

Theory and History of Literature
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On Autobiography

Philippe Lejeune

Edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin

Translated by Katherine Leary

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P.J.E.

Foreword

Paul John Eakin

The publication in 1980 of James Olney's collection, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, marks a milestone in the progress of autobiography studies toward critical maturity. Singularly omitted, however, from Olney's canon in this otherwise comprehensive and exemplary anthology is any selection from the work of Philippe Lejeune, whose range and authority as a student of autobiography are matched only by Olney himself. My aim is to address three different aspects of Lejeune's work, beginning with his concept of the autobiographical pact. The aggressiveness of Lejeune's formulations as a theorist of the genre, and the scientific aura of his carefully drawn schemata, have generated a mistaken perception of him as narrowly devoted to an intemporal formalist idealism, so I want next to consider his compelling attraction to the contingent and the referential, his consuming interest in autobiography as a primary object for the cultural historian's research. As Valéry reminds us, "There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography,"¹ and I shall conclude, accordingly, with some consideration of Lejeune as an autobiographer.

The Autobiographical Pact

Lejeune's study of autobiography as a genre developed in a period that, in the United States, became increasingly inhospitable to genre criticism. Some critics have claimed, moreover, that autobiography cannot properly be termed a genre at all. Thus Paul de Man, for example, complaining of the distressing sterility of

generic discussions of autobiography, argued in 1979 that “empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition,” and Avrom Fleishman concluded in 1983 that, since “autobiography is not generically distinguished by formal constituents, linguistic register, or audience effects,” it “therefore has no history as a genre.”² Linda H. Peterson, however, demonstrates in her recent book on Victorian autobiography that English autobiographers from Bunyan to Gosse believed themselves to be participating in a distinctive generic tradition.³ Lejeune himself seems never to have doubted that autobiography could be approached as a genre, and he has been sustained in this belief, perhaps, by the continuing popularity of formalist criticism in France, as practiced, for example, by Gerard Genette, to whose “Discours du récit” he often alludes.⁴ Both the possibilities and the pitfalls of the generic approach to autobiography are amply illustrated by the large body of work that Lejeune has devoted to this subject.

Most of the early work on French, English, and American autobiography—and I am thinking of Richard G. Lillard, Louis Kaplan, William Matthews, Roy Pascal, and Wayne Shumaker, as well as Lejeune—was devoted to the inter-related problems of formulating a definition of the genre and constituting a corpus or *répertoire* of texts.⁵ Lejeune’s approach to this useful practical task in *L’Autobiographie en France* was not only sensible but necessary, given that in 1971 there was no existing study of the history of autobiography in France.⁶ Acknowledging autobiography to be a complex and unstable category, historically speaking, and eschewing any pretense to an essentialist or idealist objective, Lejeune proposed the following working definition of the genre: “we shall define autobiography as the retrospective prose narrative that someone writes concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (p. 14). The definition seems pretty straightforward, but it expresses nevertheless three of the principal biases of Lejeune as a student of autobiography: his orientation toward prose, his concern with the temporal features of narrative, and his attraction to psychology and psychoanalysis.

Like Roy Pascal and Georges May, Lejeune proceeded to emphasize that his definition was expressly intended to distinguish autobiography proper from a series of related kinds of autobiographical writing in adjacent genres, including memoirs, the autobiographical novel, the autobiographical poem, and the diary. Doubtless English readers would be quick to object to the exclusion of poetry, which would involve the refusal of a well-established tradition running from Wordsworth and Byron to Robert Lowell and John Berryman, and including Whitman, Eliot, and many others. I would agree, nevertheless, that autobiography tends generally to be a prose form, and for good reason, since narrative is above all others a temporal form and hence best suited to render the contours of our life in time.

Lejeune himself was quick to address the principal limitation of his definition, namely its failure to identify a clear line of demarcation between autobiography

and the autobiographical novel. As he readily acknowledged, there is absolutely no way to distinguish between the two on the basis of internal textual evidence (p. 24).⁷ Lejeune’s solution to the thorny problem of establishing a boundary between factual and fictional modes of discourse was his concept of *le pacte autobiographique*. In effect, the autobiographical pact is a form of contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself not to some impossible historical exactitude but rather to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life.⁸ The central issue of intentionality that surfaces here will continue to dog Lejeune right up to the present—witness such recent clarifications as “Le Pacte autobiographique (bis)” (1982; translated in English in the present volume as “The Autobiographical Pact [bis]”) and “Autobiographie, roman et nom propre” (1984).⁹ Given his insistence that autobiography is necessarily in its deepest sense a special kind of fiction, its self and its truth as much created as (re)discovered realities, and given his lively awareness that the novel has often imitated the posture of self-referential intention in all sorts of pseudo, mock, or otherwise fictive autobiographies, Lejeune concedes in *L’Autobiographie en France* that the presence of an autobiographical pact in a text, while necessary, is not enough to establish it definitively as autobiography. At this early point in his thinking, Lejeune’s pact permits the reader to distinguish between autobiography and novel only on the basis of factors external to the text (p. 24), requiring knowledge of verifiable biographical reality to support the identity posited among author, narrator, and protagonist. In this first version of the pact, then, Lejeune is appealing to an essentially author-based criticism of autobiography. Even the most cursory reading of *L’Autobiographie en France*, however, will reveal Lejeune’s obvious discomfort with the concept of sincerity, which is at once the *sine qua non* of autobiography as a genre and a “sterile problematic” (p. 84) to be avoided at all costs.

In “Le Pacte autobiographique” (1973; translated in English in the present volume as “The Autobiographical Pact”), returning to the apparently insoluble problem of establishing a distinction between autobiography and fiction, Lejeune announced a crucial modification of the position he had taken in *L’Autobiographie en France*: his discovery of the role of the proper name as “the deep subject of autobiography” (*Pacte*, p. 33; *OA*, p. 20). Taking the title page—previously overlooked—as an integral part of the text, Lejeune could now identify a textual criterion by which to distinguish between autobiography and fiction, namely the identity of the proper name shared by author, narrator, and protagonist. With an evident sigh of relief, he could abandon an author-based perspective that had required the reader’s knowledge of a finally unknowable authorial consciousness. Putting the slippery ethic of sincerity safely behind him (or so he must have thought) as he shifted the fulcrum of the genre from the extratextual state of authorial intention to *the sign of that intention* present in the text, Lejeune was well on his way to establishing a reader-based poetics of autobiography.

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The heart of Lejeune's essay on the autobiographical pact, his elaboration of his thinking about the identity of the proper name shared by author, narrator, and protagonist, offers a brilliant insight into the nature of reference in autobiography. Drawing on the distinction promoted by Emile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson between the *utterance* (*énoncé*) and the *enunciation* (*énonciation*), between the past as re-created in autobiography and the re-creation of that past in the present unfolding of the autobiographical act, Lejeune joins Olney, Barrett J. Mandel, and others in stressing that the true locus of reference in autobiography pertains not to the level of the *utterance* but to the level of the *enunciation*, the autobiographical act, where the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist is textually postulated, to be immediately grasped by the reader.¹⁰ Unlike biography, where the resemblance of the protagonist of the narrative to the verifiable facts of the life of the historical model constitutes the decisive criterion for authenticating its structure of reference, in autobiography such resemblance is of distinctly secondary importance. Biography therefore offers a misleading analogue for the nature of reference in autobiography. Lejeune rightly focuses instead on the self-referential gesture itself as the central and determining event in the transaction of autobiographical reference.

Beginning with Benveniste's structural analysis of the functioning of the grammatical person, Lejeune applies his reasoning to the autobiographical act as follows: yes, he agrees, the "I" refers to the act of *enunciation* ("Ego" is he who says 'ego'"), but the *enunciation* is not the terminal reference in this instance; the personal pronoun refers finally to a name or to an entity susceptible of being designated by a name such that the proper name emerges as the ultimate term of the act of self-reference.¹¹ Ontogenetically speaking, as I have argued elsewhere, the emergence of self and the acquisition of language go hand in hand.¹² Lejeune himself seems to take precisely such an ontogenetic perspective when he observes that in the history of human development, the proper name and third-person discourse precede first-person discourse in the order of the acquisition of language. Thus the proper name becomes the mediating term between the text and the referential world that lies beyond it. The reference of the proper name to a "real person" is decisive; for Lejeune, this phrase signifies an individual whose existence is verifiable, attested to by the legal record (*Pacte*, pp. 21-23; *OA*, pp. 10-11).

Here Lejeune parts company with those contemporary theorists who take a more limited view of the possibility of reference and the existence of self beyond language, insisting on the concept of person as a linguistic structure and holding reference to be a problematical, secondary rhetorical effect. As Paul de Man put it, "is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a referent at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity?"¹³ De Man is careful to note that, in the semiological approach to

right

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literature that he advocates, "the referential function of language is not being denied—far from it; what is in question is its authority as a model for natural or phenomenal cognition." "It is therefore not *a priori* certain," he concludes, "that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language." There is a special urgency in this view of language as "epistemologically highly suspect and volatile," for de Man recognizes the deep-seated human propensity "to confuse the materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies" when it comes to "the phenomenality of space, time, or especially of the self."¹⁴

In "The Autobiographical Pact," Lejeune's orientation toward the referentiality of autobiographical discourse is neither strictly formalist, based on an exclusively internal analysis of the features and functioning of the text, nor doggedly positivist, based on some external verification of the resemblance between the text and the person to whom it refers, for this would require a finally unobtainable knowledge of the author's inner life. Instead, Lejeune finds the poetics of autobiography upon "analysis, on the global level of *publication*, of the implicit or explicit contract proposed by the *author* to the *reader*, a contract which determines the mode of reading of the text and engenders the effects which, attributed to the text, seem to us to define it as autobiography" (*Pacte*, p. 44; *OA*, p. 29). This reader-based orientation of Lejeune's approach, which parallels the speech-act model proposed by Elizabeth Bruss, would make of autobiography "a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing, . . . a historically variable *contractual effect*" (*Pacte*, p. 45; *OA*, p. 30), such that "the history of autobiography would be therefore, above all, a history of its mode of reading" (*Pacte*, p. 46; *OA*, p. 30).¹⁵

Lejeune's definition of autobiography and his concept of the autobiographical pact have already received extensive commentary, and I shall mention only one of the more controversial issues, the place of narrative in Lejeune's conception of autobiography. It was Michel Beaujour, in an essay entitled "Autobiographie et autoportrait" (1977), who first drew attention to an apparent contradiction among Lejeune's various articulations of the defining criteria of the genre. In *L'Autobiographie en France* Lejeune had boldly asserted that "autobiography is above all a *narrative*, which follows in time the *story* of an individual" (p. 33), and Beaujour points out that Lejeune had, accordingly, excluded Montaigne's *Essais* from his canon because its principal structure was logical and synthetic rather than narrative and chronological.¹⁶ In *Lire Leiris* (1975), however, Lejeune claimed for Michel Leiris the honor of having realized "the secret project of all autobiography, the discovery of the *order* of a life," precisely by "inverting the importance and role of chronology and meaning" customarily observed in traditional or classical autobiography, thus "giving precedence to thematic order and relegating chronology to a distinctly secondary level of importance."¹⁷ In his enthusiasm for the Freudian experimentation of Leiris, Lejeune even speaks rather extravagantly of the possibility of the ideal autobiography he would like to write

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himself as "a story without narrative" (p. 184; *OA*, p. 240), meaning, doubtless, "without a traditional narrative."¹⁸ Lejeune was fed up with the straitjacket that the biographical model seemed to impose on the genre, and he offers a wonderfully funny parody of the biographical paradigm, singling out for special mockery the pretensions of the narrative of childhood: "I admire all these people who believe they are born, who seem to know what it is to be born. . . . We have the impression while reading their autobiographies, that their birth is like a piece of property that they would own in the country, or like a diploma" (p. 179; *OA*, p. 235). In "L'Ordre du récit dans *Les Mots* de Sartre" (1975; translated in English in the present volume as "The Order of Narrative in Sartre's *Les Mots*"), a companion piece to his meditations on Leiris, Lejeune praised Sartre for having grasped (as did Leiris) that the *structure* of a narrative, usually neglected by most autobiographers, could serve as a primary mode of self-representation (*Pacte*, pp. 198, 202; *OA*, pp. 71, 73).

If we juxtapose *Lire Leiris* with *L'Autobiographie en France*, as Michel Beaujour did, we seem to find a divided Lejeune, who asserts on the one hand an ideal of autobiography as "a story without narrative," and on the other a definition of the genre as a "retrospective narrative," "the story of a personality." One could infer a change of heart or a careless contradiction, but I think it would be truer to say that the disparity between these formulations points to the fundamental complexity of Lejeune's critical personality. There is a Lejeune who, as theoretician, is fascinated by the virtual possibilities of creativity in the genre, who is understandably bored by the mechanical unfolding of chronological order in conventional autobiographical narrative (*Pacte*, p. 197; *OA*, p. 70). This Lejeune is instinctively drawn to the rare examples of genuine formal experimentation in autobiography, to Sartre and Leiris, as we have seen, and to Serge Doubrovsky, who claims to have been inspired by Lejeune's concept of autobiographical pact to stretch it to the breaking point in his "autofiction," *Fils* (1977) (*Moi*, pp. 62-69). There is also a Lejeune who enjoys an excellent rapport with the average individual, who is a connoisseur of autobiographies published by vanity presses;¹⁹ this is the Lejeune who rightly perceives that most autobiographies have been and always will be couched in the traditional chronological form derived from biography. I do think, nevertheless, that the theoretician in Lejeune underestimates the significance of chronology as a structure of reference in autobiographical narrative. Recent work by Paul Ricoeur, Avrom Fleishman, and Janet Varner Gunn posits a phenomenological correlation between the temporal structure of autobiography and what they take to be the essential narrativity of human experience.²⁰ In this sense the presence of chronology in autobiography would be a manifestation of the ineluctable temporality of human experience, a pull toward temporal structure not satisfactorily accounted for solely by appeal to biographical convention.

We might articulate the relation between the two Lejeunes I have described

in terms of the relation between *story* and *discourse* in autobiographical narrative. The lesson of Leiris for Lejeune is that the true reference of *story* in autobiography is not to some comparatively remote period in the subject's past but rather to the unfolding in language of the autobiographical act itself. In this sense *story* in autobiography functions as a metaphor for *discourse*.

I would be the first to point out the limitations of my heuristic, bipartite model of Lejeune, since both tendencies often appear in close proximity within a given essay. Thus, for example, in his recent article, "Autobiographie, roman et nom propre" (1984), if he is prepared to praise the originality of Serge Doubrovsky's undertaking in *Fils*, he is also disturbed by Doubrovsky's cavalier way with referential truth. When he discovers that the identity posited by Doubrovsky's autobiographical pact is only an effect of *rompe-voeil*, he is obliged to recognize that Doubrovsky is essentially a novelist at heart, to be distinguished from autobiographers like Leiris who are haunted by an ethical concern for truth (*Moi*, pp. 68-69). Similarly, in the same essay, Lejeune reports that he was moved to write Jacques Lanzmann for clarification about the generic status of *Le Tetard* (1976)—autobiography or novel, "how should one read this book?" (*Moi*, p. 60).

Lejeune's struggle with the problem of sincerity at the heart of autobiography illustrates in exemplary fashion the difficulties of referential art. From as early as *L'Autobiographie en France*, we find Lejeune insisting, as a point of departure, that autobiography is necessarily a fiction produced under special circumstances (p. 30), yet without some sincere basis in referential fact autobiography risks losing its status as a distinct genre and collapsing completely into fiction. To read autobiography in the manner of Lejeune, one must be both sophisticated, alive to its imaginative art, and naive, believing in the sincerity of the author's intention to present the story of "a real person concerning his own existence" (*Pacte*, p. 14; *OA*, p. 4). Accordingly, in "Autobiographie, roman et nom propre," we find Lejeune modulating from an empiricist confession of his problems as a trusting reader to a formalist promulgation of a grammar of the factors that govern the perception of a name as real in a text. Moreover, he is able to adduce documentary evidence from the readings of other critics to support his own insight into the decisive role of the proper name in determining the nature of reference in autobiography. To the extent that Lejeune is able to ground formalist criteria for generic identification in empirical fact, the essay is properly understood as an extension of the work of Norman Holland and Hans Robert Jauss, essential to the development of a reader-based poetics of autobiography as a genre.²¹

The most outspoken critics of Lejeune as a theorist of genre have not kept pace with the progressive sophistication of his development. Thus, for example, while apparently conceding the central contribution of Lejeune and Elizabeth Bruss to our understanding of autobiography as a genre, Avrom Fleishman is prepared to hang them on the issue of sincerity, failing to acknowledge that both are concerned not with an interiority of intention, but with modes of behavior displayed

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in the demonstrable features of literary texts.²² Adopting the preemptive strategy that he identifies as one of his most characteristic modes as a critic, Lejeune himself presents in "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)" (1982) the most comprehensive and searching analysis that his performance as a theoretician of autobiography has yet received. He opens with a playful self-portrait (in the manner of La Bruyère) as *Autopact*, acknowledging his own responsibility for his reputation as a dogmatic formalist. Conceding refinements on several points connected with his original definition of autobiography and the autobiographical pact, he is, nevertheless, engaged in a process of fine-tuning. He remains faithful to his concept of the pact, reaffirming on the one hand his belief in the confession of identity that establishes autobiography's very existence as a referential art (*Moi*, p. 21; *OA*, p. 125), and on the other, his belief in the crucial importance of excluding by his definition anything that would paralyze the reader's trust in reference (*Moi*, p. 26; *OA*, p. 128). Like his critics, Lejeune is well aware that the motivating force of the genre for both autobiographers and their readers is a matter of ideology; the last words of *L'Autobiographie en France* are "the myth of the SELF" (p. 105).

At the very heart of "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)," Lejeune, true to his model, makes his own pact with the reader, a confession of faith in autobiography, in reference, in the self. Because I think Lejeune captures here the state of mind of many who persevere in the study of autobiography despite full knowledge of the vexing theoretical problems it poses as a genre, I shall quote the passage at some length:

It's better to get on with the confessions: yes, I have been fooled. I believe that we can promise to tell the truth; I believe in the transparency of language, and in the existence of a complete subject who expresses himself through it; . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost of the first person. And who doesn't believe in it? But of course it also happens that I believe the contrary, or at least claim to believe it. Whence the fascination that *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 1975) has held for me; it seems to be the anti-Pact par excellence . . . "In the field of the subject, there is no referent . . ." We indeed know all this; we are not so dumb, but, once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know it. Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject—it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing. (*Moi*, pp. 30–31; *OA*, p. 131)

Let us be quite clear: belief and disbelief in the fully constituted subject can both be construed as matters of ideology. The interest of Lejeune's position resides in his willingness to concede the fictive status of the self and then to proceed with its functioning as experiential fact. While the most extreme deconstructionists would theorize belief in the self out of existence, Lejeune joins Elizabeth Bruss,

Georges Gusdorf, Karl J. Weintraub, and others in accepting such belief as a fact of contemporary cultural experience with demonstrable practical consequences for autobiography, which has become one of the most characteristic mediums for its expression.²³

Je est un autre

Although Lejeune has maintained a continuing interest in problems of generic definition in all his books on autobiography, from *L'Autobiographie en France* (1971) right up to his most recent, *Moi aussi* (1986), he has devoted himself increasingly to a set of historical and cultural issues not typically predicated by the formalist theorizing and explication of his early work. It is regrettable that the most extended commentary on Lejeune in English to date, Michael Ryan's review of *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975) for *Diacritics* in 1980, perpetuates the image of Lejeune as the proponent of a narrow formalist idealism, completely missing the social and historical dimension of his approach to autobiography. To be sure, the prescriptive strain in Lejeune's work, especially in the earlier essays, invites such treatment; Ryan's review, however, grossly misrepresents Lejeune's views, as when he comments, "Like the legal subject of bourgeois law, Lejeune's autobiographical subject has no historical, social, or class content."²⁴ In the final essay in the volume, "Autobiographie et histoire littéraire" (translated in English in the present volume as "Autobiography and Literary History"), which Ryan ignores, Lejeune himself subjects the apparently normative function of his own definition of autobiography—and those of Richard Lillard, Barrett J. Mandel, Francis R. Hart, and William Howarth—to a searching critique. He presents his work as a theorist of genre in the context of genre criticism in general, which should be devoted, he urges, not to the construction of some absolute, intemporal classification of genres but to the description of the laws governing the functioning of historical systems of genres as they evolve over time. Thus he rejects the antihistorical idealism of Northrop Frye, for example, whose theory of genres postulates the existence of an immanent structure in literature, in favor of the relativist stance of Elizabeth Bruss, who demonstrates that the autobiographical pact is a variable theoretically independent of the formal textual features with which it is often associated. Accordingly, the projects of research on autobiography that Lejeune proposes here follow Hans Robert Jauss and his concept of the shifting horizon of expectation that governs the generic recognition of literary works at any given time; they involve the systematic synchronic study of the functioning of one of the systems of reading in a given period through examination of reception and response preserved in surviving historical documents.

