Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography

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For whatever reasons, autobiography has become a flourishing and sophisticated art, and literary critic and theorist alike pay it increasing attention. The new sophistication of the artist has modified older expectancies and methods; and predictably, the new critical apologists divide into traditionalists, who seek to regularize what they take to be a "genre" with a hereditary essence — "true autobiography," Gusdorf's "autobiographie proprement dite," and relativists such as Alfred Kazin, who begin with what looks peculiarly new and postulate that "autobiography, like other literary forms, is what a gifted writer makes of it." ¹

Both sides are continually preoccupied with a question which, while inescapable, is in part a pseudo-problem: the relation in autobiographical writing of the fictive and the historical, "design" and "truth," Dichtung und Wahrheit. But two other questions also persist. The evaluative question of formal consistency and integrity provokes theorists to specific judgments that are conventional and premature. Moreover, analytic surveys of the question of autobiographical intention become rigid and exclusive, identifying "autobiography proper" with a single "form" or intention, and excluding works that differ in formal perspective, dramatic focus, or rhetorical end. The questions are neither improper nor irrelevant. But if their answers are not to be narrow or premature, they had best be considered first in light of the wide plurality of mimetic and formal value of which autobiography has proved capable. Following is a brief contribution to such an anatomy, focused on the three preoccupations I have singled out: the mimetic question of the interplay of history and fiction, the formal question of the tension between purposive form and experimental development, and the generic question of intention, of the autobiographer's fluctuating idea of his purpose and of the reader he would

reach. The present state of such questions may be seen in the valuable pioneering works of Shumaker, Kazin, Spender, Gusdorf, Pascal, Sayre, Morris, and Mandel. Noticing their problems, I shall offer my own less prescriptive approach to truth, form, and intention in modern autobiography. The formulation will proceed into a considerable body of possible — and controversial — applications. On the equally controversial assumption that modern autobiography began two centuries ago, I shall limit these applications to Rousseau and his successors.

On the first question, Rousseau sounds the keynote. He will display to his kind "a portrait in every way true to nature" (17) by relating "in simple detail all that has happened to me, all that I have done, all that I have felt," and, says Stephen Spender, "of course Rousseau does not tell the truth. There is a lie concealed within his very method" (70). Truth is a definitive but elusive autobiographical intention. John Morris is right: "autobiography is . . . a species of history — a narrative of events occurring in time" (10). But, notes the Bergsonian Gusdorf, "l'historien de soi-même" inevitably commits "le péché original de l'autobiographie . . . revenant en visite dans son propre passé, il postule l'unité et l'identité de son être, il croit pouvoir confondre ce qu'il fut avec ce qu'il est devenu" (116-17). And so Renan was right, too, when he reflected on Goethe's title (Vérité et poesie for him), "Ce qu'on dit de soi est toujours poesie." Seeking to be history, autobiography must be fictive. The pages given to demonstrating this truism might be better spent exploring it.

Gusdorf and Kazin both contradict themselves on it. Gusdorf observes that in autobiography we are given "le témoignage d'un homme sur lui même . . . à la recherche de sa plus intime fidelité," that the search itself is (like the mirror in a Dutch interior) a dimension of the life imaged; and then he pronounces surprisingly that it matters little if the picture (the mirror!) is full of errors, omissions, lies: "fiction or imposture, the value of art is real!" Kazin observes


that Hemingway, Nabokov, Dahlberg, and others like them are autobiographers who simply use the appearance of fact to produce enjoyable narrative, "designed, even when the author does not say so, to make a fable of his life, to tell a story, to create a pattern of incident, to make a dramatic point." Yet, he acknowledges, the creative writer "turns to autobiography out of some creative longing that fiction has not satisfied," and finds there "some particular closeness and intensity of effect" that he values, some "felt relation to the life data themselves" (211-12). Autobiography, then, whatever the reader's response, must be a profoundly different activity. But perhaps the contradictions — or paradoxes — of Gusdorf and Kazin are truer than the categorical insistence of Shumaker that the autobiographer invariably "wishes to be understood as writing of himself and as setting down . . . nothing that is not literally and factually true" (105), or the shifting rigidity of Mandel (220): "the autobiographer . . . may never falsify his facts for a fictional purpose without giving up his claim to the name of autobiographer"; he strives "to sound as truthful as possible"; he gives what he "wishes to be taken as true about his life." The truism that in autobiography history and fiction are intentionally distinct proves too slippery to hold.

Nevertheless, such theorists are on the right track. The autobiographer knows there are differences and struggles with them. Edwin Muir wistfully speaks of the freedom of fiction: "I could follow these images freely if I were writing an autobiographical novel. As it is, I have to stick to the facts and try to fit them in where they fit in."4 Spender wonders in retrospect "whether I would have done better to write my autobiography as a novel," without "the immediacy of the writer who says: 'the hero is I,'" and then replies to his own doubts. He could not give "the truth about himself within the decent and conspiratorial convention of contemporary fiction"; that would be offering both reader and writer "avenues of escape from the glaring light of consciousness of him who says: 'I am I'" and would therefore defeat his confessional purpose.5 Nabokov, for whom the tracing of images into intricate harmonies is what autobiography does, nevertheless (like Goethe and other artist-autobiographers) deliberately writes to repossess the realities of his past from the sterile fictive world to which he has sacrificed them. "The man in me revolts against the fictionist" is both a theme and a motive of Speak, Memory6 (as of many autobiographies). The historicity of the recreation is impera-

6 Speak, Memory, the revised edition (New York, 1966).
tive, even though the autobiographer knows the terrible elusiveness of that historicity. "I have changed nothing to my knowledge," says Yeats, "and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge."

But when George Moore insists that Hail and Farewell (and O'Casey from the outset implies that Mirror in My House) is an autobiographical novel, or when Dahlberg remarks "I have come to that time in my life when it is absolutely important to compose a good memoir," or when Hemingway prefaces A Memorable Feast, "If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact" — when these are the signals, then the signals are distinctively (and no doubt deliberately) ambiguous. Mailer, for example, scrupulously and subtly disjoins such signals into the structural principle of Armies of the Night.

