



LITERARY STYLE:  
A Symposium

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1971  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON AND NEW YORK



## THE STYLE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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A BIOGRAPHY of a person written by himself: this definition of autobiography establishes the intrinsic character of the enterprise and thus the general (and generic) conditions of autobiographical writing. But this is not merely the definition of a literary genre: in their essentials, these conditions ensure that the identity of the narrator and the hero of the narration will be revealed in the work. Further, they require that the work be a narrative and not merely a description. Biography is not portrait; or if it is a kind of portrait, it adds time and movement. The narrative must cover a temporal sequence sufficiently extensive to allow the emergence of the contour of a life. Within these conditions, autobiography may be limited to a page or extended through many volumes. It is also free to "contaminate" the record of the life with events which could only have been witnessed from a distance. The autobiographer then doubles as a writer of memoirs (this is the case of Chateaubriand); he is free also to date precisely various stages of the revisions of the text, and at the moment of composition to look back upon his situation. The intimate journal may intrude upon autobiography, and an autobiographer may from time to time become a "diarist" (this, again, is the case with Chateaubriand). Thus, the conditions of autobiography furnish only a large framework within which a great variety of particular styles may occur. So it is essential to avoid speaking of an autobiographical "style" or even an autobiographical "form," because there is no such generic style or form. Here, even more than elsewhere, style is the act of an individual. It is useful nevertheless, to insist on the fact that style will only assert itself under the conditions which we have just mentioned. It can be defined as the fashion in which each autobiographer satisfies the conditions of the genre. These conditions are of an ethical and "relational" order and require only the truthful narration of a life, leaving to the writer the right to determine his own particular modality, rhythm, span, etc. In a

narrative in which the narrator takes his own past as theme, the individual mark of style assumes particular importance, since to the explicit self-reference of the narration itself the style adds the implicit self-referential value of a particular mode of speaking.

Style is currently associated with the act of writing. It is seen as resulting from the margin of liberty offered to the "author"<sup>1</sup> after he has satisfied the requirements of language and literary convention, and of the use he has put them to. The self-referential value of style thus refers back to the moment of writing, to the contemporary "me." But this contemporary self-reference may appear as an obstacle to the accurate grasp and transcription of past events. Critics of Rousseau and Chateaubriand have often thought that the perfection of their styles—whatever the reality of the depicted facts—rendered suspect the content of the narrative, setting up a screen between the truth of the narrated past and the present of the narrative situation. Every original aspect of style implies a redundancy which may disturb the message itself.<sup>2</sup> But, obviously, the past can never be evoked except with respect to a present: the "reality" of by-gone days is only such to the consciousness which, today, gathering up their present image, cannot avoid imposing upon them its own form, its style. Every autobiography—even when it limits itself to pure narrative—is a self-interpretation. Style here assumes the dual function of establishing the relation between the "author" and his own past; but also, in its orientation toward the future, of revealing the author to his future readers.

The misunderstanding of this subject is in large measure the result of conventional ideas about the nature and function of style. According to the view which sees style as a "form" added to a "content," it is logical to regard qualities of style in autobiography with suspicion. ("Too beautiful to be true" becomes a principle of systematic objection.)

This objection finds support in the ease with which a narrator may slip into fiction, a hazard which we ourselves are surely aware of from our own experiences in recounting past events. Not only (in this view) can the autobiographer lie, but the "autobiographical form" can cloak the freest fictive invention: "pseudo-memoirs" and "pseudo-biographies" exploit the possibilities of narrating purely imaginary tales in the first person. In these cases, the *I* of the narrative, "existentially" speaking, is assumed by a non-entity; it is an *I* without referent, an *I* which refers only to an arbitrary image. However, the *I* of such a text cannot be distinguished from the *I* of a "sincere" autobiographical narrative. It is easy to conclude, under this traditional conception of style, that, in autobiography or confession, despite the vow of sincerity, the "content" of the narrative can be lost, can disappear into fiction, without anything preventing its transition from one plane to another, without there even being a sure sign of that transition. Style, as an

original quality, accentuating as it does the importance of the present in the act of writing, seems to serve the conventions of narrative, rather than the realities of reminiscence. It is more than an obstacle or a screen, it becomes a principle of deformation and falsification.