Since 1975, however, Lejeune's program of research on autobiography has developed along lines rather different from the program announced in "Autobiogra-

phy and Literary History." Not only has his concern shifted from *reception* to *production* of texts in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but his basic assumptions about autobiography and autobiographers have radically altered as well. Lejeune himself traces this shift in perspective to his detailed explication of a three-minute sequence from the film *Sartre par lui-même* (1976), directed by Alexandre Astruc and Michel Contat. The difference between Sartre's autobiographical discourse in *Les Mots* and in the filmed interview brought home the importance of the distinction between the written and the spoken, the consequences of medium for the study of genre. It is, perhaps, hardly surprising that when Sartre related his life in the filmed interview, he spoke in a colloquial manner that suggested his kinship with the man in the street: "Ça s'est fait comme ça" ("that's the way it happened"), he commented, speaking of the break with his mother that marked a turning point in his adolescence. The impact of this performance on Lejeune, however, suggests the extent to which his study of autobiography had been governed by what he came to recognize later on as an essentially elitist attitude.²⁵

In the years following Lejeune's work on this film, study of the classic written text by the canonized great writer would be displaced by his exploration of autobiographical self-expression in a wide range of media by increasingly ordinary and even illiterate individuals. This shift in emphasis is readily apparent in Lejeune's next book, *Je est un autre: L'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias* (1980): while traditional formalist studies of rhetorical structure ("Le Récit d'enfance ironique: Valles" [1976]; translated in English in the present volume as "The Ironic Narrative of Childhood: Valles") and generic definition ("L'Autobiographie à la troisième personne" [1977]; translated in English in the present volume as "Autobiography in the Third Person") continue to appear, most of the collection is devoted to a broad-based study of autobiographical self-expression as a pervasive social and cultural phenomenon. The title itself, moreover, captures the consequences of Lejeune's altered perspective in capsule form: the autobiographical "I" had indeed become someone else, not only literally, as with collaborative autobiography, but also more generally, in the sense that the self in question now might well prove to be someone who would never have figured in the select company of one hundred French autobiographers he had chosen for the canon published in *L'Autobiographie en France* in 1971. This new, egalitarian individual might not be a writer at all, but rather, in Sartre's concluding formula for his identity in *Les Mots*, "a whole man, composed of all men and as good as all of them and no better than any." As Lejeune put it later on, quoting this line, "Why privilege Sartre?" (*Moi*, p. 32; *OA*, p. 132). And literature, he might have added.

The result is a book in which peasants and artisans, Meme Santerre and Gaston Lucas, figure cheek by jowl with writers like Jules Valles, Victor Hugo, and Sartre, a book in which the object of study originally restricted by Lejeune to the "retrospective prose narrative that someone writes concerning his own existence"

has been drastically redefined to admit the manifold and heterogeneous modes of referential self-expression that are currently practiced in contemporary culture. "Someone" might well include someone else, a ghostwriter, say, or oral historian, while the "prose narrative" in question might in fact be a transcript of oral discourse, broadcast on the radio or presented in film. The ownership implicit in the phrase "his own life," moreover, was now frequently a subject of litigation. The founding referential claim posited by Lejeune's autobiographical pact no longer provided an apodictic basis for generic identification; the very *autos* and *graphein* of the genre were now in question, and problem cases abounded.

Lejeune unpacked these ambiguities in his discussion of authorship and authority in the long final section of the book devoted to "L'Autobiographie de ceux qui n'écrivent pas" (translated in English in the present volume as "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write"), his paradoxical formula for collaborative autobiography. Now prepared to affirm that "a person is always *several* people when he is writing, even all alone, even his own life" (*Je*, p. 235; *OA*, p. 188),²⁶ he seized on collaborative autobiography, which necessarily subverts the concepts of the unified author and person, as an opportunity to disclose the individualist ideology that has sustained most autobiographical practice and criticism in Western culture since the time of Rousseau. Adopting a sociological perspective, inspired in part by Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the mechanisms of exchange in an economy of symbolic goods,²⁷ Lejeune demonstrates the cultural relativity of a concept like that of the author when it comes to collaborative autobiography. The notion of "the man who 'held the pen,'" to cite Jean Starobinski's phrase,²⁸ has been widely received as a prominent component of the identity of the classic autobiographer, and most of the individuals studied by scholars and critics so far, moreover, have been writers. In collaborative autobiography, however, the fact that someone has written the text does not necessarily determine that individual as its "author" in the published product. In the case of the ghost-written autobiography, for example, the writer rarely claims the strategic place reserved for the author's signature, which becomes in effect an attribute of the featured subject whose fame or notoriety claim the attention of the public (*Je*, p. 247; *OA*, p. 195); by contrast, in the case of the autobiography of an unknown (and often illiterate) individual gathered by a journalist or oral historian working in the field, the writer proclaims authorship in the signature as a guarantee that the subject "has written *nothing*," and this avowal in turn functions as a guarantee of the product's authenticity, that "what has been written is a faithful image of what [the subject] said" (*Je*, p. 248; *OA*, p. 196).

The test of authorship as a marker for the generic identification of a text is completely transformed by the circumstances of collaborative autobiography. The question no longer concerns the behavior of the author (whether or not the author signs his own name, or signs his name at all) but rather the author's very identity. The relation between the featured self and the writer of his or her story requires

negotiation; sometimes it is settled in the writer's conscience, and sometimes in the courts. In any case, Lejeune's analysis exposes the role of class in the exercise of power in which the act of writing is necessarily implicated. The politics of autobiography is most strikingly displayed in the current vogue of the lives of common people collected by journalists and oral historians, lives that gain access to the printed word only through an intermediary belonging to the dominant class that controls the production and consumption of such texts (*Je*, p. 268; *OA*, p. 209). Lejeune has a lively sense of the ambiguities involved in transactions of this kind, for to the extent that the system of communication in question serves to promote the values and ideology of the dominant (literate) class (*Je*, p. 252; *OA*, p. 198), even the most apparently disinterested ethnographic project may not be free of the taint of exploitation. A collaboration ostensibly devoted to the preservation of autobiographical data that might otherwise perish may nonetheless entail a fundamental condescension that possesses the potential for voyeurism and violation (*Je*, p. 269; *OA*, p. 210). Thus it is by no means clear that the illiterate individual (peasant, artisan, worker) has in fact been enfranchised through such ethnographic intervention, achieving "authority" over his or her own life in the spirit if not the letter of the author's signature.

In *Je est un autre* Lejeune singles out *Gaston Lucas, serrurier, chronique de l'anti-héros* (1976), by Adelaïde Blasquez, as a masterpiece of ethnographic truth-telling, because it steers an artful middle course between fidelity to the ragged incoherence of the subject's unretouched spoken discourse, on the one hand, and surrender to irresponsible fictionalizing in the interest of producing a readable narrative, on the other (*Je*, pp. 299–301). In a more recent essay, however, "Ethnologie et littérature: *Gaston Lucas, serrurier*" (1985), Lejeune reviews the history of his own contacts with Blasquez in order to reveal the complexities of the ethnographic encounter, which becomes a kind of distorting mirror in which the traditional problems of the autobiographical pact are reflected in a new and disconcerting fashion. The initial shock of his first interview with Blasquez is the revelation that the documentary value of her book is impossible to verify, for she erased each taped interview with Lucas as soon as she made a transcription, and, what is more, felt free to alter his language to suit the purpose of her narrative (*Moi*, pp. 275, 276). It is true that later, when she discovers a tape intact, Lejeune listens and recognizes the voice of the Gaston on the tape as *identical* to the voice he attributed to Gaston in his imagination while reading the book (*Moi*, p. 277). Despite this apparent vindication of a novelistic approach to referential truth, Lejeune's interviews with Blasquez introduce him to a fractured world of multiple selves that would seem to defy the power of any referential pact to unify and structure.

For example, there is the Adelaïde Blasquez whose voice he hears on the tape, struggling to heighten the political consciousness of Gaston in order to adapt him to fit her own leftist sympathies. Then there is the Adelaïde he meets in person,

who expresses her impatience with the repetitious discourse of her troublesome subject. Finally, there is the Adelaïde of the published book, who has erased her own presence from the body of the text, leaving a preface in which she characterizes her collaboration with Gaston in glowing, egalitarian terms that mask the power relations implicit in the proceedings (*Moi*, pp. 277–78). These last are communicated decisively to Lejeune later, when her publisher decides to videotape an interview with her and she invites Lejeune to be her interlocutor. When he suggests that the publisher should complement this interview with another featuring Gaston, Blasquez replies that in the context of the book, what the living Gaston has to say is without value; he doesn't exist in himself, for it is the written Gaston that counts, an individual who has acquired, thanks to her art, the consistency and truth of a character in a novel.

What, then, becomes of the referential premise of the narrative, for the guarantee of its ethnographic value is precisely that there is only one Gaston, faithfully represented? What is the obligation of the writer to the personal integrity of his or her subject and story? How is it possible to honor the obligation to referential truth without determining first whose is the truth to be told? (*Moi*, pp. 283–84). Lejeune is scrupulous to add that these delicate considerations of moral responsibility also apply to his own presentation of his meetings with Blasquez; noting, however, that she, unlike Gaston, knows how to write and hence possesses the power to answer his commentary with one of her own, he lets himself off the hook (*Moi*, pp. 289–90).²⁹ In *Je est un autre* and related pieces, which expand the frontiers of the study of autobiography from a narrowly literary to a broadly social and cultural context, Lejeune explodes the structures of medium and person that have traditionally defined the genre. He has not, however, left the old problems of the autobiographical act behind him: identity, sincerity, the pact—all the familiar issues that attend the solitary individual writing the story of his or her life—seem destined to crop up willy-nilly whenever it is a question of telling the truth about the self.

The Trashcan of History

In the late 1970s, at about the same time that Lejeune began the study of contemporary modes of autobiographical self-expression that would culminate in *Je est un autre*, he began to devote himself to compiling an exhaustive inventory or "répertoire" of all the autobiographies written in France in the nineteenth century. In "La Cote Ln 27" (1984), he presents a retrospective rationale for this vast program of research, which has the potential to occupy him (and any others who might enlist) for years to come. Like the *répertoire* he offered in *L'Autobiographie en France* in 1971, this one is to be annotated; unlike its predecessor, however, which he now terms "an [overly] purified and literary corpus" (*Moi*, p. 259), too

selective to represent the actual history of the genre, this one is to be a broadly inclusive canon, as exhaustive as the surviving documents themselves permit. The purpose of the project is twofold, at once literary and historical. Because of its egalitarian nature, the *répertoire*, once constructed, will permit an anatomy of the "micro-forms" of autobiographical discourse that can be said to have achieved popular currency, a grammar of the building blocks of personal narrative. At the same time the *répertoire* will enlarge the historian's knowledge of what the social atom, the individual, is living, feeling, doing, thinking, at a given moment in the unfolding of culture (*Moi*, p. 270). Although such a project might seem to resemble those of Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch, Lejeune is careful to stress that he regards the texts in his corpus not as ancillary sources of historical information but rather as primary social facts in their own right (*Moi*, p. 258).³⁰ The social history that Lejeune envisages, then, is first and foremost that of the history of discourse, and autobiography must be conceptualized, accordingly, not as some absolute literary essence but instead as historically variable, belonging as it does to constantly changing networks of social practice in which the life of the individual receives articulation.

Something of the scale of Lejeune's program of historical research is suggested by the dimensions of the stack that serves as home base for the literature of *individual biography* in the Bibliothèque Nationale. *La Cote Ln27* comprises more than 94,000 items, and autobiography as defined by Lejeune makes up only a tiny fraction of this vast jumble of texts. To the winnowing of this daunting mass of material, Lejeune brings a truly Balzacian energy, noting that his present catholic attitude toward the literature of autobiography has shifted radically from the elitist literary stance that informed his early work. Whereas before he would have recoiled from the mediocrity of *La Cote Ln27* with a fastidious "What a mess; it's a disgusting heap of trash," he now approaches the same archival dump with the "gourmandise" of a ragpicker licking his lips: "This is real trash!" (*Moi*, pp. 257-58). If I savor this passage, it is because it epitomizes Lejeune's passion for the referential in its raw factuality, a passion that sets him apart from all but a very few of those who concern themselves with autobiography today. Whereas most critics instinctively gravitate to the study of literary masterworks (and I include myself), only a few take care to remind us that autobiography is nothing if not a referential art. Thus James M. Cox justly complains, "There is a distinct tiresomeness about the ease with which literary critics assure themselves that 'mere' fact has little to do with the art of autobiography."³¹ But not Lejeune, attracted as he is to the life of the ordinary individual, especially in its bourgeois, familial manifestation, delighting in "the filthy twaddle" of nineteenth-century cultural pretension that Sartre mercilessly parodies in *Les Mots*, the boring success, the petty failure, the banality of self-concept, the conventionality of life story.

Adopting membership in a social group as the only possible organizing princi-

ple for the otherwise baffling heterogeneity of his corpus of nineteenth-century French autobiography, Lejeune has published four sections of his *répertoire* to date, the lives of businessmen, industrialists, and financiers in "Autobiographie et histoire sociale au XIX^e siècle" (1982; translated in English in the present volume as "Autobiography and Social History in the Nineteenth Century"), the lives of schoolteachers in "Les Instituteurs du XIX^e siècle racontent leur vie" (1985), the lives of criminals in "Crime et testament: Les Autobiographies de criminels au XIX^e siècle" (1986), and the lives of homosexuals in "Autobiographie et homosexualité en France au XIX^e siècle."³² In these pieces his research typically centers on problems of generic definition, archival information, the publication and reception of texts, and substantive social and cultural issues, followed by an annotated corpus of autobiographies belonging to the social group under study.

Lejeune has characterized his motivation for this research as that of the "populist novelist" (*Moi*, p. 258), a latter-day Balzac or Zola, and in *Calicot* (1984), the recently published autobiography of his great-grandfather, Xavier-Edouard Lejeune, Lejeune prints an installment of the hitherto unpublished "novel" of nineteenth-century French social history, demonstrating the potential richness that single items in the *répertoire* may be expected to yield in the time to come. Believing as he does that "every person carries within himself a rough draft, perpetually reshaped, of the story of his life" (*Moi*, p. 32; *OA*, p. 132), Lejeune regards *Calicot* as an exemplary instance of "naive" autobiography, "a monument made from the materials of everyday life, constructed with infinite patience, in solitude, by an unknown individual"³³ — the antithesis, in a word, of the innovative art practiced by Sartre and Leiris.

If it is true, as Karl J. Weintraub argues in "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," that the concept of the self is derived from models supplied by the ambient culture, it becomes necessary to determine how such models of self and of life story function and evolve in a culture, and Lejeune's historical research for the *Cote Ln27* project and for *Calicot* bears directly on this question.³⁴ Whereas traditional autobiography is largely predicated on a belief in the autonomous self, the fully constituted subject who preexists the language into which he casts his story, Lejeune contends that this individualist ideology blinds us to the fact that both self and life story are culturally determined constructs (*Je*, p. 242; *OA*, p. 192). The private speech of the individual engaged in the autobiographical act is, accordingly, derived from a public discourse structured by class, code, and convention.

Thus, adopting the perspective of the historian of discourse, Lejeune observes, paradoxically, that the documentary reference of popular autobiographical texts does not consist in the deliberate creation of a faithful copy of the real (as the correspondence theory informing the publicity of such texts proposes) but rather in the unwitting imitation of common narrative forms that constitute the lingua franca of verisimilitude at a given moment in the life of a culture (*Je*, p. 208).

In his work on the *Cote Ln27*, for example, Lejeune has been obliged to resituate nineteenth-century autobiography in the larger context of the biography of the period with which it is classified: to perform research on *individual biography* at the Bibliotheque Nationale is to observe generic markers evolving at the level of the common denominator, to learn what modes of discourse were associated with life stories, to decode the significance of characteristic formulas for a title, and so forth. Again, preparing his great-grandfather's autobiography for publication, Lejeune was led to identify three cultural sources for the style of self-presentation in *Calicot*: the art of composition that Xavier-Edouard Lejeune learned in a Montmartre grammar school from 1856 to 1858, the romantic novels of Victor Hugo, Eugene Sue, Alexandre Dumas, and others that he devoured in his adolescence, and especially the newspapers of the period that he read assiduously, clipped extensively, and occasionally even recopied (*Moi*, pp. 199–200). Both the performance of the autobiographical act and the narrative that it typically produces easily lend themselves to a belief in the possibility of self-creation, an individualist, Romantic solution to the mystery of origins that masks the agency of cultural institutions at work in the language of life history, determining our stories and our selves. For the historian of discourse, the self who writes is written.

Lejeune brings to the study of the contemporary production of French autobiography the same insatiable ethnographic curiosity that characterizes his work on French autobiography in the nineteenth century. Since 1972 he has kept a record of the personal narratives published in France, and in 1984 the first installment appeared of what he hopes will be a biennial "Bibliographie des etudes en langue francaise sur la litterature personnelle et les recits de vie."³⁵ Always on the lookout for the characteristic or representative feature of the production of autobiographical narrative—how does autobiographical discourse exist in France today? who engages in it? who reads it? where does it come from?—Lejeune has examined the perennial flow of autobiographies from vanity presses and the current popularity of manuals that instruct the reader in the writing of autobiography.³⁶

It is just possible that Lejeune's work as a historian of discourse may help to answer the large-scale questions that the referential nature of autobiography invariably prompts its most searching readers to ask. Avrom Fleishman is one of these, and he formulates the problem of the ontology of the genre as follows: "One does not sit down to write an autobiography without a narrative language in which to compose the sentences of one's life story. Where do the expressions of that language, the supplement of one's 'natural' language, come from?" Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological conception of narrative, Fleishman suggests that life itself may be "already structured as a narrative,"³⁷ whereas Lejeune's approach to the origins of autobiographical discourse, as we have seen, tends to be sociological in nature. Will Lejeune's research into the lives of common, ordinary people and the common forms of life story yield an answer to Fleishman's question,

or will his scrabbling in the textual detritus of the *Cote Ln27* and the vanity press turn up only a mess of pottage?³⁸ As far as Lejeune is concerned, he is content to proceed at a cautious and measured pace, publishing local results as he goes along, while resisting the pull toward a global level of generalization that would be unwarranted by his (comparatively) meager samples to date. The first volume of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualite* (1976–84), for example, makes him uneasy in this regard, for he believes that Foucault relies heavily on large-scale assertions without adducing enough supporting evidence.³⁹ It is, perhaps, too soon to pass judgment on the benefits that the history of discourse can be expected to bring to the study of autobiography, but at the very least such an approach offers a useful corrective to the tendency of theorists of the genre to generalize prescriptively on the basis of a limited canon of literary masterpieces.

