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Source: *New Literary History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Self-Confrontation and Social Vision (Autumn, 1977), pp. 1-26

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/468434>

Accessed: 07-03-2019 21:12 UTC

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The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography

Louis A. Renza

In an autobiography one cannot avoid writing “often” where truth would require that “once” be written. For one always remains conscious that the word “once” explodes that darkness on which the memory draws; and though it is not altogether spared by the word “often,” either, it is at least preserved in the opinion of the writer, and he is carried across parts which perhaps never existed at all in his life but serve him as a substitute for those which his memory can no longer even guess at.

Franz Kafka, *The Diaries: 1910-13*

I say “memory” and I recognize what I mean by it; but where do I recognize it except in my memory itself? Can memory itself be present to itself by means of its image rather than by its reality?

St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, X.15

I did begin [my autobiography] but the resolve melted away and disappeared in a week and I threw my beginning away. Since then, about every three or four years I have made other beginnings and thrown them away.

Mark Twain, a letter, 1904

I

PERHAPS MORE THAN any other literary concept, autobiography traps us into circular explanations of its being. Is it an indeterminate mixture of truth and fiction about the person writing it? Is it based essentially in fact rather than self-invention? Or is it a full-fledged “literary” event whose primary being resides in and through the writing itself: in the “life” of the signifier as opposed to the life being signified?

James M. Cox doubtless expresses our commonsense response to

such questions when he claims that autobiography is basically a factual rather than fictional “narrative of a person’s life written by himself.”¹ But as we learn from instances where fiction mimics autobiography, the narrative by itself formally determines and so takes precedence over the putative, factual orientation of autobiographical references. Moreover, we can stress with Northrop Frye and other critics that the autobiographical narrative, in selecting, ordering, and integrating the writer’s lived experiences according to its own teleological demands, is beholden to certain imperatives of imaginative discourse. Autobiography, in short, transforms empirical facts into *artifacts*: it is definable as a form of “prose fiction.”² Cox himself examines particular autobiographies less as a neutral rendering of facts than as a charged, condensed narrative through which the autobiographer symbolically reckons with his life as it was lived in socially dramatic situations, in revolutionary periods, for example, “when politics and history become dominant realities for the imagination” (p. 144).

In practice, at least, Cox’s “factual” conception of autobiography agrees with Frye’s and indeed with the theoretical bias of contemporary critics: that the writing of autobiography entails a unique act of imagination and not simply the writer’s passive negotiation of the constraints and/or compulsions native to any act of self-publication. Various ways exist to reinforce this “imaginative” conception. Perhaps the most obvious way involves citing the presence of explicit fictional techniques or elements in specific autobiographies.³ But the presence of such elements only shows that autobiography self-consciously borrows from the methodological procedures of imaginative fiction, not that autobiography is founded on the immediate requisites of imaginative discourse. A more cogent way to “prove” the imaginative quality of autobiography is to keep in mind, as does Georges Gusdorf, that the autobiographical act spontaneously generates epistemological ambivalence. The autobiographer of necessity knows as well as writes about his past from the limiting perspective of his present self-image—*ce qu’il est devenu*—and thus adopts, wanting to express the “truth” about this past, specific verbal strategies in order to transcend such limitation.⁴ But if we wish to argue for the artistic constitution of autobiography, the writer’s self-cognitive dilemma must be seen to permeate the composition of his text. It must not, as Roy Pascal implies when he describes autobiography as a mutually delimiting mixture of “design” and “truth,” preexist the act of composition by a separate act of self-reflection.⁵

So we are theoretically led to a third “imaginative” conception of autobiography, namely, that the dynamics or drama of

autobiographical cognition occurs in terms of the written performance itself. According to this conception, a given autobiographical text normally manifests the writer's spontaneous, "ironic," or experimental efforts to bring his past into the intentional purview of his present narrative project.⁶ The autobiographer cannot help but sense his omission of facts from a life the totality or complexity of which constantly eludes him, the more so when discourse pressures him into ordering these facts. Directly or indirectly infected with the prescience of incompleteness, he concedes his life to a narrative "design" in tension with its own postulations, the result being an autobiographical text whose references appear to readers within an aesthetic setting, that is, in terms of the narrative's own "essayistic" disposition rather than in terms of their nontextual truth or falsity. Thus apparent discrepancies between the life being signified and the mode of its signification can "[render] suspect," Jean Starobinski says, "the content of the narrative, setting up a screen between the truth of the narrated past and the present of the narrative situation."⁷

But while some autobiographies seem to exhibit or evince "ironic" discrepancies such as Starobinski perceives, for example, in Rousseau's *Confessions*, it is also true that in most autobiographies, instances of tension between the act and object of signification are unequally distributed throughout the narrative: they are inconsistent with or inessential to the narrative as a whole. Moreover, though this conception successfully suspends the so-called "truth" import of autobiographies, it fails to argue for the full aesthetic accessibility of an autobiographical text. Being mentally closer to his past than the reader, the writer can best appreciate its anxious complication of his present narrative and vice versa; the reader can only "suspect" this temporal dialectic. Clearly, we can argue for autobiography as a genuine, imaginative enterprise only if, adopting the reader's a posteriori relation to the text, we insist that the writer's references to his past are subordinate to—as a mere contingent source of "life"-images—a narrative essentially representing the writer's present self-identity as seen, also, in the light of his future.⁸ Here the immediately accessible narrative *is* the autobiography; in other words, autobiography is the writer's attempt to elucidate his present, not his past. Thus Barrett John Mandel tells us in effect that it is the autobiographer's present which spawns the drama of self-cognition mentioned before, for no one can "talk about the present at all but . . . by distancing and fictionalizing it." Speaking as a would-be autobiographer, Mandel argues that his *present* creates "my past by inspiring meaningless data with interpretation, direction,

suggestiveness—life. But as long as I live, my past is rooted in my present and springs to life with my present. . . . I cannot fully give my past to the page because it flows mysteriously out of the incomprehensible moods of the present. And as new moods come upon me, my past comes upon me differently.”⁹ This almost Coleridgean isolation of the writer’s creative present at the time of writing allows us to view autobiography as a work, like works of poetic fiction, wholly and immediately accessible to readers. But note what we have done: in sacrificing the autobiographer’s past to a secondary role vis-à-vis his “incomprehensible . . . present,” *any* first-person narrative-of-a-life, which necessarily is a presentification of the author’s own mental experiences at the time of writing, could be termed autobiographical and/or fictive.