But if one rejects this definition of style as "form" (or dress, or ornament) superadded to a "content" in favor of one of style as deviation (*écart*), the originality in the autobiographical style—far from being suspect—offers us a system of revealing indices, of symptomatic traits. The redundancy of style is individualizing: it singles out. Hasn't the notion of stylistic deviation been elaborated precisely with a view to coming nearer to the psychic uniqueness of writers?<sup>3</sup> Thus the celebrated aphorism of Buffon has been rediscovered (in a slightly altered sense), and the style of autobiography now appears to bear a minimal veracity in its contemporaneity with the life of the author. No matter how doubtful the facts related, the text will at least present an "authentic" image of the man who "held the pen."

That brings us to some observations concerning more general implications of the theory of style. Style as "form superadded to content" will be judged above all on its inevitable infidelity to a past reality: "content" is taken to be anterior to "form," and past history, the theme of the narrative, must necessarily occupy this anterior position. Style as deviation, however, seems rather to exist in a relation of fidelity to a contemporary reality. In this case, the very notion of style really obeys a system of organic metaphors, according to which expression proceeds from experience, without any discontinuity, as the flower is pushed open by the flow of sap through the stem. Conversely, the notion of "form superadded to content" implies—from its inception—discontinuity, the very opposite of organic growth, thus a mechanical operation, the intervening application of an instrument to a material of another sort. It is the image of the *stylus* with a sharp point, which tends thus to prevail over that of the *hand* moved by the writer's inner spirit. (Doubtless it is necessary to develop an idea of style which envisages both the *stylus* and the *hand*—the direction of the *stylus* by the *hand*.)

In a study devoted to "Temporal Relations in the French Verb," Emile Benveniste distinguishes *historic* statement (*l'énonciation historique*), a "narrative of past events," from *discourse* (*discours*), a "statement presupposing a speaker and an auditor; and in the first-named, an intention of influencing the second in some way."<sup>4</sup> While the narrative of past facts in historic statement uses the *passé simple* as its "typical form" in current French (which Benveniste calls "aorist"), discourse prefers to use the *passé composé*. A glance at recent autobiographies (Michel Leiris, Jean-Paul Sartre) shows us, however, that the characteristics of discourse (statement tied to a narrator named "I") may coexist with those of history (use of the

arist). Is this an archaism? Or better, aren't we dealing in autobiography with a mixed entity, which we can call *discourse-history*? This is surely a hypothesis which needs examination. The traditional form of autobiography occupies a position between two extremes: narrative in the third person<sup>5</sup> and pure monologue. We are very familiar with third-person narrative; it is the form of the *Commentaries* of Caesar or of the second part of the *Mémoires* of La Rochefoucauld, namely, narrative which is not distinguished from history by its form. One must learn from external information that the narrator and the hero are one and the same person. In general, such a process is expressly a depiction of a series of important events in which the editor puts himself into the scene as one of the principal actors. The effacing of the narrator (who thereby assumes the impersonal role of historian), the objective presentation of the protagonist in the third person, works to the benefit of the event, and only secondarily reflects back upon the personality of the protagonist the glitter of actions in which he has been involved. Though seemingly a modest form, autobiographical narrative in the third person accumulates and makes compatible events glorifying the hero who refuses to speak in his own name. Here the interests of the personality are committed to a "he," thus effecting a solidification by objectivity. This is quite the opposite of pure monologue, where the accent is on the me and not on the event. In extreme forms of monologue (not in the domain of autobiography but in that of lyrical fiction), the event is nothing other than the unwinding of the monologue itself, independently of any related "fact," which in the process becomes unimportant. We see the intervention of a process which is the opposite of that just described for third-person narrative: the exclusive affirmation of "I" favors the interests of an apparently vanished "he." The impersonal event becomes a secret parasite on the "I" of the monologue, fading and depersonalizing it. One need only examine the writings of Samuel Beckett to discover how the constantly repeated "first person" comes to be the equivalent of a "non-person."