There is, as Norman Holland observes, nothing in an autobiographical passage itself to distinguish history from fiction. Response is determined strictly by the expectation the reader brings, and the autobiographer who supplies ambiguous signals establishes his work (for whatever reason) on a basis of ambiguous expectancy. The reader is of course free to respond, however unmistakable the mimetic or historical signals, as if the autobiography had the fictive autonomy of narrative invention, and "understand" it accordingly. But in understanding fiction one seeks an imaginative grasp of another's meaning; in understanding personal history one seeks an imaginative comprehension of another's historic identity. "Meaning" and "identity" are not the same kind of reality and do not make the same demands. One has no obligation to a fantasy. Holland quotes Sidney — "For the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore nothing lieth" — and interprets the continuation to mean that when we look only for fiction our imaginations are liberated to carry on our own "profitable invention." There is — or should be — no such freedom, no such total imaginative access or response, for either writer or reader, in the historiographical transaction that is autobiography. For both, as Pascal puts it, "there is a cone of darkness at the centre" (184); "unreliability" is an inescapable condition, not a rhetorical option; truth, like form and intention, is a problematic goal to be sought in various ways; "one of

9 A Memorable Feast (New York, 1965), Preface.
10 The Dynamics of Literary Response (New York, 1968), pp. 6ff.
the joys of reading autobiographies," says Pascal, is watching "a wrestling with truth" (75). The reader who treats the conditional effort as mere fantasy or free creation, or who uses the published vulnerability of another historic person as mere signals from one fantasy world to another, is repudiating the basic human implication that is the inescapable condition of his access to the autobiographical situation.

Critics such as Gusdorf and Pascal recognize this. But the recognition has not yet had much effect on considerations of autobiographical form and intention. Neither can be thought of as having the autonomy or rhetorical accountability of form and intention in a purposive fiction; each may or may not reach a final state of articulation, for each must be experimental, dynamic. Yet even the best theoretic discussions of autobiography seem committed to forms that are "unified" and "appropriate" and rhetorical ends that are "achieved." The most comprehensive survey of autobiographical "forms" is Shumaker's chapter on "Shape and Texture," filled with useful, if schematic, hypotheses, and yet chained to the deduction that form must be an achievement of unity, that the means of achievement is the selective principle appropriate to a certain autobiographical "kind," that the autobiographer must find or achieve his form, but that, alas, "autobiography is especially prone to impertinency" and we must be prepared "for the discovery of imperfections" (141) — surely a disconcerting way to look for what actually happens during an autobiographical "wrestling with" form. Shumaker's disciple Mandel forges himself the same critical situation. The critic must first seek an "organizing principle" or "purpose," ask "to what degree does [the work] reveal organic unity based on a defined sense of its own end?" expect "the conscious shaping of a whole life for one informing purpose," demand that the autobiographer as artist "be in control of the way in which he selects and presents" the "ambiguities of his nature" even though he "may not be able" to fathom them, and of course expect some autobiographers to create "dangerously protean" structures and many autobiographies, however impressive, to suffer from a lack of consistency and control (221-4). Such is the restrictiveness of a rhetorical approach to autobiographical form.

Pascal, in a sense the follower of Gusdorf, goes to an opposite pole and makes a prescriptive position out of a "process" view of form and an existentialist view of process. Where there is no voyage of genuine — hence unanticipated — self-discovery, we feel "a partial failure at any rate." The "act of writing [autobiography] is a new act of the man . . . it leaves the man different" (182-3), and presumably where this happens and the autobiographical self reaches the
completion of therapeutic process (Wordsworth, Wells) or a new
dramatic phase of self-formulation (Sartre, Malcolm X) we are to
feel "a partial success at any rate," even though such an end may have
emerged out of formal chaos. Basil Willey begins Spots of Time
unsure in what direction his life has been moving: "It is in the hope
of finding out that I am now writing this book." And "reading
[The Buried Day] through again," C. Day Lewis is "astonished to find
that my earlier selves — the schoolboy, the adolescent, the young
man — had collaborated in it without my conscious knowledge."
Imperatives of exploration have made control in any continuous and
deliberate sense impossible — and such often seems the case in auto-
biography; but to elevate this condition into the formal necessity of
"true autobiography" is narrowly prescriptive.

Form in an autobiographical work partakes in experimental fluc-
tuation of both control and revelation, and the experimental activity
often generates a variety of controlled forms: the tensile forms of
inner and outer, man and mask, Dichtung und Wahrheit; forms of
stylistic and modal counterpoint; metaphoric or parabolic forms —
the journey, the penetration, the spiral; rhythmic and expository and
therapeutic forms; anti-forms (Malraux, Robert Graves, Mailer)
playing against conventional expectations. Some of these are manifest
experimentally in the emergent narrative patterns of the recovered
life. Others appear in the dramatic patterns of the evolving act of
recovery, the autobiographical situation in which the autobiographer
recognizes, interrelates, and attempts to manipulate toward some truth
or integrity his relationships with his recoverable past, with his formal
or technical options, and with his rhetorical and psychological inten-
tions. Any description of form must take into account this situation
in both its narrative momentum and its dramatic evolution, as well
as the degree to which one or the other prevails. Or to use Shumaker's
terms, every autobiography necessarily moves on "two temporal
planes" juxtaposed, narrative past and dramatic present. It is tempt-
ing to insist (as some autobiographers do) on the primacy of the
present act, hence dramatic form or "process." Dillon Johnston rightly
notes: "The autobiography, more than any literary genre, tends to
talk about itself: the development of the subject matter is so depend-
ent upon psychological theory and ideas about documentation . . .
that a discussion of the formation of autobiography almost always
becomes part of the subject matter." But not always; such a devel-

opment is a formal option; and autobiography is not "process literature" because it does not imitate the creative process enacting itself — it is a recreative act. The occasional primacy of the dramatic present should not be elevated into a formal criterion.

Formal principles in autobiography evolve and fluctuate as autobiographical intentions interact and shift; a formal problem or option often refocuses the autobiographer's intention or even redefines the nature of his truth. Such is the relation of form to intention. It is not reasonable for the interpretive critic of autobiography to demand or expect unity and consistency of intention. It is certainly not safe to suppose that intention will always be explicit or that intentions are independent of their dramatic locations. No autobiographer writes without reasons for writing or readers to reach, but none has single reasons or readers, and the identification of reasons and readers is itself an experimental feature of the evolving autobiographical situation. Shumaker is far righter in theory than his rage for critical order allows him to be in application: "one has not the right to suggest that some ways of reliving bygone experience are more legitimate than others . . . . At any rate, a study which is meant to be inclusive must accept its materials as they are found" (52) — and this means recognizing distinct intentions for what they are and proceeding to identify and interpret their correlations and fluctuating predominances in individual autobiographical works.

Traditional terms will serve, so long as we understand them in their characteristic post-Enlightenment connotations. "Confession" is personal history that seeks to communicate or express the essential nature, the truth, of the self. "Apology" is personal history that seeks to demonstrate or realize the integrity of the self. "Memoir" is personal history that seeks to articulate or repossess the historicity of the self. "Confession" as an intention or impulse places the self relative to nature, reality; "apology" places the self relative to social and/or moral law; "memoir" places the self relative to time, history, cultural pattern and change. Confession is ontological; apology ethical; memoir historical or cultural. As these or any comparable definitions suggest, such intentions must overlap; one can hardly appear in total
independence of the others. In practice, they complement or succeed or conflict with each other. Every autobiography can appropriately and usefully be viewed as in some degree a drama of intention, and its dramatic intentionality is another component of the autobiographical situation for the interpreter to attend to.

