot Robert's desk. A few pages later, that same picture (only smaller and in black and white) is accompanied by the caption "*Interior, West Twenty-third Street loft, 1988*" (see fig. 17). We may conclude that this is Robert's loft because Smith makes reference to it in the story:

> I walked with Robert to his new loft. He was no longer on Bond Street but lived in a spacious studio in an Art Deco building on Twenty-third Street, only two blocks from the Chelsea. . . . I panned the room with my eyes: an ivory Christ, a white marble figure of the sleeping Cupid; Stickley armchairs and cabinet; a collection of rare Gustavsberg vases. His desk, for me, was the crown of his possessions. Designed by Gio Ponti, it was crafted of blond burl walnut with a cantilevered writing surface. Compartments lined in zebra wood were outfitted like an altar with small talismans and fountain pens. (349)

We are thus able to see the desk both in Robert and Delilah's rooms, living its first and second lives, and we, as Patti, get the feeling that a cycle is being completed.

Fig. 16 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 342-3

Fig. 17 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 350

Also related to Patti and Robert and the type of relationship they shared are the pictures of their work, of which we find seven. Mainly, these are photographs of drawings, manuscripts, and typescripts. The first drawing is one by Robert titled "Memorial Day" (see fig. 18). Smith makes reference to this artwork in the narrative: "I was particularly moved by the drawing he had done on Memorial Day. I had never seen anything like it. What also struck me was the date of Joan of Arc's feast day. The same day I had promised to make something of myself before her statue" (40).

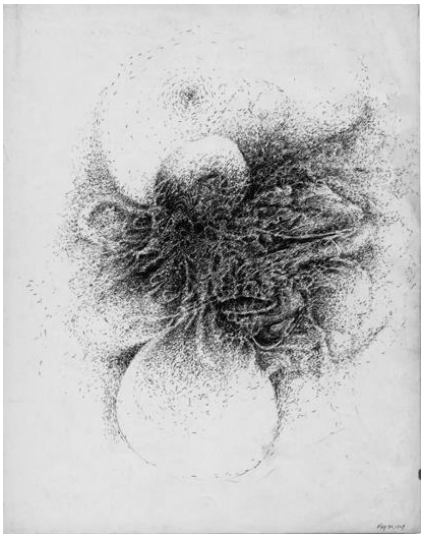

Fig. 18 *Just Kids* 41

Fig. 19 *Just Kids* 76

Next we find a self-portrait by Patti ("Self Portrait, *Brooklyn, 1968*") (76). Although there is no allusion to this particular piece of work, Smith does mention her self-portraits: "I became my own subject, producing self-portraits that emphasized a more feminine, earthy side of myself" (73); "I emulated Frida Kahlo, creating a suite of self-portraits, each containing a shard of poetry that tracked my fragmented emotional state" (75). Looking at portraits of Patti from that year, it is clear that she was not seeking to produce an accurate representation of herself. Instead, the image seems to illustrate her attempt to bring out "the more feminine, earthy side" in her (see fig. 19). This image is especially pertinent in the analysis of Patti Smith's persona. Smith, whose image has become so public, is granting us privileged access to a private conception of herself from a period marked by self-doubt and mixed-up feelings. Other art pieces included in the narrative are: a tie rack made by Robert for Patti (132), a typescript by Patti titled "Sleepless 66" (206), two drawings of Robert by Patti (254, 304), and a manuscript titled "Just Kids" and dated December 20, 1988. While some of these are representative of their artist-muse relationship, others are revealing of their individual experimentation with different media. In all cases, they show Patti and Robert's early relationship with art, one that would last a lifetime.

The five remaining pictures that appear in *Just Kids* are photographs of places, all of them shot by Patti Smith. The first two pictures are from one of her trips to France: one of the Arthur Rimbaud Museum in Charleville (228) and one of Jim Morrison's grave in Paris (231). These stand as further evidence of the pilgrimages Patti makes in order to honor the artists she admires, something that is also present in her other two autobiographical accounts. The other three pictures are placed in the small catalog of photographs and poems added following the end of the story and they all illustrate places mentioned in the narrative. The first one, captioned "*Hotel Chelsea*" (see fig. 20) is a photograph of the Dylan Thomas plaque at the entrance of the Chelsea Hotel: "I exited the hotel and stood before the plaque honoring the poet Dylan Thomas" (96). The second one, captioned "*Nathan's, Coney Island*," (see fig. 21) shows the sign of Nathan's, a restaurant mentioned a few times throughout the story: "We spent hours at Pearl Paint on Canal Street and then took a subway to Coney Island to walk along the boardwalk and share a Nathan's hot dog" (64); "The pier was swept away in a big storm in the eighties but Nathan's, which was Robert's favorite place, remained" (110); "We did all the things

we liked. We wrote our names in the sand, went to Nathan's, strolled through Astroland" (161).

Fig. 20 *Just Kids* 294

Fig. 21 *Just Kids* 295

Finally, there is a picture captioned "*View from the window of the Hotel Chelsea, room 206*" (301). Although there are plenty of references to the Chelsea Hotel throughout the memoir, there is no specific allusion to this picture. Still, it is indicative of the significance of a place like the Chelsea in the story. There are only five location photographs and two of them are connected to the legendary hotel, a building that is inevitably tied to the time shared with Robert. These pictures, then, rather than contributing to the ethnographic aspect of the memoir—which they do, only to a lesser extent—exemplify once again the centrality of Patti and Robert's relationship. Nathan's or the Chelsea Hotel are places Smith revisits in order to bring back Robert's presence.

Patti Smith's use of photography in *Just Kids* helps illustrate the different forms of life writing identified in the text. Looking at the categories I grouped the pictures into, it may be easily noticed that they are all connected to Patti and Robert, insisting once again on the relationality present throughout the text. Besides, the decision of portraying only a younger Robert is connected to the form of autothanatography and to the idea of immortalizing a certain image of him. Not only that, but photographs themselves are "*memento mori*." As Susan Sontag reminds us, "[t]o take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (11). Finally there are pictures of pieces written, drawn, photographed or handcrafted by Patti or Robert

which complement the *Künstlerroman* aspect of the narrative and pictures of the places Patti and Robert frequented which are also defining of a generation, their generation, which complement the autoethnographical account.

5.2. *Just Kids* (Illustrated Edition)

In 2018, eight years after the publication of *Just Kids*, a full-color Illustrated Edition of the book was published. Of the 88 pictures contained in it, 27 are already displayed in *Just Kids*, while 61 of them are original to the Illustrated Edition. As we saw in the textual analysis of *Just Kids*, the narrative remains the same in the Illustrated Edition, save for a preface titled "Our Story" (xi-xiii). In it, Patti Smith explains:

> This illustrated edition has been designed with the coming of the thirtieth anniversary of Robert's passing in mind. It includes the fruits of a wide search for new images, that due to the nature of those times when few people owned cameras, and our meager financial situation, were surprisingly scarce. I am grateful to all of the photographers whose work can be found in these pages, and to the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation for their assistance. (xiii)

Some of the photographs from *Just Kids* are placed in different parts of the text in the Illustrated Edition and they are sometimes captioned differently, too, providing us with further information about the pictures. Still, they essentially work in the same way: they mainly depict Patti and Robert and the world around them. We find pictures of the twosome together, individual pictures of them, pictures of their work or pictures of the places they frequented. This time, however, other people are also portrayed.

The first person (other than Patti and Robert) to appear in the book is Vali Myers[99] (see fig. 22). Although there comes a time when Patti meets Myers,[100] this picture has no connection to Patti's life[101] other than the fact that she happens to come across a set of portraits of Myers which make an impact on her: "The photographs of the beautiful Vali Myers, with her wild hair and kohl-rimmed eyes, dancing on the streets of the Latin

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[99] Vali Myers was an Australian artist and dancer who lived in Europe (Paris, Positano) and New York (at the Chelsea Hotel) and became muse to other artists.

[100] As mentioned in the chapter dedicated to *Just Kids*, Vali Myers is the one who tattoos Patti's knee and Shepard's hand (see note 63).

[101] The picture was taken, as its caption indicates, in Paris in 1959, when Patti was barely twelve and still living in New Jersey, and is credited to Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken. The fact that the picture is neither taken by Patti Smith herself nor by anyone in her immediate circle does not prevent it from being relevant to her autobiographical discourse. As Matthias Christen explains, the discourse of the self is not defined by a photograph's content or origin, but rather by "the way texts appropriate those pictures originating from different sources in order to incorporate them into a dispositive of identification . . . images do not have to be taken by the subject herself in order to become an integral part of their autonarrative" (650).