Autobiography is certainly not a genre with rigorous rules. It only requires that certain possible conditions be realized, conditions which are mainly ideological (or cultural): that the personal experience be important, that it offer an opportunity for a sincere relation with someone else.<sup>6</sup> These presuppositions establish the legitimacy of "I" and authorize the subject of the discourse to take his past existence as theme. Moreover, the "I" is confirmed in the function of permanent subject by the presence of its correlative "you," giving clear motivation to the discourse. I am thinking here of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine: the author speaks to God but with the intention of edifying his readers.

God is the direct addressee of the discourse; the rest of mankind, on the contrary, is named in the third person as indirect beneficiary of the effusion

which it has been allowed to witness. Thus the autobiographical discourse takes form by creating, almost simultaneously, two addressees, one summoned directly, the other assumed obliquely as witness. Is this a useless luxury? Shall we assume the invocation of God to be only an artifice of rhetoric? Not at all. God certainly doesn't need to receive the story of Augustine's life, since He is omniscient and sees the events of eternity at a single glance. God receives the narrator's prayer and thanksgiving. He is thanked for the intervention of His Grace in the narrator's destiny. He is the present interlocutor only because He has been the master of the narrator's previous fate: He has put him to the test, He has rescued him from error, and He is revealed to him ever more imperiously. By so openly making God his interlocutor, Augustine commits himself to absolute veracity: how could he falsify or dissimulate anything before One who can see into his innermost marrow? Here is a content guaranteed by the highest bail. The confession, because of the addressee which it presumes, avoids the risk of falsehood run by ordinary narratives. But what is the function of the secondary addressee, the human auditor who is only obliquely invoked? He comes—by his supposed presence—to legitimize the very "discursiveness" of the confession. The confession is not for God, but for the human reader who needs a narrative, a laying out of the events in their enchained succession.

The double address of the discourse—to God and to the human auditor—makes the truth discursive and the discourse true. Thus may be united, in a certain fashion, the instantaneousness of the confession offered to God and the sequential nature of the explanatory narrative offered to the human intelligence. And thereby are reconciled the edifying motivation and the transcendent finality of the confession: words addressed to God will convert or comfort other men.

Let me add this remark: one would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life—conversion, entry into a new life, the operation of Grace. If such a change had not affected the life of the narrator, he could merely depict himself once and for all, and new developments would be treated as external (historical) events: we would then be in the presence of the conditions of what Benveniste has named *history*, and a narrator in the first person would hardly continue to be necessary. It is the internal transformation of the individual—and the exemplary character of this transformation—which furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which "I" is both subject and object.

Thus we discover an interesting fact: it is because the past "I" is different from the present "I" that the latter may really be confirmed in all his prerogatives. The narrator describes not only what happened to him at a different time in his life, but above all how he became—out of what he was—what

he presently is. Here the discursive character of the narrative is justified anew, not by the addressee but by the content: it becomes necessary to retrace the genesis of the present situation, the antecedents of the moment from which the present "discourse" stems. The chain of experiences traces a path (though a sinuous one) which ends in the present state of recapitulatory knowledge.