What, then, does the interpretive reader find when he seeks the distinctive truth, form, and intention of an autobiography? He is in search of an evolving mixture of pattern and situation — pattern discerned in the life recovered, pattern discovered or articulated in the self or “versions of self” that emerge in that recovery, pattern in the recovery process. The total emergent reciprocity of situation and activity and pattern is what is formative or distinctive, and this he seeks to identify. What follows is a set of interpretive observations made of nearly forty extremely various autobiographical works since and inclusive of those of Rousseau, Franklin, and Gibbon. Their validity remains undemonstrated and controversial; they are offered simply as the kinds of observations I believe one needs to make and test before historical generalization and critical judgment are possible.

We begin with the question of truth, the first relation of which the autobiographical situation is made, the relation between the autobiographer and his personal, historical subject. The relation has various elements. To seek the personal focus of an autobiographical truth is to inquire what kind of “I” is selected, how far the selected “I” is an inductive invention and how far an intentional creation, and whether one single or one multiple “I” persists throughout the work. Moreover, the autobiographer’s relation to the pastness or historicity of his selected “I” involves his sense and manipulation of the problem of continuity and discontinuity of identity and perspective. Again, perspective implies access, and the autobiographer’s limited and erratic access to the past and present of that ambiguous “I” implies the problem of the form and authority of personal memory. In practice such selections of personal focus are numerous, fluctuating, and often mixed; and the interpreter has no business assuming that certain types and persistences of “I” are more “truly autobiographical” than others. I am not sure there is justification even for Mandel’s reasonable postulate that “an autobiographer of great ability will select one aspect of his total personality to stand for the complex whole” (223).

The selection of “I” is made and remade according to such criteria as naturalness, originality, essentiality, continuousness, integrity, and significance. By whatever criteria chosen, the selective “I” plays one or more of a number of structural roles: the “I” that has been hidden or misconstrued; the “I” that has been lost, or gained, regained or sought after in vain; the “I” that has been cultivated, imposed, pre-
served, developed. The fate of the selective "I" is bound to be of central concern, but the several elements of a multiple "I" may have diverse fates, or a single fate may have various explanations, and the fate or fates may occasion various attitudes: comprehension or bewilderment, celebration or lamentation.

Some autobiographers intend at first to delineate an "I" that is comprehensive, essential, total, while others intend initially only a partial personal truth, chronologically or analytically restricted. Such initial intentions may prove unstable or illusory, and the autobiographer's idea of what is total or essential — of the personal truth that matters — may not persuade or satisfy the reader. Moreover, the "total" autobiographer often discovers motives for restriction or refocusing that he had not anticipated. Rousseau would like "in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's eye," to let the reader notice all of its movements (169), to recount faithfully the "succession of feelings" that constitute "the history of my soul" (262), and thus let the reader discover the "principle which has produced them." But that history becomes the lamentable record of how the perversities and contradictions of his nature have been exploited by a false and cruel society to prevent his becoming what nature intended him to be. The pervasive longing throughout his true history for the true self he could be only in rare intermittences of idyllic timelessness — with his cousin, with "Mama," with Therese — is, in a sense, the essential, if thwarted, Rousseau. Newman sets out in the Apologia to show "what Dr. Newman means," to give "the true key to my whole life," to be "known as a living man," by showing historically how "the concrete being reasons; . . . the whole man moves" (196). Many readers miss "the whole man" in the history of opinions, and are puzzled to find at crucial points — the illness in Sicily, for instance — that it is a divine mystery what Newman meant, that the meaning of Dr. Newman may in fact be comprehensible only when it has been sacrificed to the divine meaning — the principle of the Tracts: "we promote truth by a self-sacrifice." The essential or selective self of Ruskin's Praeterita is the youthful visionary, and the autobiographer imaginatively recovers identity with that lost self, but falls into confusion when trying to relate to and account for the fallen selves that replaced it after 1850. The selective "I" of Goethe's Dichtung und Wahrheit might be equated with the "daemon" that drives him ohne hast ohne rast on to some mysterious destiny, or with the

passion for experience, the capacity to "value highly every thing that contributed to my own cultivation" (II, 18), or with "the organ by which I seized the world," the eye (I, 185), or more properly with the poetic power, the "tendency to turn into an image, into a poem, every thing that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied me" (I, 235), or most likely with that total process of assimilation, that pulsation of self-concentration and self-expansion Goethe calls cultivation.

The selves that undergo crisis in Wordsworth's Prelude, Mill's Autobiography, and the Autobiography of Malcolm X share a duplicity wherein a disintegration or transformation of character somehow leaves a hidden or implicit nature intact; the selective "I" is somehow a transcendence of both. In their brave Rousseauistic candor, setting out to confess shy, unconventional selves, Gide and Spender (in If It Die and World Within World) both struggle with the secrecy of their moral natures, their backgrounds in a puritanical horror of intimacy. Both find it impossible to describe openly what really matters; both discover what Gide calls "the fear of being led on to say too much" (213); and both rest finally in the acceptance of their own intimate complexities, which prevail over any ultimate articulation of a selective "I." The "spiritual and intellectual autobiography" of Cleaver, Soul On Ice, begins in the sense of lost identity — a common starting point for the autobiographical situation — and moves on experimentally into several new identities — a not uncommon direction for the situation to take. But which is the genuine Cleaver, the one who tells Beverley Axelrod he has lost a sense of who he is, or the one who says this is false — he knows well who he is — he is a vain deceiver and an egoistic prophet of doom? The "autobiography" of Edward Dahlberg, Because I Was Flesh, projects as strident a single rhetorical self as the most strident of Cleaver's rhetorical selves. Yet Dahlberg's autobiographical voice asks in Boswellian bewilderment, how many contradictory and unstable selves can a man contain?

The autobiographer provokes a distinct expectation if he initially restricts the "I," analytically or developmentally. The autobiography