Reading and Writing the Self

A few years ago, in a closely reasoned essay, Jonathan Loesberg grappled with the problem of the generic definition of autobiography, demonstrating the circularity and indeterminacy that result from the troublesome implication of its texts in an elusive, finally unknowable, extratextual reality. In particular he indicted the criticism of autobiography for its characteristic tendency to run afoul of referentiality, attributing to the author what can only be the problems of the reader.⁴⁰ Loesberg may well deconstruct the critic's preoccupation with the author's relation to the text, with intention, with sincerity, yet this deconstruction in no way prevents such readings from being enacted. On the contrary, this recurring pattern in the criticism testifies to the fact that the critic's concern with reference, with the author and the author's intention, is built into the very structure of autobiography considered as a figure of reading. The principal limitation of Loesberg's otherwise illuminating analysis stems from his heuristic insistence on distinguishing author and reader as discrete entities, whereas it is, I suspect, precisely an author's instinctive *readerly* knowledge of the effect of autobiographical narrative that would lead him or her to exploit its potential for reference to endow that principal referent, the self, with a reality it might not otherwise enjoy. That is to say, if the premise of autobiographical referentiality that we can move from knowledge of the text to knowledge of the self proves to be a fiction, the text becomes paradoxically not less precious but more: in making the text the autobiographer constructs a self that would not otherwise exist. Moreover, in the specular reciprocity of the world of autobiography the author as reader is matched by the reader as author, for the reader's involvement in authorial consciousness, which seems to be intrinsic to the functioning of the autobiographical text, is ultimately self-referential; the reader, perhaps especially the critic, is potentially an autobiographer himself or herself.

Certainly this is true of Lejeune, whose inveterate practice of featuring a meticulous, blow-by-blow account of his response to a text in much of the criticism he writes has taken on an increasingly autobiographical cast in recent years.⁴¹ The formalist persona of the reader-critic in the early work has been supplanted, as the title of his most recent book suggests, by *moi aussi* (me too). The publication of *Lire Leiris: Autobiographie et langage* in 1975 marks a turning point in this progressive disclosure of the autobiographical self performing the critical analyses ostensibly devoted to the revelation of the selves of others—Proust, Rousseau, Sartre, Leiris. The autobiographical import of *Lire Leiris* was noted in two perceptive reviews by Jean-Michel Olivier and Claude Mauriac. In his aptly titled essay, “Lire Lejeune,” the most elaborate commentary on Lejeune’s work to be published to date, Olivier argued that reader Lejeune discovers at the very heart of the desire to read a desire to speak himself, so that the initial project to read Leiris becomes a projection of the reader into the text he is in the process of reading. Olivier’s term for Lejeune’s deliberately self-reflexive style of criticism is *l’autobiocritique*. Similarly convinced of the autobiographical nature of *Lire Leiris*, Claude Mauriac, himself an autobiographer, recognized the book as a self-portrait, and he called on Lejeune to abandon the discretion of his indirect, derivative approach to self-revelation in favor of a bold, frontal engagement in pure autobiography. Although I suspect that the *autobiocritique* displayed in *Lire Leiris* and *Moi aussi* will continue to remain Lejeune’s preferred public mode of self-expression for the time to come, by his own testimony he has been answering—in private and for many years—Mauriac’s call to autobiography (*Moi*, pp. 181–82).⁴²

Confirming the insights of Olivier and Mauriac, in “The Autobiographical Pact (bis)” Lejeune places confession at the heart of the autobiographical domain, and, as if to demonstrate the extent to which the criticism of autobiography is likely itself to be an autobiographical enterprise, he proceeds to a double confession of his own, his belief in the subject (which I quoted earlier) and his concomitant desire to write his autobiography: “I chose to work, academically, *on* autobiography, because in a parallel direction I wanted to work *on* my own autobiography” (*Moi*, p. 31; *OA*, p. 132). It is worth noting, in this connection, how frequently critics have been drawn to give an autobiographical account of their involvement with autobiography—Roy Pascal would be a prominent example of this strain of crypto-autobiography that often motivates study of the genre. Unlike Pascal, however, who remains at the threshold in his book *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, recognizing that he is impelled to write about autobiography by “an insistent moral pressure” that he identifies with “a state of mind from which autobiography springs,”⁴³ Lejeune crossed over into autobiography itself, as he announced in the “Epilogue” to *Lire Leiris* (1975; translated in English in the present volume as “Epilogue”).

Lejeune explicitly presents the “Epilogue” as a fragment of autobiography, and

the presence of the familiar generic markers of Lejeune’s own model—the confession, the secret, the quest for origins—supports this identification. The “Epilogue” constitutes, in effect, Lejeune’s first published autobiographical pact, concerned as it is with the birth of his own autobiographical discourse and with the assertion of identity, especially if we grasp the extent to which Leiris functions in the critical narrative in the body of the book as a surrogate for Lejeune himself, or at least a “prodigious” and “prodigal” father (p. 183; *OA*, pp. 238–39). As Lejeune put it, *Lire Leiris* meant “read oneself here” (“*sy lire*”) (p. 181; *OA*, p. 237), to read oneself in the text. Acknowledging that his earliest attempts to write about himself had demonstrated the inadequacy of traditional autobiographical narrative derived from biography, and that his subsequent recourse to the strategies of the novel and the diary had also ended in failure, Lejeune credits Leiris with showing him the way to the kind of autobiography he too could write. In the excitement of his discovery of a new language and form, he repudiated the notion of autobiography as an act of genuine communication between author and reader (pp. 175–76; *OA*, pp. 232–33): the “I” of Leiris became an “I without referent” (p. 177; *OA*, p. 234), and Lejeune proposes to himself to write “a story without narrative” (p. 184; *OA*, p. 240). This paradoxical notion inspired by Leiris points to an autobiography in which *story* is subsumed by *discourse*, in which the free association of language unfolding moment by moment during the autobiographical act supplants the conventional model of autobiography as a transparent rendering of a recoverable past.

Not surprisingly, Lejeune’s conception of his autobiography seems to have changed as he has changed, and in “Memoire familiale” (1984) (*Moi*, pp. 183–92), in which he discusses his recent preoccupation with the history of the Lejeunes, he expressly distances himself from the narcissism of the psychoanalytic, associative model he embraced with such fervor during the period of his work on Leiris. When he reviews his project of reconstructing the collective memory of his family in order to place himself and his life story in the context of those who preceded him, it becomes clear that *story* is back in the saddle again, armed this time with a tape recorder and an apparently boundless appetite for archival research. Although he rejected the traditional biographical narrative at the bidding of his surrogate father Leiris, his subsequent inquiry into family history led him to the discovery of another surrogate father-autobiographer in his great-grandfather Xavier-Edouard Lejeune, and his editorial commentaries in *Calicot* place a premium on referential truth, undoing the fictions of his ancestor even as he publishes them.

To assemble the available evidence concerning Lejeune’s practice of autobiography—the published fragments in the “Epilogue” to *Lire Leiris* together with the commentaries there and in “Postscriptum à *Lire Leiris*” (1986; *Moi*, pp. 164–77) and “En famille” (1984, 1985; *Moi*, pp. 181–202)—is to recognize how various it has been. It would be hard to say whether his shifting allegiances to

referential fact and imaginative art, to narrative and to language, are mutually contradictory or complementary, and Lejeune himself shows no inclination to opt for one mode at the expense of another. To the contrary, he reports the attraction he feels toward Claude Mauriac's autobiography, *Le Temps immobile* (1974-84), which experiments with a kind of temporal montage, juxtaposing writings dating from all periods of his life (*Moi*, pp. 126-27). The appeal of Mauriac is instructive, for whereas the traditional, correspondence model of autobiographical reference tends to subordinate the text to that which it is presumably about, for Lejeune, following Leiris, the creation of the text is primary; autobiography is literally a writing; and the corollary of this textualization of the genre is a performative conception of the content of a life story in which the relevant events are equivalent to the cumulative series of a writer's engagements in the autobiographical act.⁴⁴

This writerly, Leirisian bias notwithstanding, Lejeune's practice as a critic of the autobiographical writing of others amply testifies not only to his belief in the referential dimension of such texts but specifically to his conception of the content to which they characteristically refer: if autobiography is properly conceived as the performance of a kind of writing, its subtext is the confession of sexuality.⁴⁵ Olivier has remarked on the veritable obsession with the secret in Lejeune's criticism, and the secret usually proves to be some aspect of infantile sexuality as conceptualized in the classic Freudian paradigm of the Oedipal family drama.⁴⁶ Confession of desire in Proust and Rousseau concerns masturbation and maternal love; again, Lejeune detects repressed desire for the mother in Sartre, and repressed desire for the father in Leiris.⁴⁷ Lejeune's analyses suggest that it is in the very nature of desire that there is always a sexual secret to be confessed, and what fascinates him, what he anatomizes again and again in intricate detail, are the ingenious strategies of denial and repression that refuse confession yet confess nonetheless in the very act of refusal. If confession is central to Lejeune's conception of autobiography, if the impulse to confess, to articulate desire, proceeds by indirection through the impulse to conceal and repress, and if, moreover, Lejeune affirms that he has approached confession himself mostly by indirection through analysis of confession in others (*Moi*, p. 166), what, then, may we infer about the autobiography he has yet to publish?

The history of Lejeune's engagement with autobiographical writing seems to have paralleled his shifting attitude toward psychoanalysis, and indeed the most important published fragments of his autobiography, the "Epilogue" to *Lire Leiris* and the "Postscriptum à *Lire Leiris*," concern psychoanalysis both as method and as content for autobiographical self-revelation. Lejeune's earliest exposition of the relation between autobiography and psychoanalysis, the long concluding section in *L'Autobiographie en France*, is also his most balanced assessment: distinguishing carefully between autobiography on the one hand and autoanalysis and psychoanalysis on the other, he concludes that psychoanalysis has not fulfilled its

original promise of providing a theoretical basis for the autobiographical enterprise. Lejeune is careful in this respect to note that Leiris's practice of a psychoanalytically inspired autobiography constitutes a literary rather than a clinical application of Freudian analysis (pp. 91-104). In support of his negative finding with regard to the contribution of psychoanalysis to autobiography, he includes in an appendix extracts from an essay by Bernard Pingaud, "L'Écriture et la cure," which argues that writing is a nontherapeutic act, and hence, I should add, unsuited to the project of confessional autobiography formulated by Lejeune: functioning as a defense mechanism, it reveals no secret but constitutes one itself (pp. 257-62). A few years later, however, Leiris had cast his spell, prompting Lejeune in the "Epilogue" to conceive of the autobiographical act as an analogue to the psychoanalytic encounter, in which the analysand "knows that the moment when he speaks is the center of his story, in the sense that everything is repeated here" (p. 179; *OA*, p. 236).

The euphoria of the Leirisian moment, which Lejeune seems to have experienced as a release from literary constraint and psychological inhibition, enabling the free-associative (and imitative) style of autobiographical writing illustrated in the "Epilogue" ("prodigal" and "prodigious" father) was relatively short-lived, as he recently revealed in the "Postscriptum à *Lire Leiris*" (1986). The subject of the "Postscriptum," which relates Lejeune's face-to-face meeting with Leiris in 1976, focuses on the clinical experience of psychoanalysis, both Leiris's and Lejeune's, which emerges as the prototype for the autobiographical act conceived as confession.⁴⁸ As far as Leiris's analysis is concerned, Lejeune is frankly disappointed: Leiris is portrayed as surprisingly naïve, psychoanalytically speaking, someone who never understood the Freudian conception of dream work, someone who openly repudiated free association, someone who was visibly shocked by Lejeune's suggestion that he could have wished "to be his father's wife" (*Moi*, p. 175). Leiris himself was also disappointed by his analysis, which seems only to have reenforced his resistance (*Moi*, p. 170), for he emerged from it without having discovered anything, without having attained knowledge of an origin or a secret (*Moi*, p. 173). For Leiris, and for Lejeune as well, the possibility of self-revelation through analysis is both threat and lure, and Lejeune discerns in his obsessive curiosity to get at the substance of Leiris's analysis a screen for his desire to come to terms with his own. Ironically, he reports that his own analysis, hitherto concealed as a kind of guilty secret, was just as disappointing as Leiris's; its meager discoveries really didn't amount to much (*Moi*, p. 166). The upshot of the "Postscriptum" is to discredit analysis as a paradigm for confessional autobiography; with characteristic self-mockery he writes, "I saw myself advance stealthily toward a trivial confession" (*Moi*, p. 167). From this perspective, the paradoxical innovations proclaimed in the "Epilogue," the "I without referent," the "story without narrative," show as evasions, wishful formulas for the confession of a confession in which nothing is confessed. Janus-faced, psy-

choanalytic autobiography shifts from liberation to repression: "writing," he now acknowledged, "is only the dream of a solution" (*Mai*, p. 164). The "Postscriptum" seems to announce Lejeune's farewell to autobiography, at least to the psychoanalytic confessional model he has embraced so far.⁴⁹

Lejeune's own sense of his reluctance to confess may indicate that the publication of his autobiography is unlikely to occur soon or even ever. Moreover, given the high expectations his current reputation as a theorist of the genre would naturally generate concerning such a text, he is understandably skittish about getting it into print. In a revealing moment in the "Postscriptum," he characterizes his ambivalent stance toward Leiris in terms that could apply with equal justice to his own stance as autobiographer: "I was torn between contradictory fears and hopes, both equally chimerical; fear of the anger of a Noah, whose cloak I would have stripped away, desire to see my commentaries confirmed" (*Moi*, p. 165). Oedipal fear of the father and desire for his exposure may also stand for Lejeune's simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from the autobiographical act itself, angry Noah a double for Narcissus unveiled. Interestingly, he now entertains the idea of having others assist him in the performance of the autobiographical act, doing for him what he may not be prepared to do for himself, as in his project to record his parents in a series of taped interviews on the subject of his childhood (*Moi*, p. 185), or again, at the end of the "Postscriptum," in his dare to some future critic to play the Lejeune to his own Leiris, sneaking up on him unaware in his autobiographical discourse to catch him (Noah once more) in the act (*Moi*, p. 177). Whatever his own autobiography may turn out to be, and whether or not he ever lays aside his protective mantle of defensive and ironic self-consciousness, I think that Philippe Lejeune has done as much as anyone to enlarge our appreciation of the literature of autobiography, whether speculating as a theorist about what the genre might become in the hands of genius, or, as a historian, rooting in the trashcan of reference to see what it has been most of the time.

I. Autobiography: Theory of the Genre and Analysis of Discourse

Chapter 1

The Autobiographical Pact

Is it possible to define autobiography?

I had tried to do just that in *Autobiographie en France (Autobiography in France)*,¹ so as to be in a position to develop a coherent corpus of texts. But my definition left a number of theoretical problems unaddressed. While trying to find stricter criteria, I felt the need to refine and clarify this definition. I inevitably encountered along my way the classical discussions to which the genre of autobiography always gives rise: the relations of biography and autobiography, and the relations of the novel and autobiography. These problems are irritating because of the endless repetition of arguments, the vagueness that surrounds the vocabulary that is used, and the confusion of problematics borrowed from unrelated fields. Through a new attempt at a definition, then, it is the very terms of the problematic of the genre that I intend to clarify. In wanting to provide clarity, we run two risks: that of seeming to be caught up in an endless repetition of the obvious (because it is necessary to start from the very beginning), and that, on the contrary, of appearing to want to complicate things by using distinctions that are too subtle. I will not avoid the first; as for the second, I will try to base my distinctions on reason.

I had devised my definition not by placing myself *sub specie aeternitatis*, and examining the “things-in-themselves” that would be the texts, but by putting myself in the place of the reader of today who attempts to distinguish some sort of order within a mass of *published* texts, whose common subject is that they recount someone's life. The situation of the “definer” is thus doubly relativized and spe-

cified: *historically*, this definition does not claim to cover more than a period of two centuries (since 1770) and deals only with European literature; this does not mean that the existence of a personal literature before 1770 or outside Europe must be denied, but simply that our way of thinking about autobiography today becomes anachronistic or not very pertinent outside this area. *Textually*, I begin from the position of the reader: it is not a question of starting from within the mind of the author, which indeed poses a problem, nor is it one of establishing the canons of a literary genre. By taking as the starting point the position of the reader, (which is mine, the only one I know well), I have the chance to understand more clearly how the texts function (the differences in how they function) since they were written for us, readers, and in reading them, it is we who make them function. It is thus by the series of oppositions between the different texts, which are available for reading, that I have tried to define autobiography.

In its modified form, the definition of autobiography would be:

DEFINITION: *Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.*

The definition brings into play elements belonging to four different categories:

1. *Form of language*
 - a. narrative
 - b. in prose
2. *Subject treated*: individual life, story of a personality
3. *Situation of the author*: the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical
4. *Position of the narrator*
 - a. the narrator and the principal character are identical
 - b. retrospective point of view of the narrative

Any work that fulfills all the conditions indicated in each of the categories is an autobiography. Genres closely related to autobiography do not meet all these requirements. Those requirements that are not met are listed here according to genres:

- memoirs: (2)
- biography: (4a)
- personal novel: (3)
- autobiographical poem: (1b)
- journal / diary: (4b)
- self-portrait or essay: (1a and 4b).

It is obvious that the different categories are not all equally restrictive: certain conditions can be met for the most part without being satisfied completely. The text must be *mainly* a narrative, but we know how important *discourse* is in autobiographical narration. The perspective is *mainly* retrospective; this does not exclude some sections from taking the form of the self-portrait, a journal of the work or of the contemporary present of the composition, and some very complex temporal structures. The subject must be *primarily* individual life, the genesis of the personality; but the chronicle and social or political history can also be part of the narrative. It is a question here of proportion, or rather of hierarchy: some transitions with other genres of personal literature work quite naturally (memoirs, diary, essay), and a certain latitude is left to the classifier in the examination of particular cases.

On the other hand, two of the conditions are a question of all or nothing, and they are of course the conditions that oppose autobiography (but at the same time the other types of personal literature) to biography and the personal novel: these are conditions (3) and (4a). Here, there is neither transition nor latitude. An identity is, or is not. It is impossible to speak of degrees, and all doubt leads to a negative conclusion.