The deviation, which establishes the autobiographical reflection, is thus double: it is at once a deviation of time and of identity. At the level of language, however, the only intruding mark is that of time. The personal mark (the first person, the "I") remains constant. But it is an ambiguous constancy, since the narrator was different from what he is today. Still, how can he keep from being recognized in the other which he was? How can he refuse to assume the other's faults? The narrative-confession, asserting the difference of identity, repudiates past errors, but does not, for all that, decline a responsibility assumed forever by the subject. Pronominal constancy is the index of this permanent responsibility, since the "first person" embodies both the present reflection and the multiplicity of past states. The changes of identity are marked by verbal and attributive elements: they are perhaps still more subtly expressed in the contamination of the discourse by traits proper to history, that is, by the treatment of the first person as a quasi-third person, authorizing recourse to the historical aorist. The aorist changes the effect of the first person. Let us remember too that the famous "rule of twenty-four hours"<sup>7</sup> was still generally respected in the eighteenth century, and that the evocation of past and dated events could not avoid recourse to the *passé simple* (except by using here and there the "historical" present). But it is the statements themselves, and their own *tone*, which make perfectly explicit the distance at which the narrator holds his faults, his errors, his tribulations. The figures of traditional rhetoric (and more particularly those which Fontanier defines as "figures of expression by opposition"<sup>8</sup>: preterition, irony, etc.) contribute something too, giving to the autobiographical style its particular color.

I shall take Rousseau as an example.

The presence of the imagined addressee strikes us even in the preamble to the *Confessions*: ". . . Qui que vous soyez que ma destinée ou ma confiance ont fait l'arbitre du sort de ce cahier. . ."<sup>9</sup> Still more clearly, we find in the third paragraph of the first book, the double addressee (God, mankind) whose Augustinian prototype we have earlier tried to make precise:

Que la trompette du jugement dernier sonne quand elle voudra; je viendrai ce livre à la main me présenter devant le souverain juge.  
[. . .] J'ai dévoilé mon intérieur tel que tu l'as vu toi-même. Être

éternel, rassemble autour de moi l'innombrable foule de mes semblables: qu'ils écoutent mes confessions, qu'ils gémissent de mes iniquités, qu'ils rougissent de mes misères.<sup>10</sup>

To guarantee the veracity of his utterances, Rousseau, like Augustine, requires the presence of a divine gaze. But he requires it only at the outset, and then once and for all. Within the body of the book there is scarcely a single invocation or apostrophe to God. We note the diffuse presence of the reader (with whom Rousseau sometimes engages in fictive dialogue), a putative witness who is reduced most often to an indefinite *on*:<sup>11</sup> "It will be thought that . . ." (*on pensera que . . .*), "One will say that . . ." (*On dira que . . .*) Rousseau constantly assigns to this imagined interlocutor the objections of good sense and social convention. He attributes to him also the suspicion which he feels surrounds him. He strives to convince him of the absolute truth of his narrative, as of the abiding innocence of his intentions. The fact that his relation to God is looser than that of Augustine or Theresa d'Avila cannot help affecting the veracity of his statements. The preliminary invocation, one senses, is not sufficient: truthfulness must exist each moment, but Rousseau does not ask God to be a constant witness. In Rousseau's work the private emotions and conscience inherit some of the functions assigned to God in traditional theological discourse. As a consequence, the veracity of the narrative must be demonstrated with reference to intimate feeling, to the strict contemporaneity of emotion communicated in the writing. Pathos replaces the traditional address to a transcendent being as the sign of reliable expression. Thus it is not surprising to see Rousseau take from Montaigne and the Latin epistolary writers the *quicquid in buccam venit*, and to attribute to it, this time, a quasi-ontological value: the spontaneity of the writing, copied closely (in principle) from the actual spontaneous sentiment (which is given as if it were an old, relived emotion) assures the authenticity of the narration. So style, as Rousseau himself says, takes on an importance which is not limited to the introduction of language alone, to the technical search for effects alone: it becomes "self-referential," it undertakes to refer back to the "internal" truth within the author. In recalling old feelings, Rousseau wants to make the present narration strictly dependent on the "impressions" of the past:

Il faudroit, pour ce que j'ai à dire, inventer un langage aussi nouveau que mon projet: car quel ton, quel style prendre pour débrouiller ce chaos immense de sentiments si divers, si contradictoires, souvent si vils et quelquefois si sublimes dont je fus sans cesse agité [. . .] Je prends donc mon parti sur le style comme sur les choses. Je ne m'attacherais point à le rendre uniforme; j'aurai toujours celui qui me viendra, j'en changerai selon mon humeur sans scrupule, je dirai chaque

chose comme je la sens, comme je la vois, sans recherche, sans gêne, sans m'embarrasser de la bigarrure. En me livrant au souvenir de l'impression reçue et au sentiment présent je peindrai doublement l'état de bon âme, savoir au moment où l'événement m'est arrivé et au moment où je l'ai écrit: mon style inégal et naturel, tantôt rapide et tantôt diffus, tantôt sage et tantôt fou, tantôt grave et tantôt gai fera lui-même partie de mon histoire.<sup>12</sup>

Among the diversity of styles cited by Rousseau, two particularly significant "tonalities" strike us in reading the *Confessions*: the elegiac and the picaresque.

The elegiac tone (as it is used, for example, in the celebrated lines which open the Sixth Book) expresses the feeling of lost happiness. Living in a time of affliction and menacing shadows, the writer takes refuge in the memory of the happy hours of his youth. The sojourn at Les Charmettes becomes the object of a fond regret: Rousseau is carried off by imagination, he tastes again vanished pleasures. Thus, by his imagination and at will, he fixes in writing a moment of his life in which he longs to hide. He is certain that such happiness will never come to him again:

Mon imagination, qui dans ma jeunesse allait toujours en avant et maintenant rétrograde, compense par ces doux souvenirs l'espoir que j'ai pour jamais perdu. Je ne vois plus rien dans l'avenir qui me tente: les seuls retours du passé peuvent me flatter, et ces retours si vifs et si vrais dans l'époque dont je parle me font souvent vivre heureux malgré mes malheurs.<sup>13</sup>

The qualitative accent visibly favors the past, to the detriment of the present. The present in which these memories are set down is a time of disgrace; the old era which Rousseau is trying to recapture in writing is a lost paradise.

On the other hand, in narrative of the picaresque type it is the past which is "deficient": a time of weaknesses, errors, wandering, humiliations, expedients. Traditionally, the picaresque narrative is attributed to a character who has arrived at a certain stage of ease and "respectability" and who retraces, through an adventurous past, his humble beginnings at the fringes of society. Then he did not know the world, he was a stranger, he got by as best he could, more often for the worse than for the better, encountering on the way all the abuse, all the oppressive power, all the insolence of those above him. For the picaresque narrator, the present is the time of well-merited repose, of seeing oneself finally a winner, of finding a place in the social order. He can laugh at his former self, that obscure and needy wretch who could only respond in hang-dog fashion to the world's vanities. He can