17 If It Die [Si le grain ne meurt], pub. 1920, trans. D. Bussy (New York, 1963); Spender above.
18 Soul On Ice (New York, 1968); the descriptive phrase is not Cleaver's.
19 Note 8 above.
that breaks off with some climactic issue from youth or early manhood appears to be a special problem of integrity and continuity. But the restriction may prove less real than the totality. The autobiography whose selective “I” is a suprapersonal significance, a principle of representativeness, sets out from a different kind of restriction, but one equally problematic. “What interests me in any man,” says Malraux,20 “is the human condition; in a great man, the form and essence of his greatness; in a saint, the character of his saintliness. And in all of them, certain characteristics which express not so much an individual personality as a particular relationship with the world.” But Malraux has already asked, “what do I care about what matters only to me” (1)? And his answer is momentously personal: “I have never really learned to re-create myself . . . . I do not find myself very interesting” (2). Thus the selection of a personal representativeness may itself be definitive of an idiosyncratic “I.” George Kennan’s Memoirs21 cannot segregate the representative history of the modern American diplomat from Kennan’s “intellectual autobiography” or, some would add, from his apology. Claude Brown proposes (in Manchild in the Promised Land) to “talk about the first Northern urban generation of Negroes . . . about the experiences of a misplaced generation”22; and Gosse, Yeats, Henry Adams,23 and others offer representative personal histories of cultural generations or epochal conflicts, in which the selective “I” is a struggle with historicity for personal freedom and/or unity of being. Mill and Wells24 profess to give intellectual histories of what one calls an intellectual nature “rather below than above par” and the other calls “a very ordinary brain.” But the experimental Wells shifts focus: “Let me alter the pose and the lighting of my experiences so as to bring out in its successive phases the emotional and sensual egoism rather than the intellectual egoism that has hitherto been the focus of attention” (349). And Mill forms his record emphatically on the principle that moral character is of far greater importance than intellectual. When Wordsworth and Goethe trace the growth of a poet’s mind, relations between conceptions of poet and of social or political man remain to be worked out. The restrictive idea of a public career for Franklin,

23 Gosse, Father and Son (Boston, 1965); Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (New York, 1931); Yeats above.
24 Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (Philadelphia, 1967); Mill above.
Gibbon, and Podhoretz\textsuperscript{25} is a topical focus to be tested, not a sufficient initial signal of selectivity.

A third kind of expectation is initiated by the autobiographer who projects an "I" more true somehow than the "versions of self" historically recoverable. Early in The Words Sartre says, "I keep creating myself; I am the giver and the gift,"\textsuperscript{26} and from the vantage of some new creation looks back — as do Gosse and Dahlberg and Wright — on earlier selves that appear to have been fictions, phantoms, impositions. Yeats says, "if we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. . . . Wordsworth is often flat and heavy, partly because his moral sense has no theatrical element, it is an obedience to a discipline which he has not created" (317-18). And presumably — but not in fact — Yeats's Autobiography is the history of that disciplined, created self. The autobiographer of The Prelude is the true self that has returned to its nature and therein found the power to create a history recounting temporary and unreal lapses into false or fictive selves. But the real autobiographical situation of the poem is as Hartman describes it: "At the beginning of The Prelude a poet returns to nature, yet the poem he writes is about the difficulties of that return. He cannot always sustain his quest to link what makes him a poet, the energy of imagination, to the energy of nature."\textsuperscript{27} The autobiography of a created "I" must be what Wells describes as any man's struggle for his persona: "Our personas grow and change and age as we do. And rarely if ever are they the whole even of our conscious mental being. All sorts of complexes are imperfectly incorporated or not incorporated at all, and may run away with us in the most unexpected manner" (9). Thus the deliberate history of the created "I," like that of the restricted "I," is an experiment in autobiography. And in the first case the interpretive reader seeks to comprehend the creation, as in the second case the restriction, with reference to an implicit totality with which the restriction or creation is in some kind of tension.

Some autobiographers define the truth of the "I" in terms of such a tension. And it is tempting to single them out normatively as truer to an existential autobiographical situation — tempting, but pre-


mature. Goethe's fluctuation between self-expansion and self-concentration is such a formative tension. For Rousseau such a tension persists between the serene and sociable "I" that should have been and the perverse and isolated "I" that nature and society have made. For the autobiographer of cultural conflict the tension may be of the sort T. E. Lawrence describes: "The effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self . . . . At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin . . . . I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our [?] legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness . . . . Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near . . . ."28 Stephen Spender postulates a tension of perspectival duplicity: "An autobiographer is really writing a story of two lives: his life as it appears to himself, from his own position, when he looks out at the world from behind his eye-sockets; and his life as it appears from outside in the minds of others; a view which tends to become in part his own . . . . However, the great problem of autobiography remains, which is to create the true tension between these inner and outer, subjective and objective, worlds" (viii).

The tension between two lives is often formative in the autobiographical works we call journals. The act of journalizing intensifies the conflict in any autobiographer between life and pattern, movement and stasis, identification and definition, world and self. Journalizing becomes a habit of self-collective withdrawal — for the man of action a time of retrospective stasis (Che in his jungle tree), for the social man a time of solitude (Boswell in the wee hours or confined by the clap), for the artist a moment of undisciplined expression. The habit becomes a problem. Scott gave up journalizing because it made him a solitary egoist. Otto Rank advised Anaïs Nin to "leave your Diary; that is withdrawing from the world," and Henry Miller told her it was her malady, her fear of transformation, her preoccupation with completeness.29 The tension becomes formative in Gide's journal.30 For Amiel,31 too, on occasion, his journal "is a kind of epicurism rather than a discipline" (468); on others, it reestablishes "the integrity of the mind and the equilibrium of the conscience, that is,

28 Seven Pillars of Wisdom (Garden City, 1937), pp. 31-2.
one’s inner health” (566). The journalist’s autobiographical tension is a kind of ontologic respiration, an inward and outward of being, itself punctuating and helping to shape the discontinuous life being lived. There may be a reason here why in our times existential autobiographers turn more to the journalistic.

The autobiographer has always had to consider how to manage, and whether to dramatize, the discontinuities inherent in autobiographical recreation. The most basic discontinuities are the intermit-tences of memory. Autobiographies are always what Morris calls “first of all exercises in recollection — recollection in its simplest concep-tion, as the tactic the mind employs to mitigate the destructive powers of time” (62). But recollection in autobiography is never simple, always the process Berdyaev describes: “Such a cognitive process is not a mere remembering or recapitulation of the past: it is a creative act performed at the present moment.” And the first question is whether to dramatize the act. Some do not. Others dramatize memory as a characterizing power, illustrating Malraux’s dictum: “One day it will be realized that men are distinguishable as much by the forms their memories take as by their characters. The depths vary, as do the nets they use and the quarry they hunt” (102). It is hardly necessary to cite the complex retrospective mode of Wordsworth’s Prelude, but equally distinctive are the forms of memory in other autobiographies.

Rousseau is as dependent as Wordsworth (or Proust) on the binoc-uars of retrospective vision. All that is left him now is memory; that other power his “fearful imagination” has done its worst. Yet the “sweet memories of my best years” are capricious, remind him of painful moments when he sought in vain to recapture remembered innocence, and lead him to chapters wherein sweet memory, like other powers of innocence, is transformed into bitterness and pain. The dominant memory of Nabokov’s Speak, Memory is reminiscent of Rousseau’s. But it is less an ambivalent gift of nature than an aristocratic inheritance, a well-cultivated estate. Nabokov reenters his past. It is his — an intensely personal possession which he jealously reclains from fictional characters and worlds. Memory’s “supreme achievement” is “the masterly use it makes of innate harmonies when gathering to its fold the suspended and wandering tonalities of the past” (70). It creates — it must create — the most densely particularized harmonies, for “I have to make a rapid inven-tory of the universe. . . . I have to have all space and all time partici-pate in my emotion, in my mortal love, so that the edge of its mortal-

ity is taken off, thus helping me to fight the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence" (297).

