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Chapter 2

Medieval Autobiography

The *Opusculum de conversione sua* presents itself as an autobiography, and more precisely an autobiography about conversion. It is its form that should concern us, independent of the questions that have already been raised regarding the "authenticity" of the testimony and the Jewish identity of the supposed "author." I insist all the more on this point since the scholarship of the past fifteen years that has been devoted to this text, most of which concerns whether Judas/Herman existed or not and whether he indeed wrote the text, has for the most part neglected the question of its autobiographical form, thus abandoning the path once opened by Georg Misch. The separate but related questions of "autobiography" and "author" cannot be understood in a vacuum, but only in the relevant context of the period. During the Middle Ages "authors" tended to express themselves by hiding behind "authorities," that is, models, arguments, and quotes by which they were "authorized" to write. It is their arrangement in their own texts that often constitutes the main strategy of their writings. On the other hand, this did not prevent an often abundant use of the first person and even the desire on the part of certain "authors" to present themselves to their readers, to tell their life stories, and even to reveal their feelings. It is somewhat paradoxical, then, that the literary culture of the Middle Ages made a place for autobiographical forms of writing.

By all available evidence, the *Opusculum* is a remarkable example of such an autobiography. It has an author who gives his name, explains to a certain "Henry" the reasoning behind his work, and relates the peripities of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. So far, all seems simple and clear. In fact, however, all these categories as we understand them today—of "author" or "autobiography," no less than the notion of "fiction," of which we have already spoken—must be subjected to a historical critique. These terms must be applied with caution to the realities of the Middle Ages.

An "Author"?

It is for the sake of convenience that we speak of the "author." But even in our day this notion poses many problems for the philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists who study the issue of literary creation.[1] The same is true, perhaps more so, when we turn to the multiple genres of medieval Latin or of vernacular literature. The notion of "author" is not fixed in the vocabulary of the Middle Ages but derives from two distinct ideas, that of *actor*, which denotes the one who conceives of a book, and that of *auctor*, which refers to the authenticity guaranteed by an authority (*auctoritas*).[2] The medieval author, who strictly speaking is the one who "augments" the subject of written knowledge, does not necessarily lay claim to originality as would a modern author. Often enough, his talent consists in a compilation (a term by no means pejorative at this time), that is, in the skillful arrangement of earlier sources and writings, of quotations from the Bible, Church Fathers, and other "authorities" both ancient and recent. Inasmuch as the notions of "signature" and "intellectual property" are unknown during this period,[3] those who write are not interested in asserting their identity. By hiding behind an illustrious name, such as St. Augustine, for example, they guarantee a reputation for their work that it would not otherwise be able to enjoy.[4] As Roger Dragonetti has remarked, the Middle Ages are a time of "pseudonymous writings." With regard to vernacular literature, the concealment of the "author's" name, or the occasional word games based on his name, such as endlessly misleading anagrams, are not necessarily marks of humility (of the sort that can account for the anonymity of monk writers). Rather, such concealment relates to the medieval conception of writing and knowledge, so much so that writers knew how to draw "effects of meaning" from these word games, inversions, pseudonyms, and double meanings. Even such names as "Chrétien de Troyes," the Christian from Troyes, "Jean Renart," John the Fox, or "François Villon" might be symbolic constructions as much as "real" names . . .[5]

But none of this seems to be relevant to the *Opusculum* of Herman the Jew. If the *Life of Godfried of Cappenberg* is indeed anonymous, the *Opuscu-*

lum, on the other hand, is attributed to a named author, Herman, who speaks in the text in the first person. But what has been said above regarding fiction should be enough to give us pause. The idea that a canon named Herman was able to sit down at his desk, alone, in order to write his memoirs, is totally anachronistic. Such an idea ignores an essential dimension of medieval literature to which many recent works, such as those by Paul Zumthor and Michael Clanchy, have called attention: its dimension of orality. For it is this dimension which is put forward in the very first lines of the *Opusculum*, in Herman's letter to his "son Henry": giving in to the repeated demands of the brothers and sisters of Cappenberg who often heard him *tell* his story, Herman finally resolves to put it in writing. Nothing therefore prevents us from imagining an oral circulation in the first instance of such an account by one of the "many Jewish converts" which Cappenberg gloried in welcoming. This could then have been followed by a redaction by an *actor/auctor*, perhaps this still surviving convert, or perhaps, as Avrom Saltman has convincingly suggested, by another Cappenberg canon (or even several), writing after the death of their "Hebrew brother" and sprinkling his story with quotations from the Vulgate which can equally serve as "authorities," even going so far as to give this brother a name, Herman, while leaving us to try and discover its significance.

It thus serves no purpose to try to over-individualize and over-personalize this piece of writing. One has first to consider this text, like many medieval works, in its tension between orality and writing, and consider it more for its *form* (whoever was responsible for it) and less from the point of view of its "author," a notion easily tainted with anachronism. Today we call this form "autobiography," and the real matter before us is to understand of what this form consists and why this form was chosen.