Quarter deeply impressed me. I did not swipe the book, but kept her image in mind" (30), writes Smith.

Fig. 22 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 31

Looking at the image, we can see how, in time, Patti would model herself after women like Myers. Next, we find portraits of Harry Smith (144) and Judy Linn (162), close friends of Patti and Robert who are mentioned several times in the narrative and whose influence on Patti and Robert's lives has already been discussed. There is also a picture of Janis Joplin (214) illustrating the passage in which Smith recounts how she managed to show Joplin the song she had made for her. Although the picture is credited to photographer David Gahr and is not related to the story Smith is telling, it still serves as a visual aid for the reader, for it portrays Joplin in the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel. The two remaining solo portraits are of Allen Lanier (259) and Sam Wagstaff (see fig. 23), the former having been romantically involved with Patti and the latter with Robert. From the moment Sam Wagstaff enters the narrative, Smith insists on how pivotal a figure he is in Robert's life (and, to some extent, in her life as well), so it seems fitting to have him represented not only textually but also visually. Smith describes Sam as having "a sculptural presence, as if he were carved from granite, a tall and rugged version of Gary Cooper with a Gregory Peck voice" (266), which is in stark contrast with her description of Robert as "a teenage girl, waiting for Sam to call" (266). This contrast is further

illustrated by the picture of Sam and Robert together (see fig. 24), in which their age difference,[102] ever so slightly hinted at by Smith, is made evident.

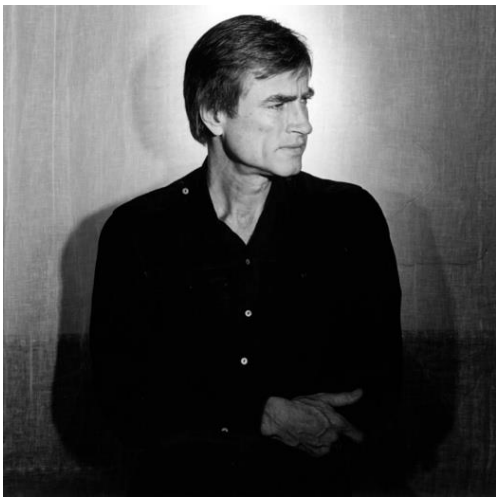

Fig. 23 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 267

Fig. 24 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 288

Sam Shepard, Gerard Malanga, Tom Verlaine, William Burroughs, and the members of the Patti Smith Group (guitarist Lenny Kaye, bassist Ivan Kral, pianist Richard Sohl, and drummer Jay Dee Daugherty) also appear in the photographs of this Illustrated Edition, only they are not portrayed individually but next to Patti. While Malanga, Verlaine, Burroughs and the members of the Patti Smith Group appear in one picture each (the latter together in the same picture), there are five photographs which portray Sam Shepard with Patti. We could argue that, in the story of *Just Kids*, Sam Shepard is to Patti Smith what Sam Wagstaff is to Robert Mapplethorpe. Although their love affair does not last long, Shepard's[103] presence in Patti's life exerts a significant influence on her. Besides, as we learn from her following autobiographical accounts, especially *Year of the Monkey*, years later they would continue to cultivate a long-standing friendship. One of the pictures shows the twosome performing *Cowboy Mouth*, a play they write together, at the American Place Theatre (241). In the other four photographs, they are portrayed embracing and demonstrating their affection for one another (see figs. 25 and 26).

[102] There was an age difference of twenty five years between Robert Mapplethorpe and Sam Wagstaff.

[103] Although I refer to the characters in the book by their first names (or their full names) instead of by their family name to differentiate them from the actual people existing outside the narrative, I refer to Sam Shepard as Shepard so that the reader does not mistake him for Sam Wagstaff.

Fig. 25 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 222

Fig. 26 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 243

Patti's fondness for Shepard is hinted at in the text ("We never strayed far from the Chelsea yet it seemed as if the city had dissolved into sagebrush and the stray debris rolling in the wind transformed as tumbleweeds" [221]; "With Sam I could be myself. He understood more than anyone how it felt to be trapped in one's skin" [225]) and these pictures help illustrate that feeling. The fact that we find photographs of the people who were close to Patti and Robert in this Illustrated Edition contributes to the depiction of a generation which in *Just Kids* is present only in the text.

The rest of the pictures belong to the categories already present in *Just Kids*, but there are additional photographs in the Illustrated Edition in all of these categories. We find, for instance, pictures of places other than the Chelsea Hotel which are also significant for the story of Patti and Robert. Such is the case with Max's Kansas City (see fig. 27) with its "big black-and-white awning flanked by a bigger sign" (148) or CBGB (see fig. 28), the club "that drew a strange breed who welcomed artists yet unsung" (322). These were pivotal locations for the countercultural movement of seventies New York and have become synonymous with the underground scene. Including pictures of these places helps Smith better contextualize the story.

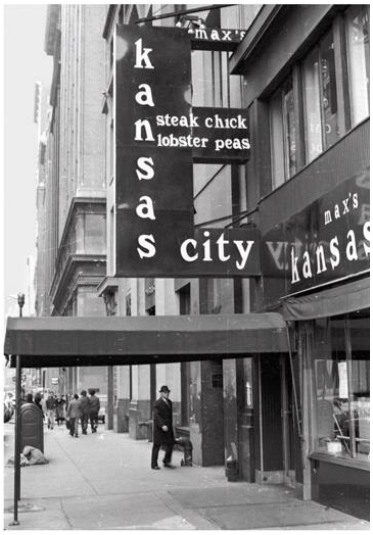

Fig. 27 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 147

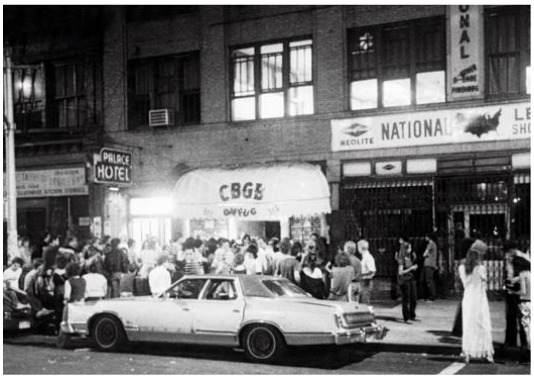

Fig. 28 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 320-1

As for the photographs showing Patti and Robert's artwork, we also find new pictures in this edition which help reaffirm Patti and Robert's artistic collaboration as artist and muse and vice versa, while also showing the variety of art forms they both experimented with. These additional pictures show a goatskin tambourine made by Robert for Patti's twenty-first birthday (see fig. 29), one of Robert's collages using mixed media (see fig. 30), a drawing made by Patti of Robert and herself in Coney Island (154),

Fig. 29 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 65

Fig. 30 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 84

a drawing of Arthur Rimbaud made by Patti on the day he died (303), and one of Robert's photographs titled *Calla Lily* (see fig. 31). These pieces, created between 1967 and 1978, are a testimony to Patti and Robert's devotion to the world of art as well as to their tireless search for the medium that would best mirror their inner world. Besides, since Robert

Mapplethorpe is mainly known for his S&M photography, incorporating pictures of his early work allows Smith to get readers acquainted with a different side of Robert's production—and not just any side, but the one which would lay the foundations for the work that would later give him recognition.

Fig. 31 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 352

There are additional pictures of a younger Robert too (see figs. 32 and 33), as well as of a younger Patti. These serve the purpose of further humanizing Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe, the seventies icons, who once where, as we all are at some point in our lives, just kids. We also get a better insight into Patti and Robert's lives in New York City, with photographs that show them and their surroundings.

Fig. 32 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 18

Fig. 33 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 26-7

Given that this story so often mentions aspects dealing with physique and appearance (androgyny, resemblance, ambiguity, clothing, hairstyles), pictures help draw attention to

these representational concerns. In this Illustrated Edition, the author has chosen to include a few pictures of Robert in which he is older than in the photographs of *Just Kids* (see figs. 34 and 35). This allows us to conjure up a much more detailed image of Robert in our minds which, in turn, makes us feel as if we have a broader understanding of the story.