speak of his past with irony, condescension, pity, amusement. This narrative tone often requires the imaginary presence of an addressee, a confidante who is made an indulgent and amused accomplice by the playfulness with which the most outrageous behavior is recounted (the *Lazarillo de Tormès*, the prototype of the picaresque hero, is offered to the reader as a character named simply *vuestra merced*, and, pleasantly inverting the Augustinian confession, presents himself with the vow "not to be holier than my neighbors"—"confesando yo no ser mas sancto que mis vecinos"). Lazarillo's desire to begin at the beginning ("por el principio") is not without relevance to the method of Jean-Jacques' *Confessions*, for Lazarillo also wants to give a complete picture of his person ("por que se tenga entera noticia de mi persona").<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of fact, not only are purely picaresque episodes very numerous in the first six books of the *Confessions*, but it is not unusual to find elegiac episodes intimately mixed with picaresque, the change occurring back and forth with great rapidity. Shouldn't we recognize, here, in this full re-creation of lived experience, the equivalent of an important aspect of Rousseau's "system," a replica of his philosophy of history? According to that philosophy, man originally possessed happiness and joy: in comparison with that first felicity, the present is a time of degradation and corruption. But man was originally a brute deprived of "light," his reason still asleep; compared to that initial obscurity, the present is a time of lucid reflection and enlarged consciousness. The past, then, is at once the object of nostalgia and the object of irony; the present is at once a state of (moral) degradation and (intellectual) superiority.<sup>15</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I employ this term to designate an autobiographer independently of his quality as writer.
2. Cf. Gilles-G. Granger, *Essai d'une philosophie du style* (Paris, 1968), pp. 7-8.
3. I refer, obviously, to the conception of stylistics implicit in the first period of the work of Leo Spitzer. Cf. *Linguistics and Literary History* (New York, 1962), pp. 11-14.
4. Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1966), p. 242. See, also, Harald Weinrich, *Tempus. Besprochene und erzählte Welt* (Stuttgart, 1964).
5. "In the narrative, if the narrator doesn't intervene, the third person is not opposed to any other, it is truly an absence of person," *Ibid.*, p. 242.
6. On the role of autobiography in the history of culture, see Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (Bern-Frankfurt-am-Main, 1949-1969), in eight volumes. See also Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London, 1960).

7. There is an excellent discussion of this problem in Weinrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-53.
8. Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, introduction by Gérard Genette (Paris, 1968), pp. 143 ff.
9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1959), I, 3:  
"Whoever you may be whom my destiny or my confidence has made the arbiter of the fate of this notebook . . ."
10. *Ibid.*, p. 7:  
"Let the last trump sound when it will, I shall come forward with this work in my hand, to present myself before my Sovereign Judge . . . I have bared my secret soul as Thou thyself hast seen it, Eternal Being! So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions. Let them groan at my depravities, and blush for my misdeeds." Translation by J. M. Cohen (Baltimore, 1953).
11. Cf. Jacques Voisin, "Le Dialogue avec le lecteur dans *Les Confessions*," in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son oeuvre: Commémoration et colloque de Paris* (Paris, 1964), 23-32.
12. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *op. cit.*, I, 1153.  
"For what I have to say I need to invent a language which is as new as my project: for what tone, what style can I assume to unravel the immense chaos of sentiments, so diverse, so contradictory, often so vile and sometimes so sublime, which have agitated me without respite? . . . Thus I have decided to do the same with my style as with my content. I shall not apply myself to rendering it uniform; I shall always put down what comes to me, I shall change it according to my humor without scruple, I shall say each thing as I feel it, as I see it, without study, without difficulty, without burdening myself about the resulting mixture. In giving myself up to the memory of the received impression and the present feeling, I shall doubly paint the state of my soul, namely at the moment when the event happened to me and the moment when I wrote it: my uneven and natural style, sometimes rapid and sometimes diffuse, sometimes wise and sometimes mad, sometimes grave and sometimes gay, will itself form part of my story."
13. *Ibid.*, p. 226:  
"My imagination, which in my youth always looked forward but now looks back, compensates me with these sweet memories for the hope I have lost for ever. I no longer see anything in the future to attract me; only a return into the past can please me, and these vivid and precise returns into the period of which I am speaking often give me moments of happiness in spite of my misfortunes."
14. *La Vie de Lazarillo de Tormès (édition bilingue)*, introduction by Marcel Bataillon (Paris, 1958), prologue, p. 88.
15. I refer principally to *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. Cf. preface and critical commentary in Rousseau, *op. cit.*, III.



## DISCUSSION OF STAROBINSKI'S PAPER

In connection with Starobinski's discussion of the function of the tenses in autobiography, it was noted that the *passé composé* in French is the tense which brings the past into the present and that perhaps its effect was stronger in earlier times when it contrasted even more with the *passé simple* than it does now. Starobinski replied that in Rousseau the use of the *passé composé* is a means of introducing elegiacally a nostalgic, evocative, quasi-present attitude.