Out of a need to justify or “apologize” for placing autobiography in the context of imaginative rather than what Frye would call “descriptive” modes of writing, we are bound to accept James Olney’s assertion that “autobiography and poetry are both definitions of the [writing] self at a moment and in a place.”¹⁰ But ironically, the genre-nominalism of such “apologies” must deny what allows us to theorize about autobiography in the first place: the fact that we have little difficulty recognizing and so reading autobiographies as opposed to works of fiction.¹¹ Second, in having to assume that the desideratum of both modes of writing devolves on the reader’s self-effacing participation in the process, the “becoming” of the writing self through his work, such “apologies” must overlook the fact that most formal autobiographies fail to pass the test of being intrinsic, purely self-referential—“literary”—events.¹² However secondary the role it plays in actual narrative execution, the factual basis of autobiographical references tends to generate texts relatively closed off from rather than wholly open to the Muse who speaks in plurisignative tongues. For the reader who is intent on maintaining the aesthetic-intransitive experience of literary texts as a criterion for autobiographies, conventional autobiographies are thus less appropriate as paradigms than novelistic works like Frank Conroy’s *Stop-time* (Mandel) or T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (Olney), or essays like Montaigne’s, which can be made over into a hypothetical narrative reflecting a discrete, cumulative, yet always present interrogation of the self who is, like a surrogate “everyman,” the narrative(s) we read, and in reading, equally become.¹³

Nostalgic for the presentational powers of imaginative literature, and desiring to colonize autobiography in the name of literary art, the “apologist” for autobiography is apt to fictionalize the object about which he theorizes. He attenuates autobiography’s explicit, formal

claim to be a legitimate personal-historical document. He underestimates the truism that autobiographical references appear *as* subject to extrinsic verification (Pascal, p. 188), especially to contemporary readers; or that autobiographies, prone to the rhetorical justifications or ideological assertions of the writing self which specifically pertain to his cultural-historical (and not timeless) milieu, also tend to exclude the immediate participation of a noncontemporary audience. Most important, such an apologist fails to consider the high casualty rate his “literary” standard would effect if it were seriously used as a way to define and judge *prima facie* autobiographies.

Must we settle, then, for that compromising, commonplace conception that depicts autobiography as a formal mutation, a hybrid genre, a vague, unresolved mixture of “truth” about the autobiographer’s life dyed into the colors of an ersatz, imaginative “design”? Or can we formulate autobiography as a unique phenomenon, definable neither as fiction nor nonfiction—not even a mixture of the two?

II

Although our recognition of autobiography as a formal genre historically precedes our attempts to explain its constitution, nothing prevents us from exploring the issue of how discrete acts of writing become identifiable *as* autobiographical to the writing self as he writes.¹⁴ Adopting this perspective, we will soon realize how alienated, how verbally entropic, the autobiographical enterprise is. Unlike the apologist for autobiography, we will find that even in the “heat” of writing, writing autobiographically seems to occlude the writer’s own continuity with the “I” being conveyed through his narrative performance.

Something of this alienation can be gleaned from thinking about marginally formal examples of autobiographical writing. Diary and journal entries, for example, not only signify their referents but also, to the writer who wrote them and now reads them in another present, the absence of his past-present consciousness as to their genesis, their original urgency or meaningfulness. Written by “another,” in this case himself, the journal writer’s previous thoughts can return to him with that Emersonian echo of alienated majesty. Such discontinuities or lesions of personal time also occur with specific memory-acts, even when these acts pertain to other memories. Thus Proust notes that

between the memory which brusquely returns to us and our present state, and

no less between two memories of different years, places, hours, the distance is such that it alone, even without any specific originality, would make it impossible to compare one with the other. Yes: if, owing to the work of oblivion, the returning memory can throw no bridge, form no connecting link between itself and the present minute, if it remains in the context of its own place and date . . . for this reason it causes us suddenly to breathe a new air, an air which is new precisely because we have breathed it in the past.¹⁵

But Proust himself demonstrates that the writer of fiction casts just such a bridge between two times and seeks to find that “new air” of old memories—memories made literally new again by their introduction into the proleptic focus of narrative. The fiction writer’s intentional act, his consciousness-of-his-memory as he signifies it, makes his “actual” memories suitable for fiction by dissolving them into silhouette images, by slipping “often,” in Kafka’s words, into the setting of a radical “once” which one can legitimately ascribe to past events. The fiction writer thus effectively displaces the private “darkness on which the memory draws” and reflects the human tendency to universalize, to make public or representable images out of, personal memories: “It was true that I had suffered successively for Gilberte, for Mme. de Guermantes, for Albertine. But successively I had also forgotten them, and only the love which I dedicated to different women had been lasting. The profanation of one of my memories by unknown readers was a crime that I myself committed before them” (p. 157).

A fictional text, then, is trained on its own present; it posits a total world composed of setting, characters, and action, whose definitive representation is kept in narrative abeyance like the still, unravished bride of imagination. It invites us as readers to fill in the blanks, to supplement its world with our own experiences in order to become simultaneous with its temporality. No less than the writer, we also submit our memories, our pasts, to the “profanation” of the fictional world. In self-conscious fiction, in works like Beckett’s *Malone Dies*, for example, we are even asked to assemble the narrative world (and often the narrative itself) we are intent on imaginatively consuming, but which we must endlessly “wait” for, thus prevented from entertaining even the illusion of preterite representation.¹⁶

The autobiographer’s intentional act, however, aggravates the duality inherent in personal memory-acts. This duality goes beyond the epistemological dilemma previously discussed, for it neither precedes the verbal act nor results in the writer’s immediate commitment to his narrative. Wanting to verbalize past events, one finds that they appear against a prelinguistic background, a gestalt of pastness, which is at once absent from these signifiable events and in

contrast with the “present” orientation of the discursive intention.¹⁷ Moreover, written discourse exacerbates the phenomenological dilemma created by verbal recollection. More than speaking, writing is what “explodes that darkness on which the memory draws.” Writing exposes that experienced arbitrary relation between the act of signification and the signified past; writing makes possible the isolation of pastness vis-à-vis the verbal medium which initially permits the autobiographical project to be conceived. Not the omission of facts—this after all implies that the past is a hypothetically recoverable totality—but the omission of the past itself stands beyond the pale of spoken recitations of one’s life. Augustine’s written confessions, for example, lie somewhere between his awareness of his own lacuna-ridden past and his awareness that language displaces this past whenever he speaks of it to others: “with regard to the past, when this is reported correctly what is brought out from the memory is not the events themselves (these are already past) but words conceived from the images of those events. . . . My boyhood, for instance, which no longer exists, exists in time past, which no longer exists. But when I recollect the image of my boyhood and tell others about it [*cum eam recolo et narro*], I am looking at this image in time present.”¹⁸ “Words” used in telling, while being two removes from the event indicated by “this image,” do not provoke the “autobiographical” speaker to focus on their problematic, nonimmediate relation to the remembered event being signified.

Thus the speaker tends not to recognize that the “I” used in his speech act is, as Roland Barthes has said, “always new, even if it is repeated” and despite the fact that his interlocutors suppose this “I” to be “a stable sign, product of a complete code whose contents are recurrent.”¹⁹ But in writing, this breach between an “always new” narrator and a “stable” one becomes imminent: “When a narrator [of a written text] recounts what has happened to him, the *I* who recounts is no longer the one that is recounted” (p. 162). Even this recounting “I,” composed of what Barthes after Emil Benveniste calls “the instance of discourse,” is not the self who writes as long as we take this self to be “an interiority constituted previous to and outside language” (p. 163). From this view, autobiography would seem to be guilty of Barthean “bad faith.” Is not autobiography an attempt to signify the autobiographer’s nontextual identity or “interiority”? But in the above quotation Augustine not only suggests but demonstrates—*by* his writing—the capacity of writing to isolate and transcend the way spoken self-references hypostatize images of his past as the events themselves. Writing, as it does here, thus bears metaverbal gifts: it allows Augustine to reflect on its own process of signification; to grasp the nonexistence or absence of his past in relation to both spoken and

written self-references. Most important to a Christian autobiographer, it allows him to “confess,” to be a witness or (in the older sense of the word) a “confessor” to his brute “I was” and “I am” apart from what he can record verbally about his life.