Monodic Writing

One of the first scholars to turn to the *Opusculum*, we have already noted, was the distinguished historian of autobiography Georg Misch.[6] His ambitious enterprise was brought to completion in exile and published immediately following the Second World War. For its magnitude, erudition, and the finesse of his analyses of innumerable texts, one can classify Misch's work as one of the great historiographical landmarks of the twentieth century. It belongs to a long tradition of German philosophy that goes back to Goethe and Herder, passing through to Jakob Burckhardt and Wilhelm Dilthey (d. 1911), Misch's direct master and father-in-law.[7] This tradition puts emphasis on the "development" in the history of the West of what the author calls "sense of identity" (*die Entwicklung des Persönlichkeitsbewusstseins*). To Misch it seemed more important to defend a progressive representation of European history seen from the angle of a history of consciousness—a representation not so different from Norbert Elias's notion of the "progress of civilization" proposed during those same years—when "its loss seemed sealed" by the anti-humanist totalitarianism which was rife in Germany and in Europe at the time Misch conceived of, and carried out, his work.[8] He wrote his work like a great chronological fresco: from pagan antiquity through Judaism (including the prophet Jeremiah in the seventh century B.C.) and Christianity (starting with Saint Paul and then Gregory of Nazianzus and especially Saint Augustine) he aimed to compile a register of all "autobiographical" works produced in the West. As has often been noted, the early Middle Ages shows itself to be rather lacking in works of this genre (with the notable exceptions of Gregory of Tours[9] and Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century, Valerius in the seventh, Audradus Modicus in the ninth, and Ratherius of Verona in the tenth). The rebirth of the genre comes in the eleventh century with Peter Damian and Otloh of Saint-Emmeran and especially in the twelfth century, with writers from Guibert of Nogent and Bernard of Clairvaux to Peter Abelard, among many others. The flowering of various forms of autobiographical writings is only confirmed by Dante and Petrarch and the Renaissance that followed.[10] Misch's criterion for cataloguing these works and their authors is the personal expression of one's self-consciousness. This expression takes many different forms, and it is far from always having to do with an "autobiography" in the sense of a text written entirely for that purpose and relating to a specific literary genre. The texts that are included are of a most varied kind: letters, visionary accounts, pedagogical dialogues, theoretical treatises, polemical works or works in the form of a "confession," etc. Thus one could reproach Misch for having occasionally cast his net too widely, while in other respects his list presents some lacunae that are difficult to account for.[11] But isn't the question precisely to know how it is possible to speak of an autobiographical "genre," or, more precisely, of autobiographical "forms" as early as the Middle Ages?

Although a specialist on autobiography as eminent as Philippe Lejeune willingly recognizes the existence of a "personal literature" before 1770, as well as outside of Europe, he nevertheless attaches the birth of the autobiographical genre to Western modernity and, more especially, to the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Indeed, nothing is more alien to the Middle Ages than Rousseau's egotistical claim about the absolute singularity of his personality and his simultaneous claim about the unique character of his literary project, which is according to him without precedence and without posterity: "I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent, and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man is myself."[12] Rousseau forgets that the very title of his work is an explicit reference to Saint Augustine and the entire Christian tradition!

Having circumscribed chronologically the object of his study, Philippe Lejeune offers a precise definition for the genre: autobiography is "a retrospective account in prose that an actual person gives of his or her own existence, with the emphasis placed on the individual life, and in particular the development of the personality." He adds that in order to speak of autobiography, "it is necessary that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist be one." For Lejeune this forms the foundation on which the essential matter rests: what he calls the "reader's contract" or the "autobiographical pact" between narrator and reader.[13] One has to begin not so much from the work, he explains, but from the exterior point of view of its reception: "Thus if autobiography is defined by something exterior to the text, it is not because it falls short of an unverifiable resemblance to a real person, but because it is more than the type of reading it gives rise to, the belief it creates, and the belief which can be found in the text itself."[14]

These strong remarks pose a number of problems for medievalists wishing to speak of autobiography in their period. The fact that medieval Latin and vernacular literature makes an abundant use of the grammatical "I" in letters or monastic treaties in order to express the great themes of spiritual friendship, as with Ailred of Rievaulx, or in order to have the listeners of an epic song bear witness to the veracity of the account, does not constitute a sufficient criterion, for it seems often enough that no personality, no "author," stands behind the text. In an article entitled "Autobiography in the Middle Ages?" Paul Zumthor concludes that such a genre does not exist for this period, adding, "there are very few medieval literary texts where one encounters some *I*, the subject of 'direct discourse,' that is to say words for which the referent of this *I* is the enunciator."[15] As the critic par excellence of the resolutely "autoreferential" character of medieval literature, did Paul Zumthor, like Roger Dragonetti, succumb too much to the pervading structuralism of the 1970s and underestimate the subjective value of the "poet's *I*"?[16]

Since then scholars of medieval literature have tried to rehabilitate both the subject and the author. For Michel Zink it is "subjectivity" that signals the birth of "literature" in the thirteenth century. But one has to guard against any anachronism: "literary subjectivity" in the Middle Ages is not "spontaneous display or real expression in a text of an author's personality, opinions, or feelings, but rather what marks the text as the point of view of a consciousness." The text "designates itself as the product of a particular consciousness"[17] and it is in this that subjectivity and literature are inextricably linked. For as Michel Zink rightly notes: all is not new in this double appearance, for "the Middle Ages were a time of subjectivity."[18] The entire ideology of this period, an ideology intimately linked to Christianity, presupposes a personal connection between believer and God. It is thus no accident that the long tradition of *confessio* runs through the majority of the texts that Misch, in his history of autobiography, uses as markers for the medieval period. This concept of *confessio* needs to be understood first in the Augustinian sense of confession of one's faith to God and then in the penitential sense of confession of sins.

It is nevertheless clear that there do not exist for the Middle Ages any autobiographies in the modern sense of the term. But there does exist a "monodic narration" which, under the notion of *confessio*, is devoted to the alliance between Christian subject and God. This consists of "singing oneself alone" (*chanter soi seul*) without distinguishing the subject "self" that addresses its prayer to God and the object "self," which is placed under the watch of one's consciousness and the consciousness of God. In the thirteenth century still, one has to look for "monodic narration . . . within the memoir range of confession. The thirteenth century was the age of memoirs."[19]

While studying the "verse autobiographies" of the two Latin poets of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Hildebert of Lavardin and Hugh Primat of Oréans, Jean-Yves Tilliette also concluded that it is necessary to handle the word "autobiography" with caution for this period. He first gives the impression of siding entirely with Paul Zumthor regarding the impossibility of knowing anything about the authors behind their texts: in the first case "the poem tells us nothing of the psychological personality of its author," the scenes evoked are only types and "Hildebert's 'I' comes to be identified with *homo*, the human being"; if in the second case Hugh gives his proper name, *Primas*, this move inspires Tilliette to offer the following commentary:

> This oblique manner of signing denotes on one hand the assumption of an identity—rather egotistical given the pseudonym—and on the other hand the distancing by the writer (who never signs *Hugo*) from the literary personage whom he stages in the first person, for it is indeed a staging. All Hugh Primat's autobiographical poems, or the ones alleged to be such, converge towards the construction of a *persona* in the sense that psychologists, following Cicero and Horace, use the term, that is the way we choose to appear to others, like a theatrical mask.[20]

One cannot help but think back to chapter 16 of the *Opusculum*. Here, once again, the "author" conceals himself from his readers.