An attempt was made to confirm Starobinski's idea of autobiography as a mixed entity—a discourse-history—by suggesting the possibility of the reverse, namely that of a history-discourse, as exemplified by Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*. Whereas in the confessions of St. Augustine and Rousseau, the discourse-history seeks to support the conversion, in Descartes it seeks to lessen the weight of the truth because the truth is a dangerous one. Starobinski agreed about the possibility of a history-discourse. He felt the need for a detailed study of Rousseau's style and thought that perhaps the reason for the present lack of such study was precisely that it was a style whose emotive and intellectual values send us compulsively back to the referent. There is thus an effect of concealing the style.

It was also observed that in the autobiography, as in the novel, discourse has to be interpreted in terms of the *real*. Yet discourse is not itself the real, but rather a sign of the real; there exists a semiotic relation.

The rest of the discussion turned on the importance of the pronouns, as parties of the discourse, in establishing the genre. Starobinski was asked whether the presence of a *you* (*tu*) which is addressed by an *I* is an essential element in the autobiography. It is noteworthy that autobiography is a dialogue in which the *I* does not wait for a response. His attention was drawn to an early biography, Abélard's *Historia Calamitatum* whose first sentence contains a "you" (*tu*) which is purely fictive. This pronoun gave to contemporaries the possibility of an interpretation. The first sentence of the first letter by Eloise refers to this text as a "consolation"; the consolation is a well-defined genre in the period. Historically this consolation

aroused a response from the real "you" when the original "you" was fictive. Starobinski said that he was happy to have another illustration of the problem of analyzing "address" (*destination*) in the genre. Theresa of Avila could also be mentioned in this connection: she addressed herself to her confessors; again it is the addressee or audience which justifies the writing. He added that it is useful to recall that medieval authors were very conscious of the dangers of the pleasure implicit in writing; communicating something elegantly and well could be a culpable act. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, Augustine offers precautions against feeling any sense of pleasure in hearing a sermon when one is supposed to be paying attention to the edifying message. The moral legitimation of autobiography can be a sort of exorcism against taking pleasure in literature, an art judged by the era and by long tradition to be capable—like the theater—of distracting one from holiness.

Concerning the analysis of the receiver or addressee (*destinataire*, or *allocutaire*), it was noted that, according to Freud, no present discursive situation can exist except in reference to a preceding discursive situation. The topic of the present utterance was necessarily the addressee of the former. The present "he" is the former "you." No discourse should be conceived as occurring for the first time.

Another participant noted that every *I* necessarily implies a *you*; the *you* is the image which one supposes the other to have of himself. As for the "I" of autobiography, there is no other definition of "I" than "the one who calls himself 'I.'" This is essentially a "shifter" definition (to use Jakobson's term); the autobiographical "I," the *auto-* in *autobiography*, is the exorcising substitute for the linguistic tautology that "I is the one who says 'I.'" It tries to exorcise the tautology, to divert it, to substantivize and deformalize it. Thus it is a process of "de-shifterizing" the shifter. How? By filling this "I who says 'I'" with an image, that is, someone of veracity and sincerity; he is, of course, no less imaginary than any other character in narrative. This ontologically empty "I" is filled by Rousseau with a figure possessing desire, pride, and intelligence. It is the image which Rousseau wants people to have of him. In such *littérature de signification* each episode functions as an exemplum of character, of a person. The autobiography is something which fills that which is unfillable at the level of language. It takes the whole discourse to "de-shift" this shifter. Starobinski found himself in substantial agreement, except that one must recognize that there exists for Rousseau a prior imaginary person who must be responded to and warded off, namely the persecutor. Rousseau wrote because he felt universally persecuted. It was necessary to re-establish the image of his true innocence. He needed to get others to recognize his innocence, for it was only when they did that he could be reconciled with himself.

## 6

THE STYLES  
OF INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS  
AND TEXTS