Like Ruskin's and Gide's, Yeats's memory is informed by an abiding sense of place: "I only seem to remember things dramatic in themselves or that are somehow associated with unforgettable places" (20) —places with human centers that exemplify proud, traditional, solitary ways of life. But the formative memory of Reveries is not just personal. It is fixed in local and family tradition, in legend, and the anecdotal discontinuity of Reveries suggests the effect of legendary tales. Identity is having one's story; leaving one's place is losing that story. Creating a new personality is recreating one's legend in association with memorable place. Gide finds in his temporal memory "a person whose eyes cannot properly measure distances and is liable to think things extremely remote which on examination prove to be quite near" (16). Memory fails to provide Sartre with the personal truth that matters:

What I have just written is false. True. Neither true or false, like everything written about madmen, about men. I have reported the facts as accurately as memory permitted me. But to what extent did I believe in my delirium? ... How could I determine — especially after so many years — the imperceptible and shifting frontier that separates possession from hamming [43-4]?

Dahlberg finds in memory his only reality. Then, as for Rousseau, this only reality becomes a trap and a phantom. The man is prisoner of "the phantasms of his childhood" (49-50). But "did the child who is now the man ever live" (92)? and "what remains of that boy who flits like a sapless phantom through my memory? I am more familiar with Theophrastus, Bartram or with Thoreau than I am with him" (122). The remembered past fluctuates wildly between sole reality and nameless phantom, and Dahlberg's commemoration ends strangely. The mother he has confessed to, commemorated, exorcised — the brave, fleshly lady barber portrayed by a fictive omniscience independent of the boy's present consciousness — even she, after all, is beyond memory and understanding. She has been vividly understood, but not by the phantom "I." It is as if the emergence of the "I" had displaced that understanding: "Who was Lizzie Dalberg? I wish to God I knew, but it is my infamy that I do not." Has the fictive narrator's compassionate omniscience redeemed the phantom boy-man from his infamy, or only deepened, articulated it?

Gosse is in an intriguingly similar imaginative paradox vis à vis his remembered father. Like Nabokov — "The break in my own destiny affords me in retrospect a syncopal kick" (250) — Gosse initiates
Father and Son in a radical discontinuity. He derides the "hallowed proverb" that "the child is father of the man." The child's life is so brief, "its impressions are so illusory and fugitive, that it is as difficult to record its history as it would be to design a morning cloud sailing before the wind. . . . But in memory, my childhood was long, long with interminable hours, hours with the pale cheek pressed against the window pane. . . . I feel now the coldness of the pane, and the feverish heat that was produced, by contrast, in the orbit round the eye" (57). Memory has replaced past reality, yet with an intense and mysterious continuity of sensation, and a power of panoramic visual impression, setting its own terms and limits: "precisely as my life ceases to be solitary, it ceases to be distinct." Memory dictates a distancing vividness wherein child and father attain the same external reality. But, as in Dahlberg, the parent is realized inwardly, as well, with an imaginative compassion denied the ludicrously fictive child. We recall Sartre when Gosse remembers himself as "an adroit little pitcher," and think, too, of the extraordinary distance from which Graves "remembers" the "caricature scenes that now seem to sum up the various stages of my life" (180),33 moments of absurd visualization by which memory effectively bids "goodbye to all that" in the very act of comic revocation.

Such instances of memory's forms have taken us into considerations of structure and method, problems of retrospective point of view and its essential paradox in autobiography. Effective access to a recollected self or its "versions" begins in a discontinuity of identity or being which permits past selves to be seen as distinct realities. Yet only a continuity of identity or being makes the autobiographical act or purpose meaningful. The paradox of continuity in discontinuity is itself a problem to be experimented with, and it is a problem both of truth and of form. Manipulation of autobiographical point of view is conditioned by the demands of the paradox, but it is also conditioned by rhetorical considerations of intention and emphasis, formal and stylistic considerations of clarity and proportion. And such demands necessarily fluctuate as the autobiographical situation evolves.

Consider two seemingly contradictory manipulations which together illustrate the paradox. Chapter One of Wright's Black Boy34 climaxes a recreation of the experience and awareness of a violent, lonely boy with a visit to the father who had deserted his family for a mistress. The scene closes. The narrator now superimposes Richard's images

33 Graves, Good-bye to All That — the passage is only in the revised edn. (Garden City, 1957).
"many times in the years after that" on the boy's sensory immediacy. Finally comes the long interpretive perspective of the man after a lapse of a quarter of a century "during which my mind and consciousness had become so greatly and violently altered" that "I" then looked at the "sharecropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy hoe in his gnarled, veined hands," with the compassion of a distanced and mature understanding. The separation that had been the father's moral recklessness had become a final condition of the autobiographer's development. The development of the artist, the tragic naturalist whose emergence we trace in the next chapter, is the precondition of the imaginative truth achieved by an intricate conflation of temporal and psychological perspectives. Of such intermingled discontinuities is an autobiographical truth formed.

Or consider the middle chapters of the Autobiography of Malcolm X. The autobiographer recalls how he was saved, like Paul on the road to Damascus, by the miraculous intervention of Elijah Muhammad's Muslimism. The historic truth of influence and conversion must be realized. Yet in retrospect the truth comes to include the jealousy and misunderstanding that soon became part of his relation to his leader. This too must be revealed, without compromising the moral power that Malcolm felt and the autobiographer seeks to convey. While editing these chapters, Malcolm was forced to see the truth; and Hayley feared that in his bitterness Malcolm would revise the chapters. Malcolm admitted, "There are a lot of things I could say that passed through my mind at times even then, things I saw and heard, but I threw them out of my mind. I'm going to let it stand the way I've told it. I want the book to be the way it was." The result is truer to the personality of Malcolm revealed in the total remembrance: his fierce loyalty, his vigorous openness to each new stage of his extraordinary career of changes. The picaresque vitality of the versatile confidence man is reaffirmed in the histrionic exuberance of the autobiographer, recalling the early Harlem days, "scat-singing and popping his fingers, 're-bop-de-bop-blop-bam—'" (391), or recreating with zest the absurdly conked and zootsuited lindy-hopper at Roseland State Ballroom. Historical and psychological truth has been recreated by the careful, even deceptive, manipulation of temporal perspective.