Hildebert and Guibert of Nogent, whom we shall discuss later on, remain in the tradition of *Confessions*, but Hugh *Primas* exceeds them both in introducing for the first time "something new." If I push Tilliette's suggestion, this something might already align itself to what Lejeune has called for the modern period an "autobiographical pact": "The birth of personal expression is marked as much by the appearance of an 'I' as by the acknowledgement that this person exists only in the eyes of the 'other.' The monodic writings settled for appealing to divine judgment. The perspective of others is henceforth part and parcel of autobiographical initiative."[21]

One is clearly not yet dealing with autobiography in the style of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but perhaps one can witness the first sketch of a "reading contract" (or hearing contract). In any case, the sort of analysis that is proposed here, with its painstaking attention to the specificity of each historical moment and each mode of writing, shows how risky it can be to want to propose a history of "literary subjectivity," let alone autobiography or even the "birth of the individual," conceived of as a linear, regular, quasi necessary "progress" that the historian can enclose in a strict chronology.[22]

The Augustinian Model

Many different approaches confirm the important place Saint Augustine's *Confessions* occupy in a history of autobiography "before autobiography." Thus it is appropriate to ask whether this work may have constituted a sort of underlying pretext for the *Opusculum* attributed to Herman the Jew.

The question is all the more legitimate since the *Confessions* enjoyed an unprecedented position of favor among the literati of the twelfth century.

This is attested to by the growth in the numbers of manuscripts of this work and the increased borrowings and quotations from the text, particularly among Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Ailred of Rievaulx. Indeed Saint Augustine is affforded further honor by a good number of newly created orders of canons regular—from Premonstratensians in the beginning of the twelfth century to Preachers and Augustinians at the beginning of the thirteenth century—who place themselves under the much-appreciated flexibility of Saint Augustine's Rule. In addition, no less than three twelfth-century Lives of Saint Augustine come to replace the old Life written by Possidius: the first of these is written by Yves of Chartres (1040–1116) when he is still a canon regular; the second is composed by the Benedictine, Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) who popularizes a famous dream by Augustine's mother Monica (we meet Rupert in the *Opusculum* in the role of interlocutor with the young Jew Judas); finally, the third is the work of the Prémontré Philip of Harvengt (1100–1182), the declared adversary of Rupert who completes the Life of Possidius with information taken from the *Confessions* and delicately changes it on several important points; for example, he places in direct speech the words of the young man who appears to Monica in the "dream of the rule," words that are so important for Augustine's conversion.[23]

Let us recall that Augustine completed his *Confessions* in 398 at the age of forty-three or forty-four. The work comprises thirteen books, the first nine of which display an autobiographical character that has long been employed: it has been called the "first Christian autobiography" and also an "autobiographical masterpiece."[24] The category of "autobiography" is as problematic when applied to the *Confessions* as when used for medieval works. Peter Brown, whose fascinating biography of Saint Augustine is the authority in the vast field of Augustinian studies, offers the following nuanced view: "It is often said the *Confessions* is not an 'autobiography' in the modern sense. That is true, but not particularly helpful. Because, for a Late Roman man, it is precisely this intense, autobiographical vein in the *Confessions* that sets it apart from the intellectual tradition to which Augustine belonged."[25] Our problem, perhaps, is to determine the nature of the "autobiographical vein" of the *Opusculum*, one that is assuredly different from that of the *Confessions* and one we can only fully grasp by comparing it to all the other "veins" which fed into the rich body of medieval autobiographical writings between the fifth and twelfth centuries.

The first nine books of the *Confessions* make up a retrospective account: Augustine writes from memory twelve years after his baptism and the death of his mother Monica, this latter event marking, in 387, the end of the autobiographical part of his work. The last four books are composed of philosophical reflections on memory and time and a commentary on the first verses of Genesis.[26] In the intervening years Augustine has become a priest (in 391) and then Bishop of Hippo (between 395 and 396), but he does not speak of these episodes in his life. It is in the light of his present experience as Bishop, *a posteriori*, that he reinterprets his past, his youth, his attachment to Neo-Platonist philosophy, and his nine-year-long seduction by the Manichaean heresy over the orthodox Christianity his mother preferred. Time interposes between that "then" and this "now."[27] Death and mourning also slip in: Augustine puts an end to his autobiography when Monica dies.

In the meantime, the flow of external events that punctuate his path toward baptism constitutes only the surface of an interior drama described by the *Confessions*, and from which the book draws its remarkable tension. It is this drama, with its hesitations, temptations, and relapses that Augustine "confesses" to God—by this title the work is a sort of dialogue with God, a form of prayer—even if at the same time Augustine speaks to his own conscience in a painful interior monologue. The verb *confiteri* indeed has these two meanings, whose subtle variations Augustine explores: to confess one's faith in God while at the same time discovering the Wisdom that allows one to better "know thyself." And because this inner struggle is full of pitfalls and remorse, *confiteri* thus also means to confess one's sins, both those of the past that were inspired by worldly glory (*superbia*), carnal pleasures (*libido*), and the intellectual pride of pagan philosophy (*curiositas*), as well as those sins that continue to threaten the Christian's will, for baptism has not put an end to temptations, especially sexual ones. The Bishop of Hippo is not a "cured man" but a "convalescent."[28]