The written text consequently functions as a point of meditative departure for Augustine. Desiring to be more and more aware of God’s Creation, Augustine also desires to interpret his personal existence as a self-experienceable sign of this Creation. Autobiographical writing facilitates this interpretation insofar as it elicits, by exposing the discrepancy between the past he has lived and his “present” signification of it, a consciousness of self which transcends his “words” and is therefore imageless—just *there* in its absence and pastness: the mystery of his own time contemplated as testimony to God’s Creation in Book XI of the *Confessions*. Similarly, the image of self propagated by the lexical “I” of discourse allows him to grasp what his actual present is not; the “I” of his textual present becomes grounds for identifying his present as his own, a mystery to himself, through but finally beyond his discrete textual acts. And again, focused on himself, the “silence” of written discourse compared with the spoken serves as an immediate occasion to apprehend the silent or private identity of his own soul, especially since, as we have already observed, it has the capacity to unloosen and disrupt the coitions of words, images, and events. Written words recognize, as it were, their finite status: they essentially signify a higher signifier, the *logos* of human consciousness, which in turn signifies what cannot become signified, the eternal *Logos*. In this sense, the words composing Augustine’s *Confessions* are imitations, copies, or more precisely, intentional acts whose object, his consciousness of self as such, reduces them to exterior signs concealing (dialectically determined) silent or invisible confessions: “And I do not make my confessions by means of the words and sounds of the flesh, but with the words of the soul and the crying out of my thought which [Your] ear knows” (X.2).

While in Augustine’s *Confessions*, ideology and autobiography complement each other, it seems evident from later examples of the genre that such complementarity is due as much to the self-intentionality induced by autobiographical writing as to the prescriptive demands, say, of Christianity. Thus, self-abnegation, the transcendence of self from an existence named and nameable by discourse, constitutes revelation for Augustine but is a source of anxiety and paranoia for Rousseau. At the very least, such transcendence underscores the suicidal implications of the genre. But what we need to stress here is that the written autobiographical act—and not a prior cognitive or methodological dilemma—yields this potential self-abnegation, this divorce

between the writing self and his textual rendition. There is no question of “bad faith” with the autobiographical act, only with the ensuing product which presents the writer as he writes with an empty or discursive “self,” an “I” never his own because it makes present what remains past to him. It is as if he could communicate his life to others but never to himself: “There’s no such thing as the impossibility of communication except in a single case: between me and myself.”²⁰

The autobiographer thus cannot assume, as can a writer of traditional or self-conscious fiction, that he can elide the gap between himself as he writes and the discursive “I” passing *seriatim* through any sustained piece of writing. And where spoken discourse minimizes this discontinuity, the ambiguous anonymity of the “I” in a written work radicalizes it and raises the issue of transcendent privacy, the pressure of sheer pastness, as imminently invading the autobiographer’s necessary acts of recollection. Thus, to acknowledge such a pressure and yet to persist in the autobiographical project, the autobiographer must come to terms with a unique pronominal crux: how can he keep using the first-person pronoun, his sense of self-reference, without its becoming—since it becomes, in the course of writing, something other than strictly his own self-referential sign—a *de facto* third-person pronoun?

To write autobiographically, then, one has no choice but to engage somehow, in some manner, the “impersonating” effect of discourse, either to give into it as Gertrude Stein does, for example, in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, or to resist it openly as Henry Miller does in *Tropic of Cancer*. On such diacritical retention of the “I” does autobiographical intentionality depend. In this sense, Thoreau’s famous assertion at the beginning of *Walden* lends itself to two contexts of interpretation: “In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained.” Formally, this is “apology,” an asserted justification of “egotism” or vanity to the self-effacing norms of conventional and literary writing. But phenomenologically, it is a self-conscious insistence on the self-referentiality of his “I” made in the face of writing’s law of gravity, that is, to write of his own existence as if it were not radically grounded in his own existence.

III

Autobiographical writing thus entails a split intentionality: the “I” becoming a “he”; the writer’s awareness of his life becoming private even as he brings it into the public domain or presentifies it through

his act of writing. This split, peculiar to the autobiographical task, suggests that the project of writing about oneself to oneself is always at the beginning, is always propaedeutic in structure, and therefore prone to an obsessive concern with method as well as a “stuttering,” fragmented narrative appearance.²¹ But there are ways to mitigate this split. One can try to suppress the consciousness of pastness; or one can “confess” it openly to oneself; or one can even extol it and emphasize the narcissism proposed by the autobiographical act. If a self-referential privacy defines the autobiographical act as such to the writing self, then how he deals with this self-privacy during the course of his writing also determines the mode of autobiographical statements and the resultant appearance of the “form.”

Needless to say, any or all three type(s) of mitigation may occur within particular autobiographical narratives, for in autobiography, especially, the part determines the whole. Despite the fact that the formal identity of a given autobiography tends to be unstable, however, let us transform these three into a typological spectrum, supposing that an autobiographical writer is apt to rely on one of them to the exclusion of the others. Thus in the first type, the memoir mode, the writer tends to suppress his evocation of pastness by surrendering to the presentifying or public currents of language and literary convention, notably to the criteria of “self” they bear as the matrices of the writer’s historical situation, thus governing the way any contemporary might represent himself to others. The memoir-prone autobiographer uses language to declassify information about his life: he uses language to apprehend his own life as an intersubjective phenomenon. Discourse proffers the impression that his life is transparently accessible to others—readers immediately invoked as he writes—and he accedes to this impression in order to distract himself from the marginalia of pastness which his autobiographical act intentionally sets in motion. Thus, for example, an autobiographer’s apostrophic appeal to an indefinite “posterity” not only serves to modify contemporary pressures affecting his act of self-representation, it also serves to defuse, for himself, the issue of pastness the autobiographical act itself brings up.²² If this issue were pursued further, it could disrupt the project; it would desocialize or *declassify*, as he writes, whatever intersubjective sense of self the autobiographer has carried into his work.

The “secret” script of Pepys’s diaries, for example, relativizes or circumvents his implicit alienation as a voyeur or private person in a bourgeois society. Excluding, in effect, this contemporary sense of self (for which nonsecret diaries would have sufficed), his private code “presents” or defines himself to himself before an imagined, unalien-

ated audience “located” in some indefinite future where and when he will be only the self signified by his diaries. Like most diarists, Pepys believes in the magical power of language to banish now, in the present of his discourse, the blank waysides accruing to lived time. For this reason, he writes “posthumously”: in and through a discursive present when his quotidian experiences will have been and “are” saved from becoming irretrievably past.

But language used in this manner is given an overdetermined power of self-revision. The memoir-prone writer relies heavily on preestablished verbal conventions to neutralize, to accommodate self-convincingly, the private past which his act intentionally brings up to him as an immanent pressure. Hence, the formal habits of autobiographies are often strategies to reinforce the line against phenomenological eruptions of private time. The famous *res gestae* format, for instance, effectively public-izes the writer’s already public deeds; or it sets up a socially current, ideological framework which makes the writer’s “interior” experiences, as with religious autobiographies and their depictions of sins, graces, conversions, and spiritual trials, seem fully accessible to himself as well as others. Similarly, the teleological pattern, the convention of treating one’s life as a story, encourages the writer to use socioreligious quotients of success or failure in viewing his life as having a beginning, middle, and end.²³ But the price of such usage can be telling. On the one hand, invoking the spell of intersubjective, verbal conventions—whose intersubjectivity is underscored by the visual duration of written texts—outlaws the writer’s conceiving the possibility of a radically private setting to his experiences. On the other, this possibility *becomes* possible as soon as the “I” is written down since now the writing self can “intend” this “I” as leaving behind in its wake references that alter the referents themselves: his signification of the past can appear *as* an act which conceals or, at the very least, somehow mediates it.

