

# The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography\*

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

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

--St. Augustine

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

-1-

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

James M. Cox doubtless expresses our common-sense response to such questions when he claims that autobiography is basically a factual rather than a fictional "narrative of a person's life written by himself."<sup>1</sup> But as we learn from instances where fiction mimics autobiography, the narrative by itself formally determines and so takes precedence over the putative, factual orientation of autobiographical references. Moreover, along with Northrop Frye and other critics, we can stress that in selecting, ordering, and integrating the writer's lived experiences according to its own teleological demands, the autobiographical narrative is beholden to certain imperatives of imaginative discourse. Autobiography, in short, transforms empirical facts into *artifacts*: it is definable as a form of "prose fiction."<sup>2</sup> Cox himself examines particular autobiographies less as a neutral rendering of facts than as a charged, condensed narrative through which the autobiographer symbolically reckons with his

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life as it was lived in socially dramatic situations--in revolutionary periods, for example, "when politics and history become dominant realities for the imagination" (p. 252).

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

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

But while some autobiographies seem to exhibit or evince "ironic" discrepancies such as Starobinski perceives (for example, in Rousseau's *Confessions*), it is also true that in most autobiographies instances of tension between the act and object of signification are unequally distributed throughout the narrative. In other words, they are inconsistent with or inessential to the narrative as a whole. Moreover, though this conception manages to suspend the so-called "truth" import of autobiographies, it fails to argue for the full aesthetic accessibility of an autobiographical text. Being mentally closer to his past than the reader, the writer can best appreciate its anxious complication of his or her present narrative and vice versa, whereas the reader can only "suspect" this temporal dialectic. Clearly, we can argue for autobiography as a genuine imaginative enterprise only if we adopt the reader's *a posteriori* relation to the text and insist that the writer's references to his or her

past are subordinate to (as though they were a mere contingent source of "life-images") a narrative essentially representing the writer's present self-identity apprehended also in the light of his or her future.<sup>8</sup> Here the immediately accessible narrative becomes the autobiography itself. Put another way, autobiography is the writer's de facto attempt to elucidate his/her present rather than past.

Thus, Barrett John Mandel essentially argues that the autobiographer's present spawns the aforementioned drama of self-cognition, for no one can "talk about the present at all but . . . by distancing and fictionalizing it." Speaking as a would-be autobiographer, Mandel argues that his *present* creates his past "by inspiring meaningless data with interpretation, direction, suggestiveness--life. But as long as I live, my past is rooted in my present and springs to life with my present . . . . I cannot fully give my past to the page because it flows mysteriously out of the incomprehensible moods of the present. And as new moods come upon me, my past comes upon me differently."<sup>9</sup> This all but Coleridgean isolation of the writer's creative present at the time of writing allows us to view autobiography as a work, like works of poetic fiction, wholly and immediately accessible to readers. But note what we have done: in sacrificing the autobiographer's past to a secondary role vis-à-vis his "incomprehensible . . . present," *any* first-person narrative-of-a-life that necessarily seems to re-present the author's own mental experiences at the time of writing could be termed autobiographical and/or fictive.

Out of a need to justify or "apologize" for placing autobiography in the context of imaginative rather than what Frye would call "descriptive" modes of writing, we are led to accept James Olney's assertion that "autobiography and poetry are both definitions of the [writing] self at a moment and in a place."<sup>10</sup> Ironically, however, the genre-nominalism of such "apologies" perforce overlook the fact that allows us to theorize about autobiography in the first place: we have little difficulty recognizing and therefore reading autobiographies as opposed to works of fiction.<sup>11</sup> Second, in having to assume that the desideratum of both modes of writing turns on the reader's self-effacing participation in the process, his or her becoming more or less coincident with the writing self when reading the work, such "apologies" must overlook the fact that most formal autobiographies fail to pass the test of being intrinsic, purely self-referential--"literary"--events.<sup>12</sup> No matter how secondary the role it plays in actual narrative execution, the factual basis of autobiographical references tends to generate texts relatively closed off from rather than open to the muse who speaks in plurisignative tongues. That is why the critic intent on maintaining the aesthetic-intransitive experience of literary texts finds conventional autobiographies to be less appropriate paradigms than novelistic works like Frank Conroy's *Stop-time* (Mandel), or extended lyrical poems like T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (Olney). The holistic-minded reader can even transform separate essays like Montaigne's into a hypothetical narrative reflecting a discrete, cumulative, yet always present interrogation of the author who, like a surrogate "everyman," coincides with the very narrative(s) we are in the process of reading.<sup>13</sup>

Nostalgic for the presentational powers of imaginative literature, then, and desiring to colonize autobiography in the name of literary art, the apologist for autobiography is apt to fictionalize the object about which he or she theorizes. One here attenuates autobiography's explicit, formal claim to be a legitimate personal-historical document. One thus underestimates the truism that autobiographical references appear as subject to extrinsic verification (Pascal, p. 188), especially to the autobiographer's contemporaries. One also assumes that autobiographies, prone to the rhetorical justifications or ideological assertions of the writing self that specifically pertain to his or her cultural-historical (and not timeless) milieu, also tend to exclude the immediate participation of a

noncontemporary audience. Most important, such an apologist fails to consider the high casualty rate that this "literary" standard would effect if it were seriously used as a way to define and judge *prima facie* autobiographies.

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

-2-

Although our recognition of autobiography as a formal genre historically precedes our attempts to explain its constitution, nothing prevents us from exploring the issue of how discrete acts of writing become identifiable as autobiographical to the writing self as he or she writes.<sup>14</sup> Adopting this perspective, we very well might soon realize how alienated, how verbally entropic, the autobiographical enterprise is. Unlike the apologist for autobiography, we find that even in the heat of writing, the autobiographical enterprise occludes the writer's own continuity with the "I" being conveyed through his or her narrative performance.

