

UDC 821.133.1-31:82-3:82.09

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## LONELINESS AS A NARRATIVE AND EXISTENTIAL CATEGORY IN FRÉDÉRIC BEIGBEDER'S NOVEL "UN HOMME SEUL"

The article analyses the functioning of the category of loneliness in the novel «Un homme seul» by the contemporary French writer Frédéric Beigbeder. The study aims to identify the ways in which loneliness in the work manifests itself simultaneously as an existential experience of the characters and as a principle of the artistic organization of the narrative. Attention is paid to the relationship between the thematic content of the novel and its narrative structure.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the concepts of autofictional writing and autobiographical narrative developed in the works of Serge Doubrovsky, Philippe Lejeune, Philippe Gasparini, Tetiana Cherkashyna and Olena Ivanova as well as on narratological approaches proposed by Gerard Genette. The interpretation of the experience of traumatic memory represented in the novel draws on the principles of trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth and on the concepts of cultural memory and postmemory formulated by Paul Ricoeur and Marianne Hirsch. The methodological basis of the research is narratological analysis, which makes it possible to examine the compositional features of the text, the structure of the narrative, and the communicative organization of the narrative discourse.

The article demonstrates that loneliness in the novel emerges because of a traumatic childhood experience and the institutional violence endured by the narrator's father, and manifests itself in the inability to openly express emotions and in the formation of emotional distance within the family. Particular attention is given to the mechanism of the intergenerational transmission of this experience, which is reflected in the repetition of patterns of silence and alienation between father and son.

The analysis of the novel's narrative structure shows that the theme of loneliness also determines the form of the narrative. Fragmentary composition, the predominance of internal monologue, the nonlinear organization of memories, and the address to an absent addressee create a text in which the act of writing becomes an attempt to retrospectively comprehend lost family bonds. The narrative takes the form of a reflective monologue addressed to the deceased father, emphasizing the paradoxical communicative situation of the text.

The study concludes that in the novel «Un homme seul» loneliness functions not only as a thematic motif but also as a narrative principle that determines the composition, the structure of memory, and the communicative logic of the work. Thus, Beigbeder's novel may be considered a characteristic example of contemporary autofictional prose in which existential experience is transformed into a form of artistic organization of the text.

**Key words:** autofiction, contemporary French literature, Frédéric Beigbeder, Un homme seul, narratology, traumatic memory, postmemory, family memory, autobiographical narrative.

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## САМОТНІСТЬ ЯК НАРАТИВНА ТА ЕКЗИСТЕНЦІЙНА КАТЕГОРІЯ В РОМАНІ ФРЕДЕРІКА БЕГБЕДЕ «UN HOMME SEUL»

У статті проаналізовано функціонування категорії самотності в романі «Un homme seul» сучасного французького письменника Фредеріка Бегбеде. Дослідження спрямоване на виявлення засобів, за допомогою яких самотність у творі проявляється водночас як екзистенційний досвід персонажів і як принцип художньої організації оповіді. Особливу увагу приділено взаємозв'язку між тематичним змістом роману та його наративною структурою.

Теоретичну основу дослідження становлять концепції автофікційного письма та автобіографічного наративу, розроблені у працях Сержа Дубровського, Філіпа Лежена, Філіпа Гаспаріні, Тетяни Черкашиної та Олени Іванової, а також наратологічні підходи, запропоновані Жераром Женетом. Інтерпретація досвіду травматичної пам'яті, представленого в романі, спирається на положення теорії травми, розробленої Кеті Карут, а також на концепції культурної пам'яті та постпам'яті, сформульовані Полем Рікером і Маріанною Хіри. Методологічну основу дослідження становить наратологічний аналіз, який дає змогу розглянути композиційні особливості тексту, структуру оповіді та комунікативну організацію наративного дискурсу.

У статті показано, що самотність у романі виникає як наслідок травматичного дитячого досвіду та інституційного насильства, пережитого батьком оповідача, і проявляється у нездатності відкрито виражати емоції та у формуванні емоційної дистанції всередині сім'ї. Особливу увагу приділено механізму міжпоколінневої передачі цього досвіду, що виявляється у повторенні моделей мовчання та відчуження між батьком і сином.