In order for there to be autobiography (and personal literature in general), the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical. But this "identity" raises a number of problems, which I will try, if not to resolve, then at least to formulate clearly in the sections that follow:

- How can the identity of the narrator and the protagonist be expressed in the text? (*I, You, He*)
- In the narrative written "in the first person," how is the identity of the author and the protagonist-narrator shown? (*I, the Undersigned*) Here we have the opportunity to contrast autobiography with the novel.
- Is there not confusion, in most of the arguments concerning autobiography, between the notion of *identity* and that of *resemblance*? (*Exact Copy*) Here we will have occasion to contrast autobiography with biography.
- The difficulties encountered in these analyses will lead me, in the last two sections of this chapter (*Autobiographical Space* and *Reading Contract*), to try to shift the basis of the problem.

I, You, He

The identity of the *narrator* and the *principal character* that is assumed in autobiography is marked most often by the use of the first person. This is what Gerard Genette calls "autodiegetic" narration in his classification of narrative "voices," a classification he establishes from works of fiction.² But he states quite clearly

that there can be narrative "in the first person" without the narrator being the same person as the principal character. This is what he calls in broad terms "homodiegetic" narration. We need only continue this reasoning to see that in the reverse order there can be identity of the narrator and the principal character without the first person being used.

It is necessary, then, to point out two different criteria: that of the grammatical person, and that of the identity of the individuals to whom the aspects of the grammatical person refer. This elementary distinction is forgotten because of the polysemy of the word "person"; it is masked in practice by the conjunctions that *almost always* come between a given grammatical person and a given relation of identity or a given type of narration. But it is only "almost always"; the undeniable exceptions compel us to rethink the definitions.

Indeed, by bringing up the problem of the *author*, autobiography brings to light phenomena that fiction leaves in doubt: in particular the fact that there can be identity of the narrator and the principal character in the case of narration "in the third person." This identity, no longer being established within the text by the use of "I," is established indirectly, but without any ambiguity, by the double equation: author = narrator, and author = character, from which it is deduced that narrator = character even if the narrator remains implicit. This procedure is consistent, to the letter, with the root meaning of the word "autobiography": it is a biography, written by the person involved, but as a simple biography.

This procedure could be used for very diverse reasons and could bring about very different *effects*. Talking about oneself in the third person can imply either tremendous conceit (this is the case with Caesar's *Commentaries* or with the comparable texts of General De Gaulle), or a certain kind of humility (this is the case with certain early religious autobiographies, in which the autobiographer calls himself "the servant of God"). In the two cases the narrator assumes, vis-a-vis the character that he was, either a distancing from the perspective of history or a distancing from the perspective of God, i.e., of eternity, and introduces in his narration a transcendence with which, in the final analysis, he identifies. We can imagine the totally different effects—of contingency, of dividing, or of ironic distancing—that the same procedure might produce. This is true of the book by Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, in which the author relates in the third person the quasi-Socratic quest of a young American in search of an education—himself. In all the examples given above, the third person is used throughout the narration. There do exist some autobiographies in which one part of the text refers to the principal character in the third person, while in the remainder of the text the narrator and this principal character are confused in the first person; this is the case with *Le Traître*, in which André Gorz expresses the uncertainty of his own identity through tricks of voice. Claude Roy, in *Nous (Us)*, uses this procedure more tritely in order to place an episode of his love life at a modest distance.³ The existence of these bilingual texts, true Rosetta Stones of

identity, is of great import: it confirms the possibility of autobiographic narration "in the third person."

Even if we remain within the personal register (first and second persons), it is obvious that it is possible to write without using the first person. What would prevent me from writing my life's story and calling myself "you"? In the realm of fiction, such a thing was done by Michel Butor in *La Modification*, and by Georges Perec in *Un Homme qui dort (A Man Who Is Sleeping)*. I am not aware of any autobiographies that have been written entirely in this way; but this method appears somewhat fleetingly in the *speeches (discours)* that the narrator addresses to the person that he was, either to cheer him up if he's in a bad mood, or to lecture him or repudiate him.⁴ There is certainly a distance from this point to a narrative, but such a thing is possible. This type of narrative would show clearly, at the level of enunciation, the difference between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance treated as addressee of the narrative.

These uses of the third and second persons are rare in autobiography, but they keep us from confusing the grammatical problems of person with the problems of identity. We could also imagine a diagram with dual access conceived in this way:

grammatical person ↘ identity ↓	I	YOU	HE
narrator = principal character	classical autobiography (autodiegetic)	autobiography in the 2nd person	autobiography in the 3rd person
narrator ≠ principal character	biography in the 1st person (witness narrative) (homodiegetic)	biography addressed to the model	classical biography (heterodiegetic)

Remarks on the diagram

1. By "grammatical person," we must understand here the person used in a privileged manner throughout the narrative. It is obvious that the "I" is not understood without a "you" (the reader), but the latter remains generally implicit; in

the opposite direction, the "you" supposes an "I," equally implicit; and narration in the third person may include intrusions of the narrator in the first person.

2. The examples given here are all borrowed from the gamut of referential narratives that are biography and autobiography; we could also fill up the diagram with examples of fiction. I indicate the categories of G. Genette in the three corresponding blocks; we see that they do not cover all possible cases.

3. The case of biography addressed in the model is that of academic discourses, where the person whose life is told is addressed, before an audience who is the true addressee, just as in an autobiography told in the second person, if such existed, the addressee (formerly oneself) would be there to receive a discourse that would be presented to the reader.

It is necessary, starting with exceptional cases, to dissociate the problem of the person from that of identity. This dissociation allows us to understand the complexity of existing or possible models of autobiography. It is also characteristic of this dissociation to shake the certainties that exist with regard to the possibility of giving a "textual" definition of autobiography. For the moment, having brought up the exception, let's go back to the most frequent case: the classic autobiography "in the first person" (autodiegetic narration); our purpose is to discover new uncertainties, aimed this time at the manner in which the identity of the *author* and the *narrator-character* is established.

I, the Undersigned

Let's suppose, then, that all autobiographies are written in the first person, as the great refrain of the autobiographers—I—leads us to believe. Thus Rousseau: "I, I alone"; Stendhal: "Put *I* with *me* and you have repetition"; Thyde Monnier: *Moi (I)* (autobiography in four volumes); Claude Roy: *Moi, je (Me, I)*; and so on. Even in this case the following question is still being asked: how does the identity of the author and the narrator manifest itself? For an autobiographer, it is natural to wonder quite simply: "Who am I?" But since I am the reader, it is no less natural for me to ask the question differently: who is "I?"—i.e., who is it who *says* "Who am I?"

You will excuse me for mentioning, before going on with the analysis, some elementary notions of linguistics. But, in this area, the simplest things are the ones that are most quickly forgotten: they seem natural and disappear in the illusion that they engender. I will begin with some of Benveniste's analyses, even if I end up with conclusions slightly different from his.⁵

The "first person" is defined through articulation on two levels:

1. *Reference*: the personal pronouns (I/you) have real reference only within discourse, in the very act of enunciation. Benveniste points out that there is no

such concept as "I." The "I" refers, each time, to the person who is speaking and whom we identify *by the very fact* that he is speaking.

2. *Utterance*: the first-person personal pronouns mark the *identity* of the subject of the enunciation and of the subject of the utterance.

Thus, if someone says: "I was born the . . .," the use of the pronoun "I" results, through the articulation of these two levels, in our identifying the person who is speaking with the one who is being born. At least this is the total effect obtained. We are not necessarily led to believe here that the types of "equations" established on these two levels are the same. At the level of reference (speech as it refers to its own enunciation), identity is immediate; it is instantaneously understood and accepted by the addressee as a *fact*; at the level of utterance, it is a question of a simple relationship . . . uttered, i.e., of one assertion like another, that we can believe or not, and so on. Moreover, the example that I have used gives us some idea of the problems raised: is it really the same person, the baby who is born in such and such a clinic, in an era of which I have no memory whatsoever—and *me*? It is important to clearly differentiate these two relationships, blurred in the use of the pronoun "I"; we will see later that it is our failure to make such a distinction that causes the greatest confusion in the problematic of autobiography (see *Exact Copy*, below). Setting aside for the moment the problems of utterance, I will limit myself to thinking about enunciation.

The situation of *oral* discourse is the starting point of the analyses of Benveniste. In this situation, we might think that the reference of the "I" poses no problem: "I," it is the person who is speaking—and me, in my position as interlocutor or listener, I have no difficulty in identifying this person. Nevertheless, there exist two series of oral situations in which this identification can pose a problem.

1. *Quotation*, which is discourse within discourse. The first person of the second discourse (quoted) refers to a situation of enunciation itself expressed in the first discourse. Different signs, dashes, quotation marks, etc., differentiate the inserted (quoted) discourses, when we are dealing with written discourses. Intonation plays an analogous role in oral discourse. But these signs become blurred, or faded, and uncertainty appears: this is the case in *re-quotation/re-citation* and in a more general way in the theater. When Berma plays *Phèdre*, who is saying "I"? The theatrical situation can certainly perform the function of quotation marks, pointing out the fictitious character of the person who says "I." But here, our head starts to swim because the idea crosses the minds of even the most naïve of us that it is not the individual who defines the "I," but perhaps the "I," the individual, that is to say, the individual exists only in discourse. Let's avoid chaos for the moment. What we are touching upon here, in autobiography, are problems related to the difference between the autobiographical novel and autobiography. But also, in terms of autobiography itself, we find evidence that the first person is a role.

2. *Oral from a distance*, which takes place in the moment, as in a telephone

conversation, any conversation through a door or at night. There is no other way to identify the individual except through aspects of voice: who's there?—me— who, me? Here, dialogue is still possible that might lead to identification. Let the voice be delayed in time (recording), or even, in the moment, one-way conversation (radio), and we cannot identify it. We now go back to the case of writing.

Up to this point, I have tried to follow Benveniste, simply by imagining everything that, in an oral situation, might succeed in restoring the identity of the undetermined individual. That the "I" refers to the enunciation, no one is trying to deny. But the enunciation is not the last term of the reference: it poses in its turn a problem of *identity*, which, in direct oral communication, we resolve instinctively from some extralinguistic facts. When oral communication is confused, identity is a problem. But, in written communication, unless s/he wants to remain anonymous (which does happen!), the person who formulates the discourse must allow his/her identification within this speech by using something besides physical signs, like the postmark, writing or spelling peculiarities.

Benveniste indicates (p. 226) that there is no such concept as "I"—quite an accurate remark if we add that there is no such concept as "he" either, and that, in general terms, no personal, possessive, demonstrative, pronoun, etc., has ever *referred* to a concept, but simply exercises a function, which consists in referring to a noun or to an entity that can be designated by a noun. Accordingly, we will propose to qualify his analysis by the following two propositions:

1. The personal pronoun "I" refers to the speaker at the moment of discourse when the "I" appears; but this speaker is himself capable of being designated by a noun (whether we are talking about a common noun, determined in different ways, or about a proper noun).

2. The opposition *concept/no concept* takes its meaning from the opposition of common noun and proper noun (not from common noun and personal pronoun).

Benveniste thus justifies, economically, the use of this first person, which has reference only in its own enunciation: "If each speaker, in order to express the feeling he has of his irreducible subjectivity, made use of a distinct identifying 'signal' (in the sense in which each radio transmitting station has its own call letters), there would be as many languages as individuals and communication would become absolutely impossible" (p. 220). A strange hypothesis, since Benveniste seems to forget here that this distinct signal *exists*, and it is the lexical category of proper names (those proper names that designate people): there are almost as many proper names as there are individuals. Naturally, this is not an aspect of verb conjugation, and Benveniste is right in emphasizing the economic function of the "I"; but, in forgetting to articulate it in the lexical category of names of people, he renders incomprehensible the fact that each one, utilizing the "I," does not lose himself for all that in anonymity and is always capable of enunciating what is irreducible in naming himself.

It is in the *proper name* that person and discourse are linked even before being joined in the first person, as the order of language acquisition by children shows. The child talks about himself in the third person while calling himself by his first name, long before he understands that he too can use the first person. Next each of them calls himself "I" in speaking; but for each one, this "I" refers to a single name, which he will always be able to express. All the identifications (easy, difficult, or undetermined) suggested above from oral situations inevitably result in transforming the first person into a proper name.⁶

Each time that oral discourse is necessary, the return to the proper name is accomplished. This is the *presentation*, made by the person involved or by a third party (the word "presentation" itself is suggestive by its inaccuracy: physical presence is not sufficient to define the speaker; there is complete presence only through naming). Similarly in written discourse, the *signature* designates the enunciator, as the address does the addressee.⁷

It is thus in relation to the *proper name* that we are able to situate the problems of autobiography. In printed texts, responsibility for all enunciation is assumed by a person who is in the habit of placing his *name* on the cover of the book, and on the flyleaf, above or below the title of the volume. The entire existence of the person we call the *author* is summed up by this name: the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person, which requires that we thus attribute to him, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the production of the whole written text. In many cases, the presence of the author in the text is reduced to this single name. But the place assigned to this name is essential: it is linked, by a social convention, to the pledge of responsibility of a *real person*. I understand by these words, which figure in my definition of autobiography, a person whose existence is certified by vital statistics and is verifiable. Certainly, the reader is not going to verify this, and he may very well not know who this person is. But his existence is beyond question: exceptions and breaches of trust serve only to emphasize the general credence accorded this type of social contract.⁸

An author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two. The author is defined as simultaneously a socially responsible real person and the producer of a discourse. For the reader, who does not know the real person, all the while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing this discourse, and so he imagines what he is like from what he produces. Perhaps one is an author only with his second book, when the proper name inscribed on the cover becomes the "common factor" of at least two different texts and thus gives the idea of a person who cannot be reduced to any of his texts in particular, and who, capable of producing others, surpasses them all. This, we will see, is very important for the reading of autobiographies: if the autobiography is a first book, its author is thus unknown, even if he relates his own story

in the book. He lacks, in the eyes of the reader, that sign of reality which is the previous production of *other texts* (nonautobiographical), indispensable to that which we will call "the autobiographical space."

The author is, then, the name of a person, identical, taking upon himself a series of different published texts. He draws his reality from the list of his other works which figure often in the front of the book: "By the same author." Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about. What we have here is a very simple criterion, which defines at the same time as autobiography all the other genres of personal literature (journal, self-portrait, essay).

An objection comes to mind at once: what about pseudonyms? An easy objection to avoid, as soon as we have defined pseudonym and distinguished it from the name of a fictional character.

A pseudonym is a name that is different from the one found in vital statistics, which a real person uses in order to *publish* all or part of his writings. The pseudonym is the name of an *author*. It is not exactly a false name, but a pen name, a second name, exactly like the one a religious assumes upon taking orders. To be sure, the use of a pseudonym can sometimes cover up deceptions or be imposed for reasons of discretion; but it has to do most often with isolated productions, and almost never with a work being passed off as the autobiography of an *author*. Literary pseudonyms are in general neither mysteries nor hoaxes. The second name is as authentic as the first; it simply signals this second birth which is the published writing. Writing his autobiography, the author under his pen name will himself explain its origin; thus Raymond Abellio explains that he is calling himself Georges Soules, and why he has chosen his pseudonym.⁹ The pseudonym is simply a differentiation, a division of the name, which changes nothing in the identity.

We must not confuse *pseudonym*, defined in this way as the name of an *author* (noted on the cover of the book), with the *name* attributed to a fictional person *within the book* (even if this person has the status of narrator and assumes the whole of the text production), because this person is himself designated as fictitious by the simple fact that he is incapable of being the *author of the book*. Let me give a very simple example: "Colette" is the pseudonym of a real person (Gabrielle-Sidonie Colette), *author* of a series of narratives; Claudine is the name of a fictitious heroine, narrator of the stories that have her name for a title. If the *Claudines* cannot be accepted as autobiographies, it is quite obviously for the second reason, not at all for the first.

In the case of the fictitious name (i.e., different from that of the author) given to a character who tells his life story, the reader has reason to think that the story lived by the character is precisely that of the author: by cross-checking with other texts, or by delving into external news items, or even by reading the narrative

whose fictional appearance rings false (as when someone tells you: "What happened to a very good friend of mine was . . ." and proceeds to tell you the story of this friend with a completely personal conviction). We would have all the reasons in the world to think that the story is exactly the same; nonetheless, the text produced in this way is not an autobiography. The latter supposes first of all an *identity claimed* at the level of enunciation, and absolutely secondarily, a *resemblance* produced at the level of the utterance.

These texts would therefore fall into the category of "autobiographical novel." This is how I will refer to all fictional texts in which the reader has reason to suspect, from the resemblances that he thinks he sees, that there is identity of author and *protagonist*, whereas the author has chosen to deny this identity, or at least not to affirm it. So defined, the autobiographical novel includes personal narratives (identity of narrator and protagonist) as well as "impersonal" narratives (protagonists designated in the third person); it is defined at the level of its contents. Unlike autobiography, it involves *degrees*. The "resemblance" assumed by the reader can be anything from a fuzzy "family likeness" between the protagonist and the author, to the quasi-transparency that makes us say that he is "the spitting image." Thus, concerning *L'Annee du crabe* (1972) by Olivier Todd, one critic has written that "the entire book admits to being obsessively autobiographical behind the transparent pseudonyms."¹⁰ Autobiography does not include degrees: it is all or nothing.

We see, in these distinctions, how important it is to use a clearly defined vocabulary. The critic was talking about "pseudonym" for the name of the hero: for me, pseudonym is good only for the author's name. The hero can resemble the author as much as he wants; as long as he does not have his name, there is in effect nothing. The case of *L'Annee du crabe* is exemplary from this point of view. The subtitle of the book is *Novel*: Olivier Todd's hero is named Ross. But on page 4, a publisher's note assures the reader that Todd is Ross. A clever advertising trick, but one that changes nothing. If Ross is Todd, why does he have another name? If it was he, how come he does not say so? It matters little whether he coquettishly allows us to guess it, or that the reader guesses it in spite of him. Autobiography is not a guessing game: it is in fact exactly the opposite. What is missing here is the essential, what I call the *autobiographical pact*.

Turning back from the first person to the proper name, I am therefore prompted to rectify what I wrote in *Autobiography in France*: "How to distinguish autobiography from the autobiographical novel? We must admit that, if we remain on the level of analysis within the text, there is *no difference*. All the methods that autobiography uses to convince us of the authenticity of its narrative can be imitated by the novel, and often have been imitated." This is accurate as long as we limit ourselves to the text minus the title page; as soon as we include the latter in the text, with the name of the author, we make use of a general textual

criterion, the identity ("identicalness") of the *name* (author-narrator-protagonist). The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover.

The autobiographical pact comes in very diverse forms; but all of them demonstrate their intention to honor his/her *signature*. The reader might be able to quibble over resemblance, but never over identity ("identicalness"). We know all too well how much each of us values his/her name.

An autobiographical work of fiction can be "exact," the protagonist resembling the author; an autobiography can be "inexact," the protagonist presented differing from the author. These are questions of fact—let's still put aside the question of knowing *who* will be the judge of the resemblance, and how—which have no bearing on questions of *right*, that is to say, on the type of contract entered into between the author and the reader. We see, moreover, the importance of the contract, in that it actually determines the attitude of the reader: if the identity is not stated positively (as in fiction), the reader will attempt to establish resemblances, in spite of the author; if it is positively stated (as in autobiography), the reader will want to look for differences (errors, deformations, etc.). Confronted with what looks like an autobiographical narrative, the reader often tends to think of himself as a detective, that is to say, to look for breaches of contract (whatever the contract). It is here that the myth of the novel being "truer" than the autobiography originates: when we think we have discovered something through the text, in spite of the author, we always accord it more truth and more profundity. If Olivier Todd had presented *L'Année du Crabe* as his autobiography, perhaps our critic would have been sensitive to the faults, to the gaps, to the manipulations of his narrative—namely to the fact that all questions of *fidelity* (problem of "resemblance") depend ultimately upon the question of *authenticity* (problem of identity), which is itself expressed with regard to the proper name.