One can evoke something of this alienation when thinking about marginally formal instances of autobiographical writing. Diary and journal entries, for example, do not simply signify their referents to the writer who wrote them and now reads them in another present; they can also signify to him or her the absence of a past-present consciousness concerning their genesis--their original urgency or meaningfulness. Written by "another," in this case himself or herself, the journal writer's previous thoughts can return to that writer with that Emersonian echo of alienated majesty. Such discontinuities or lesions of personal time also occur with specific memory-acts, even when they pertain to other memories. Thus, Proust notes how

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

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

lasting. The profanation of one of my memories by unknown readers was a crime that I myself committed before them" (p. 157).

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

In contrast, the autobiographer's intentional act aggravates the duality inherent in personal memory-acts. This duality goes beyond the epistemological dilemma previously discussed, for it neither precedes the verbal act nor results in the writer's immediate commitment to his or her narrative. Wanting to verbalize past events, one finds that they appear against a prelinguistic background, a gestalt of pastness, which is at once absent from these signifiable events and at odds with the "present" orientation of the discursive intention.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, written discourse exacerbates the phenomenological dilemma created by verbal recollection. More than speaking, writing is what "explodes that darkness on which the memory draws." Writing exposes as arbitrary or merely contiguous the relation between the act of signification and the signified past, thus making possible the isolation of pastness vis-à-vis the verbal medium that permits the autobiographical project to be conceived in the first place. Not the omission of facts--this after all implies that the past is a hypothetically recoverable totality--but the omission of the past *as* past stands beyond the pale of spoken recitations of one's life. Augustine's written confessions, for example, lie somewhere between his awareness of his own lacuna-ridden past and his awareness that language displaces this past whenever he speaks of it to others:

With regard to the past, when this is reported correctly what is brought out from the memory is not the events themselves (these are already past) but words conceived from the images of those events . . . . My boyhood, for instance, which no longer exists, exists in time past, which no longer exists. But when I recollect the image of my boyhood and tell others about it [*cum eam recolo et narro*], I am looking at this image in time present.<sup>18</sup>

"Words" used in telling, while being two removes from the event indicated by "this image," do not provoke the "autobiographical" speaker to focus on their problematic, nonimmediate relation to the remembered event being signified.

Thus, the speaker tends not to recognize that the "I" used in his speech act is, as Roland Barthes maintains, "always new, even if it is repeated," despite the fact that his interlocutors suppose this "I" to be "a stable sign, product of a complete code whose contents are recurrent."<sup>19</sup> But in writing, this breach between an "always new" narrator and a "stable" one becomes imminent: "When a narrator [of a written text] recounts what has happened to him, the I who recounts is no longer the one that is recounted" (p. 162). Even this recounting "I," composed of what Barthes after Emile Benveniste calls "the instance of discourse," is not the self who writes, as long as we take this self to be

"an interiority constituted previous to and outside language" (p. 163). As a matter of fact, autobiography here would seem to be guilty of a Barthesian mode of "bad faith," for is not autobiography an attempt to signify the autobiographer's nontextual identity or "interiority"?

But in the previously cited quotation, Augustine not only suggests but demonstrates--*by* his writing--the capacity of writing to isolate and transcend the way spoken self-references hypostatize images of his past as the events themselves. Writing thus bears metaverbal gifts: in the passage in question, it allows Augustine to reflect on its own process of signification and to grasp the non-existence or absence of his past in relation to both spoken and written self-references. More relevant for a Christian autobiographer, it allows him to "confess," to be a witness or (in the older sense of the word) a "confessor" to his brute "I was" and "I am" apart from what he can record verbally about his life. The written text consequently functions as a point of meditative departure for Augustine. Desiring to be more and more aware of God's creation, Augustine also desires to interpret his own personal existence as an experienceable sign of this creation. By exposing the discrepancy between the past the autobiographer has lived and his "present" signification of it, autobiographical writing facilitates this interpretation insofar as it elicits a consciousness of self that transcends his "words" and is therefore imageless--just there, in its absence and pastness. Another example of the foregoing occurs in Book XI of the *Confessions* where, precisely through the meditative space afforded by writing, Augustine is enabled to focus on the disjunction between his experience of time as lived versus that experience as knowable. He then proceeds to use the resultant indeterminacy of these juxtaposed "experiences" as testimony to the continuing mystery of God's creation.

Similarly, the image of self propagated by the lexical "I" of his textual present becomes grounds for identifying his present as his own, a mystery to himself, through but finally beyond his discrete textual acts. Focused on himself, the "silence" of written as compared with spoken discourse serves as an immediate occasion to apprehend the silent or private identity of his own soul, especially since (as we have already observed) writing has the capacity to loosen and disrupt the coitions of words, images, and events. Written words recognize their finite status: they essentially signify a higher signifier, the *logos* of human consciousness, which in turn signifies what *cannot* become signified: the eternal *Logos*. Thus, the words composing Augustine's *Confessions* are imitations, copies, or more precisely, intentional acts the object of which (his consciousness of self as such) reduces them to exterior signs concealing (dialectically determined) silent or invisible confessions: "And I do not make my confessions by means of the words and sounds of the flesh, but with the words of the soul and the crying out of my thought which [Your] ear knows" (10:2). While in Augustine's *Confessions* ideology and autobiography complement each other, it seems evident from later examples of the genre that such complementarity is due as much to the indefinite intentionality of self induced by autobiographical writing as to the prescriptive demands, say, of Christianity. Thus, self-abnegation--the transcendence of self from an existence named and nameable by discourse--constitutes revelation for Augustine, but is a source of anxiety and paranoia for a writer like Rousseau. At the very least, such transcendence underscores the suicidal implications of the genre. But what I want to stress here is that the written autobiographical act itself--and not a prior cognitive or methodological dilemma--yields this potential self-abnegation, this divorce between the writing self and his textual rendition. There is no question of "bad faith" with the autobiographical act, only with the ensuing product that presents Augustine as he writes with an empty or discursive "self," an "I" never his own because it makes present what remains past to him. It is as if the autobiographer could

communicate his life to others but never to himself: "There's no such thing as the impossibility of communication except in a single case: between me and myself."<sup>20</sup>