Аналіз нарративної структури роману показує, що тема самотності визначає і форму оповіді. Фрагментарна композиція, домінування внутрішнього монологу, нелінійна організація спогадів і звернення до відсутнього адресата формують текст, у якому акт письма стає спробою ретроспективно осмислити втрачені сімейні зв'язки. Оповідь набуває форми рефлексивного монологу, адресованого померлому батькові, що підкреслює парадоксальну комунікативну ситуацію тексту.

У результаті дослідження зроблено висновок, що в романі «Un homme seul» самотність функціонує не лише як тематичний мотив, а й як нарративний принцип, який визначає композицію, структуру пам'яті та комунікативну логіку твору. Таким чином, роман Фредеріка Бегбеде можна розглядати як характерний приклад сучасної автофікційної прози, у якій екзистенційний досвід трансформується у форму художньої організації тексту.

**Ключові слова:** автофікція, сучасна французька література, Фредерік Бегбеде, *Un homme seul*, наратологія, травматична пам'ять, постпам'ять, сімейна пам'ять, автобіографічний нарратив.

**Statement of the problem.** The novel «Un homme seul» by the French writer Frédéric Beigbeder is of particular interest for contemporary literary studies concerned with the transformation of genre forms and narrative strategies in twenty-first-century literature. Contemporary French prose increasingly departs from the classical model of the novel based on an event-driven plot and external conflict, turning instead toward texts focused on the subject's inner experience, memory, and reflection. In this context, Beigbeder's novel demonstrates the blurred boundaries between autobiography, fiction, and essayistic writing that are characteristic of contemporary autofictional prose.

A distinctive feature of «Un homme seul» lies in the fact that loneliness functions not only as a theme but also as a principle organizing the narrative. It manifests itself simultaneously on the existential level as a condition experienced by the characters and as the result of traumatic experience and on the narrative level, shaping the form of the text, particularly through the predominance of internal monologue, a fragmentary structure, and the rejection of linear narration.

In this regard, the following research problem arises: how loneliness in the novel «Un homme seul» functions simultaneously as an existential category and as a narrative principle that determines the structure and communicative organization of the text.

**Purpose of the article** is to analyse the functioning of loneliness in the novel «Un homme seul» by Frédéric Beigbeder both as an existential experience and as a principle of the artistic organization of the narrative.

**The methodological framework** of the research combines narratological and interpretative approaches applied to the analysis of contemporary autofictional prose. The study employs narratological analysis, which makes it possible to examine the compositional

features of the text, the form of narration, and the communicative structure of the narrative. Attention is given to such aspects as the fragmentary nature of the narrative, the internal monologue, the organization of memory, and the address to an absent addressee.

**Research analysis.** The relationship between personal experience, memory, and narrative form occupies an important place in studies of contemporary French literature, particularly within the context of autofictional writing. The concept of autofiction was introduced by Serge Doubrovsky, who defined it as an artistic reinterpretation of strictly real events and facts (Doubrovsky, 1977). Subsequently, autofiction came to be regarded as a specific form of writing in which the boundaries between autobiography, the novel, and essayistic discourse become blurred.

In studies of autobiographical writing, Philippe Lejeune emphasizes that the reconstruction of lived experience in literature is inevitably connected with processes of interpretation and narrative construction. In his view, the autobiographical text constitutes a kind of pact between factual reality and its narrative representation (Lejeune, 1980). From a narratological perspective, such texts are characterized by complex temporal organization and a subjective narrative structure (Cherkashyna, 2014). As noted by Gerard Genette, narrative can freely rearrange the chronological sequence of events, creating various forms of anachrony that often reflect the particularities of perception and the workings of memory (Genette, 1972).

Contemporary studies of autofictional writing also emphasize the role of subjectivity and the fragmentary structure of narration. Thus, Philippe Gasparini considers autofiction a form of writing in which autobiographical reference is combined with artistic freedom and experimental narrative organization (Gasparini, 2008). In turn, Arnaud Schmitt argues that autofictional texts are often structured around the subjective experience of memory, loss, and identity, which leads

to the emergence of reflective and fragmentary narrative forms (Schmitt, 2014).