Fig. 34 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 306

Fig. 35 *Just Kids* (Ill.) 346

This Illustrated Edition of *Just Kids* with over fifty additional photographs considerably enriches the story. Pictures allow us to trace Patti and Robert's stylistic evolution as well as the evolution of the spaces they inhabit, all of which is ultimately representative of themselves. They also allow us to better understand their experimentation with art and the way they each gradually develop their language (whether through photography or the written and spoken word). Although the narrative in *Just Kids* already stands on its own, the fact that it is complemented with photographs that illustrate such a magical time of Patti and Robert's lives can only enhance the resulting work. Readers can close the book with the feeling that they have got to know Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe as the young artists who worked incessantly in order to fulfill their dreams and not as the Godmother of Punk and the S&M photographer.

5.3. *M Train*

It has been argued above that, with each new publication, Patti Smith has moved farther away from the conventions of (celebrity) memoir. The same happens with the use of photography in these books. Where Smith's choice of pictures in *Just Kids* is remarkable mainly because photographs illustrating her relationship with Robert

Mapplethorpe outweigh those portraying her as the protagonist artist, in *M Train* only five out of sixty-one pictures portray the author. This time, however, it is not a relationship with another person that eclipses her individuality as an artist; objects and places are the stars of the narrative, accounting for three quarters of the photographs in the book. This might be explained by the presence of life writing forms such as autotopography (concerned with objects) or travel narrative (mainly concerned with places) in the text. The photographs in *M Train* can be classified into the following six categories: (1) pictures of Patti, (2) pictures of Fred, (3) pictures of other people, (4) pictures of animals, (5) pictures of objects, and (6) pictures of places.

Of the five portraits of Patti, one of them occupies the cover of the book (see figs. 36 and 37).[104] She appears pensive, sitting in what could plausibly be a café, next to a cup of coffee and her camera.

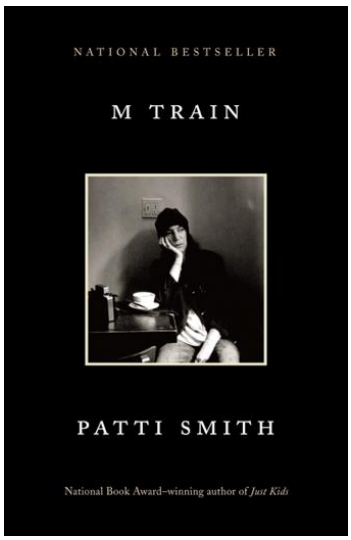

Fig. 36 *M Train* cover

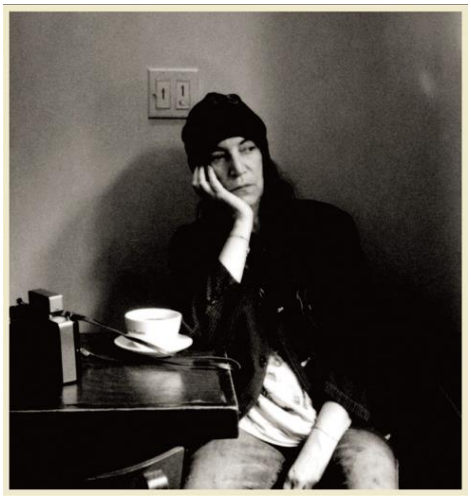

Fig. 37 *M Train*
zoom into cover image

This is probably the picture which best encapsulates both the story and the atmosphere in the book, for Smith finds herself invariably reaching for coffee in one of her favored cafés and giving free rein to her train of thought. Although the photograph is not mentioned in the list of illustrations, in the book Smith makes reference to a picture which seems to match this image:

> A young girl who frequented the café was going by carrying a Polaroid camera identical to my own. . . . I asked her to take my picture. The first and last picture at my corner table in 'Ino. She

[104] I am referring here to the paperback edition published by Vintage Books.

> was sad for me, having seen me through the window many times in passing. She took a few shots and laid one on the table—the picture of woebegone. (204)

This scene, which takes place on Café 'Ino's closing day, most probably corresponds with the image illustrating the cover of the book.[105] The second portrait of Patti appears alongside one of Fred (see figs. 38 and 39), both of them taken for a visa application, as Smith tells us in the narrative: "we thought of applying for a visa to Brazil, having our pictures taken by a mysterious Chinaman called Dr. Lam" (23).

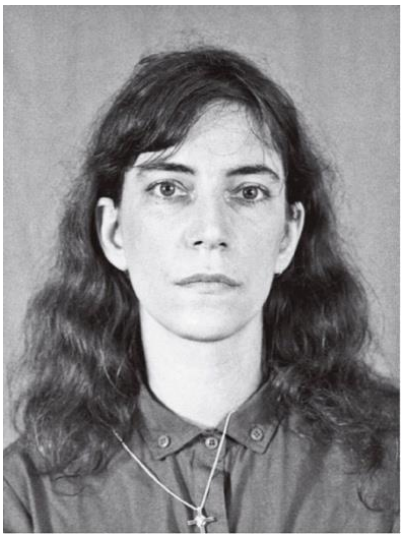

Fig. 38 *M Train* 22

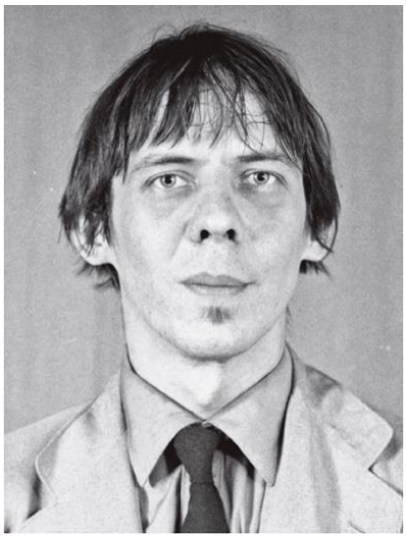

Fig. 39 *M Train* 23

These are the only pictures which do not appear in the list of illustrations at the end of the book. A third picture of Patti, this time as a child, appears towards the middle of the narrative, preceding a chapter, "The Well," which begins with the story of the day in which, after months quarantining because of scarlet fever, seven-year-old Patti was able to go outside. Another picture of Patti, this one credited to her late husband Fred Smith, shows her beside the willow they had in their Detroit home back when Fred was still alive (133). Finally, Patti appears in one more picture, this time next to the late writer Paul Bowles (see fig. 40). As its caption reads, it was taken in Tangier in 1997, which coincides with the time Patti was asked by German *Vogue* to interview Bowles: "He sat propped up in bed, wearing a soft plaid robe," Smith remembers. "I crouched down trying to find a graceful position in the awkward air" (218). These are the only pictures we find of Patti

[105] Further evidence of this correspondence might be found in the first picture in the book (6). Captioned in the list of illustrations appended at the end of the book as "Café 'Ino," this photograph shows not only a table and a chair in the corner of a room, but also what seems to be a socket on the wall which is identical to the one behind Patti in the cover picture.

in *M Train* and only one of them (the one in the cover) illustrates a moment coinciding with the time frame of the narrative—the other four are photographs from past memories—underlining once again the rejection of the celebrity memoir conventions.

Fig. 40 *M Train* 220

As for pictures of Fred, there are four in total (one of which is the one taken for the visa). The remaining three, all taken by Patti Smith, are photographs of his life with Patti: during their trip to French Guiana (12), in the boat they bought and parked in their yard (see fig. 41), and on Father's Day in Lake Ann, Michigan (see fig. 42). In the narrative, Fred is present through Patti's memories of their time together and, although she often thinks of him, it is not the story of Fred nor the story of their marriage.

Fig. 41 *M Train* 131

Fig. 42 *M Train* 230

Still, there are photographs which, despite not portraying Fred, are connected to him and to his life with Patti. Patti's portrait next to the willow in their yard (see fig. 43) actually serves to illustrate the story of the afternoon a thunderbolt struck the willow and it fell over their boat: "Fred was standing at the screen door and I at the window. We watched it happen at the same moment, electrically bound as one consciousness" (132).

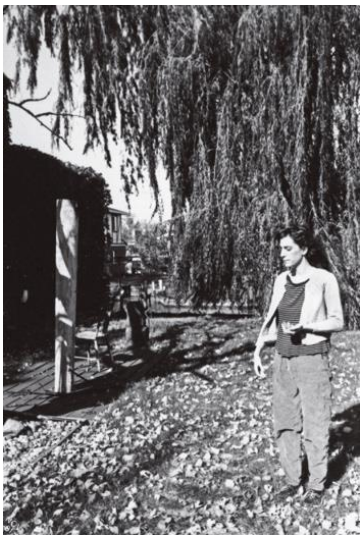

Fig. 43 *M Train* 133

The same happens with a photograph of the Arcade Bar (84). Taken separately from the narrative, it is simply a bar sign but in reality it is not just any bar, it is the bar Fred loved when he was living with Patti at the Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit in 1979 (85). There are photographs, then, which require a written narrative for the reader to understand the meaning behind them. In Sontag's words, "[o]nly that which narrates can make us understand" (18). An image, as explicit as it may be, requires interpretation, whether on the writer or the reader's part.