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

To write autobiographically, then, one has no choice but to engage somehow, in some manner, in the "impersonating" effect of discourse, either to give into it, as Gertrude Stein does in *Everybody's Autobiography*, or to resist it openly, as Henry Miller does in *Tropic of Cancer*. Autobiographical intentionality depends on just such diacritical retention of the "I." In this sense, Thoreau's famous assertion at the beginning of *Walden* lends itself to two contexts of interpretation: "In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained." Formally, this is "apology," an asserted justification of "egotism" or vanity to the self-effacing norms of conventional and literary writing. But phenomenologically it is a self-conscious insistence on the self-referentiality of his "I" made in the face of writing's law of gravity: namely, that writing about his own existence ironically entails a denial of this existence as his own and thus as a secure referential source for such writing.

-2-

Autobiographical writing thus entails a split intentionality: the "I" becoming a "he" or "she"; the writer's awareness of his or her life becoming private even as he or she brings it into the public domain and putatively makes it present through the act of writing. This split, peculiar to the autobiographical task, suggests that the project of writing about oneself to oneself is always at the beginning, is always propaedeutic in structure, and is therefore prone to an obsessive concern with method as well as a "stuttering," fragmented narrative appearance.<sup>21</sup> But there are ways to mitigate this split. One can try to suppress the consciousness of pastness; one can "confess" it openly to oneself; or one can even extol it and emphasize the narcissism proposed by the autobiographical act. If a self-referential privacy defines the autobiographical act as such to the writing self, then how he deals with this self-privacy during the course of his writing also determines the mode of autobiographical statements and the resultant appearance of the "form."

Needless to say, any or all three types of mitigation may occur within particular autobiographical narratives, for with autobiography especially the part at once determines and undermines the whole. Despite the fact that the formal identity of a given autobiography tends to be unstable, however, let us transform these three into a typological spectrum, supposing that an autobiographical writer is apt to rely on one of them to the exclusion of the others. Thus in the first type, the memoir mode, the writer in effect tries to suppress her evocation of pastness by surrendering to the present-oriented and public currents of language and literary convention, notably to the way they conspire with the writer's specific historical situation and its ideological parameters of "self" to determine how one tends to represent oneself before contemporaries. The memoir-prone autobiographer uses language to declassify information about her life; she uses language to apprehend her own life

as an intersubjective phenomenon. Discourse proffers the impression that this life is transparently accessible to others--to the readers immediately invoked as she writes--and she accedes to this impression in order to distract herself from the margins of pastness that her autobiographical act intentionally sets in motion. Thus, for example, an autobiographer's apostrophic appeal to an indefinite "posterity" not only serves to modify contemporary pressures affecting her act of self-representation, it also serves to defuse, for herself, the issue of pastness that the autobiographical act itself invokes.<sup>22</sup> If this issue were pursued further, it could disrupt the project; it could desocialize or *declassify*, as she writes, whatever intersubjective sense of self the autobiographer has carried into her work.

The "secret" script of Pepys's diaries, for example, serves to secrete from himself his implicit identity as an alienated voyeur or private person in bourgeois society. Excluding, as it were, this contemporary sense of self (for which nonsecret diaries would have sufficed), his private code "presents" or defines himself to himself before an imagined, nonalienated audience "located" in some indefinite future where and when he will be only the self signified by his diaries. Like most diarists, Pepys believes in the magical power of language to banish now--in the present of his discourse--the blank waysides accruing to lived time. For this reason, he writes "posthumously": in and through a discursive present when his daily experiences, as if already in some future present, will have been saved from becoming irretrievably past.

But language used in this manner is given an overdetermined power of self-revision. The memoir-prone writer relies heavily on preestablished verbal conventions to neutralize, to accommodate self-convincingly, the pressure of a private past that his act intentionally brings up to him. Hence, the formal habits of autobiographies are often strategies to reinforce the line against phenomenological eruptions of private time. The famous *res gestae* format, for instance, effectively "public-izes" the writer's already public deeds; or it sets up a socially current, ideological framework that makes the writer's "interior" experiences--as with religious autobiographies and their depictions of sins, graces, conversions, and spiritual trials--seem fully accessible to himself as well as others. Similarly, the teleological pattern--the convention of treating one's life as a story--encourages the writer to use socioreligious quotients of success or failure in viewing his life as having a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>23</sup>

However, the price of such usage can be telling. On one hand, invoking the spell of intersubjective, verbal conventions, whose intersubjectivity is even underscored by the visual duration of written texts, outlaws the writer's conceiving the possibility of a radically private setting to his or her experiences. On the other hand, this possibility *becomes* possible as soon as the "I" is written down since now the writing self can "intend" this "I" as leaving behind in its wake references that alter the referents themselves; one's signification of the past now can appear to oneself as an act that conceals or, at the very least, somehow mediates this past.

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

narrative "I" belongs to language, that it constitutes a "secondary revision" of one's life, or that it is and can only be a mask of oneself, one may still use this apperception of the writing act to filter out the pastness that, as I have argued, the act itself evokes. He or she may still present self-references in the mode of a wholly accessible self or as if some anyone. But any such declaration of independence from one's past would be self-conscious--it must be chosen continually--and hence tends to occur here and there rather than as a whole throughout the work. Short of aborting the autobiographical project altogether, how else could it be? To identify with or certify an arbitrary rendition of oneself leads at one extreme to hagiography and at the other to a fictive suspension of the writer's distance from his or her written "I."