The *identity of name* between author, narrator, and protagonist can be established in two ways:

1. *Implicitly*, at the level of the author-narrator connection, in the case of the *autobiographical pact*; the latter can take two forms: (a) the use of *titles* leaving no doubt about the fact that the first person refers to the name of the author (*Story of My Life, Autobiography*, etc.); (b) *initial section* of the text where the narrator enters into a contract vis-à-vis the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the "I" refers to the name shown on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text.

2. *In an obvious way*, at the level of the name that the narrator-protagonist is given in the narrative itself, and which is the same as that of the author on the cover.

Identity has to be established in at least one of these two ways; this is often accomplished by both of them at the same time.

Parallel to the autobiographical pact, we could place the *fictional pact*, which

would itself have two aspects: *obvious practice of nonidentity* (the author and the protagonist do not have the same name), *affirmation of fictitiousness* (in general it is the subtitle *novel* which today performs this function on the cover; it should be noted that *novel*, in current terminology, implies fictional pact, whereas *narrative [recit]* is, itself, indeterminate and compatible with the autobiographical pact). Some people will object perhaps that the novel has the capability of *imitating* the autobiographical pact: is not the eighteenth-century novel composed precisely by imitating the different forms of personal literature (memoirs, letters, and, in the nineteenth century, diary)? But this objection does not hold—if we consider that this imitation cannot go back as far as the final term—namely the *name of the author*. We can always pretend to record, to publish the autobiography of someone we are trying to pass off as real; as long as this someone is not the *author*, who alone is responsible for the *book*, there is in effect nothing. Only cases of literary fraud therefore would escape this test: they are extremely rare—and this rarity is not due to respect for someone else's name or to the fear of penalties. Who would prevent me from writing the autobiography of an imaginary character and to publish it under his equally imaginary name? It is exactly this, in a slightly different domain, that MacPherson did for Ossian! This is rare, because few authors are capable of renouncing *their own name*. Witness the fact that even the fraud of Ossian was short-lived, since we know who its author is, since MacPherson couldn't keep his name (as adapter) from being included in the title!

Once these definitions are in place, we can classify all the possible cases by bringing into play two criteria: the relationship of the name of the protagonist and the name of the author, the nature of the pact concluded by the author. For each of these criteria, three situations are possible. The protagonist (1) has a name that is different from that of the author; (2) has no name; (3) has the same name as the author; the pact is (1) fictional; (2) absent; (3) autobiographical. In articulating these two criteria, we obtain theoretically nine combinations; actually only seven are possible, the coexistence of the identity of the name and the fictional pact, and that of the difference of name and the autobiographical pact being excluded by definition.

The accompanying chart gives the pattern of possible combinations; the numbers indicated are those of the description that follows; in each box, at the bottom, is the effect that the combination produces on the reader. It goes without saying that this chart is applied only to "autodiegetic" narratives.

1. *Name of the protagonist ≠ name of the author*. This fact alone excludes the possibility of autobiography. It matters little, from then on, whether or not there is, in addition, affirmation that the work is fiction (1a or 1b). Whether the story is presented as true (autobiographical manuscript that the author-publisher would have found in an attic, etc.) or whether it is presented as fiction (and believed to be true, attributed to the author, by the reader)—in any case, there is no identity of author, narrator, and hero.

<i>protagonist's name</i> Pact ↓	≠ author's name	= 0	= author's name
fictional	1a NOVEL	2a NOVEL	
= 0	1b NOVEL	2b indeterminate	3a AUTOBIO- GRAPHY
autobiographical		2c AUTOBIO- GRAPHY	3b AUTOBIO- GRAPHY

2. *Name of the protagonist = 0*. This is the most complex case, because it is indeterminate. Everything depends, then, on the pact concluded by the author. Three cases are possible:

a. *Fictional pact* (the "fictional" nature of the book is indicated on the cover page). The autodiegetic narrative is thus attributed to a fictitious narrator. It's a case that must happen infrequently—no example comes immediately to mind. We might be tempted to evoke *Remembrance of Things Past*, but for two reasons that fiction does not correspond exactly to this case: on the one hand, the fictional pact is not clearly indicated at the beginning of the book, with the result that innumerable readers have made the mistake of confusing the author Proust with the narrator; on the other hand, it is true that the narrator-protagonist has no name—except one single time, when in the same utterance it is suggested to us as a hypothesis that we give the narrator the same first name as the author (an utterance that can only be attributed to the author, because how would a fictitious narrator know the name of his author?), and when it is thus pointed out to us that the author is not the narrator. This bizarre intrusion on the part of the author functions both as fictional pact and as autobiographical clue, and sets the text in an ambiguous space.¹¹

b. *Pact = 0*. Not only does the protagonist not have a name, but the author does not conclude any pact—neither autobiographical nor fictional. The indetermination is total. Example: *Mother and Child*, by Charles-Louis Philippe. Even though the secondary characters in this narrative have names, the mother and child have no family name, and the child has no first name. We can certainly suppose that it is about Mme. Philippe and her son, but this is not written anywhere. Moreover, the narration is ambiguous (does it concern a general hymn to child-

hood or the story of one particular child?), the place and time are quite vague, and we do not know who the adult is who is talking about this childhood. The reader, according to his mood, will be able to read it in the register that he wants.

c. *Autobiographical pact*. The protagonist does not have a name in the narrative, but the author has declared explicitly in an initial pact that he is identical to the narrator (and thus to the protagonist, since the narrative is autodiegetic). Example: *Histoire de mes idées* (*Story of My Ideas*), by Edgar Quinet; the pact, included in the title, is clarified in a long preface, signed Edgar Quinet. The name does not appear one single time in the narrative, but, because of the pact, "I" always refers to Quinet.

3. *Name of the protagonist = name of the author*. This fact alone excludes the possibility of fiction. Even if the story is, historically, completely false, it will be on the order of the *lie* (which is an "autobiographical" category) and not of fiction. We can distinguish two cases:

a. *Pact = 0* (let's understand by pact the pact of the title or the prefatory pact). The reader establishes the author-narrator-protagonist identity, although it is not the object of any solemn declaration. Example: *Les Mots* (*The Words*), by Jean-Paul Sartre. Neither the title nor the beginning indicates that this is an autobiography. Someone is telling the story of a family. On page 13 the narrator intervenes explicitly for the first time in the narrative ("*He intrigues me: I know that he remained a bachelor,*" or "*She loved him, I believe*"); on page 14, in the story, appears Doctor Sartre, who, on page 15, has a grandson: "me." From the name, we thus grasp the identity of the protagonist, of the narrator, and of the author whose name is displayed above the title: Jean-Paul Sartre. And, that it indeed concerns the famous author, and not a homonym, is proved by the text itself, whose narrator takes credit on page 54 for *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*), *Les Chemins de la liberté* (*Roads to Freedom*), and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (*The Condemned of Altona*), and on page 251, *La Nausée* (*Nausea*). The story will even give us the most diverse aspects of this name, from the dreaming about fame: "That little Sartre knows his business. France does not realize what she would be losing if he passed away" (p. 92), to the familiar (and familial) deformations of the first name: "André feels that Poulou puts on airs" (p. 224).

We might consider this criterion perfectly contingent. The occurrence of the proper name in the narrative takes place long after the beginning of the book, in reference to a minor episode that we really feel could disappear from the text without changing its general appearance. Thus in the autobiography of J. Green, *Partir avant le jour* (*Leave Before Day*, Grasset, 1963), it is only on page 107, in an anecdote on giving away prizes, that the name appears. At times even this irruption of the name into the text is unique and allusive. This is the case in *L'Âge d'homme* (*Manhood*), where Michel is read behind "Micheline";¹² the fact remains that almost always, he appears. Naturally, in general, the autobiographical pact does not mention the name: our name is so obvious to us, and it will ap-

pear on the cover. Because of this ineluctable character of the name, it never is the object of a solemn declaration (the *author*, by the very fact that he is the author, always assumes that he is more or less known to the reader), yet it always ends up reappearing in the story. After all, this name itself can be given in plain language, or, insofar as it almost always has to do with an author's name, it can be implied by the attribution that the narrator makes to himself of the author's works (if Quinet does not name himself, he names his works, which amounts to the same thing).

b. *Autobiographical pact*. This is the most frequent case (because very often, so as not to appear in a formal way at the beginning of the book, the pact nevertheless appears scattered and repeated throughout the text). Example: *Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (*The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*); the pact already appears in the title, is developed in the preamble, and confirmed throughout the text by the use of "Rousseau" and of "Jean-Jacques."

Here, then, I will call "autobiographies" the texts that enter into cases 2c, 3a, 3b; as for the rest, we read the texts falling into cases 1a, 1b, 2a as novels; and, according to our mood, category 2b (but without our overlooking the fact that it is we who are choosing).

In this type of classification, consideration of borderline cases is always instructive and says more than the description of what is a matter of course. Are the solutions that I declare impossible really so? Two fields are to be explored here: first, the problem of the two blackened squares in the chart above; next, the problem of the anonymous *author*.

— *The blackened squares*. (a) Can the hero of a novel declared as such have the same name as the author? Nothing would prevent such a thing from existing, and it is perhaps an internal contradiction from which some interesting effects could be drawn. But, in practice, no example of such a study comes to mind. And if the case does present itself, the reader is under the impression that a mistake has been made. Thus the autobiography of Maurice Sachs, *Le Sabbat* (*The Sabbath*), had been published in 1946 by Correa, with the subtitle *Souvenirs d'une jeunesse orageuse* (*Memories of a Stormy Childhood*); it was republished in 1960 by Gallimard (and again in 1971 in the collection *Livre de Poche*) with the subtitle *Novel*: because the story is told by Sachs using his own name (he even gives his real name—Ettinghausen—in addition to his pseudonym), and since the responsibility for the subtitle is clearly the publisher's, the reader picks up on the error. (b) In the *stated* autobiography, can the protagonist have a name different from that of the author (the question of the pseudonym aside)? This is hardly ever seen;¹³ and if, by some artistic effect, an autobiographer chose this formula, the reader would always have doubts: isn't he reading a novel, quite simply? We see in these two cases that if the internal contradiction was voluntarily chosen by the author, it would never result in a text that we would read as an autobiography:

nor really as a novel either; but in a Pirandellian game of ambiguity. To my knowledge, it is a game that we practically never play *seriously*.

In the above chart, the ascending diagonal, which includes the two blackened squares and the central square, marks out a zone of indetermination (from "neither one nor the other" in the central square to "the two together" in the blackened squares).

— *The anonymous author*. This chart assumes that the author has a name; a tenth case should therefore be considered: the case of the anonymous author. But this case (with the subdivisions that it would engender depending on whether the protagonist has a name or not, and that a *publisher* concludes in the place of the absent author such and such a pact with the reader)—this case is also excluded by definition, as the author of an autobiography cannot be anonymous. If the disappearance of the author's name is due to an accidental phenomenon (the manuscript found in an attic, unpublished and not signed), there are two possibilities: either the narrator states his name someplace in the text, and an elementary historical study lets us know if this has to do with a real person, given that by definition an autobiography recounts a dated and situated story; or else the narrator-protagonist does not give his name, and we are dealing either with a text that is part of category 2b or else with a simple fiction. If the anonymity is intentional (a published text), the reader is in a state of legitimate mistrust. The text can appear to be authentic, to give all sorts of verifiable and likely particulars, to ring true—it remains that all this can be counterfeited. At best, this would be a sort of extreme case, analogous to category 2b. Everything rests, then, on the decision of the reader. We will have an idea about the complexity of the problem in reading, for example, the *Mémoires d'un vicaire de campagne, écrits par lui-même* (*Memoirs of a Country Priest, Written by Himself*) (1841), attributed to Father Epineau, whose ecclesiastical office would have forced him to remain provisionally anonymous.¹⁴

Surely by asserting that it is impossible to write an anonymous autobiography, I am only stating a corollary to my definition, and not "proving" it. Everyone is free to assert that it is possible, but then it will be necessary to start with another definition. We see that here, everything depends, on the one hand, on the link that I establish, through the notion of *author*, between the person and the name; on the other hand, on the fact that I have chosen the perspective of the reader in defining autobiography. For any reader, a text in the autobiographical style, which is claimed by no one, and a work of fiction are as much alike as two drops of water.

But I think that this definition, far from being arbitrary, brings out the essential point. What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text. If I write the story of my life without mentioning my

name in it, how will my reader know that it was *I*? It is impossible for the autobiographical vocation and the passion for anonymity to coexist in the same person.

The distinctions proposed here, the attention paid to the proper name, have, then, a great importance on the practical level as criteria for classification; on the theoretical level, they impose several series of reflections whose features I will only mention.

1. *Author and person.* Autobiography is a literary genre which, by its very content, best marks the confusion of author and person, confusion on which is founded the whole practice and problematic of Western literature since the end of the eighteenth century. Whence the kind of *passion for the proper name*, which exceeds simple "author's vanity," since through such passion it is the person him/herself who claims existence. The deep subject of autobiography is the proper name. We think about those sketches by Hugo, displaying his own name in gigantic letters across a countryside in chiaroscuro. The desire for fame and eternity so cruelly demystified by Sartre in *Les Mots* rests entirely on the *proper name* become author's name. Do we imagine the possibility of an *anonymous* literature today? Valéry was already pondering over it fifty years ago. But it doesn't seem that he thought about practicing it himself, since he ended up in the Academy. Having achieved his reputation, he could dream about anonymity. The *Tel Quel* group, by calling into question the notion of author (replacing it by that of "scripteur"), heads in the same direction but does not pursue the thing any further.

2. *Person and language.* We saw earlier that we could legitimately wonder, with regard to the "first person," if it was the psychological person (conceived naively as being outside language) who was expressing himself by making use of the grammatical person as an instrument, or if the psychological person was not an *effect* of the enunciation itself. The word "person" contributes to the ambiguity. If there is no one outside of language, since language is other people, we would have to arrive at the idea that autobiographical discourse, far from referring, as each person imagines it, to the "I" minted in a series of proper names, would be, on the contrary, an alienated discourse, a mythological voice by which we would all be controlled. Naturally, autobiographers are in general farthest from the problems of the Beckettian hero of *L'Innommable* (*The Unnameable*) wondering who is saying "I" in him; but this anxiety shows on the surface in some books, such as *Le Traître* (*The Traitor*) by Gorz—or rather in the kind of transcription that Sartre did of it (*Des rats et des hommes* [*Of Rats and Men*]). Under the name "vampire," Sartre designates these voices that control us. The autobiographical voice is undoubtedly part of them. Thus would open up—all psychology and mystique of the individual demystified—an analysis of the discourse of subjectivity and individuality as the myth of our civilization. Moreover, each of us indeed feels the danger of this indetermination of the first person, and it is no accident if we try to neutralize it by grounding it in the proper name.

3. *Proper name and proper body.* The acquisition of the proper name is no doubt as important a stage in the story of the individual as the mirror stage. This acquisition escapes memory and autobiography, which can recount only these second and inverse baptisms that are for a child the accusations that freeze him in a role through a qualifier: "thief" for Genet, "yid" for Albert Cohen (*O vous, frères humains* [*You, Human Brothers*], 1972). The name received and assumed first—the father's name—and especially the Christian name that distinguishes you from it, are no doubt essential basic principles in the story of *me*. Witness the fact that the name is never indifferent, whether we adore it or we detest it, whether we accept that we owe it to others or we prefer to receive it only from the self. This can go on to a generalized system of displacements, as it does with Stendhal;¹⁵ to an increase in the value of the first name, as in Jean-Jacques (Rousseau); and, in a more banal way, to all those games of chance, to parlor games or to private games on those few letters in which each of us thinks instinctively that the essence of his being is registered. Plays on spelling and meaning: of the unhappiness in being named François Nourissier, for example;¹⁶ plays on sex: Michel or Micheline Leiris (see note 12). The presence of a name in the voice of those who have pronounced it: "Oh Rousseau, I thought you were a good fellow," said Marion. Infantile meditation on the arbitrariness of the name, and search for a second name that is essential, as with Jacques Madaule.¹⁷ History of the name itself, established often quite tediously for the reader in those preambles in the form of a family tree.

When we try, then, to distinguish fiction from autobiography, to determine what it is that the "I" refers to in personal accounts, there is no need to go back to an impossible world-beyond-the-text; the text itself offers this last word at the very end, the proper name of the author, which is both textual and unquestionably referential. If this reference is beyond doubt, it is because it is based on two social institutions: vital statistics (agreement internalized by each of us from early childhood) and the publishing contract; there is, then, no reason to doubt identity.

Exact Copy

Identity is not resemblance.

Identity is a *fact* immediately grasped—accepted or refused, at the level of enunciation; resemblance is a *relationship* subject to infinite discussions and nuances, established from the utterance.

Identity is defined starting with three terms: author, narrator, and protagonist. Narrator and protagonist are the figures to whom the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance refer *within the text*; the author, represented at the edge of the text by his name, is the referent to whom the subject of enunciation refers by reason of the autobiographical pact.

As soon as it becomes a matter of *resemblance*, we are obliged to introduce a fourth symmetrical term on the side of utterance, an extratextual referent that we could call the prototype, or better yet, the *model*.

My reflections on identity have led me to distinguish especially the autobiographical novel from autobiography; for resemblance, it is the opposition with *biography* that is going to have to be specified. In the two cases, moreover, vocabulary is the source of errors: "autobiographical novel" is too close to the word "autobiography," itself too close to the word "biography," for some confusions not to arise. Is not autobiography, as its name indicates, the biography of a person written by him/herself? We thus have a tendency to consider it a particular case of biography, and to apply to it the "historicizing" problematic of this genre. Many autobiographers, amateur or established writers, fall naively into this trap—probably because this illusion is necessary to the functioning of the genre.

As opposed to all forms of fiction, biography and autobiography are *referential* texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of *verification*. Their aim is not simple verisimilitude, but resemblance to the truth. Not "the effect of the real," but the image of the real. All referential texts thus entail what I will call a "referential pact," implicit or explicit, in which are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the text lays claim.

The referential pact, in the case of autobiography, is in general coextensive with the autobiographical pact, difficult to dissociate, exactly, like the subject of enunciation and that of utterance in the first person. The formula for it would not be "I, the undersigned" either, but "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The oath rarely takes such an abrupt and total form; it is a supplementary proof of honesty to restrict it to the *possible* (the truth such as it appears to me, inasmuch as I can know it, etc., making allowances for lapses of memory, errors, involuntary distortions, etc.), and to indicate explicitly the *field* to which this oath applies (the truth about such and such an aspect of my life, not committing myself in any way about some other aspect).