An important role in the interpretation of such texts is played by the theory of traumatic memory. According to the concept developed by Cathy Caruth, traumatic experience resists coherent representation and often manifests itself in literature through repetition, ruptures, and fragmentary narrative structures (Caruth, 1996). A related perspective is proposed by Paul Ricoeur, who considers narrative as a form of organizing memory that brings together recollection, interpretation, and imagination (Ricoeur, 2000). Studies of cultural memory also emphasize the importance of the intergenerational transmission of traumatic experience. In the works of Marianne Hirsch, the concept of postmemory is introduced to designate a form of relationship to the past in which the experiences of a previous generation continue to shape the perception and identity of descendants (Hirsch, 2012).

In recent years, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on autofictional texts devoted to family memory and to the reconstruction of the parental figure. Studies of contemporary literature note that many authors employ autofictional form as a means of reflecting on complex intergenerational relationships and reconstructing family history through fragmentary narration (Grell, 2020; Viart, 2021; Ivanova, 2021). According to Dominique Viart, recent French prose is characterized by a turn toward so-called *recits de filiation*, in which writing becomes a way of reinterpreting family memory and restoring lost connections between generations (Viart, 2021). Researchers also emphasize that such texts frequently revolve around experiences of loss, silence, and emotional distance within the family, which leads to the emergence of fragmentary and reflective narrative forms (Grell, 2020).

Within this theoretical context, the novel «Un homme seul» presents particular interest, since personal experience of loss and loneliness determines not only the thematic content of the text but also its narrative organization. The fragmentary narrative structure, the constant return to memory, and the attempt to reconstruct the figure of the father allow the work to be considered an example of autofictional writing in which existential experience is transformed into a principle of the artistic organization of the text.

**Presenting main material. 1. The Genesis of Loneliness and Its Intergenerational Transmission.** The figure of Jean-Michel Beigbeder in the novel «Un homme seul» by Frédéric Beigbeder appears as the bearer of a primary, profound loneliness whose roots lie in early childhood experience, particularly in the traumatic period spent at the boarding school

of Abbaye-école de Sorèze. In the text, the father's loneliness is not interpreted as the result of personal choice or a stable character trait. On the contrary, it emerges because of a violent rupture with the family and of the systematic suppression of individuality within an institutional environment. Already in the description of this episode, Beigbeder employs a lexicon of isolation and confinement: «*La France venait d'être libérée quand mon père fut enfermé. En octobre 1946, sa famille l'a banni au pensionnat de Sorèze*» (Beigbeder, 2025: 8). The choice of the verbs *enfermer* and *bannir* emphasizes that the boarding school appears not as an educational institution but as a space of exile and deprivation of freedom.

The boarding-school experience is described as a system of physical and psychological violence whose consequences prove to be long-lasting. The author notes that «*Quand il sortira de Sorèze, il ne sera définitivement plus le même*» (Beigbeder, 2025: 8), thereby marking the boarding school as a point of existential rupture. Such an experience may be interpreted in the context of trauma theory: as Cathy Caruth argues, a traumatic event is not limited to the moment of its occurrence but continues to structure memory and subjective experience, returning in the form of repetition (Caruth, 1996).

In this context, loneliness emerges not as an isolated emotion but as a mode of existence formed under conditions of constant humiliation and fear. Particularly indicative is the remark that beatings were accompanied by a ban on parental visits: «*Les élèves tabassés étaient privés de visite pour que les parents ne voient pas leurs bleus, même si leurs pires ecchymoses étaient mentales*» (Beigbeder, 2025: 8). Physical violence is thus reinforced by symbolic violence the child is deprived of the possibility of being seen and heard.

The formation of loneliness is further intensified by intra-family hierarchy. Relations with the elder brother are presented as an additional source of humiliation and isolation: «*Jean-Michel doit faire bonne figure devant son frère aîné, Gérard, toujours moqueur, qui le surnomme "l'arriéré" ou "Ursule"*» (Beigbeder, 2025: 8). As a result, the narrator's father finds himself isolated not only within the boarding-school environment but also within his own family, where his position as the younger sibling is reinforced through mockery and symbolic devaluation. Such an experience undermines the possibility of forming a stable sense of belonging and self-worth.