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

Yet the pull of the past always remains a latent issue abrogating this autobiographical project. Specific memories that in "content" seem laden with affectivity are muffled by the momentum of his self-evidently emotionless prose:

We both [Denham and himself] were taken ill. My Distemper was a Pleurisy, which very nearly carried me off: I suffered a good deal, gave up the Point in my mind, and was rather disappointed when I found my Self recovering; regretting in some degree that I must now some time or other have all that disagreeable work to do over again. I forget what his Distemper was. It held him a long time, and at length carried him off. He left me a small Legacy in a nuncupative Will . . . and he left me once more to the wide World. (p. 107)

Here particularly, Franklin's casual style belies the affective implication of his memory, namely that his present success was nearly nullified by this past event. Thus, he manages to convert this memory, which could signify for him the contingency of his origins and therefore of his present self-identity, into the present of serially disposed, oblique verbal images like "suffered *a good deal*," "very nearly gave up *the Point*," and "*in some degree*." By his defused language, by the ease with which he surrenders this incident to the linear momentum of his narrative, and by his rather cursory allusion to a teleological future ("left me once more to the wide World," that is, leading to his self-certain present) Franklin cancels his own latent "distemper" in recollecting a specific scene charged with

social impotence and even a suicidal inclination. Language not only allows him to mitigate personal as well as social friction; as the arbiter of his own self-consciousness, it allows him to do so arbitrarily.<sup>26</sup>

With its concealment of the writing self's distance from his written "I" as it appears through the autobiographical act, Franklin's *Autobiography* shows us that the exemplary motif common to autobiographies is not simply reducible to a determinate ideology preceding the work. The exemplary or model "I" in autobiography ipso facto belongs to writing: it constitutes a self-evident "dummy" ego by which the autobiographer is kept aware of or acknowledges the discrepancy between his "life" and life. In more definitive cases of the confessional mode of writing, the autobiographer explicitly testifies or "confesses" to his or her own separation both from the written "I" and from the intersubjective imperatives incurred by this act of writing. St. Teresa openly confesses, for example, how the authority of the Church is submerging, as she writes, the actual appearance of her thus privately constituted experiences behind the verbal persona of her life: "I wish I had also been allowed to describe clearly and in full detail my grave sins and wicked life . . . . [But] I have been subjected to severe restrictions [by my confessors] in the matter."<sup>27</sup> Teresa's *Life* is being written, then, as a secondary revision, a public version, of a "life" being silently and conterminously traced in her mind. What would otherwise be a repressive dilemma, however, works in Teresa's favor here. The socioreligious prescriptions forcing her to write as a spiritual persona for lay and clerical members of the Church help her determine the privacy of her past and present existence, which she can then--again, privately--sacrifice to God, offering Him, in effect, the untouched because unsignified "virginity" of her being. Thus, toward the end of her *Life*, she willingly embraces her social isolation and, by analogy, chooses to exclude the socially discursive aspect of her written *Life*: "His Majesty [God] has put me in this little comer, where I live in such strict enclosure, and where I am so much like a dead thing that I once thought nobody would ever remember me again. But this has not been so to the extent I should like, as there are certain people to whom I am obliged to speak" (*Works*, 1 :297-298). Encased within the intersubjective walls of language, her autobiography, like the cloister, paradoxically excludes her sense of others.

Teresa's withdrawal from life is also, then, a withdrawal from the public aspect of her *Life*. She converts the latter into a radically private prayer, a monological text, a secret expression of her own self, which she can do only by silently writing in reverse--toward herself alone--in order to experience what remains a project (not a realization) of religious self-abnegation. Teresa's Christian orientation, of course, invites her to use in a positive way the duality inherent in autobiographical intentionality. But in secular autobiographies such as *The Education of Henry Adams* where no single sanctioned ideology immanently seems to circumscribe the autobiographical act, this duality results in an outright alienation from the text, in a fixation on the unresolved discrepancy between the way writing "public-izes" the autobiographer to others and the way it signifies himself to himself.

Adams therefore regards his *Education* as a "failure," an arbitrary document per se, reflecting neither his intersubjectively accessible life and times nor his own existence as he lived it to himself. On one hand, he writes as an exemplary "he" caught within the teleological trappings of a narrative of "education"; yet if he restricts the value and immediate availability of his work to a privileged audience already familiar with his life and times, he finally blocks even from this audience, Adams defamiliarizes his persona by reducing it to a dumb "manikin" or an explicit, abstract, anonymous "he" subject to inexpressible "supersensual" forces. On the other hand, his own past appears to him through the gap pervading the middle of his life as he writes his "life." He literally leaves out his

marital life from *The Education* not because it has little to do with the topic, but because his wife's suicide permeates his recollections with inexpressible pastness. That is, the gap signifies his own immediate absence, his present discontinuity, from a life he nevertheless lived.<sup>28</sup> Unable to see himself as a representative persona for anyone and yet also unable to "intend" his own past except in the context of a dissipating gestalt, Adams writes an autobiographical work that is, to himself, thoroughly incomplete--an "education" that leads him out of the accountable into the unaccountable aspect of his past life.