Apart from Patti and Fred, only four other people are portrayed in *M Train*, one of them being Paul Bowles. The first other person is "a young boy who agreed to take [Patti and Fred] across the Maroni River by pirogue" (14) during their trip to French Guiana but his face is barely discernible in the picture (13). The remaining two people are Ace and Dice, friends of Patti whom she meets during her trip to Japan and who are photographed together in Kamakura (181). There are four pictures of animals in *M Train* too: one of a bison in the Zoologischer Garten in Berlin (44), one of a stuffed bear in Tolstoy's house in Moscow (69), one of a pony in Iceland (266), and one of Patti's cat

Cairo (271). It is not the people or the animals, however, that attract the readers' attention, but the objects.

There are twenty-two pictures of objects in *M Train*. These photographs are tightly connected to the concept of autotopography on two different levels. First, the objects captured in the pictures are those autobiographical objects described earlier in this dissertation which, with the passing of time, are valued not for their original or practical purpose but rather for the significance they have acquired, i.e., for what they have come to represent. Such is the case with the table and chair from the Café 'Ino (see fig. 44), the arrangement of items on Patti's dresser (see fig. 45), or her coffeemaker (see fig. 46).

Fig. 44 *M Train* 6

Fig. 45 *M Train* 33

Fig. 46 *M Train* 36

There are also pictures of objects which belong (or, more properly, used to belong) to artists whom Patti admires: Roberto Bolaño's chair (see fig. 47), Frida Kahlo's bed (see fig. 48), Herman Hesse's typewriter (248), or Virginia Woolf's walking stick (150). These objects are actually biographical of their owners but the pictures themselves are autobiographical of Patti; the fact that she has decided not only to take those pictures, but also to hold on to them and include them in one of her books reveals a lot about the author and her devotion to certain artists and their belongings.

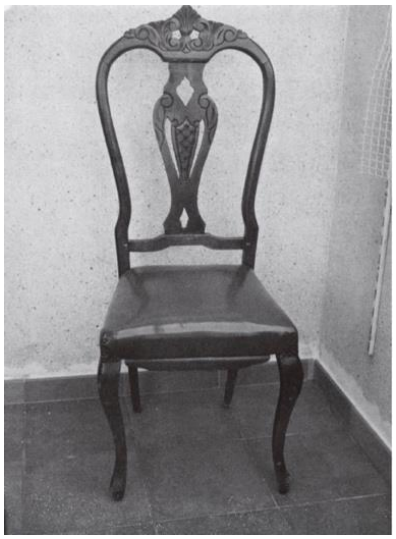

Fig. 47 *M Train* 26

Fig. 48 *M Train* 106

This is the second level in which the Polaroids in *M Train* are related to the concept of autotopography: the photographs themselves become autobiographical objects and, together, they form the aforementioned museum of Patti's self. According to Sontag, photographs are artifacts "[b]ut their appeal is that they also seem . . . to have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real" (54). Smith herself writes in the book:

> Spanish pilgrims travel on Camino de Santiago from monastery to monastery, collecting small medals to attach to their rosary as proof of their steps. I have stacks of Polaroids, each marking my own, that I sometimes spread out like tarots or baseball cards of an imagined celestial team. (200-2)

The pictures she takes acquire a certain holiness, as do the objects she photographs: she describes a chess table (see fig. 49) as "the holy grail of modern chess" (40), Friedrich Schiller's table as "innately powerful" (103) or a well she finds on Washington Square in New York City (see fig. 50) as "the object that had transformed and reenergized the atmosphere. A true object of desire" (273). However ordinary these items may seem, they hold a special value for Patti.

Fig. 49 *M Train* 41

Fig. 50 *M Train* 276

When asked in an interview about the objects photographed in her book, Smith answers: "They're like relics, really. . . . Things that I want to remember but I also want to share with others" ("In 'M Train'" 2:52-3:27). Some of these items may be found in her own home, but they are mostly objects that she gets to appreciate in her many travels, which takes us to the next category of photographs.

M Train may be regarded, to a certain extent, as a scrapbook of travel memories displaying pictures of the places Patti has visited in the past or is visiting in the present of the story. The first such place is Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, in French Guiana, which Smith remembers visiting with Fred during their first wedding anniversary. A few pictures of the prison where Jean Genet would have liked to serve his time are displayed (see figs. 51 and 52).

Fig. 51 *M Train* 15

Fig. 52 *M Train* 16

As ordinary as it may look, this place is actually significant for Patti as well as for the narrative. Not only is it the place she traveled to on her first wedding anniversary with her husband, who is no longer alive, but also the place where one of her most admired writers wanted to spend part of his life. Patti's wish, indeed, is to bring Genet "its earth and stone" (11), which she fails to do because he ends up passing away before she can accomplish her mission. She does manage, however, to take the stones from Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni to Genet's grave in Larache. Towards the end of the narrative, a picture of this moment is included (see fig. 53).

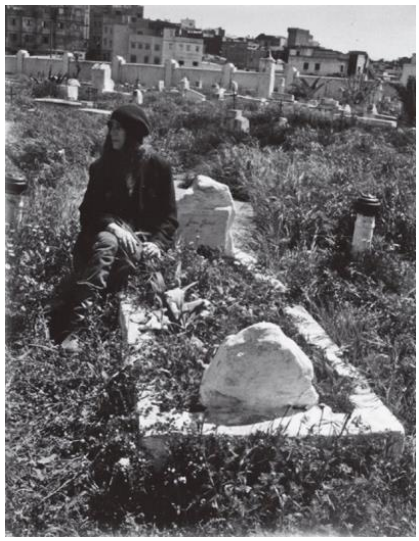

Fig. 53 *M Train* 229

From the prison Genet wanted to be incarcerated in to his grave, Patti makes pilgrimages in order to honor his wishes. The Larache Christian Cemetery, however, is not the only one Patti visits. While in Japan, she pays respects to writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa at his gravesite (185) and, on the plane back home, she remembers her two visits to Sylvia Plath's grave in Heptonstall (England), of which she only keeps pictures of the latter (199, 201). In her interview for radio show *q* on CBC, Smith explains: "For me, to go visit the grave of somebody I admire is like going to visit my family. . . . It's like going to church, it's a nice place to be" ("Patti Smith says" 07:02-08:45).

In *M Train*, there are also photographs of places which are not necessarily places of adoration or reverence but which are still meaningful for Patti and her narrative. Such is the case with cafés, the places she frequents the most: where she reads, where she writes, where she takes refuge from the outside world, where she connects with her inner world. So important are cafés for her, that she includes a lengthy list of them:

> *Le Rouquet in Paris, Café Josephinum in Vienna, Bluebird Coffeeshop in Amsterdam, Ice Café in Sydney, Café Aquí in Tucson, Wow Café at Point Loma, Caffe Trieste in North Beach, Caffè del Professore in Naples, Café Uroxen in Uppsala, Lula Café in Logan Square, Lion Café in Shibuya, and Café Zoo in the Berlin train station*. (24)

In the book, Patti sets foot in several cafés across different cities. Two of these, of which we find pictures, are the Pasternak Café in Berlin (see fig. 54) and the Café Collage in Venice Beach (see fig. 55). Her favored cafés, however, are probably those in New York City: Café 'Ino (206) and Caffè Dante (260), the former being her favorite, her "portal to where" (206), and the latter being the first café she visits in New York City on a trip in 1965 as well as the last one she visits in the story of *M Train*.