Reflecting on the nature of violence in the boarding school, the author expands the personal experience of his father into a broader observation about the mechanisms of the reproduction of trauma: «*À partir*

*du moment où vous demandiez à des hommes adultes, célibataires par vocation, sans doute eux-mêmes abusés dans leur enfance, de gérer des centaines d'enfants terrorisés dans un endroit clos, que voulez-vous qu'il arrivât?»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 10). From this perspective, loneliness appears not only as an individual experience but also as a structural effect of a system in which traumatic experience is reproduced and transmitted.

One of the central paradoxes of the novel is the representation of paternal love as a feeling that exists yet lacks the possibility of open expression. Beigbeder deconstructs the binary opposition "love – absence of love", proposing a more complex model of a hidden, almost clandestine feeling, which the author himself designates as *amour clandestin*. In this perspective, the father's silence appears not as a sign of indifference but as the consequence of an internal limitation shaped by the traumatic experiences of childhood and by an incapacity for emotional openness.

The impossibility of directly expressing feelings is particularly evident in the father's relationships with his children. Love is present in their lives mainly in indirect forms through hints, occasional gestures, or belated recognitions that become intelligible only retrospectively. As the narrator observes: *«S'il a été fier d'eux, ils ne l'ont su que par ricochet, accident ou gaffe, à titre posthume et indirectement»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 114). Love does not disappear, but it loses its communicative function: instead of connecting individuals, it intensifies the distance between the father and his sons. Seeking to preserve emotional restraint and not to burden his children with his feelings, the father effectively reproduces a situation of alienation: *«Il a aimé ses fils de loin, sans l'exprimer, pour ne pas peser sur eux»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 114).

The paradoxical nature of this situation becomes especially evident when one compares the private and professional spheres of the characters' life. As a successful intermediary between influential figures in politics and business, the father functions freely within the sphere of public communication, yet remains incapable of expressing feelings within the family. The narrator notes: *«Toute sa vie, le boulot de mon père a été de servir d'intermédiaire entre les puissants, il vendait aux grands industriels l'amour qu'il était impuissant à exprimer dans sa famille»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 125).

Loneliness in the novel thus appears not so much as an individual trait as a recurring behavioural pattern. Such a mechanism may be interpreted through the concept of postmemory proposed by Marianne Hirsch, according to which the traumatic experience of a previous generation is transmitted to descendants

through forms of family memory, silence, and emotional practices (Hirsch, 2012).

Thus, the novel «Un homme seul» presents loneliness not as an individual psychological characteristic but as a complex existential structure formed through early traumatization and reproduced within intergenerational relationships. The traumatic experience of the boarding school, the impossibility of expressing love, and the silent transmission of emotional distance form a mode of existence that is reproduced in the next generation and determines the internal logic of the narrative.

**2. The Narrative Reconstruction of Loneliness: Memory, Fragmentation, and Hypothesis.** The narrative organization of the novel «Un homme seul» by Frédéric Beigbeder is not structured as a sequential account of biographical events but rather as a form of reflective writing aimed at understanding the relationship between father and son. The narrative emerges after the death of Jean-Michel Beigbeder and constitutes an attempt at a retrospective comprehension of the father's figure, with whom a significant emotional distance existed during his lifetime. The narrator explicitly formulates the nature of this task, describing the book as a *«tentative posthume pour briser cette malédiction»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 17). Writing thus functions not only as a form of narration but also as a means of symbolically overcoming a lost communication.

The communicative structure of the text is defined by a paradox of address. The novel is constructed as an address to the deceased father, who can no longer become a real participant in dialogue. As a result, the narrative assumes the form of a monologic utterance directed toward an absent addressee. The narrator directly acknowledges this situation: *«La personne pour qui ce livre est écrit ne le lira pas»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 27). In this context, the act of writing loses its usual pragmatic function and becomes a form of internal dialogue with the past.

These communicative features also determine the composition of the novel. The text does not construct a linear biography of Jean-Michel Beigbeder but instead takes shape as a constellation of individual memories, episodes, and reflections. The narrator himself conceptualizes this structure through the metaphor of a puzzle: *«Mon père est un puzzle, ce qui explique la forme éclatée de cette reconstitution»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 101). Fragmentation thus becomes not only a formal compositional principle but also a reflection of the nature of memory through which the reconstruction of the past takes place. The narrator's recollections remain incomplete and dispersed, since during childhood the father's figure was associated primarily with distance and absence.