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

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

Such eclecticism, no doubt, could be construed as simple mimetic strategy. We could take Rousseau at his word, for example, and view the shifting "styles" in his *Confessions* as ways to depict himself according to his past life: "I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or about what my feelings have led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story."<sup>31</sup> More likely, however, these eccentric swerves from self-sustaining narrative compression indicate the autobiographer's anxiety over the way writing channels his existence into a progressive self-image not his own. Unlike the memoir mode where they serve as temporary substitutes for the perpetually inadequate self-image writing presents via autobiographical intentionality, and unlike the confessional mode where they signify a resigned or willing concession to the intersubjective limits imposed on self-expression, in various autobiographies of the

narcissistic mode these eccentric verbal moments act as signs of vigilance, guarding the writer's consciousness of himself, his self-identity, from slipping into whatever norms of self-reference he is aware of, if only subliminally, at the time of writing. In this sense Rousseau's "mimetic" explanation for his stylistic pluralism in the *Confessions* should be weighed against his conscientious resistance to writing about himself according to the pressures and habits of those modes of self-representation with which he was familiar before writing his work. Thus he abjures the tempting but (to himself) self-distorting routes of apologetics, religious narratives of conversion, also "*des histoires, des vies, des portraits, des caracteres . . . des romans ingenieux batis sur quelques actes extérieurs, sur quelques discours qui s'y rapportent, sur de subtiles conjectures où l'Auteur cherche bien plus à briller lui-même qu'à trouver la vérité*"--he even abjures the method of what to him are the quasi-autobiographical revelations of Montaigne, claiming it only gives us a "profile" of the person, an artistic portrait of Montaigne's self ensconced in the chiaroscuro of language.<sup>32</sup>

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

For Rousseau, then, to write autobiographically means to react consistently and aggressively against self-forgetfulness through the discursive act--against, in other words, fictional intentionality. It also means to assert and experience his self-identity by excluding the presence of others "who" appear immediately, as a presupposition of writing, and otherwise distract him from his task to *write* about his life as accessible to and hence assessable by himself alone: "I shall continue just the same faithfully to reveal what J. J. Rousseau was, did, and thought, without inquiring whether any others have thought like him" (*Confessions*, bk. 12, p. 595). Incessantly protesting too much, he sees himself always plotted against. The autobiographical act, with its intrinsic suspicion of discourse's tendency to present the self before others and make present--mediate--a consequently evermore inviolable pastness, condenses the object of Rousseau's paranoia into the plot-ridden traps of language itself. Thus, even those reveries included in the *Confessions*, in spite of their seemingly random, relatively timeless and depressurized "this, then that happened" appearance, can be construed as aggressive responses to his anxiety over being "fixed" in a narrative-cum-existential sense at the time of writing.<sup>33</sup> Feeling plotless himself, Rousseau *looks for* plots outside of himself so that he can view himself as, in every meaning of the pronoun, the first person of his life, an idiosyncratic "*moi, moi seul*" ("*Ebauches*," p. 1149) concealed between the lines of each narrative moment. In the invisible recesses of his text, Rousseau retains the "I-ness" of his written "I" the more he reveals it self-consciously before his anticipated readers.

Rousseau finally disdains the possibility of balancing the dualistic appearance of persona and person; rather, he "intends" himself mostly as an illicit person and crosses over into what I heuristically term the narcissistic mode of autobiographical writing. Here, the writing self tries to trans-

form the self-privacy yielded by the autobiographical act into a sui generis principle of self-identity. This is where we encounter the provocative association of autobiography and paranoia, an association touched upon by Freud in his psychobiographical revision of Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*.<sup>34</sup> I would like to suggest that a metafather image, mediated, yet not finally expressible by literal and figurative father images (cf. Franklin's Denham and Teresa's confessors), generates the writer's need to assert his self-identity repetitively or else as a once-and-for-all conversion.

Psychologically fatherless and ideologically (if not in his literal discourse) godless, Rousseau evokes through his autobiographical act the chaos of absence, the equivalent of Kafka's "that darkness on which the memory draws." Rousseau brings up his own discontinuous, arbitrary origins--his pastness--which he tries to convert into being the fatherlike source of himself. This is why he excludes "others" from the consciousness of his act. In effect, "they" distract him from the self-privacy elicited by this act. So too his confessions of masturbation and general sense of betrayal by others not only signify his aggressive exclusion of others, his rejection of "social" intercourse, sexual, discursive, and otherwise; they also mirror his autobiographical act in that they represent withdrawals of affect from others (in autobiographical terms, the "others" attached to discourse and the eventual destiny of his text) so as to effect a wholly private, autoeroticized consciousness of self. Analogously, in early Puritan autobiographies of the seventeenth century, the self-abasing "I," the mostly male writer's narrative inflation of himself as the "chief of sinners," serves as a pretext by which he "elects" idiosyncrasy--spiritual uniqueness--or strives to realize a definitive experience of his own spiritual identity beyond that of others and in the paranoid context (here evoked by the desire for a special self-conversion) of an arbitrary God.<sup>35</sup>

A spirit of anarchism thus haunts the autobiographical act. Such anarchism is frequently mitigated in works where the writer blends the exclusive sense of self disclosed through his or her act into an exclusive, though collective, "minority" persona. A black autobiographer defining self over and against what to him or her consists of an arbitrary yet pervasive system of white values--values synonymous with the very language being employed; Franklin casually asserting his American independence from the arbitrary tyranny of English political and cultural life by infiltrating the homonymic English language; homosexual autobiographies or autobiographical works like Whitman's or Genet's, written in the immediate context of heterosexual "others" and disguised as such for the writing self by their socially privy ("in drag") pronominal references--these are common examples of how the writing, revolutionary self, already predisposed to resist linguistic usage that is phenomenologically occupied by a given social establishment, coincides with and at least temporarily realizes the narcissistic trend of autobiographical intentionality. But it is also clear that any sustained autobiographical project, predicated as it is on the duality inherent in its intentional acts, inevitably tends to expose the writing self's distance from even his revolutionary persona, as in the case of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Or else it leads to its own abandonment in fact if not in literal performance; for in repressing this incurred duality, the writer forfeits his or her textual performance as signifying *one's own* self in favor of a self at once continuous with others and in accord with the idealism of an omniscient discourse.