Fig. 54 *M Train* 54

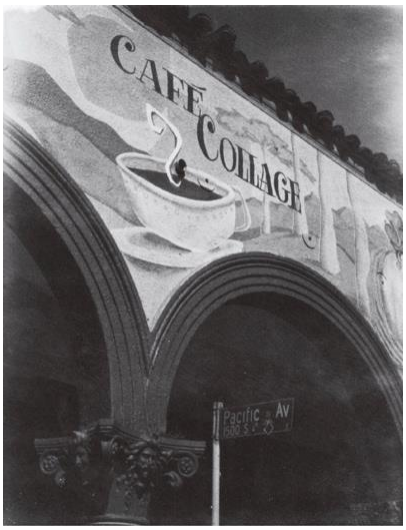

Fig. 55 *M Train* 194

Finally, there is a place in the story which leaves Patti particularly captivated despite its all-too ordinary aspect: a bungalow in Rockaway Beach (see fig. 56). "As I walked back toward the station," writes Smith, "I was drawn to a small lot surrounded by a high, weatherbeaten stockade fence. It resembled the kind that secured the Alamo-style forts that my brother and I built as kids" (132). From this moment on, she cannot help but think about the property which, luckily, is for sale: "I was so taken by Rockaway Beach and the ramshackle bungalow behind the derelict wooden fence that I could think of nothing else" (134). Such is her fixation with the bungalow, that she finally acquires it and has it refurbished (see fig. 57). Her Alamo, as she calls it (143), thus becomes a home for her. People might look at the hundred-year-old bungalow and see nothing but debris yet it ultimately becomes Patti's "writer's house in Rockaway Beach" (256), a place where she can escape from the rush of the city.

Fig. 56 *M Train* 138

Fig. 57 *M Train* 256

In *M Train*, Smith's train of thought constantly takes her back to the past through her memories, and photography plays an important role in linking present to past and vice versa. As Rugg reminds us, one of the functions of photographs, "both actual and metaphorical, is their reference to remembering, which is a bringing of the past into the present moment. All photographs . . . represent past time and stand in the present as a link to the past" (21). Since Smith alludes in the book to certain objects and places which seem to have a particular value for her, it seems appropriate for the reader to have the opportunity to identify them. Even though Smith's Polaroids of these objects and places denote ordinariness—some of them are slightly out of focus or oddly framed—they hold a special place in her heart. As Sontag notes, "[t]o photograph is to confer importance. There is probably no subject that cannot be beautified; moreover, there is no way to suppress the tendency inherent in all photographs to accord value to their subjects" (22).

5.4. *Year of the Monkey*

Of the three books considered in this dissertation, *Year of the Monkey* is the one which contains the most fictional narrative elements, hence its analysis as part autofiction. Fact is intermingled with fiction, and fiction with dreams, in such a way that, for a moment, the reader loses track of the story's veracity. Similarly, whereas the use of photography in *Just Kids* and *M Train* served the purpose of illustrating whatever was being told in the text, in *Year of the Monkey* the correspondence between text and image is often purposefully neglected. This results in a reassessment of the role of photography in autobiography. As Arribert-Narce explains,

> [i]n photobiographies the effects produced by a picture depend on its various interactions with texts. Captions and narratives can problematize its interpretation and can even make it fictional if there is an obvious discrepancy between what is said and what is shown. . . . Photographs can thus be used as elements of fiction or can even produce a 'fiction effect' if their spectators realize that they do not match the text. (50)

The photographs in *Year of the Monkey* are thus harder to classify, for some of them are not really illustrative of the text.

Generally speaking, we can refer to four categories of photographs in this book: (1) pictures of Patti, (2) pictures of other people, (3) pictures of places, and (4) pictures of objects. These categories, however, are not necessarily definite: some of the pictures in this book are representative of intangible feelings, even when they portray a person or a thing. Such is the case with a pair of pictures of a naked man taken in the beach with his back turned to the camera (see figs. 58 and 59). The reader cannot identify him in the pictures nor in the text. In the list of illustrations, both captions read "Bombay Beach" but no explicit reference is made to this man.

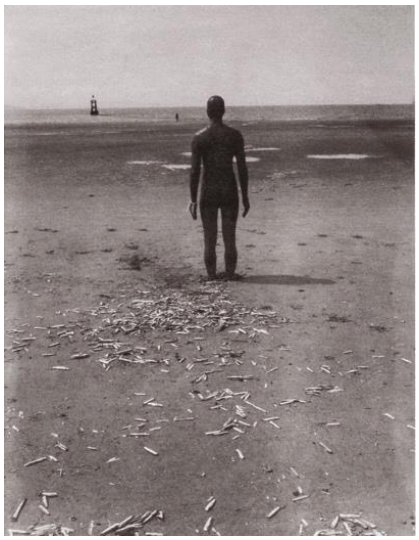

Fig. 58 *Year of the Monkey* 13

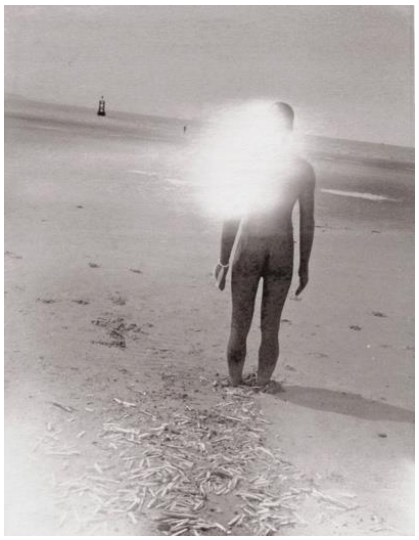

Fig. 59 *Year of the Monkey* 66

The only connection we find between the first picture and the text is through its caption (the second one has no caption), which reads "*A J. G. Ballard kind of gone*"[106] (13). This takes us back to a passage where Smith has used the same expression:

> I skated along the fringe of dream. Dusk masqueraded as night, unmasking as dawn and illuming a path I willingly followed, from the desert to the sea. Gulls were wailing and cawing as the seals

[106] J. G. Ballard was a English writer of science fiction known for the use of remarkably dystopian, bleak settings.

> slept, save their king, more like a walrus, who lifted his head and bellowed at the sun. There was a sense of everyone gone, a J. G. Ballard kind of gone. (11)

These two pictures, like certain parts of the text, insist on the idea that the author is constantly coming in and out of a dream.

This book only contains three pictures of the author, one of them showing only her hand. Of the remaining two, the first one appears on the front cover[107] (see fig. 60) and portrays Smith sitting on the beach with her trousers rolled up, and the second one portrays her also on the beach wearing a similar outfit (see fig. 61).

Fig. 60 *Year of the Monkey* zoom into cover

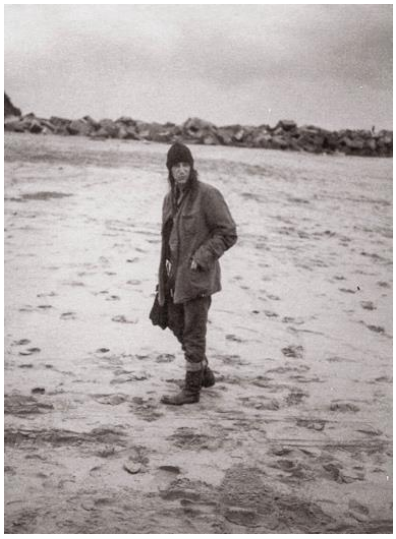

Fig. 61 *Year of the Monkey* 75

It is rather remarkable that these are the only pictures of Patti and that no reference to them is made in the text. In her entry on "Celebrity Autobiography" in the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Traci Freeman notes how "[v]isual components . . . are almost always present in some form, whether they be a selection of pictures from the celebrity's childhood or photographs of other celebrities encountered in the subject's life" (189). Freeman continues to explain that these pictures of the author and his or her celebrity environment "might foster a sense of intimacy between the celebrity and the reader or further emphasize the celebrity world inhabited by the subject" (189). This, however, is not the case with *Year of the Monkey*. Instead, Patti Smith manages to develop an intimate bond with the reader through a different kind of photography: rather than showing how

[107] It should be noted that the edition used here is the paperback published by Bloomsbury. The cover in the hardback edition published by Alfred A. Knopf does not portray Patti Smith, but her pair of boots and her Polaroid camera, a picture credited to Barre (Skills) Duryea.

other people have portrayed her, this time she chooses to include the photographs she takes of other people, but especially of things and places that are significant for her. In his study of the history of the painted self-portrait, Hall observes how, in the Middle Ages,

> the classical belief in the 'science' of physiognomy, whereby character can be read off from a person's face, had been challenged by the Neoplatonic and Christian belief that the imperishable, invisible soul rather than the corruptible visible body is the true measure of man. (17)

The fact that Smith barely shows us her face (or body) has probably nothing to do with Christian beliefs, but she does focus on offering us an insight into her soul (not only through the narrative but also through the choice of portraying other people, places, and objects). In the end, as Hall notes, "the artist's face is not necessarily the most interesting part of a self-portrait" (18).