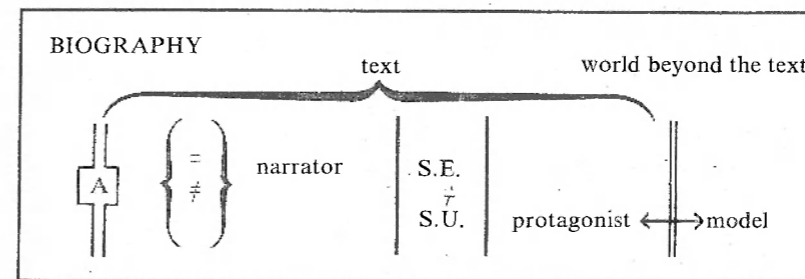
We see what makes this pact look like the one that any historian, geographer, or journalist draws up with his/her reader; but we must be naive not to see, at the same time, the differences. We are not talking about practical difficulties with the test of *verification* in the case of autobiography, since autobiography tells us precisely—here is the advantage of its narrative—what it alone can tell us. Biographical study easily allows us to gather other information and to determine the degree of the narrative's accuracy. This is not where the difference lies; it lies in the rather paradoxical fact that this accuracy has no essential importance. In autobiography, it is indispensable that the referential pact be *drawn up*, and that it be *kept*; but it is not necessary that the result be on the order of strict resemblance.

The referential pact can be, according to the criteria of the reader, badly kept, without the referential value of the text disappearing (on the contrary)—this is not the case for historical and journalistic texts.

This apparent paradox is due naturally to the confusion that I have maintained up to this point, following the example of most authors and critics, between biography and autobiography. To clear it up, it is necessary to restore this fourth term that is the *model*.

By "model," I understand the real that the utterance claims to *resemble*. How can a text "resemble" a life—that is a question the biographers rarely ask themselves and that they always assume is resolved implicitly. The "resemblance" can be found on two levels: in the negative mode—and at the level of the elements of the narrative—the criterion of *accuracy* intervenes; in the positive mode—and at the level of the whole of the narrative—what we will call *fidelity* intervenes. Accuracy involves *information*, fidelity *meaning*. That meaning can be produced only by narrative techniques and by the intervention of a system of explication involving the ideology of the historian does not prevent the biographer from imagining that it is on the same level as accuracy, in a relationship of resemblance with the extratextual reality to which the entire text refers. Thus Sartre declares shamelessly that his biography of Flaubert is a "true novel."¹⁸ The model, in biography, is thus the life of a man "such as it was."

In order to represent the biographical undertaking, we can construct the accompanying diagram, in which the division into *columns* differentiates the text and the world-beyond-the-text, and the division into *rows* the subject of enunciation and the subject of utterance. Included inside the line separating the text from the world-beyond-the-text is the author, in the marginal position represented by his name on the cover of the book.



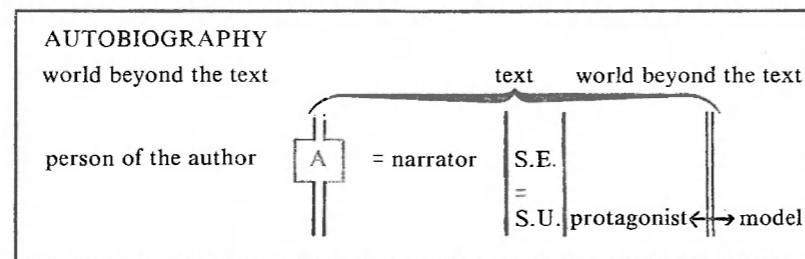
Abbreviations: A = Author
S.E. = Subject of the enunciation
S.U. = Subject of the utterance

Relationships: = identical to
≠ not identical to
↔ resemblance

Commentary on the diagram. In biography, author and narrator are sometimes linked by a relationship of *identity*. This relationship can remain implicit or vague, or can be made explicit, for example, in a preface (for example, that of *L'Idiot de la famille* [*The Idiot of the Family*], where the biographer, Sartre, explains that he has some accounts to settle with his model, Flaubert). It can also happen that no identity relationship is established between author and narrator. What is important is that if the narrator uses the first person, it is never to talk about the protagonist of the story—this is someone else. Consequently, as soon as the narrator is involved, the principal mode of the narrative is the third person, what G. Genette calls heterodiegetic narration. The relationship of the protagonist (in the text) to the model (referent in the world-beyond-the-text) is certainly first of all a relationship of identity, but it is especially one of “resemblance.” As a matter of fact, in the case of the subject of utterance, the identity relationship does not have the same *value* as it does for the subject of enunciation. It is simply a given of the utterance on the same level as the others; it proves nothing; it itself needs to be proved through resemblance.

We notice already here what is going to fundamentally oppose biography and autobiography; it is the hierarchical organization of the relationships of resemblance and identity. In biography, it is resemblance that must ground identity; in autobiography, it is identity that grounds resemblance. Identity is the real starting point of autobiography; resemblance, the impossible horizon of biography. The different function of resemblance in the two systems thereby is explained.

This becomes obvious as soon as we outline the diagram that corresponds to autobiography:



The personal narrative (autodiegetic) seems here to be absolutely irreducible to the impersonal narrative (heterodiegetic).

Indeed, in personal narrative, what does the “equal” (=) sign that is found between the subject of enunciation and that of utterance signify? It really implies *identity*; and that identity, in turn, involves a certain form of resemblance. Resemblance with whom? If we are talking about a narrative written exclusively in the past, like biography, resemblance of the protagonist to the model could be

looked at exclusively as a verifiable relationship between protagonist and model; but all narrative in the first person implies that the protagonist, even if some distant adventures about him are being told, is also at the same time the *real* person who produces the narration: the subject of the utterance is double because it is inseparable from the subject of enunciation; in a way, it becomes single again only when the narrator talks about his own present narration, never in the other direction, to designate a protagonist untainted by any real narrator.

We realize, then, that the relationship designated by “=” is not at all a *simple* relationship, but rather a *relationship of relationships*; it signifies that the narrator is to the protagonist (past or present) what the author is to the model. This implies that the ultimate expression of truth (if we reason in terms of resemblance) can no longer be the being-in-itself of the past (if indeed such a thing exists), but being-for-itself, manifested in the present of the enunciation. It also implies that in his relationship to the story (remote or quasi-contemporary) of the protagonist, the narrator is mistaken, lies, forgets, or distorts—and error, lie, lapse of memory, or distortion will, if we distinguish them, take on the value of aspects, among others, of an enunciation, which, itself, remains authentic. Let’s call authenticity that inner relationship characteristic of the first person in the personal narrative; it will be confused neither with identity, which refers to the proper name, nor with resemblance, which assumes a judgment of similitude between two different images, made by a third person.

This detour was necessary in order to grasp the inadequacy of the diagram on autobiography. The illusion is that held by all those who start off from the problematic of biography in order to think about autobiography. While constructing the diagram on biography, I had been prompted, because of the nonidentity of the protagonist and the narrator, to distinguish *two “sides”* for the extratextual reference, placing the author on the left and the model to the right. The fact that we are concerned with *simple* relationships of identity on the side of the author, and of resemblance on the side of the model, allows a linear presentation. For autobiography, the “reference” is made on one side alone (confusion of author and model) and the relationship that articulates identity and resemblance is in fact a relationship of relationships which cannot be represented linearly.

We would thus have the two following formulas:

Biography: A is or is not N: P resembles M.

Autobiography: N is to P as A is to M.

(A = author; N = narrator; P = protagonist; M = model)

Since autobiography is a referential genre, it is naturally subject at the same time to the order of resemblance at the level of the model, but this is only a secondary characteristic. The fact that we believed that resemblance is not obtained is incidental from the moment when we are sure that it has been certified. What matters is less the resemblance of “Rousseau at the age of sixteen,” represented in the text of the *Confessions*, with the Rousseau of 1728, “such as he was,” than

the double effort of Rousseau around 1764 to *paint*: 1) his relationship to the past; 2) this past such as it was, with the intention of changing nothing therein.

In the case of identity, the borderline and exceptional case, which confirms the rule, was that of *fraud*. In the case of resemblance, this will be *mythomania*—that is to say, not the errors, the distortions, the interpretations consubstantial with the elaboration of personal myth in all autobiography, but the substitution of an obviously *made-up* story, and one *totally* unrelated to life; as for fraud, it is extremely rare, and the referential character attributed to narrative is thus easily called into question by a survey of literary history. But, disqualified as autobiography, the narrative will retain its full interest as phantasm, at the level of its utterance, and the falsehood of the autobiographical pact, as behavior, will still reveal for us, at the level of enunciation, a subject that is, despite everything, intentionally autobiographical and one that we will continue to assume beyond the trumped-up subject. Thus we come back to analyze on another level, no longer the biography-autobiography, but the novel-autobiography relationship, to define what we could call *autobiographical space*, and the effects of *contrast* that it engenders.

Autobiographical Space

We must now show on what naïve illusion rests the widespread theory according to which the novel is truer (more profound, more authentic) than the autobiography. This commonplace, like all commonplaces, has no single author; each one, in turn, speaks the commonplace with his own voice. Thus Andre Gide: "Memoirs are never more than half sincere, however great the concern for truth may be: everything is always more complicated than we say it is. Perhaps we even come closer to the truth in the novel."¹⁹ Or François Mauriac: "It is looking much further back for excuses, limiting myself to one single chapter of my memoirs. Is not the true reason for my laziness that our novels express the essential part of ourself? Only fiction does not lie: it half-opens a hidden door on a man's life, through which slips, out of all control, his unknown soul."²⁰

Albert Thibaudet gave the commonplace the academic form of the "parallel," an ideal dissertation subject, opposing the novel (profound and varied) and the autobiography (superficial and schematic).²¹

I will demonstrate the illusion starting with the formulation proposed by Gide, only because his work furnishes an incomparable area for demonstration. Rest assured, I have no intention of defending the autobiographical genre, and establishing the truth of the contrary proposition, namely that autobiography would be the most truthful, the most profound, and so on. To invert Thibaudet's proposition would be of no interest, except to show that right side up or upside down, it is always *the same* proposition.

Indeed, at the very moment when in *appearance* Gide and Mauriac depreciate the autobiographical genre and glorify the novel, *in reality* they are drawing something very different than drawing a more or less questionable scholarly parallel: they designate the autobiographical space in which they want us to read the whole of their work. Far from being a condemnation of autobiography, these often quoted sentences are in reality an indirect form of the autobiographical pact. Indeed they establish the nature of the ultimate truth to which their texts aspire. In these judgments, the reader forgets all too often that autobiography is understood on two levels: at the same time that it is one of the two *terms* of the comparison, it is the *criterion* that is used in the comparison. What is this "*truth*" that the novel makes more accessible than autobiography does, except the personal, individual, intimate truth of the author, that is to say, the truth to which any autobiographical project aspires? So we might say, it is as autobiography that the novel is declared the truer.

The reader is thus invited to read novels not only as *fictions* referring to a truth of "human nature," but also as revealing *phantasms* of the individual. I will call this indirect form of the autobiographical pact *the phantasmatic pact*.

If hypocrisy is a homage that vice pays to virtue, these judgments are in reality a homage that the novel pays to autobiography. If the novel is truer than autobiography, why are Gide, Mauriac, and many others not happy with writing novels? In posing the question in this way, everything becomes clear: if they had not *also* written and published autobiographical texts, even "inadequate" ones, no one would ever have seen the nature of the truth that it was necessary to look for in their novels. Thus these declarations are perhaps involuntary but very effective tricks: we escape accusations of vanity and egocentrism when we seem so aware of the limitations and insufficiencies of our autobiography; and no one notices that, by the same movement, we extend on the contrary the autobiographical pact, in an *indirect* form, to the whole of what we have written. Double blow.

Double blow, or rather double vision—double writing, the effect, if I can risk this neologism, of *stereography*.

Posed in this way, the nature of the problem changes completely. It is no longer necessary to know which of the two, autobiography or novel, would be truer. It is neither one nor the other; autobiography will lack complexity, ambiguity, etc.; the novel, accuracy. So it would be one, then the other? Rather, one *in relation* to the other. What becomes revealing is the space in which the two categories of texts are inscribed, and which is reducible to neither of the two. This effect of contrast obtained by this procedure is the creation, for the reader, of an "autobiographical space."

From this point of view, the works of Gide and Mauriac are typical. Both have organized, for different reasons, a spectacular failure of their autobiography, thus forcing their audience into reading all the rest of their narrative production in the autobiographical register. When I talk about failure, it is not a question of making

a value judgment on admirable (Gide) or estimable (Mauriac) texts, but simply of echoing their own statements, and of establishing that they have *chosen* to leave their autobiography incomplete, fragmented, full of holes and open.²²

This form of indirect pact is becoming increasingly widespread. Formerly it was the reader who, despite the denials of the author, took the initiative and the responsibility for this type of reading; today, on the contrary, authors and publishers start off from the beginning in this direction. It is revealing that Sartre himself, who at one time thought about continuing *Les Mots* in fictional form, reverted to Gide's formula: "It would be time finally for me to tell the truth. But I could tell it only in a work of fiction," and that in this way he clarified the reading contract that he would have suggested to his reader:

At the time I was thinking of writing a story in which I would present in an indirect manner everything that I had previously intended to say in a kind of political testament. The testament would have been a continuation of my autobiography, but I had decided not to write it. The fictional element of the story I was considering would have been minimal; I would have created a character about whom the reader would have been forced to say: "*The man presented here is Sartre.*"

This does not mean that for the reader there would have been an overlapping of the character and the author, but that the best way of understanding the character would have been to look for what came to him from me.²³

All these games, which show clearly the predominance of the autobiographical project, are found again, to varying degrees, in many modern writers. And this game can itself be naturally imitated within a novel. This is what Jacques Laurent did in *Les Bêtises* (*Nonsense*, Grasset, 1971), by giving us to read both the fictional text that his protagonist would have written, then different "autobiographical" texts of the same protagonist. If Jacques Laurent ever publishes his own autobiography, the texts of *Les Bêtises* will take on a dizzying "contrast."

Reading Contract

At the end of this reflection, a brief balance sheet allows us to take note of a displacement of the problem:

—*Negative side*: certain points remain blurred and unsatisfying. For example, we might ask ourselves how the identity of the author and the narrator can be established in the autobiographical pact when the name is not repeated (see above p. 16); we might remain skeptical in view of the distinctions I suggested earlier in *Exact Copy*. That section and the one entitled *I, the Undersigned*, look only at the case of autobiography in autodiegetic narration, whereas I have stressed

that other formulas of narration were *possible*: will the established distinctions hold, in the case of autobiography in the third person?

—*Positive side*: on the other hand, my analyses have seemed fruitful to me each time that, going beyond the apparent structures of the text, they prompted me to question the positions of the *author* and the *reader*. "Social contract" of the proper name and the publication, autobiographical "pact," fictional "pact," referential "pact," phantasmatic "pact"—all the expressions used refer back to the idea that the autobiographical genre is a *contractual* genre. The difficulty I had come up against in my first attempt derived from what I was searching for in vain—on the level of structures, modes, and narrative voices—clear criteria to ground a difference that any reader nevertheless experiences. The notion of "autobiographical pact" that I had so elaborated was still wavering, for want of seeing that an essential element of the contract was the proper name. That something so evident was not apparent to me, shows that this type of contract is implicit, and, appearing grounded on the nature of things, barely invites reflection.

The problematic of autobiography proposed here is thus not grounded on a relationship, established from the outside, between the extratextual and the text—because such a relationship could only be one of resemblance, and would prove nothing. Neither is it grounded on an internal analysis of the functioning of the text, of the structure, or of aspects of the published text; but upon analysis, on the global level of *publication*, of the implicit or explicit contract proposed by the *author* to the *reader*, a contract which determines the mode of reading of the text and engenders the effects which, attributed to the text, seem to us to define it as autobiography.

The level of analysis utilized is therefore that of the *publication/published* relationship, which would be parallel, on the level of the printed text, to the *enunciation/utterance* relationship, on the level of oral communication. In order to go on, this study of author/reader contracts, of implicit or explicit codes of publication—on that fringe of the printed text which, in reality, *controls* the entire reading (author's name, title, subtitle, name of the collection, name of the publisher, even including the ambiguous game of prefaces)—this inquiry would have to take on a historical dimension that I have not given to it here.²⁴ The variations in these codes over time (due both to changes in the attitude of authors and readers, and to technical or commercial problems of the publishing business) would make it seem much more clearly that we are dealing with codes, and not with "natural" or universal things. Since the seventeenth century, for example, conventions concerning anonymity or the use of the pseudonym have changed a great deal; plays on the allegations of reality in works of fiction are no longer practiced today in the same way that they were in the eighteenth century;²⁵ on the other hand, readers have become accustomed to feel the presence of the author (of his unconscious) even behind productions that do not seem autobiographical, so much have phantasmic pacts created new habits of reading.

It is at this global level that autobiography is defined: it is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing; it is a historically variable *contractual effect*. The present study is based on the types of contract currently in use. Whence come its relativity and the absurdity that there would be in wanting it to be universal; whence come also the difficulties encountered in this undertaking of definition. I wanted to make explicit in a clear, coherent, and exhaustive system (which takes all cases into account) the fundamental criteria of a corpus (that of autobiography) made up in reality according to multiple criteria, variable in time and according to individuals and often noncoherent between them. To succeed in giving a clear and complete formula of autobiography would be, in reality, to fail. While reading this chapter in which I have tried to push exactness as far as possible, one will have often felt that this exactness was becoming arbitrary, inadequate for an object perhaps more within the scope of Chinese logic such as Borges describes it, than within that of Cartesian logic.

When all is said and done, this study would seem to me, then, to be itself more a document to study (the attempt of a twentieth-century reader to rationalize and clarify his criteria of reading) rather than a "scientific" text: a document to assign to the file of a scientific history of literary *communication*.

The history of autobiography would be therefore, above all, a history of its mode of reading: comparative history where we would be able to bring into dialogue the reading contracts proposed by different types of texts (because it would be of no use to study autobiography all by itself, since contracts, like signs, make sense only through the play of opposition), and the different types of readings really practiced on these texts. If autobiography is defined by something outside the text, it is not on this side, by an unverifiable resemblance to a real person, but on the other side, by the type of reading it engenders, the credence it exudes, and the qualities that are manifested in the critical response to autobiographies.

Chapter 2 Autobiography in the Third Person

The I calls itself I or you or he. There are these three persons in me. The Trinity. The one who addresses the I in the familiar "you" form; the one who treats him as Him.

Paul Valery

Bertolt Brecht used to suggest to actors that they transpose their role to the third person and into the past. These exercises were limited to rehearsals, and intended to encourage distancing. Autobiographers are actors too. And some of them really take this game seriously, in front of their public. But since they are at the same time the authors of the role they are interpreting, the procedure has a totally different function for them. It helps them to express their problems of identity and at the same time to captivate their readers.

These sophisticated games, and after all they are rather infrequent, are revealing *borderline cases*: they bring out into the open what is ordinarily implicit in the use of "persons." My plan here is to study, thanks to them, "the use of personal pronouns in autobiography," as Michel Butor would say. To use them as examples of "grammar" in order to clarify autobiographical narration with all the problems of pact, voice, and perspective that it brings up.¹

We will still be concerned with modern autobiographical texts. The third person, certainly, has been used formerly in historical memoirs like those of Caesar, in religious autobiographies (where the author calls himself "the servant of God"), and in aristocratic memoirs of the seventeenth century, like those of the president de Thou. It is still used today in some related genres, brief genres, very strongly coded, and related to publishing strategies, like the preface, the publisher's blurb, and the biographical notice written by the author. I will at times make allusion to these. But I have chosen to remain within a coherent whole: the use of figures always depends in the final analysis on the reading contract and on the "horizons of expectation" of the genre.

I will present successively two different situations: *autobiography in the third person*, which can seem like the simple realization of a figure of enunciation; and *autobiography with a fictional narrator*, which is based on a more complicated system.