Augustine faces both God and his own conscience. He is, however, never really alone. In Milan he is surrounded by friends who follow the Neo-Platonist tradition of cenacles. They intensively share with him their inner experiences. Later in Hippo it is for a similar group of *servi Dei* or *spiritales* that he writes down his *Confessions*. Among those who have played a determining role in his conversion, his mother Monica and Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, must be mentioned above all. Others included his friends, such as Alypius and Ponticianus. The influence of Ponticianus was critical: it was he who, in a long account, convinced Augustine to turn away from marriage so as to dedicate himself solely to God.[29] But at this moment Augustine again fights a desperate battle, both against himself and against God, which raises him to the summit of spiritual writing:

> This was the story Ponticianus told. But while he was speaking, Lord you turned my attention back to myself. You took me up from behind my own back where I had placed myself because I did not wish to observe myself, and you set me before my face so that I should see how vile I was, how twisted and filthy, covered in sores and ulcers. And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself. If I tried to avert my gaze from myself, his story continued relentlessly, and you once again placed me in front of myself; *you thrust me before my own eyes so that I should discover my iniquity and hate it*.[30] I had known it, but deceived myself, refused to admit it, and pushed it out of my mind.[31]

The *Confessions* had considerable influence. Yet it did not preclude alternative expressions of the "I" that, unlike Augustine's account, fail to unite life episodes with the hesitant quest of an inner life being divided against itself. It is this dichotomy that perhaps best characterizes the "autobiographies" of the early Middle Ages in contrast to the *Confessions*, and also to a certain array of texts that begin to appear by the end of the eleventh century. Under the influence of the frenzied monastic reform and the thirst for introspection that it kindled among certain clerics, these later texts rediscover the paths traced by Saint Augustine. In the meantime, the "veins" spoken of by Peter Brown have assumed different shapes. Among the more remarkable examples are the *quaerimoniae*, or "complaints," of the Asturian hermit Valerius (c. 630–695). These latter shape his account of forty years in the hermitic life, a work that describes his searching for greater solitude far from the crowds that are attracted to his saintly reputation, from the Cantabrian setting to San Pedro of Montes and the heights overlooking Astorga. A contemporary of two great saints of the Iberian Church—Bishop Isidore of Seville (d. 636) and the monk Fructuosus (d. 665)—Valerius explores a third path to saintliness, the one inaugurated in Egypt by the Desert Fathers. In solitude, which he shares with the few young men who joined him, he is accosted by the devil who symbolizes the perversions of the "world" and tries to block his path to conversion. "For the first time," Georg Misch writes, "the devil enters into the heart of an autobiography."[32] But, to be sure, it is a question here of a struggle against the devil, not of an interior struggle. It is onto the objective reality of the devil, exterior to himself, that Valerius projects the forces menacing him, the terrifying noises provoked by the devil in the night, the stench he exudes during the day, the sight of a monstrous giant that blocked his path one day but who was frightened off by the sign of the cross. Valerius even goes so far as to find the devil lurking in the features of a Moorish priest—an "Ethiopian"!—sent by his adversaries. Here it is no longer a question, as it was with Augustine, of probing the depths of a conscience divided against itself. Instead, as in a hagiographical "auto-legend" written in the first person,[33] Valerius sets out the accounts of miracles marking the intervention of the devil in his daily existence, but which only offer a "weak testimony concerning the consciousness which the narrator might have had of his own personality."[34]

Two centuries later the *Revelationes* of Audradus Modicus arise from a completely different intellectual context, one linked to mid-ninth-century Carolingian power. This is another form of "autobiography," fulfilling other functions. The presentation of the self is here intimately connected to a visionary experience placed in the service of the great political causes of the day. Both a monk and a priest at Saint-Martin of Tours, Audradus may have contributed to the creation of the great bible presented to the Emperor Charles the Bald in 845 by the count Vivien, lay abbot of the great monastery.[35] Shortly thereafter, Audradus was elected "Bishop of the choir" (a sort of aide to the bishop) by the provincial synod of Sens in 847/848. In 849 he went to Rome to present Pope Leo IV with the thirteen "books" of his complete work, of which the twelfth, the only one written in prose, has been partially preserved. This book is devoted to an account of his prophetic visions. But upon Audradus's return the synod of Paris of 849 announced his dismissal as one among the measures taken against the bishops of the choir. In 853 he is summoned to justify himself as a visionary in front of the Emperor Charles the Bald and succeeds in exonerating himself of all fraud. Audradus considers himself a sort of prophet, not in that he can predict the future, but in that he comments on the present as having fallen victim to all sorts of internal and external tensions. Confident of the authority granted to him by his celestial revelations, Audradus advises and even goes so far as to admonish the prince.[36] On the strength of the visions he had experienced during the Norman attacks on Paris in 845 and 851, he warns Charles the Bald against these divine punishments. In a vision that prefigures the last judgment, Audradus sees the saints who are assembled around Christ's majesty accuse the Carolingian kings of the Empire's ruin and the threats that weigh upon it: "*Culpa regum est*," "it is the kings' fault!" they cry out to the celestial sovereign. But it is no longer possible to return to the division of the Empire that, some eight years after the treaty of Verdun, Christ himself seems to accept. . . . In this same vision the heavenly king judges Lothar, brother of Charles the Bald and Louis the German, with severity: Christ has decided that Lothar be deposed because he dared to say "*ego sum*," "I am." One cannot find a better expression of the limits imposed on the expression of the self during the early Middle Ages.