Only four other people are portrayed in *Year of the Monkey* and none of them is Sandy Pearlman or Sam Shepard, which is strange, given that much of the narrative revolves around them. Apart from the two pictures of the naked man at the beach, there is a photograph of Smith's children, Jackson and Jesse (see fig. 62), and a Polaroid of a picture of singer-songwriter and guitarist Jerry Garcia (see fig. 63).

Fig. 62 *Year of the Monkey* 116

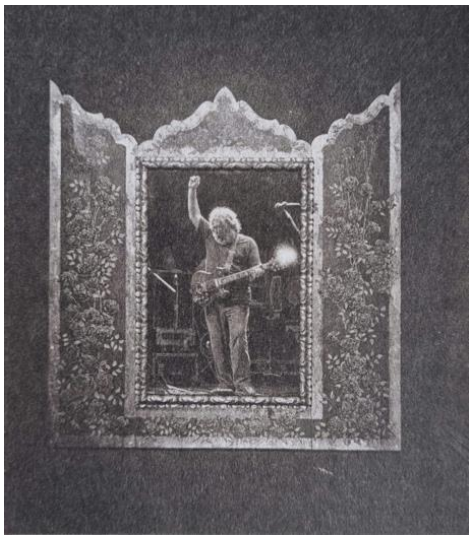

Fig. 63 *Year of the Monkey* 204

Both of these photographs are referenced in the text: "A photograph I had taken of my grown children at their grandfather Dewey's funeral came to mind. My son in a black Stetson hay and my daughter in a black dress" (117); "In the historic corridor I join the band, pausing before the alcove where the image of Jerry Garcia smiles upon us, mounting the stage with hopes that our jubilant play will provide a measure of collective joy" (205).

The majority of the pictures in *Year of the Monkey* show places or objects, as was the case in *M Train*. Since this account is part travel narrative, most of these photographs are connected to the various trips Patti makes. The first place portrayed in the book is the Dream Inn sign (see fig. 64). This picture appears both at the beginning and at the end of the story. After all, it is the Dream Inn sign that seems to conduct the whole narrative, appearing time and time again. We also find a picture of Ayers Rock, Uluru (see fig. 65), a place that is constantly mentioned throughout the book. There is something particularly remarkable about this photograph: it is credited to Patti Smith and, yet, in the story of *Year of the Monkey*, Patti has not yet set foot in Ayers Rock. As I mentioned in the chapter dedicated to this third book, we know that Patti Smith visited Uluru only years after the time frame of the narrative, but this is not something that the reader has to be aware of; one needs to resort to extratextual elements in order to find out.

Fig. 64 *Year of the Monkey* 4

Fig. 65 *Year of the Monkey* 18

There are also pictures of more generic places: a café, a bus station, the cityscape of Ghent. Most of the photographs, however, serve a specific purpose, whether to illustrate something so that the reader can easily identify it and associate it to the text or, quite the opposite, to further confuse the reader with images that somehow contradict the text. I have already mentioned the trip Patti takes with Ernest to the desert. As surreal as the story of this adventure sounds—and despite the fact that, in the end, we realize that Ernest might not really exist—there is a picture of an outpost captioned "Outpost, Salton Sea" (70) (see fig. 66) which illustrates this dubious excursion.

Fig. 66 *Year of the Monkey* 70

Were it not there, the reader might assume Smith is narrating one of her dreams, but the fact that there is a picture alters our understanding of the scene. As Sontag notes, "[a]n event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs" (15). Similarly, Adams claims that "photographs are in a sense physical traces of actual objects, [so] they somehow seem more referential than words" (xv). In our photographic culture, we seem to be more willing to trust the incontestable picture rather than the questionable word. Works in which the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred through text and photography, however, urge us to reconsider our understanding of photobiography.

Even though there are no pictures of Sam Shepard or Sandy Pearlman, we do find Polaroids of objects connected to them. There are three photographs linked to Sam, all of which may be found in the chapter titled "Big Red." The first is a picture of Sam's Stetson (see fig. 67), as we read in its caption, since there is no reference to it in the text. The second one depicts two chairs (see fig. 68), also belonging to Sam, as we are told right below the photograph: "We'd wake early, work for several hours, then take a break, sitting outside on his Adirondack chairs mostly talking literature" (88).

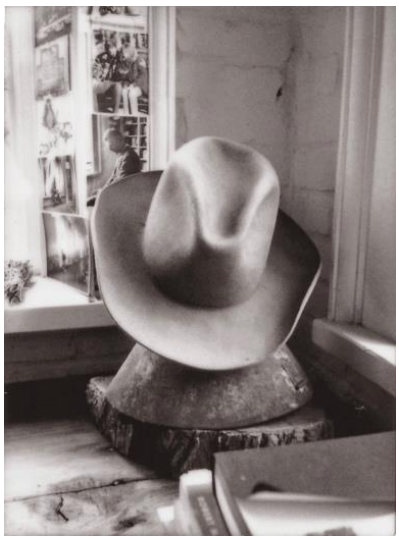

Fig. 67 *Year of the Monkey* 84

Fig. 68 *Year of the Monkey* 88

In the third one we find a torn picture which came to be the cover of Sam Shepard's novel *The One Inside* (see fig. 69), as Smith tells in the story:

> The title was gleaned from a Bruno Schulz quote, and when the question of a cover came up, it was right there, a photograph by the Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide that Sam had tucked in the corner of the kitchen window. A Seri woman with loose, dark hair and flowing skirts in the Sonoma desert carrying a boom box. We looked at it over our coffee, nodding complicity. (89-90)

As for objects related to Sandy Pearlman, there is only a photograph preceding "Imitation of a dream" (see fig. 70), the chapter in which we learn that Sandy has passed away. The picture, captioned "For Sandy," shows a gathering of objects which Patti has probably arranged to honor his friend.

Fig. 69 *Year of the Monkey* 89

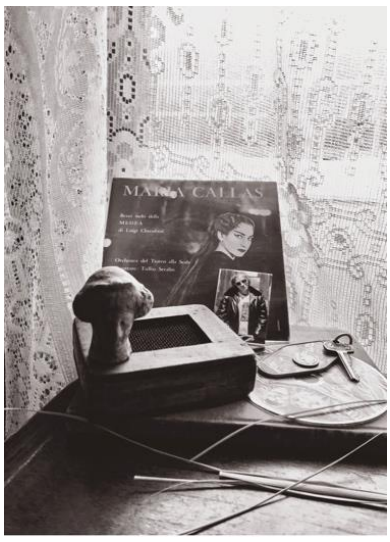

Fig. 70 *Year of the Monkey* 112

Among the objects displayed, we can identify a record sleeve of Maria Callas performing *Medea* in the Teatro alla Scala in Milan and the Grateful Dead's *Grayfolded* CD. On the one hand, Maria Callas and Medea are mentioned several times throughout the narrative. Smith remembers, for instance, how she, together with Sandy, plotted an opera based on Medea: "Not the traditional opera that would require singers with a lifetime of training, but an opera nonetheless. He wanted me to play Medea. I told him I was too old to play her, but Sandy said Medea need only be formidable" (33). On the other hand, the *Grayfolded* CD is actually a present from Sandy, which Patti decides to open on his posthumous birthday:

> Opening the small package, I pictured Sandy hastily addressing it, securing it with an excessive amount of scotch tape. It was a CD of *Grayfolded*, an experimental Grateful Dead recording, difficult to find and much coveted. He had promised me that he would find it and he did. Happy Birthday, Sandy, I said aloud, thank you for the present. (115)

Even though there are no pictures of Sam or Sandy in *Year of the Monkey*, their presence is felt in the narrative and through the objects photographed.

As in *M Train*, we find Polaroids of objects which used to belong to artists admired by Patti, such as "[t]he gray felt suit of Joseph Beuys hanging unattended in an empty gallery in Oslo" (98) or Roberto Bolaño's games (see fig. 71). Smith writes of the latter: "I'd had a sick feeling having accidentally encountered Bolaño's games. . . . The closet shelf had contained a world of energy, the concentration once invested in those stacks of games still potent, manifesting as a hyper-objectified sense, observing every move I made" (44).