Persons and Person

The Soft Pedal

If I sit down at my table to write this study, and I write: "He sat down at his table to write . . . ," the meaning of this sentence will depend above all on the reading contract that I will propose to my reader. It is this contract that will define the genre (with the attitudes of reading that it implies) and establish, eventually, the relationships of identity that order the deciphering of personal pronouns and of the enunciation. It would be the same if I wrote: "I've just sat down at my table to write."

This contract, which informs the reading, is already what is guiding the writing (even if it might happen that between the writing and the publication, I change the contract). I can choose, for example: fiction, whose reading is independent from what the reader knows about the author; autobiographical fiction, in which the reader is invited to an ambiguous reading; autobiography, in which referential reading and attitude of communication are combined. I will imagine here that I am writing my sentence (my text) and that it is being read strictly autobiographically: the person my text is talking about is I, the author of the text, and what is said is guaranteed to be accurate, exact, to be taken in the literal sense. It turns out simply that instead of talking about myself in the first person, I am talking about myself in the third. Thus Michel Leiris switches into the third person in order to substantiate a statement of failure:

Sadness not diminished by the idea that, all things being useless, what he had been able to do was of no importance, he told himself that not very much in his life was worth holding onto.²

Far from reading this as a simple statement about a character (which it would be if it were a page out of a novel), the reader perceives the erasing of the enunciation as a fact of enunciation. Recourse to the system of the story and to the "non-person" that is the third person functions here like a *figure of enunciation* within a text that we continue to read as discourse in the first person. The author talks about himself *as if* it were someone else who was talking about him, or as if he were talking about someone else. This *as if* concerns enunciation alone: utterance continues to be subjected to the strict and proper rules of the autobiographical contract. Whereas if I were using the same grammatical presentation in an auto-

biographical fiction, utterance itself would be taken in the perspective of a phantasmatic pact ("this has meaning in relation to me, but is not I").

This *figure* gives contrast and tension to the text: we feel it; I feel it myself while writing, like an unnatural ellipsis of enunciation. We constantly expect the artificial order of exclusion of the first person to cease, exactly like, when we read a lipogram, we watch for the return of the forbidden letter. At the very moment when I am writing, I mold my sentences through a sort of scouring and transposition of personal discourse: I write to myself while making myself keep quiet, or more exactly, by depressing the soft pedal. All I would have to do is lift my foot in order to restore resonance.

This use of the third person can be understood as a "figure," as opposed to the proper, or literal, meaning of the third person, which is the use of the "nonperson" in talking about the person who is neither the addressor nor the addressee of discourse. But this figure must not be understood as an indirect manner of talking about the self, which would be used in contrast to the "direct" character of the first person. It is another way of achieving, in the form of a *splitting*, what the first person achieves in the form of a *confusion*: the inescapable duality of the grammatical "person." Saying "I" is more customary (hence more "natural") than saying "he" when one talks about himself, but it is not simpler.

The Instances of the "I"

We would be almost tempted to say that "I" is itself . . . a figure. Or at least that it has all the complexities of one. In order to recognize this, we need only take the expanded formula that Benveniste has proposed: "I" is "the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing I."³ Going from this formula to "I" supposes a double displacement:

— With regard to enunciation, the deictic ("the present instance of discourse") slips from the enunciation to the speaker. This is what the customary formula of prefaces "in the third person" also reveals: "he who writes these lines";

— The subject of the utterance ("the individual") is represented by the subject of the enunciation. We are made to understand that the person we are talking about is "the same" as the one who is speaking. This "identity" is to be taken in its literal sense only in one single case, that of performative utterances. Everywhere else, it is a more or less approximate figure, and the "nonperson" thus finds himself being both represented and masked by the person.

By unfolding the pronoun "I" (or "you") in this way, we inevitably come up against the problem of *identity*. Who is this "individual" Benveniste is talking about in his formula? It is difficult to remain on a level of strictly grammatical description; any slightly advanced analysis of the play of pronouns and persons in enunciation is faced with the dizzying necessity of constructing a theory of the

subject. "Identity" is a *constant relationship* between the one and the many. Linguistically, this problem of identity appears on two levels:

— At the lexical level, it is "resolved" by the class of "proper names," to which in the final analysis the personal pronouns refer. The name is the guarantor of the unity of our multiplicity: it federates our complexity in the moment and our change in time. The subject of enunciation and that of utterance are indeed "the same," since they have the same name! Here we are given substance and unity. The dizziness would only return if we realize that we are perhaps only . . . our own homonym, or that if we were aware of the "arbitrariness" of the name (which would therefore be defined only by the intersection of utterances where it appears) . . .

— At the level of enunciation, the problem of identity is often masked by a tendency to substantivize pronouns and to personalize roles in a situation of "communication." It is very reassuring to conceive of the addressor and the addressee as persons who would start to communicate with one another. But this is playing on the double meaning of the word "person." The distribution of the roles of enunciation such as Benveniste describes them is not only a system of social rules; it is part of all utilization of language. Any speaking subject carries within himself that double split of addressor and addressee, and of enunciation and utterance. He rests fundamentally on a *split*. Or rather he does not "rest" there (which would imply a paradoxical stability), but he functions thanks to this split. "The individual is a dialogue," said Valéry. Communication is therefore a "dialogue of dialogues"; and any theory of enunciation would have to restate as a function of this hypothesis that each "role" already contains the set of roles, which can go on to infinity.

From these thoughts, we can formulate the idea that when an autobiographer talks to us about himself in the third person or talks to *himself* about himself in the second, this is no doubt a figure with regard to accepted usages, but that this figure arranges a return to a fundamental situation, which we find tolerable only if we imagine that it is figurative. In general, these gaps, these divisions, these encounters are both expressed and masked by the use of a single "I."

The first person, such as it is used in autobiography, often leaves the identity of the addressee uncertain. Internal dialogue and literary communication merge. We become aware of this when the autobiography unfolds the enunciation by writing its text "in the second person."⁴ The use of this process proves, on the one hand, the copresence in enunciation of an "I" (that has become implicit), of a "you," and of a "he" (hidden under the "you"), all three referring to the same individual. It also proves, on the other hand, the double character of the addressee: if I talk to myself while saying to myself "you," at the same time I display this unfolded enunciation to a third party, the eventual listener or reader.⁵ The latter takes part in a discourse intended for him, even if he himself is no longer addressed. Enunciation is dramatized; it can only be unfolded in this way because

imaginary footlights guarantee its unity and its relationship to its ultimate addressee. Now this dramatization already exists implicitly in many autobiographical texts in the "I": the reader can just as well believe that "I" speak to him directly, or that "I" show him how he talks to *himself*. In reality, the addressee is always more or less double, but according to the choice of the pronoun, one of his faces is out in front and masks in part the other.

The "I" (like the "you") masks, on the other hand, the gap that exists between the subject of enunciation and that of utterance. This gap can be minimal when the text settles itself in a coherent way in the register of discourse. It can increase beyond measure when there is narration. This is true of the autobiographical text, which rests on an articulation and a permanent coming and going between discourse and story. The inherent duality in the narrative voice is found to correspond to some gaps of perspective, between the narrator and the hero: gaps of information, gaps of appreciation, which are the source of all the plays of focusing and of voice characteristic of this type of narrative (restrictions of field to the protagonist or intrusions of the narrator, lyric or ironic settings, etc.). These gaps or these tensions are otherwise really masked, or at least equalized by the use of the first person, which proposes a unique signifier whose level of functioning (enunciation/utterance) and reference (at the level of the utterance) change continually. If the autobiographical narrator ever uses other figures in a combined manner, like the narrative present and the indirect free style, he will be able to create rather bewildering plays of confrontation between what he was and what he is, under the pretense of an apparently singular "I."⁶

Naturally we are not really fooled by this unity, no more than we are by the "alterity" in the case of autodiegetic narration in the third person. It remains, however, that the first person is as it were a "lexicalized" figure; it has usage going for it; it functions according to a logic of self-referential evidence which in general masks its complexity, its figurative and indirect character for the speaker and the listener. The naïve and trusting use of the first person ("me, I") is the rule; the critical reflection is a secondary phenomenon that grafts onto this first usage. And this critical reflection is arduous, so much does the "I" always tend to recombine in our eyes the fictitious unity that it imposes as signifier.

The first person always conceals, then, a secret third person, and in this sense all autobiography is by definition indirect. But in the autobiographies "in the third person" that I am going to present, this indirect character is acknowledged; it draws attention to itself in a provocative way: the procedure comes across as being artificial because it shatters the illusory effect of the first person, which is to make the indirect be taken for the direct. And because the explanation of the third person involves an occultation of the true narrator, who disappears into the implicit, or is replaced by a figurative narrator, or even by a fictitious narrator.

Everything happens as if, in autobiography, no combination of the system of persons in enunciation could satisfactorily "totally express" the person. Or rather,

to say things less naively, all the imaginable combinations reveal more or less clearly what is the distinctive feature of the person: the tension between impossible unity and intolerable division, and the fundamental split that makes of the speaking subject a creature of flight.

Figures

From One Code To The Other

Within the framework of an autobiography, which is by definition "autodiegetic," the use of the third person induces a play of figures that are not fundamentally different from those that accompany the use of the first. When, under the guise of the first person, we pretend to have the child we once were speak, while making that child seem to take responsibility for the contents of a sarcastic analysis made by an adult (combination of the voice of the child and the perspective of the adult), we create a figure of enunciation as complicated and more Machiavelian than when we dissociate ourselves from the person we were (or are) while pretending to talk about ourselves as if we were another person. In reality, we are never neither really someone else, nor really the same person. The figures of the third person provide a gamut of solutions in which it is the distancing that is put out in front, but always to express an articulation (a tension) between identity and difference.

We come to know these figures through the *transformation* of utterances "in the first person." Most often the *rules* of the transformation remain implicit. But sometimes the author clarifies them in part in a sort of reading contract to the second degree, included in the autobiographical text and preceding a section in the third person. So it is in Daniel Guérin's *L'Autobiographie de jeunesse (Autobiography of Youth)*: after having related his entire youth "in the first person," the author adds an appendix entitled "A la recherche de clés sexologiques" ("The Search for Sexological Clues") in which he summarizes his own narrative *as if* he were a doctor studying a case. Here is the text of this supplementary contract grafted onto the first:

Having completed the autobiographical narrative, I would like—although the carnal obsession is not, by far, its only theme—to try to sketch a "balance-sheet" of its sexual components. I am going to proceed as if I were a practitioner who would have been given the confession of one of his patients and who would try to analyse it in order to sift out the sexological clues. Therefore we will talk now about the sexual dissident in the third person.⁷

A summary of the book follows in which he talks about the "patient," about "our young man," by systematically adopting the present tense used in the genre

of the case study or of the biographical summary, but without changing any of the information and the interpretation already presented in the first narrative.

Each transformation is thus inscribed in the framework of the *figurative passage from one genre to another*. This passage is achieved so much more easily because the lead-off genre (autobiography) and the finishing genres (biography, novel) already have many common traits, and because throughout their history, they have been developed by reciprocal grafts and exchanges. Autobiography such as it is practiced today owes much to the biographical model, and undoubtedly also to the novel, both in its most traditional aspects and in its newest refinements. The majority of games in which contemporary autobiographers indulge are the timid echo of the investigations of modern novelists into narrative voice and focalization. Justified timidity: in fiction, one risks nothing, one can break identity and put it back together, allow oneself all points of view, give oneself any means. The autobiographer finds himself confronted with the limitations and constraints of a real situation, and can neither deny the unity of his "I," nor go beyond his limitations. He can only pretend.

What type of effect does this figurative shift engender in a biographical or fictional presentation of the self? It would be tempting, but ultimately fruitless, to introduce here a psychological hypothesis that would make the use of this procedure a "behavior" subject to a single diagnosis: the most diverse strategies have laid siege to this "figure," and this would be to fall into a form of mythology rather than to substantivize "the third person" in this way.⁸ This distancing procedure is extremely complex: it brings into play the transformation of one or several parameters of enunciation and can result in rather different effects. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the factors, and, for each factor, to imagine the possible solutions.

The three principal factors are: the reference of the third person; the transpositions of voice, of perspective, and of time; finally the very extension of the use of the figure and its eventual articulation with the "normal" usage of the first person.

Reference. There are three ways in which to specify that the third person refers to the author of the text:

1. Use of a periphrasis indicating explicitly that the third person will carry out the functions of the first: "he who is writing these lines" (ritual formula of prefaces in the third person); "he who is speaking to you" (figure used locally in a discourse). This solution implies that the formula is taken up again periodically, in order to avoid confusions and refer, each time that it is necessary, the "he" to the enunciation (name of the author, presence of the speaker). It is very awkward and is practiced in brief and heavily coded texts like the preface.

2. Use of a "he" without explicit reference. It is therefore the context that imposes the identification of the protagonist talked about with the author and that

makes us understand that we are dealing with a figurative enunciation. This is the situation in texts where a systematic blending of the first and third persons is organized. Depending on the situation, the mime can refer to the tradition of the psychological novel or to that of biography, each of which is, moreover, closely related to the other.

3. Use of the proper name itself. This procedure, at the same time that it dissipates all ambiguity, accentuates the figurative character of enunciation (at least in our civilization, where the custom is not to talk about oneself by naming oneself constantly). It can correspond to very diverse intentions and effects: figure of majesty, serious (or humorous) use of the biographical presentation, imitation of the psychological novel, beginning of the formation of a "double." The name is open to presentations referring to social codes and to different literary genres: first name alone, first name and last name, last name alone, or preceded by "Mr.," literary pseudonym rather than a last name, last name preceded by a title, and so on. One can also designate oneself by simple initials. Or even use a fictitious name, one of those little names that we give ourselves in private; or a name that already makes you a character in a novel: for example, Gide refers to himself in his journal as "Fabrice," or "X."⁹ So we are on the frontier of fiction, but it is a matter of a "fictitious fiction," if I might say, since it is simply mimed within a text that continues to pass itself off as autobiography.

Transpositions. Transpositions are difficult to analyze. It is necessary first of all, while trusting in the effect of the reading, to restore a potential text to the first person in order to compare it to the text in the third person from which it is derived. This procedure of going back and forth is not always possible, insofar as the figurative use of the presentation in the third person allows some changes of perspective, and the establishing of intermediary postures (as is true in the "fictions" that I will analyze later). Even when the text is "reversible," the types of transformation are varied and their effects complex.

The simplest case is that of a potential text presenting itself as a self-portrait or a private journal, written in the same system of discourse. The author informs the reader that he has such and such a view of himself, elaborates the descriptions of his behavior or of his character. The effect of the passage from "I" to "he" will depend on two factors: the contents of the utterances in the first person, and the tenses that are used (tenses of discourse or tenses of the story).

Two different effects of distancing are obtained depending on whether the utterance does or does not bring about the effects of enunciation. To transpose a "I believe that," "I remember," or any number of other expressions, to the third person comes down to transforming an effect of enunciation into a simple related utterance, a sort of narrative of words in indirect free style assumed by a new narrator who places himself between the first and us. The autobiographer observes his own discourse instead of assuming it directly; he steps back a little and in real-

ity splits himself as narrator. We have the impression that he is speaking to us, as it were, in "simultaneous translation." Even if he doesn't add one word, he produces an effect of unvoicing and of stepping back (an effect whose functions can be very diverse: protection, self-irony, solemnity). If the potential text does not bring about an effect of clear enunciation (that is to say, if the "I" carries out especially the function of a "he"), the transposition doesn't produce the effect of a splitting of the speaker, but more simply of a change of position in a speaker who talks about himself *as if* he were someone else. In one case the enunciation splits, in the other it distances.

These effects can be combined, and we shift easily from quoting the discourse of the person involved to miming biographical discourse. Moreover, between the two exists a large recovery zone, the autobiographical text often already being itself a translation "in the first person" of the conventional biographical text. Barthes had indeed shown that from one side of the recovery zone, *for the focalization*, certain elements were not transposable from a narrative in the third person to a narrative in the first; from the other side, in reverse order, *for the enunciation*, certain elements are transposable only at the cost of a total change of effect.¹⁰

It is only by detailed explication of texts, where enunciation, perspective, and the system of tenses would be treated as independent variables, that we could establish the gamut of possible transpositions. Autobiography in the third person provides a marvelous field of study, since by definition (by *contract*) it forces the reader, at least implicitly, to carry out an operation of translation, since all the procedures are used in a figurative manner. Better: it happens that the texts we are concerned with are presented as *bilingual* texts, juxtaposing utterances to analogous contents written sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third person, so that the grammarian would not even have "potential" texts to restore in order to make comparisons. This is the case in *Frère Bruit* by Michel Leiris,¹¹ and especially in *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes.¹²

I will cite three examples of transposition used by Barthes. The first muffles its own discourse while still retaining a self-referential element of the enunciation ("here"); the second implies an internal focalization so that we ought to experience it as the transposition of a personal discourse; the third resembles the mime of discourse that someone else could hold on him or on his texts:

Writing a certain text, he experiences a guilty emotion of jargon, as if he could not escape from a mad discourse no matter how individual he made his utterance; and what if all his life *he had chosen the wrong language*? He is all the more readily overcome by this panic here (in U.) where, staying home at night, he watches television a good deal: here is continually represented (remonstrated) a public language from which he is separated.

He more or less remembers the order in which he wrote these fragments; but where did that order come from? In the course of what classification, of what succession? He no longer remembers.

It frequently seems that he regards sociality simplistically: as an enormous and perpetual friction of languages (discourses, fictions, image-systems, reasonings, systems, sciences) and desires (impulses, injuries, resentments, etc.). Then what does "reality" become in such a philosophy?¹³

In the case of a split in enunciation, the narrator, who is the intermediary between the narrator of the potential text and us, remains a plain formal authority (as is a translator); he does not appear through a discourse that is different from the repeated and textually noticeable discourse. On the other hand, as soon as there is what I call distancing of the narrator, that is to say, miming of the forms of another's discourse on oneself, the authority of the narrator can take on the consistency of a role, in order to express himself in a coherent discourse, where the cleavage of the enunciation corresponds to a gap in perspective. This gap can have nothing of the fictitious about it and can be simply that which exists between an aged autobiographer-narrator and the life of the protagonist that he was, a gap that is the basis for the majority of autobiographies in the first person. This is something like what happens in *The Education of Henry Adams*, where the narrator maintains a rich pedagogical and sarcastic discourse in order to present and comment upon the story of his hero (himself), without using the first person either to assume his discourse or to name his protagonist.

But it can happen that the posture of the narrator emerges in the form of an explicitly personal discourse in opposition to the contemporary protagonist rejected in the nonperson. The reader will thus have the impression of being in the presence of a disturbing split personality, if something is presented in a serious manner; or else—and this is the most frequent case—the impression of a game that is difficult to manage without foundering in the ridiculous or without emphasizing precisely what we are pretending to avoid, narcissism. Gide gets out of it by making the action move toward fiction when he confides to us his impressions of his travelling companion Fabrice (himself):

Although he is too taciturn, I like traveling with Fabrice. He says, and I believe him, that at forty-eight he feels infinitely younger than he was at twenty. He enjoys that rare faculty of starting off anew at each turning-point in his life and of remaining faithful to himself by never resembling anything less than he does himself.

One of Fabrice's most disconcerting intellectual peculiarities for his neighbors (I mean for his companion of the present moment, whoever he might be) was to break away from himself constantly. — From him-

self? No, I have expressed it badly: Rather, to break away from circumstances.¹⁴

Claude Roy, at the beginning of the last volume of his autobiography, uses a similar procedure, but without recourse to a fictitious name. The confrontation represented in this way is situated in the past:

It had been then almost forty years that Claude Roy lived with Claude Roy.