Audradus's visions share the preoccupations of the ecclesiastical elites of the Empire: the Norman raids, the partitioning of the Empire, the danger to the independence of churches and monasteries presented by secular abbots such as Count Vivien who had become Audradus's main adversary and whose death during the campaign in Brittany constitutes yet another sign of divine justice. In another of his books, the *Fountain of Life*, Audradus introduces Hincmar, the archbishop of Reims, who confirms to him the reputation of his "dreams." It is indeed possible that Audradus dreamed a lot, but his visionary accounts are of a completely different genre than the dreamlike accounts of monks from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of which we shall later speak. They seem rather to resemble those other grand visions that, during the Carolingian period, were a preferred mode for political language. Examples of these include the pronouncement of the monk Wetti of the monastery of Reichenau (d. 824) and the anonymous *Vision of the Poor Woman of Laon* (between 818 and 840).[37]

There are several analogies between the tribulations that drove the sixty-year-old Audradus, deprived of his Episcopal seat, to set down his revelations in writing and those tribulations that, a century later, inspired the very different "autobiographical" writings of Ratherius, the former bishop of Verona who was then approximately of the same age. Ratherius, already driven from Verona, abandoned all hope of asserting his rights to the episcopacy of Liège and had to satisfy himself with the administration of the small abbey of Aulne near Laubach. That is when he wrote his *Dialogus confessionalis* (954). The title simultaneously echoes the *Confessions* of Augustine and the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. It also bears witness to the richness of the Augustinian notion of *confessio*, signifying both praise of God and the confession of sins. Indeed this second aspect takes on a special meaning which the dialogue form inflects with a quasi sacramental force: Ratherius of Verona produces an interlocutor who is in fact his double, the result being that there is a constant intermingling of the "I" and the "thou." He recapitulates the misfortunes that have beset him since his childhood, wherever he has lived, "in

Provence, Italy, Germany, and France." He laments his two "divorces" from the churches of Verona and Liège, the first for judicial reasons and the second because of his own vanity. At the heart of his admissions of "perjury," "adultery," "debauchery," and "homicide"—for which, he explains, 265 years of penance should be inflicted upon him!—he feels the urgent necessity for *conversio*, something he understands now in the fully medieval sense. The issue is no longer, as it was in the first few centuries AD, one of a conversion from paganism to Christianity, nor is it question of a conversion from philosophy to Christian faith, as it was for Augustine. Here the issue is a *conversio de malo ad bonum*, the ethical and interior conversion that haunts Christians who, like him, are moved by the ideal of church reform and the anxiety over personal salvation. For Ratherius this demand is countered by the conflicting feeling of his own *inconvertibilitas* to the monastic life, which he nevertheless esteems to be morally superior: because he has not renounced his secular ambitions, he still dreams of the Episcopal seat in Liège.[38]

In another work entitled *Qualitatis conjectura cuiusdam* ("The evaluation of a certain person," which can only be him) Ratherius, now seventy-six years old, tries to paint "the characteristic traits of his personality."[39] Again he speaks of his addressing someone else, here the Emperor Otto I, reminding the emperor of his promise to give him the seat of Verona against the claims of the infamous Count Milo who had expelled him. He tries to flatter the emperor by praising him as the "first great emperor in three hundred years."[40] To further ingratiate himself Ratherius has his enemies speak through the text, including the corrupt clergy. They accuse him of "always having his nose in a book" and of laying down in writing all the events that have happened, calling it by the Greek word *chronographia*, all the while claiming that "he barely knows Latin." Ratherius attributes to them this episode that was supposed to condemn him, but which he actually boasts about all while faking humility: "When someone wants to kiss his foot, he recoils and prevents it. If he could he would stay seated there all day browsing his books. He hates being surrounded by everyone, he likes solitude, does not partake in games of hoops or die, and does not bother with either dogs or hawking." . . . The paradox, or as he himself says very lucidly, the profound *ambiguitas*, is that he portrays himself with the moral traits of a perfect monk which, owing to his frustrated destiny as a bishop, he cannot bring himself to live by.

Rarely does an "autobiography" in the medieval period, or even in later periods, give the impression of being able to approach a real personality so closely. However, as Georg Misch notes, the self-satisfying "portrait" that Ratherius paints of himself does not escape the literary conventions of *psychomachy*, the struggle between vices (those of others) and virtues (principally his own, though he deplores that they are so misunderstood). Conscious of having mastery over all the resources of the Latin language in order to continue the great tradition of ancient satire, he builds a rhetorical smokescreen between himself and his readers that is difficult to penetrate—except perhaps to declare in favor of his detractors, for how can they not recognize the dream of an unquenched thirst for power that still drives the deposed prelate when, seemingly without reason, he goes to great expense to strengthen the small abbey in which he feels trapped? Ratherius reveals himself to us the most when he attempts to defend himself from accusations that he mistakenly believes to be unconvincing. Thus he seems to fall victim to the weaknesses of his own fictions . . .[41]

The Eleventh/Twelfth-Century Renewal

Following Georg Misch, it is at the turn of the eleventh to twelfth century that historians have fixed the moment when Christian writing renews an autobiographical form that had been left somewhat fallow since the time of Augustine.[42] The names and works are well known. Most often they came from black monks, such as Jean of Fécamp (d. 1078), author of a *Confessio theologica*, Otloh of Saint-Emmeran (d. 1070), or Guibert of Nogent (d. 1124). Some left the monastic life in order to assume high positions in the Church, for example Peter Damian (d. 1072), who became cardinal-bishop of Ostia, or Anselm of Bec (d. 1109), who was called to the archiepiscopal seat of Canterbury. Others such as Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis (d. 1151) could also be mentioned. All or most of them are distinguished theologians who belong to traditional currents of monastic theology or break from it in the name of reason: we know the price paid by Peter Abelard (d. 1142) from what he reveals in his *History of My Calamities* (*Historia calamitatum*).[43] Among this generation, mention must also be made of the Cistercians, including Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1151) and his early English disciple, Ailred of Rievaulx (d. 1167).

The explosion of the *ordo monasticus*, the birth of new orders of monks and canons, their frequent rivalry on the alleged scale of perfection, and the concomitant intensification of the theological debate in the monastic (and later urban) schools encourage expression by individual personalities who are not averse to exposing to their readers or listeners the adversities they have had to confront and the secret anxieties that torment them. Epistolary exchanges and more or less fictive dialogue are privileged forms of expression which, though not excluding other types of autobiographical writing, belong to what father Chenu has described as "the awakening of the conscience" in medieval civilization during the course of this long twelfth century.