The truth of a particular autobiography demands its own discrimination and conflation of perspectives, and hence its own narrative mode. Even the diurnal unit of the journalist, from Boswell to Che Guevara, is an artifice of multiple perspectives — levels of retrospect, minglings of dramatic and real anticipation, operations of significant selection. Wordsworth and Rousseau, Gosse and Adams and Nabokov,
all seem basically to share the mobile panoramic impressionism we associate with Thackeray and Proust, but the distinctive variations are mimetically, as well as formally, crucial. The impressionism of Gosse would be unsuitable for Wright, given *Black Boy*'s preoccupation with the potencies and frustrations of words, best represented in a dialogic-scenic mode. Rousseau and Newman are equally committed to a totality of perspective: Rousseau must be seen in every point of view, and Newman must be seen in the dramatic authenticity of each historic moment. The conception of one is pictorial and of the other temporal, however, and so the recreation of the momentous walk to Vincennes demands a different perspectivism than the recreation of the illness in Sicily or the final departure from Oxford. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* necessarily eschews the impressionistic mode. Goethe's idea of a cumulative totality of being, while no more comprehensive than Wordsworth's, amounts to a progressive cultivation and assimilation, not the successive retrospective reassimilation of *The Prelude*. Perhaps the most Thackerayan of major autobiographical narratives is in the panoramic mode of Adams, and for good reason, since the *Education* is a comic epic of maladjustment and discontinuity, whose rational evolutionist relearns repeatedly and in vain that his vision of order in history is an illusive compulsion, that the rule is ludicrous catastrophism.

The inference is clear. The interpretive reader of an autobiography had best interpret its method before fixing it with a general label. And the same is true of structure. The nature of an extended autobiographical act makes it self-defeating for the interpreter to expect some predictable integrity or unity. Form is too experimental, too "accidental," and at the same time too inherent in perspectives still to be recovered or imposed by memory. Conflicts or fluctuations of perspective and intention may themselves become formative, and the personal history that emerges may reveal variant or conflicting assumptions about meaningful orders in life. Furthermore, form is really a multiplicity of formative options in the simplest autobiography: options of selection and exclusion, interpretive refocus or rearrangement, conflations of historical and expository arrangement, developmental rhythms in narrative and situational rhythms in the autobiographer's sense of movement toward his end.

To begin with, autobiographers set out with divergent views of the appropriateness of form. Gauguin insists his *journal intime* is "not a book," and Cocteau confesses in his "journal" that formlessness may itself be an imposition: "Has the book I am writing completed its curve? I who boast, and in its very chapters, of never being pre-occupied with it . . . . Can I still speak to you, and keep this journal,
which is not really one, in the form of a journal, based on what happens to me? That would be falsifying its mechanism." Gide is constantly preoccupied with form in If It Die, troubled by the spatial form memory imposes. He intermittently resists and surrenders to and justifies it, yet insists that "this is not a literary composition; I am just writing down my recollections as they come to me" (44). Boswell's passion for form leads to such finely formed continuities in the London Journal as "the Louisa saga." He recognizes in himself a "love of form for its own sake" (128), and his repeated frustrations in trying to live by a form simply lead to marvelous rationalizations of formal variations. The journal was "to contain a consistent picture of a young fellow eagerly pushing through life," but salutary humbling divagations remind him "the hero of a romance or novel must not go uniformly along in bliss. . . . Aeneas met with many disasters in his voyage to Italy, and must not Boswell have his rubs?" (206) The London Journal may thus have "more form" than the "approaches to the past made at distinct times in differing modes" that Yeats finally titled Autobiography. The formal passion of Gibbon operates to form his autobiography, yet he evidently found form so problematic that he left six finely formed, differently focused, and overlapping fragments. Henry Adams's "idol Gibbon" is reincarnate in the autobiographer of the Education, who says, "From cradle to grave this problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education" (12). The rich coherences, the elegant if whimsical patterning and focusing, of Adams's world attest to the control of the philosophical historian, in relentless search of "the working of law in history" (363), determined that "everything must be made to move together" (378), while the "hero" learns by successive false starts that Mont Blanc like other spectacles of being is "a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces" (289). The result is a curious mock-form, a study in the ludicrous but beautiful balancing of illusion, a protagonist who combines the solemn naivete of Rasselas with the fugitive historicity of Arnold's scholar gypsy, and an autobiographer who, like Chateaubriand and Mark Twain, seems to speak from beyond the grave.

But Adams's views of form were at least options of a single "moment" in his history. In other cases the autobiographer’s temporal position and his situation changed radically. The Rousseau recreating 1741 in the late 1760's “two years of patient silence” after finishing 1740 has a very different perspective not just on what must follow, but on what has already been written. Franklin at St. Asaph's in 1771 is not the same as Franklin at Passy in 1784 or at home in 1788 — and such shifts, however “accidental,” must be formative. Mill's final chapter is punctuated by “In resuming my pen some years after closing the preceding narrative” (170). A silent majority of autobiographers must have found themselves in the midway metamorphosis best described by Edwin Muir: “I finished the first part of this book thirteen years ago. . . . The generation to which I belong has survived an age, and the part of our life which is still immobilized there is like a sentence broken off before it could be completed; the future in which it would have written its last word was snatched away and a raw new present abruptly substituted; and that present is reluctant now to formulate its own sentence” (194). Form in autobiography is too contingent on shifting situations ever to be interpreted as if it might be a static integrity.

It is contingent as well on shifting principles of selectivity, any one of which may be revised or replaced as each new stage of self-recreation forces a reappraisal of what is relevant. A static interpretation of selectivity would cite the “spots of time” passage in Prelude XII and suppose that events throughout have been selected accordingly. Yet the passage with its two long associative “memorials” occurs in the framing of the crucial moment of restoration; the moment becomes continuous with the autobiographical present and thus reveals a final vision of restorative events. Events in earlier books illustrate earlier visions of events: those testifying to the ministry of beauty and fear, to the reality of vocation or consecration, those that exemplify the imagination’s characteristic powers and aspirations, and man's nobility and pathos. Different principles operate at different stages. The shape of the recovered event is the shape of recovery at that point, the shape of the event as then recovered. As Black Boy traces the shaping of a literary artist, we see the growth of a vision of human events, and that vision as a selective principle necessarily evolves. At the beginning, Yeats views events as legendary, timeless, antithetical to the action of “inorganic logical straightness.” Later, as he “must not only describe events but those patterns into which they fall, when I am the looker-on” (221), certain places and eras of personal development seem in retrospect to identify themselves by a certain form or quality of event: “I see Paris in the Eighteen-nine-
ties as a number of events separated from one another, and without cause or consequence, without lot or part in the logical structure of my life" (227). Ruskin in Praeterita appears repeatedly confused about what events caused the decay of his visionary power, and how.\textsuperscript{38} Wells locates the predominant causes of his own development first in his own will, then in chance or destiny, and finally in history.