The pull toward anarchic privacy, the consciousness of one's life as one's own exclusive of others in and through discourse, this is both the self-experiential signal and latent direction of autobiographical writing to the self as he or she writes: "This then? This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, a Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty . . . what you will."<sup>36</sup> The "this" here is the narcissistic

extreme of autobiographical writing. It lasts, however, only as long as the autobiographical act is performed, for only in this act can the writer suspect the ethical, psychological, and linguistic priorities engaged, to cite a quotation from Wallace Stevens, "merely in living as and where we live." It is only in the autobiographical act that the writer can "intend" the narcissistic trend of self-consciousness as a truth as opposed to a fiction of consciousness. Continued beyond this act, the autobiographer's apperceived insulation from others can go the way of mysticism or its dubious double, namely the translation of the autobiographical act into the supreme fixation of solipsism.

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Needless to say, the typologies of autobiographical writing that I have tried to elucidate in this essay refer to autobiography's "idea," to how we can think of its verbal identity from the imagined perspective of the writer immediately situated in the act of writing. For as actual readers--those of us at a second remove from the text's genesis--we are fated to be voyeurs or "biographers" of the writer's "life." We ask the narrative to be primary; whether in content (*vis-à-vis* the author's past) or in style (her present), the "life" necessarily appears comparable or substantially continuous with the writer's life. But though we are bound to lend narrative totality to autobiographical significations, they intentionally reside, as I have tried to argue, beyond the narrative they are set in, and as a consequence tend to *detotalize*--make contingent--this very same narrative. As A. M. Clark suggested in 1935, autobiographical narratives are apt to seem two dimensional, since the autobiographer conscientiously needs "to be aware of and then to resist the temptation to create" (p. 20). Clark's observation is accurate as long as one keeps in mind that the autobiographer's awareness of and resistance to narrative fixation are not reflective but intentional acts. Except as inoperative concepts, such awareness and resistance do not preexist the writing; rather, they signify the writer's immediate consciousness of the relation of one's writing with the "time" of one's time. The autobiographical act discloses a spontaneous or an unsought-for intentionality, a "calling" uncalled for, that requires different responses from the writer at explicitly different intervals in the evolution of his text.

The nature of the autobiographical act thus precludes the possibility that the writer can deliberately adopt a persona behind which he conceals references to his own life. So-called "autobiographical fiction" and/or "incognito" autobiographies (Gusdorf, p. 121) are essentially quasi-autobiographical insofar as they presuppose the writer's having determined the privacy of his materials through a constantly prior "autobiographical" use of language, or more accurately a prior as well as nonreflective mental-scriptural act. But even granting the possibility of such an act and its unmediated, textual transcription, here again we are reminded that the text the reader reads exists at odds with the text the autobiographer writes. On one hand, the "I" of written discourse can never in itself signify the writer's self-presence. In fact, according to Jacques Derrida, it signifies his absence from being present to himself, for the writer can declare "I am also 'alive' and certain about it" only "as something that comes over and above the appearance of the meaning."<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, the autobiographer is separated from this "I" not only because of his or her absence from its present, but also because of the potential unverifiability of the autobiographer's material or references *vis-à-vis* the presence of the reading "other" whom he or she "intends" as one writes. "The child," Emerson writes in one of his journal entries, "is sincere, and the man when he is alone, *if he be not a writer* [my italics], but on the entrance of the second person hypocrisy begins."<sup>38</sup> We need not reduce his insight to a purely cognitive issue, namely that in writing about himself with the foreknowledge and immediate expectation that others will read it, the writer tends

to put his best or worst face forward; or conversely, that the task of the autobiographer is a privileged matter since he alone was the eyewitness of his life, he was closest to it, he alone can verify the authenticity of his references. Emerson's entry suggests, rather, that discourse itself spontaneously bears the stamp of verifiability, for since the "reader" is implicitly continuous with all utterances, anything to which language *can* refer is already de facto verifiable. This truism, however, poses a special problem for the autobiographer. Whereas even in spoken memory-acts the listener is, in effect, presently witnessing and procreating the objects being signified with the speaker, in autobiographical acts this present "other" appears to the writer as having been absent from the objects being signified. In autobiographical writing the intuited "reader" is phenomenologically absent from the signified references. The writer himself thus cannot immediately apprehend the verifiability of his own references.

To mitigate his alienation from his own activity brought about by the intentionality of his absent readership, the autobiographer may resort to measures like the ones discussed in the previous section of this essay. In particular, this issue of the "absent reader" helps explain why autobiographers commonly resort to writing in terms of autobiography's version of a muse: an anticipated, intimate, familial or familiar reader or group of readers, such as Franklin's son, Adams's close circle of friends (to whom *The Education* was first exclusively available), or Wordsworth's "Friend" addressed in *The Prelude*. Such invocations periodically serve to contain the severe objectification with which the split between the signifying memory and its signified referent presents the writing self.

But the fact remains that in no other discursive project does the "reader" so crucially aggravate the project's realization. Documented or not, biographical and historical materials are intersubjective through and through. Their intentional presupposition is that others were or could have been present at their making. Biographical as well as historical narratives reinforce this presupposition by seeming to act as transparent relayers of information to "others" as if already present at the time of writing, already underwriting, in other words, the verifiability of the references being made. Similarly, fictive (including poetic) writing projects its materials via a "reader" conterminous with its occurrence. These materials are thus constituted through "the instance of discourse" that propagates the illusion of their immediate accessibility and *imaginative* verifiability to this apparitional yet inescapable "reader," all of which designates discourse as an enterprise of full communication, even if only in potentia. The imagined and/or imaginary world of the writer of fiction always comes down to a "sharable" proposition.<sup>39</sup> But in autobiographical writing, materials seeming verifiable at first turn out to be unverifiable as they are written. Except by an explicit act of will, which already implies a separation from his or her act of writing, the autobiographer cannot depend on the "others" of discourse to substantiate self-references in a phenomenological sense. Writing raises the possibility that these "others" could have "existed" the writer's existence--and raises it as he or she writes. In doing this, writing also estranges one from one's signified referents--from one's own "life"--an estrangement moreover that the autobiographical writer alone is privy to while writing, since that writer is, quite literally, the only one who can *signify* his life to *herself* or *himself*.

