

CAROLYN A. BARROS      **Figura, Persona, Dynamis:  
Autobiography and Change**

When we pick up an autobiography, what are our expectations? First, to encounter a person, to “read a life”—Giambattista Vico, St. Teresa, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Vladimir Nabokov. And we assume, implicitly at least, that this “life” will be an account that traces the significant changes that this life-experience entails. Autobiography is about change, about a series of transformations, and this is an expectation we bring to any autobiographical text.

As a text of a “life,” autobiography equivalently makes an affirmation by the writer: “I was not always as I now am.” It presents the “before” and “after” of individuals who have undergone transformations of some kind. These transformations may be slight—Ruskin in *Praeterita* is simply changed from novice tourist to sophisticated traveller; or monumental—Bunyan in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is transformed from sinner to saint; Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* progresses from slave status to free woman. The transformations may be incremental—Montaigne changes each time he revises his *Essays*; or the transformation may be a quantum leap—Bertrand Russell, the boy who learned his multiplication tables in tears, comes to write *Principia Mathematica* and win a Nobel Prize.

The change typical of autobiographies is not simply the product of nature or time; it is presented as transformative, a significant mutation in the characteristic qualities and societal relationships of the principal

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persona. The text offers this metamorphosis emplotted, bounded, or framed by its language and inscribed in its configurations of words and images. Change is then the operative motive for autobiographical discourse.

Traditional critical approaches to the genre—historical, psychological, literary—in attempting to get at the nature of autobiography have not focused on the issue of transformation, on how change is manifested in a text, but on other aspects: verifiability of data, analytical insights, aesthetic quality. Obviously, each of these approaches presumes that transformation occurs in the text. The historian is attempting to verify the events of the life, and in so doing, looks at a dynamic series of events. The psychologist looks at the autobiography as representing a continuum of behaviors, and thus assumes some development in the personality. The litterateur, viewing the autobiography in terms of a dramatic or fictive principle in the life, assumes progress in the narrative. And more recently, literary critics who have blurred productively the boundaries of the genre by identifying poetic works like Eliot's *Four Quartets*, case histories like Freud's *Dora*, novels like Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, letters, diaries, family histories, and oral narratives (spoken and sung) as forms of autobiography, also assume change or transformation in the works. Even those critics who would deconstruct the autobiography out of existence assume a change: a presence which is demonstrably an absence.<sup>1</sup>

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY SAYS TRANSFORMATION

A primary feature of autobiography, then, is that “something is always happening.” Montaigne tells us in the *Essays*

I cannot keep my subject still. . . . I do not portray being: I portray passing. . . . My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences.<sup>2</sup>

Harriet Jacobs, in the preface to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, tells us that her narrative will be of incredible “adventures” and “sufferings.”<sup>3</sup> Edmund Gosse calls his autobiography “the record of a struggle between two temperaments, two consciences and almost two epochs,” ending “as was inevitable, in disruption.”<sup>4</sup> In Harriet Martineau's two-volume *Autobiography*, we find, preceding the discourse of the life, the “Contents” of the *Volumes*, a period-by-period listing of events, the “happenings” of the life in

abbreviated form, from “Tabulating Bible morals” to “Fatal illness” and “Home and preparation” for death.<sup>5</sup> Each of these autobiographies directly attests to the fact of transformation—that “something is always happening”—as their writers, early on, invite readers into their life experiences.

Even with such clear indication from the autobiographers themselves that autobiography is about change, theoretical and critical works have passed over or have failed to see transformation as central to autobiography. “One is unable,” as Wittgenstein reminds us, “to notice something because it is always before one’s eyes.” While we may not find the centrality of transformation in much of the criticism, there are two notable exceptions: Jean Starobinski’s *Montaigne in Motion*, an extraordinary work that shows Montaigne as “a spirited mind” that “never stops within itself,” and Paul John Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography*, which contends, with Sartre, that the “alternative to narrative motion is death.” Janet Varner Gunn’s *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience*, Susanna Egan’s *Patterns of Experience*, and Gordon O. Taylor’s *Chapters of Experience* focus on “experience,” and thus imply that “things happen” or change. Additionally, critical works that discuss the “myth” or “version” of the self like Stuart L. Charmé’s *Meaning and Myth in the Study of Lives: A Sartrean Perspective*, Shirley C. Neuman’s *Some One Myth: Yeats’ Autobiographical Prose*, James Olney’s *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, in drawing analogies between the events or happenings in autobiographers’ lives with those of myth, catalog transformation. Being less concerned with change and more concerned with the pattern of the myth, however, they focus on how meaning is made and enhanced by invocation of myth.<sup>6</sup>