To trace such shifts or redefinitions of narrative selection and formation is to identify one essential component of autobiographical form. Some such refocusings are themselves illustrative of a particular history or personality. Others reveal themselves as inherent in life process. Nabokov recognizes that selectivity necessarily changes as memory’s focus moves from childhood to adolescence, for the details constituting childhood’s “harmonious world” possess “a naturally plastic form in one’s memory, which can be set down with hardly any effort; it is only starting with the recollections of one’s adolescence that Mnemosyne begins to get choosy and crabbed” (24-5), generating new problems and possibilities of conscious selection. Gibbon regularly discriminates between the characteristic and universal, as his formal sophistication leads him through a succession of selective problems. Early, “since philosophy has exploded all innate ideas and natural propensities” (66) he must include all possible environmental causes and conditions. Later, he is sceptical of the “explosion” (137) and may, therefore, have included irrelevancies. The “delicate subject of my early love” reveals a new selective principle: “the discovery of a sixth sense, the first consciousness of manhood, is a very interesting moment of our lives, but it less properly belongs to the memoirs of an individual than to the natural history of the species” (108) — the same criterion by which Spender postpones recollections of early childhood, Graves mocks them, and Wordsworth and Yeats, seeking the sources of a natural or ancestral identity, stress them. Finally, Gibbon remembers his travels as amusing, but “the narrative of my life must not degenerate into a book of travels” (143), a generic scrupulousness unsuitable in autobiographers with notions of the spatiality or locality of personal identity — e.g., Yeats, Gide, Nabokov, Rousseau, for whom each new relocation is a personally momentous event, or Goethe, Spender, or Adams, for whom it is a significant self-expansion or self-complication.

For all his will to explain himself, Gibbon was not troubled by problems many post-Enlightenment autobiographers have faced. How, asks Muir, can the autobiographer exclude the experience of one-third

\textsuperscript{38} For these interpretive conclusions about Ruskin and Wells I am indebted to Johnston, Integral Self (note 13 above), pp. 40-44, 157-66.
of his life, his sleeping experience, his dreams? Imaginary or visionary experiences of all kinds may well seem crucial to self-explanation. Furthermore, the aim of self-explanation may force the autobiographer progressively into the dilemma of reconciling the need for personal historical focus with the claims of philosophical exposition. Adams and Wells, for instance, resolve their struggles for autobiographical form with final expositions of philosophies of world history and government.

The question of the end in autobiographical form is a complex one. Narrative recreation and autobiographical situation somehow terminate at once in a resolution of both narrative pattern and the search for such pattern. Any "end" belongs to both. Goethe's Dichtung and Nabokov's Speak, Memory both delight in the ever-expanding recapture of past worlds. For Goethe, as Pascal observes, the form is "an irregularly moving expansion," an "ever-widening arc," with no spiral of return, because for Goethe the self is a steady assimilative progression. But there is a counter-rhythm — or rather counter-stasis — in Goethe's lifelong tendency to use his imagination to put his mind at rest, to see how it stands relative to the moving world, to use poetry to fix that which is confused or unstable in himself (as he had done with Werther). His love of theatre, of ritual, of festive ceremony and disguise and sacrament, is the love of one who finds "comfort" in "a regular recurrence of external things" (II, 159). Nabokov too sees the process of repossessing a past world as an achievement of stasis through form — hence, "a colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life" (275). But the stasis can only seem what Robert Frost called "a momentary stay against confusion." An autobiographical form can seem closed if, like Adams, the autobiographer adopts the final fiction of seeing his whole life as past, or, like Newman and Mill, of seeing all significant movement completed. Or the form may "close" with the cessation of all narrative movement in a climax of the autobiographical act. Sartre's lifelong flight from unreal selves and spurious idealisms comes to rest in a final declaration of self-will in the autobiographer. Podhoretz narrates his decision to try a personal book about the problem of "success," itself a declared bid for success, and announces, "I just have," throwing all past narrative abruptly into the resolution of a dramatic present. The four parts of Soul On Ice, a progression of distinct modes like Yeats's Autobiography, move from the autobiographical loss of an old self to the mythical affirmation of a new, from colloquial reminiscence and self-portrait, through cultural prophecy, through the intimate personality of the letters to Beverley Axelrod, to mythopoeic vision of a new sexual Jerusalem. The Prelude, too, ends in mythopoeia, but the
vision is reached by way of an ambiguous journey backwards and forwards, into "fallings away" natural and artificial, and final redemption of a possibly waning power without whose sustaining force the journey could not have been taken. The movement of Spender's *World Within World* is comparably complex: a historico-cultural journey through a decade of crisis; a Conradian movement toward the dark center of an imperative personal complexity; a quest for the "wheels within wheels," the repossessed childhood that at last affirms and encompasses the integrity of the adult. No one has understood better than Spender the complexities of autobiographical form and its relation to the confessional intention.

So we turn at last to the question of intention, the shifting ground of the autobiographer's form, the condition of the truth he struggles for, itself subject to dramatic and narrative redefinition as the personal center fluctuates and formal options are seized or rejected. Having recognized four "kinds" of autobiography — diary or journal, confession, reminiscence, and personal history, Berdyaev declares that *Dream and Reality* will be none of these: "I decided to make this study of myself not only because I feel the need of expressing and communicating myself (a reason for which I cannot possibly claim the attention of the reader), but also because this may help to raise and resolve certain problems concerning man and his destiny and contribute to the understanding of our age. I also feel the necessity of explaining the apparent inconsistencies and contradictions which have been ascribed to my philosophical outlook. . . . I should like memory to overcome oblivion in regard to all that is of value in it" (x-xi). Thus, having disowned all antecedents, Berdyaev embraces all three traditional autobiographical intentions: to communicate one's self (confession); to show the integrity of one's career (apology); to repossess one's past (memoir)!

Ostensibly at an opposite pole is the Gibbonian autobiographer, who professes that "my own amusement is my motive, and will be my reward" (27). But such professions probably confirm Sartre's view that "our deeper intentions are plans and evasions which are inseparably linked" (120).

The list is long of autobiographers who commence, like Rousseau, by insisting that what they seek to do is not quite what the reader expects: "It is, I suppose, a hybrid form." Also long is the list of those who periodically discriminate in their motives, reassert control over the reader's generic expectations, and in so doing refine or redefine their intentions: "this is not history but education"; rather, this is the "long mistake" of a "search for education," "the shifting search
for the education he never found," rather "adventures in search of education" (Adams, 172, 185, 162). Each new formal resolution calls for a new justification, hence revelation, of intention; "but I do not judge," repeats the confessor; "I simply relate" — and his protestations accumulate with the force of a devious judicial act. Something inherent in autobiographical process calls for the continuous refocusing of expectation and intention, as each autobiographer discovers his own fluctuating mixture of confession, apology, and memoir.