When and if this possibility takes hold of the autobiographer, the second or “confessional” mode of autobiographical writing becomes a manifest part of the writer’s performance of his textual project. In this borderline area between the first two modes, the autobiographical writer no longer fully entrusts his life to the present, organizing thrust of narrative or ideological conventions; rather, he intuits how his writing is a sketchy, arbitrary rendering of his life: “If Suetonius by any chance could have noted the method of this chapter,” Cardano writes near the beginning of his autobiography, “he might have added something to the advantage of his readers; for there is nothing . . . which may not in some manner be unified.”²⁴ Whenever the autobiographer simply senses that his narrative “I” belongs to language,

that it constitutes (what Freud would call) a “secondary revision” of his life, or that it is and can only be a mask of himself, he may still use this apperception of his act to filter out the pastness the act itself evokes; he may still present his references so as to be the accessible self, the anyone, which they signify. But any such declaration of independence from one’s past is self-conscious—it must be chosen continually—and hence tends to occur “here and there” rather than as a whole throughout the work. Short of aborting the autobiographical project itself, how else could it be? To identify with or certify an arbitrary rendition of oneself leads at one extreme to hagiography, and at the other to a fictive suspension of the writer’s distance from his written “I.”

Dwelling in the present afforded by this memoir-confessional type of writing is thus bound to seem deliberate as well as tentative. For example, Franklin in his *Autobiography* employs writing as a technological medium which lets him “intend” his past as a repeatable, revisable text: “I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first” (p. 43). One could argue that the *Autobiography*, written, in fact, in moments of leisure, is an act of leisure strategically tied more to Franklin’s present, his busy career as a revolutionary and diplomat, than to his past.²⁵ But there is sufficient reason to suppose that the casual, nondialectical prose of the work belies the easy givenness of his past. I would argue that the prose strives to turn past “faults” into mere “errata” because the former are indelible points of friction in Franklin’s consciousness of his past. In this sense, even his famous effort at moral reformation, his “bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection” (p. 148), indicates his overdetermined equation of verbal prescription with consciousness of self. Franklin’s “arduous Project” dovetails into his *Autobiography* as a whole since the latter too entails a project of self-transformation, of converting the private self into a wholly public one by means of language.

But the pull of the past is always a latent issue abrogating this autobiographical project. Specific memories that in “content” seem laden with affectivity are muffled by a self-evident, emotionless, almost dreamlike prose:

we both [Denham and himself] were taken ill. My Distemper was a Pleurisy, which very nearly carried me off: I suffered a good deal, gave up the Point in my own mind, and was rather disappointed when I found my Self recovering; regretting in some degree that I must now some time or other have all that disagreeable work to do over again. I forget what his Distemper was. It held

him a long time, and at length carried him off. He left me a small Legacy in a nuncapative Will . . . and he left me once more to the wide World. (P. 107)

Here particularly, Franklin's casual style belies the affective implication of his memory, namely, that his present success was nearly nullified by this past event. Thus, he manages to convert this memory, which could signify for him the contingency of his origins and therefore of his present self-identity, into the present of serially disposed, oblique verbal images like "suffered a good deal," "very nearly gave up the Point," and "in some degree." By his defused language, by the ease with which he surrenders this incident to the linear momentum of his narrative, and by his rather cursory allusion to a teleological future ("left me . . . once more to the wide World"—leading to his self-certain present) Franklin cancels his own immanent "distemper" in recollecting a specific scene charged with, for himself, social impotence and even a suicidal inclination. Language not only allows him to mitigate personal as well as social friction; as the arbiter of his own self-consciousness, it allows him to do so arbitrarily.²⁶

With its concealment of the writing self's distance from his written "I" as it appears through the autobiographical act, Franklin's *Autobiography* shows us that the exemplary motif common to autobiographies is not simply reducible to an ideology preceding the work. The exemplary or model "I" in autobiography *ipso facto* belongs to writing: it is an explicit "dummy" ego by which the autobiographer is kept aware of or acknowledges the discrepancy between his "life" and life. In more definitive cases of the confessional mode of writing, the autobiographer explicitly testifies or "confesses" to his own separation both from his written "I" as he writes and from the intersubjective imperatives incurred by the act of writing autobiography. St. Teresa openly confesses, for example, how the authority of the Church is submerging, as she writes, the actual appearance of her thus privately constituted experiences behind the verbal persona of her *Life*: "I wish I had also been allowed to describe clearly and in full detail my grave sins and wicked life. . . . [But] I have been subjected to severe restrictions [by my confessors] in the matter."²⁷ Teresa's *Life* is being written, then, as a secondary revision, a public version, of a "life" being silently and coterminously traced in her mind. What would otherwise be a repressive dilemma, however, works in Teresa's favor here. The socioreligious prescriptions forcing her to write as a spiritual persona for lay and clerical members of the Church help her determine the privacy of her past and present existence, which she can then—again, privately—sacrifice to God, offering Him, in effect, the untouched because unsignified "virginity" of her being. Thus, toward the end of

her *Life*, she willingly embraces her social isolation and, by analogy, chooses to exclude the socially discursive aspect of her written *Life*: “His Majesty [God] has put me in this little corner, where I live in such strict enclosure, and where I am so much like a dead thing that I once thought nobody would ever remember me again. But this has not been so to the extent I should like, as there are certain people to whom I am obliged to speak” (*Life*, 40.21, pp. 297-98). Like the cloister, her autobiography, encased within the intersubjective walls of language, paradoxically excludes her sense of others.

Teresa’s withdrawal from life is also, then, a withdrawal from the public aspect of her *Life*. She converts the latter into a radically private prayer, a monologic text, a secret expression of her own self, which she can only do by silently writing in reverse, toward herself alone, in order to experience what remains a project (not a realization) of religious self-abnegation. Teresa’s Christian orientation, of course, invites her to use in a positive way the duality inherent in autobiographical intentionality. But in secular autobiographies such as *The Education of Henry Adams* where no single definitive ideology, religious or otherwise, immediately circumscribes the autobiographical act, this duality results in an outright alienation from the text, in a fixation on the unresolved discrepancy between the way writing public-izes the autobiographer to others and the way it signifies himself to himself. Thus Adams sees his *Education* as a “failure,” an arbitrary document per se, reflecting neither his intersubjectively accessible life and times nor his own existence as he lived it to himself. On the one hand, he writes as an exemplary “he” caught within the teleological trappings of a narrative of “education”; yet he restricts the value and immediate availability of his work to a privileged audience that is already familiar with his life and times; and even to this audience, Adams defamiliarizes his persona by reducing it to a dumb “manikin,” to an explicit, abstract, or anonymous “he” subject to inexpressible “supersensual” forces. On the other hand, his own past appears to him through the gap pervading the middle of his life as he writes his “life.” He literally leaves out his marital life from *The Education* not because it has little to do with the topic, but because his wife’s suicide permeates his recollections with inexpressible pastness: it signifies his own immediate absence, his present discontinuity, from a life he nevertheless lived.²⁸ Unable to see himself as a representative persona for anyone, and yet also unable to “intend” his own past except in the context of a dissipating gestalt, Adams writes an autobiographical work that is, to himself, thoroughly incomplete—an “education” that leads him out of the accountable into the unaccountable aspect of his past life.