Little by little I had almost managed to get along with him. I had taken the time. Now I knew his idiosyncrasies, his pleasures, his anxieties, his impulses, his whims. I had come to know him as if he had made me. Not well enough, happily, to be bored with him already: he had more than one curve in his bag, that catchall. Enough resourcefulness to often catch me off guard . . .

What continued to interest me about this *alter ego*, of whom I didn't really know whether he used my name or if I used his in common practice, was also that reserve of indignation that he still maintained at an age when men have in general cooled down, become resigned and "set in their ways" . . .

There were other things for which I faulted Claude Roy. Less serious. Often contradictory. For example, I had a grudge against him for having become on the one hand an ironic scalded cat, always weighing the pros of some and the cons of others, unproductive to the end out of perplexity. And for having stayed, on the other hand, sentimental, naïve in politics often to the point of being a sucker.¹⁵

All these effects are also related to another variable: the system of tenses. If the potential text is written in the tenses of speech, we can preserve them (as Barthes does in the three fragments cited above), but we can also transpose them to the tenses of the story. A page of personal meditation having to do with the present of the narrator is in this way transformed into a page from a classical psychological novel (or at least, in the cases that I am studying, *seems* to be changed). We play at talking about ourself as if we were the hero of a work of fiction, by changing the "code." Thus Gide-Fabrice:

Michel's soul offered Fabrice rapturous perspectives, which were still clouded, it seemed to him, by the morning mists. To dissipate them the rays of a first love were needed. It was of this, not of the love itself, that Fabrice felt he might be jealous. He would have liked to suffice; tried to convince himself that he might have sufficed; he grieved to think that he would not suffice.¹⁶

Or Barthes:

Elasticity. These games naturally have their limits, inscribed in the conditions of their functioning. To display openly the multiplicity of postures usually hidden by the pronoun "I" is only possible if identity continues to be postulated in the final analysis by the reading contract. The more the autobiographer "does the splits," the more it becomes necessary, on another level, for this contract, in relation to which (within which) there is a split, to be established. We cannot escape the problem of identity, but only displace it, and stage it as a problem.

The reader will inevitably experience this staging, when it is grounded on processes contrary to the conventions of the genre, as a pleasant artifice or as a pathetic game, as a pretense; it reveals to him precisely that the autobiographer cannot *seriously* do what he sets out to do. The splitting in two can only be figurative (just as the unity can only be mythical). The reader will attribute all the plays of enunciation to one single speaker, all the plays of focalization suggesting that the autobiographer sees himself as someone else to an internal comedy performed in private, even if the scene mimes the intrusion of a glance coming from the audience. Now we are really in the audience, and we witness the ventriloquy games, the performances in front of a three-way mirror, of someone, of another person who remains locked in his identity, even if he sets all its elasticity in motion.

Barthes's self-portrait is likely to remain a canonical example for the study of these problems. Barthes sought the maximum elasticity, for fear of staying trapped in his "imaginary." He himself writes a critical book about himself, in a collection of ambiguous status: the rule of the game requires that the critic reconstruct "so and so by himself," by proceeding with a montage of texts,²⁵ but this self-portrait is in a situation of dependence in relation to the discourse of the critic. What will happen if the author "himself" slips into this role of critic? This is what Barthes has attempted: he rereads his own works pencil in hand, watches himself, rewrites himself, tries to escape from the weight of the "I" through ceaseless variations on the personal pronouns (he is in turn "I," "you," "he," "R.B."), theorizing and criticizing this practice as he goes along.²⁶ He detaches himself not only as protagonist but as narrator ("all this must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel," p. 119), encroaches upon the role of the reader, and ends up writing a review of his own book in a journal that lends itself to the game.²⁷ In the end (and even if he anticipates it and says it beforehand), this game of flight from his "imaginary" turns out simply to become in our eyes his imaginary's essential characteristic.

The elasticity of the "I" has its limits. If the game were no longer a game, the coherence of the "I" would be broken, the conditions of communication and of writing would disappear. Can one really talk about oneself as if one were another person, place oneself at the window in order to watch oneself pass by in the street? These are the same problems that I am going to meet up with again in presenting more sophisticated methods, which were germinal in some of the situations I have already analyzed. Gide was pretending to watch "Fabrice"; he could just as easily

have invented a "Fabrice" who would watch Gide. Proposing a fictitious narrator's account of himself could thus correspond either to a triumphant narcissism that humorously proclaims his identity or to the anxieties of a paranoid who seeks to rebuild it.

Fictitious Fictions

Points of View on the Self

One could not write an autobiography without elaborating and communicating a point of view on the self. This point of view may include some *gaps* between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist; may be complex or ambiguous; may integrate, in order to retrieve or modify it, the image that the author believes others have of him. But, as complex or twisted as this point of view is, it will carry in the final analysis the mark of the author. We do not really know how to get out of the self; that is to say, to represent, equally with our own, a point of view different from our own. Articulating two really different points of view on the same individual is possible only outside the boundaries of an autobiographical project:

- either, for the author, within the framework of a novel, but it is then at the cost of reality (omniscience and "nonfocalization" are possible only in fiction);
- or in reality, but it is then at the cost of the autobiographical situation. The elementary type of these "dialogues" of points of view is the correspondence between two people read by a third, the confrontation of autobiographical texts written by different people, or the collection by an ethnographer of life accounts of several people belonging to the same family or to the same milieu.²⁸ It is from this type of situation that biographers are able to adopt the attitude of omniscient narrators.

Is it possible to go against what seems to be an inherent inevitability in the position of the autobiographer? We can imagine two types of attempts to abolish this limit, but these can only be a question of approximations or appearances.

Approximations, on the side of reality: we can imagine taking charge from the beginning and organizing on our own this confrontation of witnesses that in general is established after the fact and in spite of those concerned. This would be to imagine a "common autobiographical project." But the sole fact that two people start out in such an undertaking assumes some related points of view, a fundamental complicity and a sort of "collective narcissism." The texts that they will produce will reflect in fact an internal differentiation of a single point of view. Nevertheless, there are very few examples of it, and always in situations of fraternal, conjugal or friendly symbiosis. The Goncourt brothers write their journal together: they say "we" and act as if they were one single person. Two spouses can

sum up their life by exchanging a series of letters (but they do so only through the screen of fiction).²⁹ Two old friends can keep parallel journals, but the project will be "common" only for one of the two: that is what happened for Andre Gide and the "La Petite Dame." Unknown to Gide, the latter began to make note of everything that she observed about him in a journal, comparable to his, that she kept from 1918 to 1951. In this way she achieved a system of very Gidian "shifts," which even Gide imitated while doing the portrait of his traveling companion Fabrice, the glance of a critical, but accessory, *alter ego*.³⁰ The existence of truly antagonistic points of view excludes *a priori* the possibility of a common project of *overlapping* autobiographies.

Simulacra, on the side of fiction: because if one seeks to make someone else's point of view part of his autobiography, it could only be in an imaginary way, by restoring the other as a character in the novel; these games or these fantasies will translate, in the eyes of the reader, the idea that the autobiographer has of the idea the other can have of him.

It is with the presentation of some of these "fictitious fictions" that I will end this chapter. We are not concerned with genuine fictions, that is to say, with autobiographical novels governed in their entirety by a fictional pact. The general system remains that of autobiography; it is only on the level of one of the postures of the narrative (the character of the narrator) that a sort of game is grafted: the autobiographer tries to imagine what would happen if *someone else* was telling his story or sketching his portrait. He isn't looking to represent, by mimicking the discourse that is being put forth on someone else, the gaps of his internal perspective, but to recover the discourse that others are capable of holding on him, in order to impose on them, when all said and done, the image of himself which seems real to him.

The texts constructed according to this system are rare and have some differences between them; the only thing they have in common is that the use of this figure always involves the whole of the work and determines its entire composition. Two types of such texts exist: one borrows the forms of the eyewitness account, the other those of the dialogue.

Fictitious Witness

The canonical example of the first type is *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by Gertrude Stein.³¹ What you have to do is imagine how one of your close friends would be able to tell your life's story: one takes the pen in his stead and writes down his account. Naturally, there is no fraud here; the reader is warned of the rule of the game: right away Gertrude Stein makes herself known as her secretary's autobiographer; and it is because the reader keeps in mind that this is a condition of the contract that he can savor the humor and the virtuosity of the exercise. If he was inclined to forget it, the final sentences of the book would

remind him: Alice Toklas admits that, since she does not have the time to write her autobiography, Gertrude Stein offered to write it in her place. "And she has and this is it," concludes the narrator. It is true that the initial indication is ambiguous, all the more since Alice Toklas was not an imaginary person, but the very real companion of Stein. This wavering is part of the game of affectation characteristic of this type of procedure.

The game is twofold: at the same time fictional and autobiographical. On the fictional side, we are concerned with building the character of the witness, with inventing a perspective for him, with making up a style for him, so that he will be consistent enough to sustain the whole narration; we enjoy creating the freshness of "another" perspective on ourselves. To tell the truth, this game can seem rather condescending to the reader: this "other" is your subordinate, is defined only in relation to you, and you attribute to him a candid and admiring view of you. The construction of the fictitious posture of the "witness" is finally only the alibi for a presentation of the self: this detour by the witness justifies the "field restrictions" (we are not forced to talk about what has escaped the attention of the other; we can model this social figure while leaving in the shadow the entire personal domain), and it provides a humorous way of singing your own praises without someone being able to accuse you of naiveté in pride. When all is said and done, far from corresponding to an internal splitting in two or a social uneasiness, this type of game is an astute way to achieve a form of self-hagiography that neutralizes or paralyzes criticism. The reader must be captivated by the double reading proposed to him by the enunciation of the "witness" as fictitious authority and as autobiographical relay.

At least such is the game practiced by Stein. It is difficult to generalize from one single example. It is indeed evident that this type of strategy can be realized in other contexts: the dizzying construct set up by Barthes undoubtedly fulfills this function of protection better. Also evident is that the fiction of the "witness" could be used in a more critical perspective but would always be suspected of affectation.

Can we, following Gertrude Stein, reuse this procedure without falling into plagiarism? This is what Jean-Jacques Gautier has tried to do recently in *Cher Untel*.³² Aline Moussart, secretary of the writer "So-and-So," keeps her journal; little by little she traces there the portrait of the writer all the while recounting her own story, and the story of her dealings with him. At the end of her journal, she comes up with the idea of suggesting to "So-and-So" that he publish the present manuscript under his name and pass off this journal as fiction. Gautier's attempt differs from Gertrude Stein's on two essential points. First, Aline is in a conflicting relationship with the writer; she is thus led to sketch a more delicately shaded portrait of him; and as a character in a novel she has more of a personal life than Alice Toklas, even if she has less style. Especially, the whole of the game is not presented as an autobiography, but as a novel. It is true that the fictional veil is

retained: So-and-So is not Gautier, but he has published exactly the same books. This is a classic procedure of autobiographical fiction, where an identity is suggested while allowing the shadow of a doubt to hover.

Fictitious Dialogue

The second type is very different: it is no longer a question of constructing a point of view on the self, but of *destroying* one of them. The text is presented as an answer to a discourse that has already been uttered, and that must be recovered in order to be dissolved. We are going to imitate it in order to respond to it. For this, within the framework of an autobiographical text presented as such, we fictitiously reenact a *trial*, setting the scene and making the roles of prosecution and defense enter into dialogue; things indeed go in favor of the autobiographer who little by little makes his true image triumph.

This is what Rousseau did in the dialogues entitled *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*.³³ The autobiographical narrative of the *Confessions* had been composed to answer the accusations hurled against him, but Rousseau has the impression of remaining misunderstood and persecuted by an elusive plot. These secret enemies keep silent, work in the shadow. Obsessed by this mute and indirect accusation, Rousseau himself wants to try to call up this accusation, to bring it into the light of day in order to be able finally to refute it and get rid of it. In the prologue, "On the Subject and Form of This Writing," he explains his strategy. He suggests to us the dialogue of two fictitious characters: one, named "Rousseau," admires the books of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but does not know the man; the second character, named "the Frenchman," knows the author but has not read his books. "Rousseau" has difficulty believing all the bad things that "the Frenchman" says about Jean-Jacques. Their dialogue brings to the forefront the misunderstanding that is the fragile foundation of this trial. To clear the matter up, "Rousseau" is going to visit Jean-Jacques while "the Frenchman" reads the author's works. This double confrontation reestablishes the truth about the character of Jean-Jacques and allows us to understand the plot of which he is the victim.

The author, in the prologue, explains the form he has chosen:

The dialogue form having seemed to me the most appropriate to discuss the pros and cons, I have chosen it for this reason. I have taken the liberty in these conversations of taking back my family name that the public judged fitting to take away from me, and I have called myself as a third party, following their example, by my baptismal name to which they were happy to reduce me.³⁴

Here we have one of the oldest strategies in polemical literature: fictitious dialogue attributed to real characters, or attributed to fictitious characters, but bearing on real people. One of the two concerned parties claims the right to recon-

struct the discourse of the other in order to integrate it into a setting over which the first has complete control. Since Plato, this game has been played a great deal. We find it in diverse forms in *Les Provinciales*, the *Critique de l'Ecole des femmes*, and the *Interviews imaginaires* by Gide. In the autobiographical register, this is something like what the Spaniard Torres Villarroel has done in his *Correo del otro mundo* (*Postman from the Other World*), where he combines the method of the "dream" and that of the dialogue to settle his account with his enemies and put together a flattering picture of himself from different perspectives.³⁵

But what Rousseau has attempted is more complicated. Recourse to this method of dialogue is for him a solution of despair, and the game is perfectly serious, so serious that readers can be discouraged by the total lack of humor, the insistence, the repetitions, and the paranoic appearance of this setting. Such seriousness makes the *Dialogues* exemplary of the point of view that interests me: Rousseau has attempted the impossible in earnest; he has pursued as far as possible what the others are doing without believing it very much. On the one hand, he puts himself inside others in order to understand how they see him; on the other hand, he puts himself outside his self in order to see that self as if he were someone else. In the two cases, the game is, when all is said and done, a fake. But it is only when all is said and done, and not right away—in spite of Rousseau and not intentionally. Rare are the autobiographers who have played this game both ways (putting oneself in others, putting oneself outside the self) with such an "elasticity," while attempting the big split in order to be others and someone else at the same time. It is worth the effort to follow Rousseau in this double "madness":

—On the one hand, he wants to reconstruct the real point of view others have of him. It is no longer a question, as in polemical literature, of having a good time by caricaturing the adversary in order to crush him. Rousseau attempts to construct another person who is as much like him as possible, someone that he himself can believe in, who is not a simple puppet. But the manner in which he has constructed this other person reveals precisely that it is impossible for him (Rousseau) to imagine him. It would not be right to judge Rousseau severely; thus his adversaries can only be wicked men or fools. Others will therefore divide themselves into two bodies. One, irredeemable, is the group of "Gentlemen" who organize the plot and intentionally lie to mislead the public. With them, no dialogue is possible. The other, redeemable, is a Frenchman who is their dupe but who is, deep down, an honest man, and who, by a suitable maieutic, is going to be brought back to the truth, that is to say, to the point of view that Jean-Jacques has of himself. Pathetic fake: this Frenchman is a fake custom-made "other." To hide this truth from himself, Rousseau ascribes to him all the opinions of other real people and makes it convenient for him to put up (for three hundred pages) a great resistance to the evidence, to which he only gives in little by little.³⁶

—On the other hand, since he makes the effort to put himself "in the place of others," Rousseau would be within his right to demand the same. But, impartial,

he does not want to impose his point of view on himself (this is what he already did in the *Confessions*). He is going to give a lesson in objectivity. Instead of proposing his inner evidence, he shows how he would set about to know Jean-Jacques if he were someone else. This is the fictitious role of this "Rousseau," who decides to go pay a visit to Jean-Jacques in order to sound him out and form an opinion. The most surprising passage of the *Dialogues* is the long narrative of this visit.³⁷ "Rousseau" observing the behavior of Jean-Jacques while listening to his remarks, and constructing little by little an "objective" portrait that the reader can naturally take only as a self-portrait, even though he expresses himself through the fictitious voice of a homodiegetic witness. The vertigo reaches its peak when "Rousseau" begins to quote a speech that Jean-Jacques supposedly made to him.³⁸ This direct speech (which failed in the *Confessions*) appears to us as no more than a view at the end of inverted opera glasses, at the bottom of a sort of funnel, quoted by a fictitious "Rousseau," himself the pedagogical puppet of . . . Jean-Jacques Rousseau. We hear a muffled voice that sends out a pathetic call for the response of another person—another person who would be a *real* other person.

He reread what he had written.

Is it reasonable to study such a rare phenomenon? He had scarcely been able to gather a few examples drawn from a dozen books—when each year, hundreds of autobiographies candidly written "in the first person" flooded the market. But this corpus would have been meager only if he had wanted to make us believe in the existence of a genre, the "autobiography in the third person." Well, his purpose was the reverse. In his eyes the analysis of these borderline cases was simply a kind of wedge to shatter the cohesion, in part imaginary, that is granted to "genres." By dissociating the different factors, we notice that the effect produced came only from their combination and from their hierarchical organization on the genre's horizon of expectation.

We could, from this type of untying, distinguish and formulate more clearly some theoretical problems that the "normal" functioning of genres tends to confuse or to conceal—multiple, divergent problems sending the inquiry off on very different paths.

For the "persons," he dreamed of continuing the work undertaken by Valéry in his *Cahiers (Notebooks)*.³⁹ Valéry seemed to him to have the knack of placing himself from the very first at the heart of the problem, at the spot where the linguistic subject and the psychological subject are articulated, paving the way where Lacan, Benveniste, and many others have since joined in. It remained to draw the conclusions for the autobiographical narrative, as much for enunciation as for communication. And maybe in particular for a poetic of reception (what becomes of the "I," "you," etc., for me who is listening or is reading?). This question was related, laterally, to that of the contract.

Throughout his study, as a matter of fact, he had analyzed the articulation of

the elements of the autobiographical contract, but a question was left hanging: what difference is there between the figures and "fictitious fictions" used within an autobiographical text, and the system of the autobiographical novel? Is there a continuous transition from one to the other? Couldn't he pursue the question by comparing two equally overwhelming texts, *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes, on the autobiographical side, and, *La Mise a mort (Put to Death, 1965)* by Aragon, on the fictional side, where the games of splitting in two and mirrors overflow the universe of fiction and invade the reading contract itself?

After all, the margin between fiction and autobiography seems thinner than ever to him. Where the analysis distinguishes, reality often presents a continuous spectrum. Especially today, when so many fictional texts are, from the very first, offered to readers within the framework of an autobiographical space, and the most conscientious autobiographers are no longer able to put the genre into practice except in the form of parody or game. But it happened that he was asked, as if his role had been to settle the matter, in the face of such an ambiguous text: "And that, does that enter into your definition?" His definition, which was the dictionary's and everybody's, was the reason he had been taken for Aristotle—unless it was for La Palice. It had been, and remains for him, the point of departure of a many-sided and open investigation aiming for clarity and precision, without too much simplification. And not a ridiculous point of arrival.

A crossroads of problems, then. He hesitated, then chose to explore another strategy, an equally subtle one, which consists in the interweaving of the voice of the adult narrator with the voice of the child whose presence he seeks to restore.

He sat down at his table to write.