Rousseau insists on "confession" as his intention, repeatedly disclaims apology, yet Pascal rightly argues that the work is apology. "Confession" is the primary motive of Rousseau's history that gives integrity to his entire social life. The work is the confessor's characteristic act of friendship, an apology for the confessor, intended to achieve at last the society his life has consistently failed to achieve. The interplay of confession and apology is definitive; so precarious and intermittent is his repossession of a historic world that "memoir" is almost irrelevant. Gide resembles Rousseau in his determination to reveal the "secret" of his life as an "act of penance," but there is little apologetic impulse, and there is, intermittently, much of the commemorative passion of the memoirist in distinctive interaction with the confessional intention. Podhoretz resembles Rousseau, too, in confessing his public life around the "dirty little secret" of the desire for success; but memoiristic apology is strong. Like Rousseau, Goethe finds a confessional integrity in a prevalent tendency of his life: "All, therefore, that has been confessed by me, consists of fragments of a great confession; and this little book is an attempt which I have ventured on to render it complete" (I, 235). But this is confession to himself (or his daemon) of his creative relations with the natural and historic world, confession that achieves its end through memoir, the repossession of a rich and expansive experience. Spender's *World Within World* is a mixture of Rousseau and Goethe. But the apologetic intention evolves toward a confessional act of climactic political meaning. The book is as much concerned as Rousseau's with the precariousness of friendship, but the kind of relationship it chiefly defines is one we associate with memoir — personal integrity in a world of history, and what is confessed is a defiant personal balance of individuality and community.

Paradoxically, Newman the "apologist" writes in a situation closer to Rousseau's than the situations of Goethe, Spender, and Gide the "confessors." His initial intention seems closer too: he will replace the phantom deceiver in men's imagination with his truth. But just as his assumptions about personality and history differ, so his confessional-apologetic intention must evolve differently too. What is con-
fessed is the integrity or entelechy of that movement of his "living intelligence" — the "economy" — by which divine providence has revealed the "idea" of his unique personal history. The truth confessed is the immanent idea progressively revealed, quite beyond his foreknowledge or understanding — such is "history" for Newman, and in this is the apology for his life.

Malcolm X's apology is a curious analogue. Malcolm prophesies his own death, and predicts that "the white man, in his press, is going to identify me with 'hate.' He will make use of me dead, as he has made use of me alive, as a convenient symbol of 'hatred'" (381). Malcolm has intended throughout to offer his life as a mirror — and in this exemplary motive he differs from Newman. But the more personal intention has shown itself throughout in the resilient, open, loving man, the antithesis of hate, who has found and now recreates human value and vitality in each new world or underworld he entered. The result is vivid "memoir" with apologetic force, which, of course, he tries to deny: "I want to say before I go on that I have never previously told anyone my sordid past in detail. I haven't done it now to sound as though I might be proud of how bad, how evil, I was. But people are always speculating — why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth, must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality" (150). The Rousseauistic confessional intention persists, and with it a memoiristic richness of reminiscence, in spite of the apologetic intention of bearing witness to the power and goodness of Allah and the exemplary intention of telling the white man about himself and awakening the black man from his follies.

The evolving intentionality of any autobiography is complicated by an exemplary motive. Podhoretz's whimsical instructions to young writers are dramatically bound up with his apologetic memoir, just as Franklin's maxims and anecdotes mingle with other intentions: to initiate a dynastic chronicle for his posterity, a memoir for his own sense of achieved position, a personal history that will invitingly illustrate the fortunes of his young country. Adams proposes to "fit young men, in universities or elsewhere, to be men of the world" (x); he asserts that "knowledge of human nature is the beginning and end of political education" (180), but he has discovered human nature to be "sheer chaos" (153). He insists the book is education (though he never found education), not history, and not temperament (243). But it is evidently a vividly temperamental last adventure in search of education, and it surely moves through and culminates in a vision of modern history. In his exemplary life, Mill identifies three intentions at the outset, confesses an ulterior propagandistic intention in a
letter to his wife, and perhaps reveals others as the original intentions are complicated in interplay. He will record an “unusual and remarkable education”; he will show the successive phases of a mind always pressing forward, achieving intellectual selfhood. “But a motive which weighs more with me than either of these, is a desire to make acknowledgment of the debts which my intellectual and moral development owes to other persons” (1) — most emphatically the person of James Mill, who exemplifies a method and a principle of intellectual individuality, and the person of Harriet Mill, who embodies the fusion of intellectual individuality and imaginative power to which Mill aspires in vain, except insofar as he manifests it in his recreation of other persons. Thus the commemorative-memoiristic motive threatens to overwhelm the apologetic-exemplary one, and in this evolving drama of intention the book acquires its meaning.

To put the static classification of autobiography by “intention” to a final test, consider the present ambiguous status of the “kind” called memoir. If memoir is the personal record of historic events and persons, every autobiography contains some memoir. If memoir is the autobiographical search for the historicity of the self, memoir is scarcely avoidable. But to say that some autobiographies are too much memoir to be “true autobiography” is something else. Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia and Mailer’s Armies of the Night are retrospective personal accounts of events that are unique and cataclysmic experiences in historic lives, significant parts of their writers’ lives. Each “centers its chief attention on the life of the author as it was lived” (Mandel, 222). It will not do to insist that this “chief attention” must slight the representativeness of the author as witness. It will not do to object that “autobiography proper” gives the wholeness of a life; many autobiographers do not do so, and anyway, an autobiographer may choose to reveal or collect the “wholeness” of his life around one central or cataclysmic event or influence or relationship. Nor can we say that one who is the observer of, rather than a major participant in, his personal history writes memoir rather than autobiography. Adams’s autobiography is the history of an (unwilling) observer, and Lawrence of Arabia, whose Seven Pillars of Wisdom is allegedly not “true autobiography,” could not write a personal history of a significant segment of his life except as a confessional or apologetic participant. Had Orwell written a “true autobiography,” it would undoubtedly have been less “autobiographical” than a “memoir” by Spender or Newman or Mailer. What Malraux calls Anti-Memoirs is more “memoir” than “autobiography” for autobiographical reasons, as we have seen. George Kennan entitles Memoirs a book which he
then describes as “primarily . . . an intellectual autobiography” (63) and manifestly intends as apology.

Memoir is not a kind of autobiography, but, like confession and apology, a kind of autobiographical intention. Autobiographers share certain intentions in varying degrees and in numerous distinctive patterns of interaction. Rather than deducing fixed expectations from distinctions of intentional “kind,” we should try to see how — why — with what effect distinct intentions evolve and interplay in individual autobiographies. In the same way we should observe and interpret dynamic distinctions of form and evolutions and conflicts of personal focus, as the individual autobiographer wrestles with options of truth and integrity in the recovery of his personal history. The correlation of our observations and interpretations would seem to be the most promising way to the recognition of meaning and value. When such recognitions of individual autobiographies have accumulated and undergone testing and sorting, then and only then will it be possible to make real and meaningful descriptive generalizations about the historical development of modern autobiography. And when, at last, such a “new literary history” of autobiography has been undertaken, then critical judgment can be other than the facile prevention of appreciative understanding it often is at present.

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