The case of Ailred of Rievaulx provided a perfect example for Georg Misch, who discussed him as a counterpoint to Herman the Jew.[44] For Misch these two cases share the common goal of presenting "a history of conversion": the first tells of the young Scottish noble who enters into the Cistercian abbey newly founded at Rievaulx, while the second tells of the newly baptized young Jew from Cologne who enters into the first German Prémontré abbey at Cappenberg. But Misch does not underestimate the difference in form and signification found in the expression of these two comparable experiences: in the manner in which the *Opusculum* describes "the conflict between knowledge and belief and the victory of the latter over the former," Misch sees "the symbol of a historical movement characteristic of this period, a movement which led from the turbulent spiritual expansion to the stability achieved in the Middle Ages."[45] For Ailred this experience is affirmed by spiritual friendship and permits the expression of personal growth, an echo of an even larger historical evolution. Raised at the court of the Scottish King David I, the twenty-five-year-old noble Ethelred converts to the Cistercian ideal, abandoning society for the strict asceticism at Rievaulx. Five years later, on the injunction of Bernard of Clairvaux, he writes his *Mirror of Love* (*Speculum caritatis*), a work devoted to his friendship for a lost brother. This theme is explicitly taken up and again amplified in a second work, *On Spiritual Friendship* (*De spirituali amicitia*), where he addresses God while conversing with several brothers from the monastery, his "boys" Ivo, Walter, etc. But Ailred speaks especially of himself. In a chapter entitled "Example of oneself and one's conversion" (*Exemplum de se ipso et sua conversione*), he explains that it is his reading of the *Confessions* that precipitated his conversion to the monastic life. He recalls the circumstances of his conversion but endeavors above all to expose the effects this had on his interior life. The exterior peripities of his conversion are known solely from his *Vita*, written by his companion Walter David.[46] Ailred addresses God in terms resembling those of Augustine, imploring him for help in abrogating himself from the temptations of classical culture and from Ciceronian rhetoric, from which he borrows the dialogue form. Ailred is especially close to his model when analyzing the depth of his bond uniting him and his friends, for this was the case with Augustine and Ponticianus, the love of God being reflected in the love of the other. As Ailred says, "What more must I say? Is not an important part of happiness to love and be loved? To help and be helped? To be familiar with fraternal love, and to raise oneself to the splendor of God's love? And then soon, on the scale of love, to hoist oneself up to Christ's embrace, to be immediately followed by a return to contrition and a love of others."

Meanwhile, the differences are no less important: if Augustine and Ailred expose the torments of their conversion, the former submits himself in order to arrive at God's only will while the latter, living in a church in the midst of reform, is additionally aware of submitting himself to the yoke of a monastic Rule. The harshness of the monastery's asceticism is for Ailred the condition for discovering the soul's peace. For Ailred as for Herman, autobiography in the twelfth century is thinkable only within the framework of the monastic institution and the community of brothers. It is in the stability of this sacred location that the hurting soul can at last find peace and happiness: *jocunditas*, *tranquillitas*, *securitas*—this is Ailred's vocabulary.

Of all the early twelfth-century authors who contributed to reviving the *Confessions*, the Benedictine Abbot Guibert of Nogent (c. 1055–1125) is one of the more remarkable. Guibert wrote several important works including, in around 1110, *De Incarnatione contra Judaeos*, which we shall have to discuss later. He is especially known for three works: his treaty on relics, *De pignoribus sanctorum*, where he questions the authenticity of the purported relic of a baby tooth of Christ, in which the monks of Saint-Médard of Soissons take pride; a history of the first crusade (*Gesta Dei per Francos*); and finally his "autobiography" written between 1114 and 1121, when he was approximately sixty years old. This last work comprises three *libelli*, only the first of which is devoted to the old abbot's retrospective account of his youth in a family of lords in the region of Oise. He recalls how his parents dedicated him to the Virgin and the Church upon his birth, which would otherwise have been fatal to both mother and child. He then describes the education he received from his mother, who was widowed eight months after his birth. Next he evokes his entrance into the monastery and the numerous temptations he encountered. He does not undergo a conversion experience comparable to the ones that led the young pagan philosopher Augustine and Herman the

Jew to baptism, nor even to that which led the young "worldly" Ailred to the doors of the monastery. Like Otloh of Saint-Emmeran, Guibert speaks of the "internal" conversion of one who has been baptized, offered (*oblatus*) into a monastery as a child, and who comes in the cloister to know the price of a fierce interior struggle against temptations, sin, and the Devil.[47]

The second *libellus* is rather different in character: Guibert retraces the history of the monastery of Nogent since its foundation, but he also speaks of himself. By evoking his memories of the monastery of Saint-Germer of Fly where he was once a monk, by recounting his installation as abbot of Nogent, and especially by describing the death of his mother for whom he had boundless affection.[48]

The third *libellus* appears even more distanced from an autobiographical account: Guibert makes himself the witness of the "commune" of Laon, describing with terror the insurrection of the city dwellers and the murder of their lord bishop in the cathedral. Yet he once again returns to himself as he completes his work by telling the story of the healing miracle performed on him as a child in a church dedicated to Saints Leger and Maclou where his mother had taken him.[49]

Modern editors of this apparently composite work have hesitated over what title to give it: *De vita sua* (but this is not Guibert's title), *Autobiographie* in modern French, or *Memoirs* in English?[50] If Guibert did not really give a title to his work, he does nevertheless refer to it using a term derived from the Greek, calling it his *libri monodiarum*, or "books" (in the plural), in which he "sings oneself alone." And as Michel Zink has noted, this "oneself" needs to be understood without making a distinction between subject and object.[51] If the project of a "monodic writing" occupies the first book especially, it is clear that Guibert gives unity to the ensemble of his work since he speaks of himself, his mother, and his relation to God up until the end of the third book. From beginning to end, Guibert, a former student of Anselm, is driven by the will to demonstrate "the need for man to know himself in order to measure the righteousness of his will and thus be able to exercise his freedom, which was nothing but to know God and obey him."[52]

The work is directly inspired by the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. Guibert cites the *Confessions* six out of the eleven times he mentions a work by the Bishop of Hippo. It is thus no accident that Guibert chooses for the first word of the first book of his *monodiae* the verb *Confiteor* (to confess). One cannot help but observe an explicit allusion to his prestigious model. Starting with the second phrase, the same word returns and is endlessly reused as a motif. Guibert possesses the same semantic wealth as Saint Augustine, even if Guibert further insists on the penitential meaning of the admission of sins, something that is explained by the evolution of religious sensitivity and the sacramental practices of the twelfth century. For Guibert, this involves the need "to confess one's life in order to attain God through knowledge of oneself."[53]

In many respects Guibert's language also recalls the language of Augustine. In fact one is sometimes unsure to whom to attribute a phrase taken out of context: "It follows from this that I try to know you insofar as I know myself; and enjoying the knowledge of you does not mean that I lack self-knowledge. It is a good thing, then, and singularly beneficial for my soul, that confessions of this sort allow my persistent search for your light to dispel the darkness of my reason. With steady lighting my reason will no longer be in the dark about itself."[54] These are Guibert's words, but one can practically hear Augustine.