All in all, it seems impossible to conceive of autobiography without considering that it entails change, or of an autobiographical criticism that does not, in one way or another, assume or speak to the centrality of transformation. Jean Starobinski addresses the significance of transformation in an early essay, “The Style of Autobiography,” which he later develops more fully in his work on Montaigne:

If such a change had not affected the life of the narrator he could merely depict himself once and for all, and new developments would be treated as external (historical) events; . . . a narrator in the first person would hardly continue to be necessary. It is the internal transformation of the individual—and the exemplary character of this transformation—that furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which “I” is both subject and object.<sup>7</sup>

While we might disagree with Starobinski that all autobiographical transformations are internal (remembering those like Stein and Barthes, who are determined that they be otherwise) or that they are necessarily exemplary (recalling Genet and Nabokov), we could agree that where there are no significant developments or life-change experiences, there is no autobiography.

If autobiography is to be viewed in terms of what it characterizes—transformation—and how it characterizes this life-change experience, we cannot view it as case study or as documentary evidence. We must look at what it “says.” And ultimately, if autobiography is to be viewed in terms of what it “means,” we must discover its contribution to the discourse, discourse here meaning all texts as they presuppose a speaker and an auditor, and as Starobinski notes, after Emile Benveniste, “in the first named, an intention of influencing the second in some way.”<sup>8</sup> To these ends I propose a new approach to the genre, a heuristic approach that is flexible enough to deal with the traditional or canonical forms of autobiography as well as the forms recently taken into the genre that have enlarged our understanding of its boundaries and the innovative forms that are emerging. The study of autobiography, in contrast to a well-defined problem with a correct answer, is problematic and ill defined. This heuristic approach is an attempt at a grammar for autobiography, a workable yet flexible base out of which further critical study can proceed.<sup>9</sup>

Three rhetorical perspectives comprise the heuristic approach set out in this essay: the perspective of persona or subject of the transformation, the perspective of figura or mode and ground of the transformation, and the perspective of dynamis or motive of the transformation. Each is dependent on and assumes the others. From these three perspectives I will investigate the nature and method of autobiography. The rhetorical/heuristic approach does not prejudge the text by assimilating it to other genres, but investigates its functioning elements. It attempts to examine the language, images, and structures of the text as they constitute the life-change experience as it is presented. The three rhetorical perspectives, as they are ways of exploring autobiography, are conceptual “starting places”; they are not final destinations.

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY SAYS TRANSFORMATION AS PERSONA

As rhetorical concept, persona is the subject of the action. The personae or characters in an inscribed text are generally thought of as agents or actors, that is, as forces for movement. We speak about character

development, the growth of the persona, the fall of the hero. With autobiography, it is not so simple; much of contemporary autobiographical criticism centers around problems with this persona or “self” of the text—“which ‘I’ is the ‘I’ of the autobiography?” “Eye for I,” the “disappearing I,” the “recounting I,” and “dummy ego” are descriptions that provoke discussions of the problem.<sup>10</sup> Patricia Spacks’s *Imagining a Self*, James Olney’s *Metaphors of Self*, and John Morris’s *Versions of the Self* are concerned with explaining this aspect of autobiography. These works have increased our understanding of autobiography substantially by pointing out that the self of autobiography is a construct, a persona, not *the* person. For example, when Morris speaks of a “version” of the self, he is assuming that the self of autobiography is a form, a rendering, an account of the self that can take many shapes or “versions.” When Spacks’s study posits the self as “imagined” or “imaged,” she is indicating, again, that the self appears in autobiography as a creation. When Olney contends that Carl Jung’s “metaphor of self” is “myth,” he is arguing that Jung both saw his life and inscribed that life in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* as “myth.”<sup>11</sup>

While this perspective of the self as construct has advanced our understanding of the genre, it has also added to our confusion. The confusion derives from the unnecessary collapsing of all of autobiography’s images and metaphors into those of the self. As a beginning point for clearing up some of the confusion, we must separate the “metaphors of self” from the metaphors that suggest mode and motive of transformation. As construct, persona exists in the text as sets of “before” and “after” characteristics or qualities: referring back to earlier examples, Bunyan—“sinner,” “saint”; Ruskin—“naive,” “sophisticated”; Jacobs—“slave,” “free”; Russell—“tearful school boy,” “Nobel-prize-winning mathematician.” While there can be no argument that an autobiography’s persona (self), figura (mode), and dynamis (motive) share a network of images and metaphors that make for its coherence, it is necessary to separate them out if we are to untangle the confusion that continues to attend on the criticism and relieve the “self” or persona of autobiography of bearing *total* responsibility in explaining the genre. This is what is “new” about the approach I take toward autobiography. In positing a comprehensive set of rhetorical perspectives on the genre, I am assuming: 1) that from inside a text we can “see from” or talk about only one perspective at a time; 2) that it is advantageous to view the autobiography from the perspective of the persona of the transformation before attempting to deal with the figura and the dynamis of the life-change experience; 3)

that once autobiography has been viewed from each of these perspectives in turn, perhaps we will be able to describe “what” and “how” it “says” and come to some conclusions as to what it might “mean,” what it contributes to the discourse, and (a reminder); 4) the perspectives are heuristic, exploratory; they are *ways* of seeing inside the autobiography; they do not render absolutes.