Significantly, like Teresa’s *Life*, Adams’ *Education* indicates that the

locus of autobiographical “texts” is beyond the writing *through* the writing. More, the confessional mode shows us that the autobiographer’s split from his persona not only creates the possibility—for the writer, not the reader—of an alternative text to which the written version is but an oblique “prelude” or indecisive “failure,” it also denominates the autobiographical act *as such* to the writing self. But here another problem presents itself: how can the autobiographer prevent the “autobiographical” act, with its call for textual disaffection, from inhibiting the actual execution of the autobiographical project as a whole?

Nothing plays more havoc with the continuity of autobiographical narrative than this dilemma. Given his separation from his persona, the autobiographer, simply to perform his task, must make his language refer to himself allegorically, must invert the public or “present” direction of discourse so that it will not seem at odds with the residual consciousness of self it itself allows to appear in the first place.²⁹ Yet it is precisely his own narrative activity which tempts him to forget his constitutive separation from the “I” of his discursive acts. To write autobiographically, to limit the presentational effect of his narrative on himself, the writer will often “jam” his narrative’s totalizing unity (with its promise of an unselfconscious transcription of his life) by overdetermining its parts. For this reason as much as any other, a given autobiographical work tends to be a composite, an eclecticism, of distinct verbal moments; it tends to accrue discrete pockets of verbal irrelevancies such as casual or ironic self-references; compressed or abbreviated narratives within—and redundantly apart from—the major narrative line; letters substantiating the factuality of the narrative’s references, which thus appears uncertain by itself; journal and/or diary entries that in effect depresentify the narrative’s present by evoking a past-present verbal act; and especially imaginative ramblings, digressions, “visions,” reveries, unusual or drawn-out depictions of other persons—all “spots of time,” in other words, that seem complete or self-sufficient by themselves.³⁰ Each and all of these allow the autobiographer to evade, at least temporarily, his displacement of himself through narrative and thus promote the monological appearance of his writing to himself.

Such eclecticism, no doubt, can be interpreted as part of some mimetic strategy. We could take Rousseau at his word, for example, and view the shifting “styles” in his *Confessions* as ways to depict himself according to his past “inner” thoughts and not simply the publicly verifiable facts of his past life: “I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief

subjects of my story.”³¹ More likely, however, these extraverbal swerves from self-sustaining narrative compression indicate the autobiographer’s anxiety over the way writing channels his existence into a progressive self-image not his own. Unlike the memoir mode where they serve as temporary substitutes for the perpetually inadequate self-image writing presents via autobiographical intentionality, and unlike the confessional mode where they signify a resigned or willing concession to the intersubjective limits imposed on self-expression, in various autobiographies of the narcissistic mode, these eccentric verbal moments act as signs of vigilance, guarding the writer’s consciousness of himself, his self-identity, from slipping into whatever norms of self-reference he is aware of, if only subliminally, at the time of writing. In this sense Rousseau’s “mimetic” explanation for his stylistic pluralism in the *Confessions* should be weighed against his conscientious resistance to writing about himself according to the pressures and habits of those modes of self-representation with which he was familiar before writing his work. Thus he abjures the tempting but (to himself) self-distorting routes of apologetics, religious narratives of conversion, also “[des] histoires, des vies, des portraits, des caractères. . . . [des] romans ingénieux bâtis sur quelques actes extérieurs, sur quelques discours qui s’y rapportent, sur de subtile conjectures où l’Auteur cherche bien plus à briller lui-même qu’à trouver la vérité”—he even abjures the method of what to him are the quasi-autobiographical revelations of Montaigne, claiming it only gives us a “profile” of the person, an artistic portrait of Montaigne’s self ensconced in the chiaroscuro of language.³²

Rousseau thus envisions *his* autobiographical project as a first in literary history. It is a project in every sense of the word, for to write with an ever-vigilant awareness of the distinction between persona and person, without at the same time being able to accommodate this gap, as Augustine could, by trusting in the redemptive value of verbal silence, requires an endless and taxing alertness to the monistic wiles of discourse. Using stylistic shifts to so alert him, using them as if they were diacritical signals of autobiographical intentionality per se, Rousseau can withdraw from the persona being propagated at any given point in his writing and conversely experience the verbal execution of his project as phenomenologically “truthful” to his own existence or as signifying his life to himself with a minimum of mediational interference. The honesty which Rousseau wants to claim for his *Confessions* belongs as much to his determination to be honest with the autobiographical act as to the referential accuracy or frankness of his revelations.

For Rousseau, then, to write autobiographically means to react con-

sistently and aggressively against self-forgetfulness through the discursive act—against, in other words, fictional intentionality. It also means to assert and experience his self-identity by excluding the presence of others “who” appear immediately, as a presupposition of writing, and edge him over into a consciousness of being intersubjectively transparent as opposed to unique to himself alone: “I shall continue just the same faithfully to reveal what J.-J. Rousseau was, did, and thought, without explaining or justifying the strangeness of his feelings or ideas, or inquiring whether any others have thought like him” (*Confessions*, Bk. 12, p. 595). Incessantly protesting too much, he sees himself always plotted against: the autobiographical act, with its intrinsic suspicion of all presentifying mediations of a consequently ever more inviolable pastness, condenses the object of Rousseau’s paranoia into the plot-ridden traps of language itself. Thus, even those reveries included in the *Confessions*, in spite of their seemingly random, relatively timeless and depressurized “this, then that happened” appearance, can be construed as aggressive responses to his anxiety over narrative as well as existential fixation at the time of writing.³³ Feeling plotless himself, Rousseau *looks for* plots outside of himself so that he can view himself as, in every meaning of the pronoun, the “first” person of his life: an idiosyncratic “moi, moi seul” (“Ebauches,” p. 1149) concealed between the lines of each narrative moment. In the invisible recesses of his text, Rousseau retains the I-ness of his written “I” the more he reveals it self-consciously before his anticipated readers.

Rousseau finally disdains the possibility of balancing the dualistic appearance of persona and person; rather he “intends” himself mostly as an illicit person and crosses over into what I heuristically term the narcissistic mode of autobiographical writing. In this mode, the writing self tries to transform the self-privacy yielded by the autobiographical act into a *sui generis* principle of self-identity. It is here that we encounter the provocative association of autobiography and paranoia, an association touched upon by Freud in his psychobiographical revision of Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*.³⁴ I would like to suggest that a paternalistic imago, mediated, yet not finally expressible by literal and figurative father-images (cf. Franklin’s Denham and Teresa’s confessors), generates the writer’s need to assert his self-identity repetitively or else as a once-and-for-all conversion. Psychologically fatherless and philosophically, if not rhetorically, Godless, Rousseau the autobiographer evokes, through his autobiographical act, the chaos of absence, the equivalent of Kafka’s “that darkness on which the memory draws”; he brings up his own discontinuous, arbitrary origins—his pastness—which he tries to

convert into being the fatherlike source of himself. This is why he excludes “others” from the consciousness of his act, for “they” distract him, in effect, from the self-privacy elicited by his act. So too his confessions of masturbation and general sense of betrayal by others not only signify his aggressive exclusion of others, his rejection of “social” intercourse, sexual, discursive, and otherwise; they also mirror his autobiographical act in that they represent withdrawals of erotic cathexis from others (in autobiographical terms, the “others” attached to discourse and the eventual destiny of his text) so as to experience a wholly private, autoeroticized consciousness of self. Similarly, in many Puritan autobiographies of the seventeenth century, for example, the self-abasing “I,” the writer’s narrative inflation of himself as the “chief of sinners,” serves as a ruse by which he “elects” idiosyncrasy, spiritual uniqueness, or strives to realize a definitive experience of his own spiritual identity beyond that of others and in the paranoid context, here extremized for purposes leading to self-conversion, of an arbitrary God.³⁵