Guibert of Nogent borrows from Augustine not only his conception of the *confessio* and his monodic style of writing; he also goes so far as to imagine and reconstruct his life in imitation of the Augustinian model. We shall later see the place he, like Augustine, gives to dreams, and in particular the place he gives a long dream that his mother had of him and then recounted to him: indeed Guibert echoes the "dream of the rule" that Monica told her son. Guibert does not give us his mother's name, though he does name his father, Evrard, who is an orphan just like Augustine.[55] But by all evidence he sees in his mother a new "Saint Monica."

Guibert's love for his mother is equaled only by his admiration for her virtue and devotion. In the beginning of the first book he praises her beauty as the reflection of the excellence of her soul. Although no longer alive at the time of his writing, she continues to watch over him from paradise. Guibert owes everything to her: his status as a man of the Church, his education, and the example she has set for him of moral and religious perfection.[56] Further on, Guibert returns to his mother to recount her marital disappointments, her refusal to remarry once widowed, and the vow she takes to remain chaste, and to devote her life to God.[57] He returns to her once more when evoking the works he has undertaken to write. His mother worries that he is priding himself on his intellectual success, she who was the example of the greatest humility. That is where he recalls her long dream concerning him.[58] At the beginning of the second book Guibert again evokes the death of his mother, an occurrence he did not witness. But his former tutor tells him how she manifested her unshakeable faith in the Lord up until the very last moment.[59] The memory of his mother, which returns to him time and again as he writes his autobiography, constitutes the common theme in all three books, a thread of which he never lets go for very long. For Guibert as for Augustine, is not this most intimate writing—*monodiae*—a manner of accomplishing one's "bereavement work"?

The Chronicle of a Conversion?

Does the *Opusculum* attributed to Herman the Jew, roughly contemporaneous with Guibert of Nogent's work, also draw from Saint Augustine's *Confessions*?

The *Opusculum* is well aware of the Bishop of Hippo's reputation, going so far as to praise the excellence of the Augustinian Rule under which the brothers of Cappenberg live.[60] Like the *Confessions*, it is explicitly intended for a group of "friends of God," the brothers and sisters of Cappenberg to whom Herman addresses himself through his "son Henry": to borrow an expression from Brian Stock, it confirms the importance of "textual communities" in the collective thought, and in the debate about philosophical, religious, and devotional writings, in schools and monasteries as well as in the heretical circles of the same period.[61] The community of Cassiciacum, which served as a place of "retreat" for Augustine on the eve of his baptism,[62] may prefigure Cappenberg as another "paradisiac" venue—to use a term from the *Opusculum*—where Herman can come back and stay after his baptism.

In both autobiographies the departure on the path to conversion is found at the end of childhood: Augustine is a sixteen-year-old student in Carthage living a dissolute life when he is shaken by his mother Monica's retelling of the "dream of the rule" she has just recently had; but "almost nine years then followed during which I was in the deep mire and darkness of falsehood."[63] For Judas of Cologne it was in his thirteenth year that he dreamt of the emperor's banquet, which he would later understand announced his conversion; but, in the seven years following his dream, he continued to live with his Jewish family. The *Opusculum* in any case confirms the importance of the dream in autobiographical accounts of this period. We have already begun to see this with Guibert of Nogent, to whom we shall return. The most convincing parallel concerns marriage, which both Augustine and Herman represent as an absolute obstacle to perfect conversion.

Augustine's entourage pressures him to marry. Even his mother hopes that a Christian wife will know how to lead her son to baptism. A union is arranged, but it is only to be consummated two years later, for the anonymous maiden that has been chosen for him is still too young. Augustine is to separate himself from the concubine with whom he is living and with whom he had a child. But, unable to wait two years without satisfying his carnal desires, he takes another mistress.[64] Further on, when feeling ready to accept baptism, Augustine confesses that his only tie binding him to his previous life is "the woman."[65] Finally it is his friend Ponticianus who pushes him to admire the Christian Anchorite's renunciation of the flesh and convinces him to sever this last tie.[66]

In chapter 10 of the *Opusculum* the young Judas also gives in to the pressure of his family and accepts marriage to a Jewess. Like the woman promised to Augustine, she too remains anonymous. In Judas's case the marriage is consummated and Judas even delights in carnal pleasures. Then he recovers and from that moment on, as in the *Confessions*, no further mention is made of the woman. Can one speak of an implicit influence or just a coincidence favored by a common trope in Christian literature, that of the incompatibility of the search for God and the pleasures of the flesh? It seems more prudent not to pursue potential parallelisms since elsewhere the differences between Augustine's *Confessions* and Guibert of Nogent's *monodiae*, on the one hand, and Augustine's *Confessions* and Herman's *Opusculum*, on the other, are quite appreciable. The latter work hardly offers the "veins" of Augustinian autobiography: one finds neither the rhythm of the phrase, nor the vocabulary, nor even the anguished exploration of the unfathomable depths of the soul. Contrary to Guibert of Nogent, who cites the *Confessions* abundantly, the *Opusculum* gives the impression of honoring neither this work nor anything else of Augustine's corpus. The verb *confiteri* or the noun *confessio* are present only three times, and never with the meaning given by Augustine: twice the admission of an ordinary truth is simply rendered as such.[67] And if the third occurrence concerns a "confession of faith," it has nothing to do with the outpouring of the soul's motion toward God, but the recitation of the baptismal formula.[68]