There is no escaping this vicious circle. As estranged, autobiographical referents tend to appear within a dreamlike setting to the writing self; and here, at least, autobiographical writing seems to resemble fictional more than biographical or other "factual" modes of discourse. But even this resemblance must be qualified. The autobiographer cannot refer to his life as a dream without losing the *autobiographical* consciousness of that "life"; she cannot efface herself through a

dream-narrative except, again, by a willful act that denotes itself as such as she writes; nor can he fully commit himself to writing about writing's inability to signify his life, as he tries, nevertheless, to do so, for this would entail conceding his discursive act to the consciousness of "others." Each of these tacks would essentially abort the autobiographical project itself, a project thus paradoxically structured on the "reader's" absence, and hence predicated on the veto of all modes of imaginative intentionality.

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

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

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James M. Cox, "Autobiography and America," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 47 (1971): 254.

<sup>2</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 307-308.

<sup>3</sup> The problematic presence of fictional techniques and/or elements in autobiographical works has often been cited but no less often qualified in order to argue for autobiography's generic difference from overt works of fiction: A. M. Clark, *Autobiography: Its Genesis and Phases* (1935; reprint ed., London, 1969), pp. 10-21; Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 162-178 and 185-195; Alfred Kazin, "Autobiography as Narrative," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 3 (1964): 210-216; Barrett J. Mandel, "The Autobiographer's Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 27 (1968): 215-226; and Stephen Shapiro, "The Dark Continent of Literature: Autobiography," *Comparative Literature Studies* 5 (1968): 421-454. Also cf. Georg Misch, *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*, trans. E. W. Dickes (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), 1: 1,4.

<sup>4</sup> Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie," in *Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analekten zu einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits*, ed. Gunther Reichenkron and Erich Haase (Berlin, 1956), pp. 116-119.

<sup>5</sup> See Pascal, *Design and Truth*, especially pp. 83 and 188. It should be noted that Pascal and Gusdorf primarily stress the "formal" limitations of autobiography; they do not wish to claim, finally, that autobiography is what Pascal terms "imaginative art."

<sup>6</sup> See Francis R. Hart, "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," *New Literary History* 1 (1970), especially pp. 490-491 and 500-506. A clear statement of the autobiographer's "restlessness" with respect to his autobiographical efforts is given by Michael G. Cooke, "Modern Black Autobiography in the Tradition," in *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities*, ed. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca, 1973), p. 259.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York, 1971), p. 186. Cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1962), p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites," pp. 120-123, is also willing to see that the autobiographer's present consciousness of himself is incomplete since it is exposed toward his future. Also see Mandel, "The Autobiographer's Art," pp. 221 and 225, and Burton Pike, "Time in Autobiography," *Comparative Literature* 28 (1976): especially 327-328, and 337-339.

<sup>9</sup> Mandel, "Autobiography-Reflection Trained on Mystery," *Prairie Schooner* 46 (1972-1973): 327.

<sup>10</sup> James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, 1972), p.44.

<sup>11</sup> See Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (New York, 1968), p. 68, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Poetry as Fiction," *New Literary History* 2 (1971): 259-281.

<sup>12</sup> See Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, especially pp. 30-50, 261-265, and 312-314.

<sup>13</sup> Olney hardly conceals this attitude throughout his work, but see *ibid.*, especially pp. 79-88 and 299-316. Both Olney and Frye (p. 307) see Montaigne's work as "a confession made up of essays in which only the continuous narrative of the longer form is missing." Also cf. William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," *New Literary History* 5 (1974): especially 377.

<sup>14</sup> The paradox of genre and history is mentioned by Rene Wellek, "Genre Theory, the Lyric, and Erlebnis," in his *Discriminations* (New Haven, 1970), p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> Marcel Proust, *The Past Recaptured*, trans. Andreas Mayor (New York, 1971), p.132.

<sup>16</sup> Käte Hamburger discusses this notion of poetry and fiction's atemporality, its sheer presence (but not "present"), throughout her *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilyn J. Rose (1957; reprint ed., Bloomington, 1973), especially pp. 45-46, 64-98, and 139-140.

<sup>17</sup> See Stephen A. Erickson, "Language and Meaning," pp. 39-57, and Robert R. Ehman, "William James and the Structure of Self," pp. 266-270, in *New Essays in Phenomenology*, ed. James M. Edie

(Chicago, 1969). See also Brian Smith, *Memory* (New York, 1966), especially pp. 88-94 and 193-206.

<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Rex Warner (New York, 1963), 11: 18. Cf. Eugene Vance, "Augustine's Confessions and the Grammar of Selfhood," *Genre* 6 (1973): 1-28.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" in *The Structuralists: From Marx to Levi-Strauss*, ed. Richard and Fernande De George (Garden City, 1972), p.163.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene Ionesco, *Fragments of a Journal*, trans. Jean Stewart (New York, 1968), p. 74. If the medium of writing is essential to the identity of the autobiographical act, are we not forced to question the association of autobiography with cinematic narratives or those told to and scripted by an amanuensis? Autobiographical intention does not constitute autobiographical intentionality. For a further discussion of the semiological significance of the autobiographical "I" that I am about to query, see Michael Ryan, "Narcissus Autobiographer: *Marius the Epicurean*," *Journal of English Literary History* 43 (1976): especially 184-186.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hart's quotation from Dillon Johnston's "The Integral Self in Post-Romantic Autobiography" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1969) in his "Notes," p. 490.