Under these conditions, the reconstruction of the father's personality acquires a hypothetical character. The narrator possesses only partial evidence – isolated memories, family stories, documents, and photographs – which do not allow for the formation of a coherent biographical portrait. The gaps in knowledge are not eliminated during narration but remain an essential element of the text. The image of the father emerges at the intersection of facts, interpretations, and conjectures, rendering the reconstruction inevitably incomplete.

An awareness of this limitation repeatedly appears in the author's reflections. In several episodes, the narrator explicitly acknowledges the possibility of interpretative distortions. Reflecting on the presumed secret activities of his father, he admits that such a hypothesis may be the product of his own imagination: *«J'ai peut-être déliré sur ta carrière d'agent secret parce que je voulais que ta vie soit plus proche d'un roman que d'une déception»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 137). Such reservations emphasize that the narrative does not claim to establish a definitive truth but rather records the very process of interpretation.

The fragmentary nature of the reconstruction is also manifested in the fact that the various elements of the father's image do not form a fully coherent whole. In the text he appears in several partially contradictory roles: that of a successful professional, an emotionally restrained parent, and a person who struggles to express his feelings. The narrator acknowledges that the distance between them was reciprocal: *«Je suis incapable de savoir lequel de nous deux indifférait davantage l'autre»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 17). Such ambivalence persists throughout the narrative and becomes a defining characteristic of the reconstruction itself.

Gradually, the attempt to understand the father's figure leads the narrator to a reconsideration of his own biography and family history. The reconstruction of the past becomes a form of self-knowledge, in which the experience of the previous generation begins to be perceived as a significant factor in the formation of personal identity. Particularly revealing is the narrator's admission regarding the length of this process of understanding: *«J'ai mis quarante ans à comprendre que je n'en avais plus dix-sept»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 123).

The ending of the novel gives this process an existential dimension. After the father's death, the loneliness that was initially perceived as a defining feature of his life gradually shifts onto the narrator himself. In the concluding formula, *«À partir de ce jour, l'homme seul, c'est moi»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 147), a symbolic displacement of the narrative centre occurs. The

father's figure, which served as the object of reconstruction, gives way to the experience of inherited loneliness.

Thus, the narrative organization of *«Un homme seul»* is based on the combination of fragmentary composition, reflective writing, and the hypothetical reconstruction of personality. The impossibility of complete knowledge about the Other determines both the structure of the text and its semantic dynamics. The narrative does not eliminate the ruptures of memory but incorporates them into the narrative construction, transforming absence and distance into central elements of the literary form.

**Conclusions.** The analysis of the novel *«Un homme seul»* by Frédéric Beigbeder makes it possible to consider loneliness as a structural category functioning simultaneously on both the existential and the narrative levels. In the work, it appears not only as a characteristic of the characters lived experience but also as a principle organizing the narrative.

The father's existential loneliness formed under conditions of childhood traumatization and institutional violence determines not only his behavioural model but also the communicative structure of family relationships. The analysis demonstrates that this condition is reproduced in an intergenerational perspective: silence, emotional distance, and the inability to express feelings directly become mechanisms for the transmission of traumatic experience.

The narrative organization of the novel reproduces this logic of isolation. The predominance of internal monologue, the rejection of a linear structure, the fragmentary nature of the reconstruction, and the inclusion of hypothetical elements indicate that writing in the text functions as a form of working through traumatic memory that resists coherent representation.

The analysis of the communicative structure also shows that the dedication *«À mon père, trop tard»* (Beigbeder, 2025: 6) establishes a paradoxical address to an absent addressee, which determines the monologic nature of the text. The impossibility of direct dialogue leads to a displacement of the addressee and to the transformation of a private letter into a universalized discourse oriented toward an indefinite Other.

Thus, the novel *«Un homme seul»* demonstrates that in contemporary autofictional prose loneliness may function not only as a thematic motif but also as a narrative principle that determines the form, structure, and communicative logic of the text. In this case, writing does not overcome isolation but rather articulates its boundaries, transforming the impossibility of a complete reconstruction of the Other into an object of literary reflection.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 27.02.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 25.03.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 19.05.2026