To be sure, it is possible throughout the work to pick out the expressions that traditionally designate the sites of Christian interiority. Among them, the metaphor of the heart occupies a rather remarkable place: touched by the charity of the attendant Richmar, Judas preserves a "hard-heartedness" that nothing can "soften."[69] Indeed, an exterior and visible sign remains empty if it does not operate invisibly with the aid of grace "in the hearts of men."[70] Judas is strongly marked by his visit to the abbey of Cappenberg in the company of Bishop Eckbert. The piety of the brothers who "search for [God] with all their heart"[71] draws "the deepest sighs from his heart."[72] Elsewhere it is again a question of the base spirit that, through baptism, was expelled from "the house of my heart,"[73] and the priest who, at the altar, seems to consider carefully the precepts of the Gospel "as though chewing the cud in the mouth of the heart."[74] Just as frequent are the terms that, with the notable exception of *confessio*, refer to penitential vocabulary: the "contrition" manifested by tears,[75] and the grace of "repentance" promised to a softened heart,[76] all while the young Jew obstinately perseveres on the path of "concupiscence."[77] Finally, Christians have all the reasons to rejoice in the "penitence of a converted sinner."[78]

But these words are nothing more than the conventional strokes of the classical portrait of Christian "psychomachy": despite using the first person and dramatic effects of narration, this psychomachic account—a struggle between vice and virtue—does not echo the personal quest for interior truth found in Augustine's *Confessions* or Guibert of Nogent's "monodic writings." Chapter 11, where Judas breaks the ties of his short-lived Jewish marriage, is perhaps the liveliest example of the voice of a personal "spirituality." By means of rhetorical shifts that somewhat resemble the style of Augustine, Herman aptly describes the contradictions between flesh and spirit, between the past and the promise of salvation, which are tearing him apart. But even there, and this is revealing, the negative forces pulling him back are embodied in a figure exterior to himself, the Devil, and in order to remedy the situation Judas dreams only of appealing to the sign of the cross, which he uses like a talisman.

In his account Herman recounts the past peripities of his conversion and his advances toward baptism as they are thwarted by his relapses into "Jewish superstition." He does speak of his feelings, his temptations, his desires, but always with a sort of distance that prevents us from penetrating into the lived intimacy of subjectivity, into the depths of a tormented soul. Rather than a "singing oneself alone" under the double watch of God's conscience and his own, we encounter the chronicle of a conversion told in the first person. Why the first person?

One can imagine that the very nature of the *Opusculum* imposes this distancing of the subject of narration: Judas/Herman is not the former Neo-Platonic philosopher writing—according to the words of Peter Brown[79]—a "masterpiece of strictly intellectual autobiography," nor is he the monk who speaks at the end of his life of the sins that have tormented him for so long. He is allegedly writing as a Christian, but about his Jewish past. For, in the thought of medieval clerics, Judaism is by nature the realm of exteriority (*foris*) that is opposed to the interiority (*intus*) proper to Christianity; Jews can only accede to the exterior, superficial, "carnal" meaning of things while Christians alone have the capacity to grasp the interior, profound, truthful, and "spiritual" meaning. This dichotomy structures the entire opposition between Jews and Christians: it underlies the interpretation of Scriptures which Jews cannot fully understand as well as the interpretation of dreams in which they can only find material and carnal symbolism. It also underlies the representation of the existence of individuals; Judas fits the role well when he is moved by the moral examples offered by Christians, when he waits for a "sign" to convince him of the truth of Christianity, when, in a word, he resides in a surface subjectivity. But he is unable to go further, unable to open his soul completely, and unable to have knowledge of the depths of consciousness reserved for Christian introspection.

Once baptized and a priest, should not Herman at least have revealed the urges that had unconsciously guided his soul when still a Jew, and should he not have had even more reason to reveal the inner workings of his new Christian conscience? One is entitled to ask this of a retrospective autobiography. Yet the opposite occurs. The final interpretation of the childhood dream falls considerably short of sounding the depths of the remarkable personality that should at last be opened up to us (as might be expected of a psychoanalyst's patient who finally comes to understand the relation between his/her dreams and the subconscious scares of early childhood conflict). Instead, this final interpretation erases all signs of individuality by reducing the dream to categories of clerical *interpretatio* and to routine formulations of sacramental and moral discourse.

Herman is not Augustine. Nevertheless, he does share with him (as indeed with many other ecclesiastical authors of the twelfth century) the purpose of recounting in the first person at least a part of his life, or, to put it otherwise, to write his "autobiography." The autobiographical form of his account is the most remarkable aspect of this work, whatever the circumstances of its redaction or the identity of its "author(s)" may have been. Had it been written in the third person, the account would have been only a chronicle or a lengthy *exemplum*: one can indeed encounter, in briefer forms, sketches of a comparable scenario. Here it is a *persona* (with all the ambiguities conveyed by that word) that is brought to the fore, opening (slightly) his heart to his listeners and readers, and engaging them directly. This form of writing produces a remarkably powerful effect of truth. Let us not doubt that this was the objective of the *Opusculum*, and let us also recognize that it achieved its goal.

All things considered, it is more important to inquire about the choice of the autobiographical form than to know *who* is really speaking. Is it a real and unique convert, a Judas/Herman of flesh and blood with his doubts, hopes, fear, and love of God? Or is it the "textual community" of Cappenberg that may remember the oral account of one of its past converted Jews, but who, above all, find in the autobiographical form that highlights the individual destiny of the protagonist the means to proclaim his unique example? The two hypotheses are not mutually exclusive since one or more Cappenberg converts may have contributed to the telling and writing down of such an account. Whoever he may be, Herman cannot be a single individual or "author" in the modern sense of these words, but perhaps a *persona*, a mask, a twofold appearance.