There is no question but that a spirit of anarchism is bred within the autobiographical act. Such anarchism is frequently mitigated in works where the writer blends the exclusive sense of self disclosed through his act into an exclusive, though collective, “minority” persona. A Black autobiographer defining himself over and against what to him is an arbitrary yet pervasive system of White values, values synonymous with the very language he is writing in; Franklin casually asserting his American independence from the arbitrary tyranny of English political and cultural life by infiltrating the homonymic English language; homosexual autobiographies or autobiographical works like Whitman’s or Genet’s, written in the immediate context of heterosexual “others” and disguised as such for the writing self by their socially privy (“in drag”) pronominal references—these are common examples of how the writing, revolutionary self, already predisposed to resist linguistic usage that is phenomenologically occupied by a given social establishment, coincides with, and at least temporarily realizes, the narcissistic trend of autobiographical intentionality. But it is also clear that any sustained autobiographical project, predicated as it is on the duality inherent in its intentional acts, inevitably tends to expose the writing self’s distance from even his revolutionary persona—as it does in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—or else leads to its own abandonment in fact, if not in form: to a nondualistic, that is, imaginative or strictly ideological, signification of a self rather than of *one’s own* self.

The pull toward anarchic privacy, the consciousness of one’s life as one’s own, exclusive of others in and through discourse, this is both the self-experiential signal and latent direction of autobiographical

writing to the self as he writes: "This then? This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty . . . what you will."³⁶ The "this" is the narcissistic extreme of autobiographical writing. It lasts, however, only as long as the autobiographical act is performed, for only in this act can the writer suspend the ethical, psychological, and linguistic priorities engaged, to employ a quotation from Wallace Stevens, "merely in living as and where we live": it is only in the autobiographical act that the writer can "intend" the narcissistic trend of self-consciousness as a truth as opposed to a fiction of consciousness. Continued beyond this act, the autobiographer's apperceived insulation from others can go the way of mysticism or its dubious double—the translation of the autobiographical act into the supreme fixation of solipsism.

IV

Needless to say, the typologies of autobiographical writing which I have tried to elucidate in this essay refer to autobiography's "idea," to how we can think of its verbal identity from the imagined perspective of the writer immediately situated in the act of writing. For as actual readers, readers at a second remove from the text's genesis, we are fated to be voyeurs or biographers of the writer's "life." We ask the narrative to be primary: whether in content (his past) or in style (his present), the "life" necessarily appears as comparable or substantially continuous with the writer's life. But though we are bound to lend narrative totality to autobiographical significations, they intentionally reside, as I have tried to argue, beyond the narrative they are set in and as a consequence tend to *de*totalize—make contingent—this narrative.

Thus, as A. M. Clark suggested in 1935, autobiographical narratives are prone to be secondary since the autobiographer conscientiously needs "to be aware of and then to resist the temptation to create" (p. 20). Clark's observation is accurate as long as one keeps in mind that the autobiographer's awareness of and resistance to narrative fixation are not reflective but intentional acts. Except as inoperative concepts, such awareness and resistance do not preexist the writing; rather, they signify the writer's immediate consciousness of the relation of his writing with the "time" of his time. The autobiographical act discloses a spontaneous, an unsought-for intentionality, a "calling" uncalled for, which requires different responses from the writer at explicitly different intervals in the evolution of his text.

The nature of the autobiographical act thus precludes the possibility that the writer can consciously or deliberately adopt a persona behind which he conceals references to his own life. So-called “autobiographical fiction” and/or “incognito” autobiographies (Gusdorf, p. 121) are essentially meta-autobiographical insofar as they presuppose the writer’s having determined the privacy of his materials through a constantly prior “autobiographical” use of language: a prior—though nonreflective—mental-scriptural act. But this reminds us once again that the text the reader reads is at odds with the text the autobiographer writes. On the one hand, the “I” of written discourse can never in itself signify the writer’s self-presence; in fact, according to Jacques Derrida, it signifies his absence from being present to himself, for the writer can declare “I am also ‘alive’ and certain about it” only “as something that comes over and above the appearance of the meaning.”³⁷ On the other hand, the autobiographer is separated from this “I” not only because of his absence from its present, but because of the potential unverifiability of his material or references vis-à-vis the presence of the reading “other” whom he “intends” as he writes. “The child,” Emerson writes in one of his journal entries, “is sincere, and the man when he is alone, *if he be not a writer* [my italics], but on the entrance of the second person hypocrisy begins.”³⁸ We need not reduce his insight to a purely cognitive issue, namely, that in writing about himself with the foreknowledge and immediate expectation that others will read it, the writer tends to put his best or worst face forward; or conversely, that the task of the autobiographer is a privileged matter since he alone was the eyewitness of his life, he was closest to it, he alone can verify the authenticity of his references. Emerson’s entry suggests, rather, that discourse itself spontaneously bears the stamp of verifiability, for since the “reader” is implicitly continuous with all utterances, anything to which language *can* refer is already de facto verifiable. But this fact poses a special problem for the autobiographer. Whereas even in spoken memory-acts the listener is, in effect, presently witnessing and procreating the objects being signified with the speaker, in autobiographical acts this present “other” appears to the writer as having been absent from the objects being signified. In autobiographical writing the intuited “reader” is phenomenologically absent from the signified references—the writer himself thus cannot immediately apprehend the verifiability of his own references.

To mitigate his alienation from his own activity, here brought about by the intentionality of his absent readership, the autobiographer is likely to employ measures like the ones discussed in the previous section of this essay. In particular, this issue of the absent “reader”

helps explain why autobiographers commonly resort to writing in terms of autobiography's version of a Muse: an anticipated, intimate, familial or familiar reader or group of readers such as Franklin, his son, Adams, his close circle of friends (to whom *The Education* was first exclusively available), or Wordsworth, his "Friend" addressed in *The Prelude*. Such invocation temporarily alleviates the severe objectification with which the split between the signifying memory and its signified referent presents the writing self. But the fact remains that in no other discursive project does the "reader" so crucially aggravate the project's realization. Biographical and historical materials are, documented or not, intersubjective through and through. Their intentional presupposition is that others were or could have been present at their making; and biographical as well as historical narratives reinforce this presupposition by acting as transparent relayers of information to "others" who effectively are already present at the time of writing, already testifying to the verifiability of the references being made. Similarly, fictional or poetic writing projects its materials via a "reader" coterminous with its occurrence: materials thus constituted through "the instance of discourse" as if they were immediately accessible and *imaginatively* verifiable to this apparitional "reader" in the regions of discourse. The imagined, imaginary world of the writer of fiction is always a "sharable" proposition.³⁹

But in autobiographical writing, materials seeming verifiable at first turn out to be unverifiable as they are written. Except by an act of will, which already implies a separation from his act of writing, the autobiographer cannot rely on the "others" of discourse to substantiate his references in a phenomenological sense. Writing raises the possibility that these "others" could have "existed" the writer's existence, and raises it as he writes. But in doing this, writing also estranges him from his signified referents, his "life"—an experience he alone is privy to as he writes since he is, quite literally, the only one who can *signify* his life *to himself*. There is no escaping this vicious circle. As estranged, autobiographical referents tend to appear within a dreamlike setting to the writing self, and here, at least, autobiographical writing seems to resemble fictional more than biographical or other "factual" modes of writing. But even this resemblance must be qualified. The autobiographer cannot refer to his life *as* a dream without losing the autobiographical consciousness of his "life"; he cannot efface himself through a dream narrative except, again, by a willful act that denotes itself as such as he writes; nor can he fully commit himself to writing about writing's inability to signify his life as he tries nevertheless to do so, for this would amount to conceding his discursive act to the consciousness of "others": this would abort the autobiographical project

itself—which is structured on the “reader’s” absence and hence predicated on the veto of all modes of imaginative intentionality.