<sup>22</sup> Wayne Shumaker, *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Forms* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), p. 35, sees but a formal problem in the fact that "[w]hen an autobiographer saw, he saw *things*: when he thought, he thought *thoughts*: and these things and thoughts may appear less intimately personal to his reader than to himself." Concerning references to "posterity" in autobiographical works, see *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, 1964), p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> For the *res gestae formulae* in spiritual autobiographies, see Roger Sharrock's introduction to John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Oxford, 1962), and also Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1969), pp. 89-92.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome Cardan[o], *The Book of My Life*, trans. Jean Stoner (New York, 1930), p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> This is basically James Cox's view of Franklin's Autobiography in "Autobiography and America," pp. 256-262.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin himself tells us that he disliked using language that "tends to create Opposition" (p. 65). But compare this attitude with the frequently cited description of his first trip to Philadelphia (pp. 70-75), where a memory laden with affectivity, signaled by the hectically detailed narrative, leads to his arbitrary and self-disarming justification of such details. Compare also Robert F. Sayre in *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James* (Princeton, 1964) pp. 19-21.

<sup>27</sup> St. Teresa, *The Life in The Complete Works of St. Teresa*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. E. Allison Peers (London, 1946), 1: 9.

<sup>28</sup> Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," p. 369, does not question that Adams is one of those autobiographers who "carve public monuments out of their private lives. This didactic purpose . . . explains Adams's choice of 'Education' as a metaphor for his life." But in Adams's letters (the relevant ones of which have been appended to the Riverside Edition of *The Education of Henry Adams*, ed. Ernest Samuels [Boston, 1973]), Adams refers to his masochistic resistance to having his text made public ("I . . . send it out into the world only to be whipped," p. 510), and he alludes to its being no more than a failed experiment (p. 512). For Adams, *The Education* "at least served one purpose--that of educating me" (p. 511): distinctly a private rather than a public effect.

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

<sup>30</sup> An "exemplary" text in this regard is Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Most of the works cited in this essay "use" at least several such types of verbal overdetermination. Even Augustine's latter discursive ruminations in his *Confessions*, especially on time, can be interpreted as a spiritual re-vision of his "life," a self-conscious repetition of his work's process or method. It merits speculation that what we might term the autobiographical "repetition compulsion," the actual rewriting or just going into greater detail and/or abstraction over previously signified material (cf. textual histories of autobiographies by Wordsworth, de Quincey, Nabokov, and Henry Miller), also suggests the incompleteness, the "prelude" appearance, of autobiographical works to their authors.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Baltimore, 1954), bk.7, p.262.

<sup>32</sup> "Histories, lives, portraits, characters--all of them nothing but clever fictions built on some external acts, some relevant speeches, and some ingenious conjectures wherein the Author is much more concerned to shine himself than he is to discover the truth." From Rousseau, "Ebauches des Confessions," *Oeuvres completes* (Paris, 1959), 1: 1149-1150. Translation by James Olney.

<sup>33</sup> In one of his "reveries" in *The Confessions*, Rousseau, rowing on the lake, experiences a joy he cannot really understand . . . unless it was perhaps some secret self-congratulation at being thus out of the reach of the wicked" (bk. 12, p. 594). Because of their eccentric positioning with the main narrative, reveries included in *The Confessions* are not the lyrical "presents" that they apparently represent when recorded by themselves. See Christie Vance, "Rousseau's Autobiographical Venture: A Process of Negation," *Genre* 6 (1973): 108-112. Rousseau's paranoid sense of others observing his act of writing occurs explicitly in bk. 12, p. 574 of *The Confessions*.

<sup>34</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," in *Three Case Histories*, ed. Philip Rieff (1963; reprint ed. New York, 1972), pp. 103-186.

<sup>35</sup> See Delany, *British Autobiography*, p. 60. Teresa's inability to predict and sometimes to authenticate "visions" that are beyond her control, visited upon her by the unknowable discretions

of God, may "explain" the self-abasements she propagates on herself in *The Life*. This feminine or passive relation to an arbitrary God is matched by Freud's observation in "Psychoanalytic Notes," p. 129, that Schreber's delusions took the form of his assuming "a feminine attitude towards God; he felt that he was God's wife." Note: this essay was written and published before certain feminist critical codes had raised autobiographical writing as a gendered issue, and thus might properly revise my "patriarchal" surmise regarding the motivation behind some examples of autobiographical writing. For instance, the question that such critics have raised in emphasizing women's "relational" and/or "mother"-oriented impulses certainly alters what I regarded as one layer of the autobiographical genre's "unconscious." See, for example, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1980), Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). More recent feminist, psychoanalytical as well as queer theoretical perspectives offer theories of autobiographical writing that bear comparison with my notion of its "narcissistic" trajectory.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934; reprint ed., New York, 1961), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston. Ill., 1973). p. 96. On the writer's "private" relation to his use of language, see Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston, 1967), pp. 10-18.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman. Alfred R. Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, Mass., 1964),4: 314.

<sup>39</sup> E. D. Hirsch discusses this issue in his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, 1967), especially in his first chapter and particularly pp. 14-19. Contrary to my position, Howarth argues for the reader's constitutive continuity with the autobiographical text in "Some Principles of Autobiography," especially pp. 366, 371, 373, 374, 379, 381. Also cf. Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore, 1976), especially pp. 1-32.

<sup>40</sup> Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York, 1964), p. 13.