Fig. 71 *Year of the Monkey* 122

The picture of Bolaño's games is found in the chapter titled "Amulets," which accurately names these items and their meaning for Patti. Where others might see the simplicity of mere objects, Patti seems to glimpse a world of sensations and possibilities. The same

happens with the objects displayed at the beginning of "The panel of small evidences" (see fig. 72), one of the episodes in the "Epilogue of an Epilogue" appended to the paperback edition of *Year of the Monkey*. These are things she comes across during her trip to Ghent, which she decides to preserve because of the meaning they end up acquiring, which she explains in the following passage:

> A stretch of time when I was rewarded with so many mystic moments, a chunk of red chalk, a chestnut, a rusted piece of scrap metal, a nail, and a flat stone shaped like an ancient tablet. Although suggesting little of the magnificence of the work I had seen, these objects helped to inspire my newfound contentedness. I placed them with the same care as a police detective into a clean plastic bag. Evidence of an awareness of the relative value of insignificant things. (198)

These are the kind of pictures that help Smith establish a relationship of intimacy with the reader, for she chooses to share those which best represent her on the most personal level. Pictures of herself and her celebrity friends, on the contrary, might be easily found on the internet or in any biographies of the author.

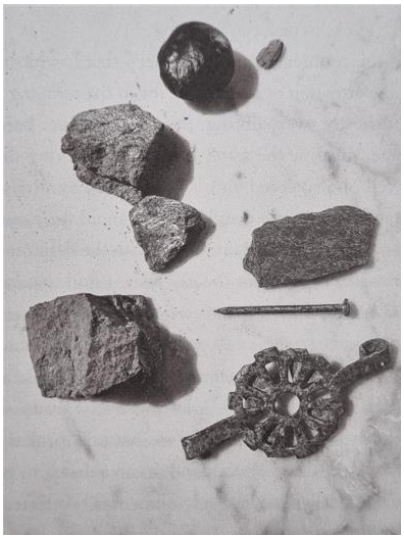

Fig. 72 *Year of the Monkey* 190

Year of the Monkey therefore stands as Smith's most unconventional photobiography as well as the most intimate look into her inner world. With it, Smith makes a bold statement: photographs of the author do not necessarily result in a better understanding of the subject; quite the opposite, it is the photographs (her photographs, indeed) of her surroundings that ultimately become the most revealing of her persona. Yet, it is also the book in which images are more dependent on text. Without the written narrative, these pictures hardly tell a cohesive story. Together with the text, they tell a story in which the boundaries between fact and fiction are constantly being blurred.

In photobiographies, writers work with two interdependent narratives: one textual and one photographic. The way readers perceive these two media, however, differs. According to Susan Sontag, "[w]hat is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation . . . Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality" (2). And yet, when these photographed images are incorporated within a piece of text, they are liable to become subject to interpretation. Photographs not only imply choices of framing, perspective or lighting; depending on how and where they are placed alongside a textual narrative, the statement they make varies: the way they are arranged (chronologically or not, close to or far from the narrative moment they illustrate), whether or not they are referred to in the text, whether or not they are captioned.

Patti Smith uses photography in different ways in her autobiographical narratives. In *Just Kids*, for instance, the inclusion of pictures helps verify a story which she wishes to tell as accurately as possible. Photography therefore becomes proof. In *Year of the Monkey*, on the contrary, Smith uses photography to insist on the arbitrariness of the fact versus fiction dichotomy. In this case, photography becomes a literary device purposefully used to blur the line between dream and reality. As Burack-Weiss notes,

> [a]t once the most transparent and enigmatic devices authors employ, photographs are commonly used as adjuncts to the text. The number of photographs, their placement within the book (spaced throughout or confined to the centerfold), the presence or absence of explanatory captions, and the wording of captions that do appear form a counternarrative that sometimes illustrates, sometimes contradicts the author's words. (41)

When speaking of photobiographies, then, the focus should not be on the content of photographs alone but also on the interactions between text and photography. While pictures per se may reveal information that might complement the written narrative, it is what surrounds them (the actual story, captions or references) that really provides them with a distinct interpretation. Whenever the photographs lack this textual interpretation, it is the reader who will be responsible for elucidating the possible meaning.

Individually, then, *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* each presents a different way of approaching the genre of photobiography. Together, however, these three books conform a more comprehensive self-portrait of the author, both visual and literary. In our culture, so heavily influenced by images, we tend to think of the self-portrait as mainly visual, whether in the form of photography, film, or painting. Yet self-portraits can also adopt the form of written texts. It is then that we can speak of a "literary self-portrait," a term that did not appear until 1980, when Michel Beaujour coined it in *Miroirs*

d'encre: Rhétorique de l'autoportrait (translated into English as *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*). Beaujour describes the form as "a much more heterogeneous and complex literary type than is autobiographical narration" (25); with no particular horizon of expectations, it remains as elusive for the one who attempts to define it as for the one who unknowingly performs it (3). The key to the definition of the literary self-portrait, then, lies in the subject's relationship with the world surrounding it:

> The self-portrait thinks of itself as the microcosm, written in the first person, of an encyclopedia and, further, as the self-awareness of the attention "I" pay to the *things* encountered in the process of scanning the encyclopedia. Not a solipsistic—or narcissistic—portrait of an "I" cut off from things, nor an objective description of things in themselves, independently of the attention that "I" turns to them, the self-portrait, rather, is a sustained textual awareness of the interferences and homologies obtaining between the microcosmic "I" and the microcosmic encyclopedia. (Beaujour 26)

A self-portraitist, then, must offer an account in which she acknowledges her individuality but also displays her awareness of the surrounding elements. It is in the interactions between outside elements and inside awareness that the self-portrait is born.

In her autobiographical prose work, Patti Smith presents an inside and an outside world which are in constant connection, both informing and being informed by one another. These worlds, conveyed to us in the form of a text, however, are also presented through the several pictures, mostly Polaroids taken by the author herself, embedded in the narrative. Certainly, Smith's self-portrait is not an ordinary one, neither in its textual nor in its visual form. If we turn to Smith's self-portrait looking for accuracy or naturalism, we will most probably be disappointed, for, as Hall notes, the form "is primarily a product of memory and imagination" (9). In Laura Cumming's words, "[w]e clearly do not consult self-portraits for documentary evidence" (7); one often portrays oneself "only to ask who or what this person is who is looking back from the mirror, how dismaying it is to be alone, how hard it is to represent or even just to *be* oneself in the wide world of mankind" (8). Self-portraiture thus goes beyond self-representation: it most importantly becomes an exercise of self-examination. This is precisely what we find when we read *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* as a continuous discourse portraying an identity which is in a state of constant flux and reconfiguration.

Through the use of photography, Patti Smith once again challenges preexisting boundaries. Where images of herself would have been expected, she has instead complemented the narrative with images of places, objects, or other people. Certainly, pictures of Smith would tell us little about herself—nothing that a quick search on the Internet cannot tell us. By including instead pictures taken by herself or the world

surrounding her, we discover much more about her interests, her lifestyle, her way of looking at things. As the narratives become more and more introspective, so do the photographs and the elements surrounding them. Smith seems to insist on avoiding the traditional way of constructing a public image. She chooses to point the lens elsewhere, towards her most private self, that is, towards the heirlooms she has decided to keep, the artists she admires, the cities she visits, the books she reads, the people she cherishes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Patti Smith has always been known as an artist who eschews frontiers, whether in music, writing, performance, or life itself. In her autobiographical prose work, she challenges not only the image of her public persona conveyed by the media thus far but also the limits of life-writing forms. Throughout the years, the press, the fans, and the unauthorized biographers have taken the liberty to tell Smith's story. It is said that with age comes an inevitable urge to reassess one's life and Patti Smith seems to find herself in such a moment. An in-depth analysis of her autobiographical prose work allows readers to delve into the public persona she has (re)constructed through the deeply introspective exploration she has made of her private self.

A review of the critic literature available on life writing and the main forms encompassed under this umbrella term provides some insight into the categorization of works commonly labelled as biographies, autobiographies, auto/biographies, and memoirs. For a long time, autobiography, normally written by white men of a certain status, was the most popular form in the market. It seems, however, that memoir has eclipsed standard, traditional autobiography as the preferred form of life writing nowadays. As of 2021, the general public no longer thinks of memoir as a form connected to 18th-century French courtesans but rather as a form that has allowed previously silenced communities to share their stories. And yet, although we should certainly celebrate the fact that such an inclusive genre is now at the disposal of many, we should beware of considering it too inclusive. Not every account loosely based on someone's life can be categorized as memoir, a concept whose definition still proves troublesome for critics. Matters of truth, self-exploration, or ethics ought to be taken into account when approaching this form. Otherwise, works may be misclassified, as is the case with Patti Smith's narratives.