We might say, then, that autobiography is neither fictive nor non-fictive, not even a mixture of the two. We might view it instead as a unique, self-defining mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, the project of self-presentification, of converting oneself into the present promised by language. We might also say that its logical extreme would be the conception of a private language, though no such thing exists as we know from Wittgenstein. At this extreme, the autobiographer’s life appears like a daydream that at first seems recordable, but then, when the attempt is made to record it, eludes the word. “All we communicate to others,” says Bachelard concerning such attempts, “is an *orientation* towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively.”⁴⁰ Thus we might conceive of autobiographical writing as an endless prelude: a beginning without middle (the realm of fiction), or without end (the realm of history); a purely fragmentary, incomplete literary project, unable to be more than an arbitrary document like the one Wordsworth, in Book VII of his autobiographical poem, recalls having seen appended to the person of a blind beggar, signifying for all of its verbal brevity and plainness

. . . the utmost we can know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe. . . .

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NOTES

- 1 James M. Cox, “Autobiography and America,” in *Aspects of Narrative*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York, 1971), p. 145.
- 2 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 307-8.
- 3 The problematic presence of fictional techniques and/or elements in autobiographical works has often been cited, but no less often qualified in order to argue for autobiography’s generic difference from overt works of fiction: Arthur Melville Clark, *Autobiography: Its Genesis and Phases* (1935; rpt. London, 1969), pp. 10-21; Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 162-78 and 185-95; Alfred Kazin, “Autobiography as Narrative,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 3 (Fall 1964), 210-16; Barrett John Mandel, “The Autobiographer’s Art,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 27 (Winter 1968), 215-26; and Stephen Shapiro, “The Dark Continent of Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 5 (Dec. 1968), 421-54. Georg Misch provocatively suggests autobiography’s historically relative, parasitic, and thus secondary adoption of “the different forms with which different periods provide the individual for his self-revelation and self-portrayal,” in his important *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, tr. E. W. Dickes (London, 1950), I, 4.

- 4 Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," in *Formen der Selbstdarstellung*, ed. Reichenkron and Haase (Berlin, 1956), pp. 116 f.
- 5 Pascal, esp. pp. 83 and 188. It should be noted that Pascal and Gusdorf ideologically stress the "formal" limitations of autobiography; they do not wish to claim, finally, that autobiography is what Pascal terms "imaginative art."
- 6 See Francis R. Hart, "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," *New Literary History*, 1 (Spring 1970), esp. 490-91 and 500-506. Hart might well have cited Rousseau in support of this "experimental" position, as Jean Starobinski does in his "The Style of Autobiography," in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York, 1971), p. 294, n. 12. A clear statement of the autobiographer's "restlessness" with respect to his autobiographical efforts is given by Michael G. Cooke, "Modern Black Autobiography in the Tradition," in *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities*, ed. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca, 1973). Cooke argues that the autobiographer's verbal "self-presentation [has] . . . to be tied up with a question of identity; the autobiographer loses clarity and authority even as he multiplies himself" (p. 259).
- 7 Starobinski, p. 186. Cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1962), p. 54.
- 8 Gusdorf, pp. 120-23, is also willing to see that the autobiographer's present consciousness of himself is incomplete since it is exposed toward his future. Pascal recognizes this aspect of the autobiographer's present, though he also warns against making it the definitive center of autobiography. Mandel, pp. 221 and 225, claims in effect that the autobiographer's "purpose" or "design" is, like Frye's sense of "dianoia" (pp. 77-78), a simultaneous, vividly present apprehension of the writer's life. For related arguments on this issue, see Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, tr. Marilynn J. Rose (1957; rpt. Bloomington, Ind., 1973), pp. 98-102; David Levin, *In Defense of Historical Literature* (New York, 1967), pp. 58-60; also see Burton Pike, "Time in Autobiography," *Comparative Literature*, 28 (Fall 1976), esp. pp. 327-28 and 337-39.
- 9 Mandel, "Autobiography—Reflection Trained on Mystery," *Prairie Schooner*, 46 (Winter 1972/73), 327.
- 10 James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, 1972), p. 44.
- 11 Such discrimination is not always determinable in a generic or an objective sense, that is, by the *kind* of statement, fictive or nonfictive, the work is structured upon. But we do recognize—caused by whatever signals, conventions, or external information—this difference in our consciousness of the statement. See Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York, 1968), p. 68; Hamburger, pp. 277-87; and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Poetry as Fiction," *New Literary History*, 2 (Winter 1971), 259-81.
- 12 Olney, esp. pp. 30-50, 261-65, and 312-14.
- 13 Olney hardly conceals this attitude throughout his work, but see esp. pp. 79-88 and 299-316. Both Olney and Frye (p. 307) see Montaigne's work as "a confession made up of essays in which only the continuous narrative of the longer form is missing." Applying Frye's "fictional modes" to kinds of autobiography, William L. Howarth holds that one kind, "autobiography as poetry," is composed of a seriated narrative (like a series of one artist's self-portraits) in which the writer "writes solely for himself, in the *lyric* genre, but the hero of his book is its reader, who alone can master its final form," in "Some Principles of Autobiography," *New Literary History*, 5 (Winter 1974), 377 et passim.
- 14 The paradox of genre and history is mentioned by René Wellek, "Genre Theory, the Lyric, and *Erlebnis*," in his *Discriminations* (New Haven, 1970), p. 252.
- 15 Marcel Proust, *The Past Recaptured*, tr. Andreas Mayor (New York, 1971), p. 132.

16 Hamburger discusses this notion of poetry and fiction's a-temporality, its sheer presence (but not "present"), throughout her *Logic*, but see esp. pp. 45-46, 64-98, and 139-40. This concept of fiction must also be the assumption behind any literary ideology which, like the "new criticism," views the literary work as an "intrinsic" phenomenon.

17 See Stephen A. Erickson, "Language and Meaning," pp. 39-57, and Robert R. Ehman, "William James and the Structure of Self," pp. 266-70, in *New Essays in Phenomenology*, ed. James M. Edie (Chicago, 1969). For a discussion of the difference between events and memories of them, see Brian Smith, *Memory* (New York, 1966), esp. pp. 88-94 and 193-206.

18 St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, tr. Rex Warner (New York, 1963), XI.18. The interpretation I am suggesting here concerning the split autobiographical act—between discursive (present) "I" and the recollected self—is argued from a different angle and with different but nevertheless insightful results by Eugene Vance, "Augustine's *Confessions* and the Grammar of Selfhood," *Genre*, 6 (Mar. 1973), 1-28.

19 Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" in *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Richard and Fernande De George (Garden City, N.Y., 1972), p. 163. For a further discussion of the semiological significance of the autobiographical "I" which I am about to query, see Michael Ryan, "Narcissus Autobiographer: *Marius the Epicurean*," *ELH*, 43 (Summer 1976), esp. pp. 184-86.

20 Eugene Ionesco, *Fragments of a Journal*, tr. Jean Stewart (New York, 1968), p. 74. If the medium of writing is essential to the identity of the autobiographical act, are we not forced to question the association of autobiography with cinematic narratives or those told to and scripted by an amanuensis? Autobiographical intention does not constitute autobiographical intentionality.

21 Cf. Hart's quote in "Notes," p. 490, from Dillon Johnston, "The Integral Self in Post-Romantic Autobiography," Diss. University of Virginia, 1969.

22 Wayne Shumaker, *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form* (Berkeley, 1954), pp. 35 et passim, sees but a formal problem in the fact that "[when an autobiographer] saw, he saw *things*: when he thought, he thought *thoughts*: and these things and thoughts may appear less intimately personal to his reader than to himself." As for references to "posterity" in autobiographical works, such occur, to take two major examples, in Rousseau's *Confessions* (future readers will vindicate him, Rousseau feels) and in Franklin's "memoirs" where he justifies his project by saying that "my Posterity may like to know, as they may find [the means by which he has arrived at a present 'State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World'] suitable to their own Situations." *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, 1964), p. 43.

23 For the *res gestae* formulae in spiritual autobiographies, see Roger Sharrock's Introduction to John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Oxford, 1962), and also Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1969), pp. 89 ff. GUSDORF's notion of autobiography's "original sin," the teleological dilemma discussed in the first section of this essay, needs to be examined in this context of phenomenological strategy.

24 Jerome Cardan[o], *The Book of My Life*, tr. Jean Stoner (New York, 1930), p. 9.

25 This is basically James Cox's view of Franklin's *Autobiography*. See "Autobiography and America," pp. 148-55.

26 Franklin himself tells us that he disliked using language that "tends to create Opposition" (p. 65)—compare this attitude with his oft-cited description of his first trip to Philadelphia (pp. 70-75) where a memory laden with affectivity, signaled by the hectically detailed narrative, leads to his arbitrary and self-disarming justification of such detail, viz., "that you may in your Mind compare such unlikely Beginnings with the

Figure I have since made there" (p. 75). In discussing this passage, Robert Sayre in *The Examined Self* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 19-21, accepts Franklin's explanation of a purposive exaggeration of his "unlikely Beginnings" at face value.

27 St. Teresa, *The Life*, in *The Complete Works of St. Teresa*, ed. and tr. E. Allison Peers (London, 1946), I, 9.

28 Howarth, p. 369, does not question that Adams is one of those autobiographers who "carve public monuments out of their private lives. This didactic purpose . . . explains Adams's choice of 'Education' as a metaphor for his life." But cf. the excerpts from Adams' letters appended to the Riverside Edition of *The Education of Henry Adams*, ed. Ernest Samuels (Boston, 1973), where Adams refers to his masochistic resistance to having his text made public ("I . . . send it out into the world only to be whipped" [p. 510]) and alludes to its being no more than a failed experiment (p. 512), especially in lieu of how his personal "education, in spite of the most favorable conditions ran down hill, for twenty years, into the bog labelled Failure" (p. 513). For Adams, *The Education* "at least served one purpose—that of educating *me*" (p. 511): distinctly a private rather than a public effect.

Like Adams, Thoreau also "omits" a familial death and writes in terms of it in his autobiographical *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*; like *The Education*, *A Week* is a private "book of the dead" commemorating experiences lost yet still intentionally affecting the writer's present at the time of writing.

29 Fredric Jameson defines allegory this way in *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 71-72. Also see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore, 1969), esp. p. 197.

30 Most of the works cited in this essay contain at least several examples of such discrete interruptions. Thoreau's *A Week* exemplifies all of the ones mentioned here. Even Augustine's latter discursive ruminations in his *Confessions*, especially on time, can be interpreted as a spiritual re-vision of his "life," a self-conscious repetition of his work's process or method: a confession, to himself, of the self-referential "silence" of his narrated story which by itself—as his literal confession of having wept over reading the narrative of Virgil's Dido shows—could distract him into its totality and from the extratextual issue of his (thus narratively unique) autobiographical project. It merits speculation that what we might term the autobiographical "repetition compulsion," the actual rewriting or just going into greater detail and/or abstraction over previously signified material (cf. textual histories of autobiographies by Wordsworth, de Quincey, Nabokov, and Henry Miller), also suggests the incompleteness, the "prelude" appearance, of autobiographical works to their authors.

31 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, tr. J. M. Cohen (Baltimore, 1954), Bk. 7, p. 262.

32 Rousseau, "Ebauches des *Confessions*," *Oeuvres Complètes*, I (Paris, 1959), 1149 and 1150.

33 In one of his "rêveries" in *The Confessions*, Rousseau, rowing on the lake, experiences a joy he cannot "really understand . . . unless it was perhaps some secret self-congratulation at being thus out of the reach of the wicked" (Bk. 12, p. 594). Reveries included in *The Confessions* are not, because of their eccentric positioning with the main narrative, the lyrical "presents" which they apparently represent when recorded by themselves; but for an "anti-social" interpretation of the *Rêveries* by themselves, see Christie Vance, "Rousseau's Autobiographical Venture: A Process of Negation," *Genre*, 6 (Mar. 1973), 108-12. Rousseau's paranoiac sense of others observing his act of writing occurs explicitly in Bk. 12, p. 574, of *The Confessions*. Related to this last issue, cf. the conditions under and with which Franklin writes his *Autobiography* on pp. 12-13 of this essay.

- 34 Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," in *Three Case Histories*, ed. Philip Rieff (1963; rpt. New York, 1972), pp. 103-86.
- 35 See Delany, p. 60 et passim. Teresa's inability to predict and sometimes to authenticate "visions" which are beyond her control, visited upon her by the unknowable discretions of God, may "explain" the self-abasements she propagates on herself in *The Life*. This feminine or passive relation to an arbitrary God is matched by Freud's observation in "Psychoanalytic Notes . . . Paranoia," p. 129, that Schreber's delusions took the form of his assuming "a feminine attitude towards God; he felt that he was God's wife." Cf. Michael Ryan's "Narcissus Autobiographer" where, using a "French Freudian" grid, he tries to examine Pater's "fictional autobiography" according to unconsciously expressed "oedipal relations" and in terms of the autobiographer's narcissistic desire for autogratiication in relation to the autobiographical project itself.
- 36 Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934; rpt. New York, 1961), p. 2.
- 37 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, tr. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill., 1973), p. 96. On the writer's "private" relation to his use of language, see Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, tr. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston, 1967), pp. 10-18.
- 38 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman, Alfred R. Ferguson, et al., IV (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 314.
- 39 E. D. Hirsch discusses this issue in his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967), esp. in his first chapter and particularly pp. 14-19. Hirsch's distinction between private "meaning experience" and public or sharable "meaning" and his sense that the latter is essential and the former contingent to the constitution of a text, emphasize how problematic autobiographical writing is compared with other modes since, as I have tried to argue, it is bound through its very structure to engage "meaning experience." Howarth, however, argues for the reader's continuity with the autobiographical text in "Some Principles of Autobiography," esp. pp. 366, 371, 373, 374, 379, 381. Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore, 1976), also strongly argues for the "performative," i.e., the writer/reader, speech-context which subtends autobiographical texts (see esp. pp. 1-32).
- 40 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, tr. Maria Jolas (New York, 1964), p. 13.