Ever since the first of Patti Smith's autobiographical prose works, *Just Kids*, was published, this book and the ones following—notably *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* but also *Devotion* and even *Woolgathering*—have consistently been referred to as her 'memoirs.' More recently, they all have become part of a subgenre known as the 'female rock memoir.' This label, however, inevitably links Patti Smith's work with the heavily criticized 'celebrity memoir,' usually denounced as the result of a combination of boastful egotism and ghost writing. As has been argued, Smith's autobiographical prose work has little to do, if anything, with the celebrity memoir. Not only that, but it also often rejects

the features normally ascribed to memoir. Out of the three books, *Just Kids* is the one which best resembles what memoir is supposed to be. It should be noted, however, that it is a highly relational story concerned with the relationship between Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe. If one wishes to learn about the years Smith spent in New York City prior to moving with her husband Fred "Sonic" Smith to Detroit, *Just Kids* will only reveal part of that story—a very important part, but still not the whole picture. As for *M Train*, it is so heavily influenced by stream-of-consciousness literature that it can hardly be called a memoir. While the narrative follows Patti around her everyday life, chronology is constantly interrupted by dreams, memories of the past, or the author's internal monologue and the reader loses track of what is real and what is not, what is present and what is past. Finally, *Year of the Monkey* is the one which bears the least resemblance to a memoir. In a narrative that is ultimately more fictional than factual, Smith negotiates illness, the state of the world, and the passing of time in a way that is more reminiscent of the personal essay.

The tools for the categorization of works provided by life writing prove inadequate for the definition of Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work. Her books are characterized by a hybridity (both in form and content) and a rejection of the boundaries surrounding genres that prevail over the truthful account of incidents in one's life supposedly told in memoir. Smith's autobiographical prose evolves from a highly relational memoir (*Just Kids*) to a literary journal with reminiscences of intellectual life writing (*M Train*) and, ultimately, to literature of high artistic value (*Year of the Monkey*). *Just Kids*, then, is the only one which might fulfill the reader's horizon of expectations when classified as memoir. The features that define memoir, especially those pertaining to truth and the autobiographical pact, are less and less evident in *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*. These two books contain not so much a story as a reflection, bringing them closer to the form of personal essay. Referring to Patti Smith's most recent narratives as 'memoirs' would be a reductionist approach, for there is an interplay between fact and fiction, personal and political, autobiographical and essayistic, which must not be overlooked. Still, the books cannot be classified as personal essays alone either. It therefore seems that there is a gap in life writing theory which does not contemplate the existence of narratives which do not conform to any standard genre. If it were up to Smith, she would "just let it be literature" ("ITV News" 00:10-00:45). If we think of *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* as a continuous single narrative, however, we can

approach Smith's autobiographical prose work as a self-portrait, mainly literary but also visual, made up of different images that complement one another.

Forms as diverse as the *Künstlerroman*, autotopography, or the travel narrative are seamlessly woven into Patti Smith's books so that the reader is presented with three cohesive narratives. Separately, each of the forms encompassed in these autobiographical prose works reveals a particular aspect of the writer and her work. Together, these life-writing forms merge into a number of motifs that end up defining the unique self-portrait Smith has created. Autothanatography (*Just Kids*), grief memoir (*M Train*), and the caregiver's tale (*Year of the Monkey*) evince a clear concern about loss and everything that surrounds it: death, guilt, or the irrecoverable past, but also remembrance, resilience, or the immortalization of a loved one. Autoethnography (*Just Kids*) and travel narrative (*M Train* and *Year of the Monkey*) illustrate Smith's strong interest in the larger reality outside her limited, individual experience. Borrowing from Beaujour's aforementioned definition of the literary self-portrait, the writer is not only preoccupied with her immediate microcosm but also with the more out-of-reach macrocosm. She consistently blends her interior monologue, tinged with subjectivity and a search for the sense of self, with a more consciously political and cultural authorial voice. Journal (*M Train*), the personal essay (*Year of the Monkey*) and, in a way, the *Künstlerroman* (*Just Kids*) attest to Smith's introspective nature and her preoccupation with the creation of a body of work that will be representative of her private self as well as have a long-lasting significance at a more universal level.

As distinct as they may be, *Just Kids*, *M Train*, and *Year of the Monkey* can be seen as different brush-strokes of a single self-portrait. This way, readers obtain a more accurate picture of how unstable and fragmented an identity is. In reimagining her public image through the exploration of her private self, Patti Smith demonstrates that the sense of self is constantly under construction. This is, after all, what is expected from a life-writing account: the author must be willing to share with the reader this process which might be internally contradictory at times but which is ultimately revealing of human nature. The autobiographical pact between writer and reader, so concerned with honesty on the writer's part, must also be a pact of empathy by means of which the reader understands the vulnerable position in which the author finds herself while the author attempts to convey, as accurately as possible, the essence of being, of becoming, oneself.

As for the use of photography in Patti Smith's autobiographical narratives, two main conclusions may be derived. The role played by photography cannot be interpreted independently of the text that surrounds it. Photographs must be seen at all times as a complement and never as a supplement to the narrative. It is precisely in the interplay between text and photography that meaning is created. Text, in this case, involves not only the story itself but also the captions describing the pictures and, to a certain degree, even the appended lists of illustrations. These captions may or may not be explicit, but this should not prevent the reader from arriving at a certain understanding; just as silence has its purpose in music, the absence of information in a narrative sometimes generates a different kind of meaning. Besides, we should bear in mind that the interplay between text and photography may not always be immediate: sometimes the reference to a picture is found much later in the narrative. When readers succeed in establishing the pertinent connections between text and image, they are thus rewarded with a 'subnarrative' that provides further meaning to the story.

Patti Smith's use of photography in the books examined is tantamount to her use of narrative techniques; everything that she accomplishes through text, she further reinforces through photography. In *Just Kids*, Smith's most celebrity-like memoir, she mainly incorporates pictures of herself and Robert, as would be expected from the genre. These pictures, however, tend to depict the twosome in their most private sphere and normally move away from the public sphere they eventually came to be part of. Just as the stories in *M Train* and *Year of the Monkey* begin to challenge the genre of memoir from a narrative perspective, so do the embedded Polaroids from a visual perspective. Not only do they illustrate the forms present in each book—when Smith grieves for her husband, we find pictures of Fred; when she travels, we find pictures of foreign cities—but also the way the author understands autobiographical literature. Where we would expect to encounter portraits of Sam Shepard or Sandy Pearlman in *Year of the Monkey*, instead we find Polaroids of places Patti (the character) has never visited or of objects which belong to people whose existence is uncertain. Smith's use of photography, then, underpins her use of text: a tendency towards the ordinary, the fictive, and the introspective is found through both media.

Ultimately, the interweaving of autobiographical life-writing forms in Patti Smith's prose works not only makes her question the standard classification of autobiographical literature; it also helps her devise a narrative with multiple layers of

significance, allowing her to (re)construct her public persona through the exploration of her private self, while engaging (purposefully or not) in matters of truth, authority, or identity, among others. Approaching Patti Smith's work as a place where she negotiates her sense of self enables us to understand life writing as a tool for women to take control of their public image: the personal becomes political and the object becomes subject. Even though Smith does not overtly state the desire to challenge the image that has been thrusted upon her for decades, choosing to devise an image of her own entails an assertion of her knowledge and authority over the subject at hand: the self, her self. This idea is further reinforced when we approach the three narratives as presenting a single self-portrait. With each new account, Smith's sense of self is further nuanced, resulting in the construction of a complex identity which is in constant evolution.

Ever since *Just Kids* was published in 2010, Patti Smith's later autobiographical prose works have been marketed as autobiographies, memoirs, or nonfiction. This classification, however, proves more inadequate with each new book. From *Just Kids*, through *M Train*, to *Year of the Monkey*, Smith's narrative evolves from public to private; from fact to fiction; from storytelling to stream of consciousness. As Smith becomes more comfortable with the intricacies of genre, she confidently makes use of the tools at her disposal to create a hybrid literature that does not conform to a single discourse. Patti Smith's autobiographical prose work now stands as testimony to the female experience from a myriad of perspectives: a blossoming young artist, a grieving widow, an aging rockstar, a tireless activist, a voracious reader. From the female rock memoir to the personal essay, Smith presents a complex public persona by drawing from the different aspects that inform her everyday life—be it the cultural atmosphere, the death of a significant other, or recurrent dreams. Ultimately, Patti Smith has come to occupy a unique space as a writer who stands at the crossroads between popular culture and high art.

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