So, back to persona. While Rousseau, as autobiographer, may have suffered from anxiety over being “fixed” in a text, the “self” of an inscribed discourse inevitably exists in the text as persona. The metaphorical nature of the term “persona” itself should not be overlooked. The “mask” equivalent from the Latin has quite different connotations from persona as it is used here. “Mask” implies that there is a real identity hidden behind the appearance. Persona, on the other hand, implies a medium of transmission which does not assume the reality-appearance dichotomy. In the dramatic context the persona/mask is the reality (the voiced words constitute the character). With autobiography it is the same. Persona is metaphor for the inscribed self of the text; it is neither guise nor facade.<sup>12</sup> In autobiography we have, on the one hand, the “before” persona, and on the other, the “after” or transformed persona. The two aspects of the persona—before and after—differ in that they represent two different sets of psychic qualities. These roles or aspects represent the *termina* of the transformation—*a quo* and *ad quem*. They also provide the *continuity* demanded by the action of transformation. These sets of characteristics or qualities of the persona are static, not dynamic; they proclaim that the persona has been transformed, but not how or why. They function, then, as the subject and object of transformation. The two aspects of the persona—old and new—affirm that 1) transformation was possible (because it happened), and 2) that the new persona is the same as the old; that is, the persona is a continuum; it is the *old* persona who is transformed into the *new*.<sup>13</sup> This is not to suggest that these before and after aspects force a coherence or unity on the persona, but rather, that while the state of the persona may range from psychic unity to fragmentation and disjunction, the persona remains, throughout the multitude of life-change experiences, the selfsame “I” of the text. We note that in the *Confessions* Rousseau characterizes himself first as adventuresome youth and last as misunderstood social reformer. Abelard describes his “was” persona, in the *Story of My Misfortunes*, as an afflicted master teacher and his “is” persona as a persecuted and calumniated cleric. In *Father and Son* Edmund Gosse depicts his “before” persona as dutiful son, his “after” persona as skeptical agnostic. Charles Darwin is at

first a boyish beetle collector, and at the end of the *Autobiography*, an acclaimed naturalist. John Stuart Mill is first “Reasoning Machine,” then humanistic philosopher. Newman’s “before” persona of the *Apolo-  
logia Pro Vita Sua* is Anglican; his “after” persona is Catholic Cardinal. Gertrude Stein is first “Alice B. Toklas’s Gertrude Stein” and last, a collage of all those artists who comprise her existence, “everybody’s” Gertrude Stein.

Are these sets of characteristics or pairs of metaphors the only ones that can be discovered in the autobiographies? While they are some of the more obvious, they should not be considered as “final words” for the self; but rather, these characterizations or “names” may be seen as starting places for further study of the self as it is inscribed in the autobiography. Additionally, while there are those autobiographers who perceive and present themselves in terms of clearly “either/or selves” (sinner/saint, slave/free), the “before” and “after” configurations of the personae need not necessarily imply that all autobiographers give themselves only two names. Rather, many autobiographers, seeing their various selves as ranging along the entire “before” and “after” continuum, give themselves a multitude of names. Rousseau names himself “child of nature,” “playwright,” “opera composer,” “botanist,” “novelist,” and “misunderstood social reformer.”

The persona (constituted by its various characteristics) is a set of attributes that define and describe; while they imply transformation, they do not themselves change; rather, the persona represents the subject that undergoes change and the object that results from it. Aristotle reminds us in *The Poetics* that the *dramatis personae* are constituted by qualities, not action. In summary, to view the autobiography from the perspective of the persona is to understand that

- 1) Persona exists in the autobiography as sets of imaged characteristics, traits, qualities that may be either explicit or implicit.
- 2) Persona provides the terminal aspects of transformation through a “was” and “is” configuration of these sets of characteristics.
- 3) Persona serves as subject for the action of the text and the object of transformation.

Given that these sets of “before” and “after” characteristics mark out and affirm that the persona has changed from “old” to “new,” we are now at a point where we can investigate transformation from a second rhetorical perspective, that of the *figura* or mode of transformation, as it is implied by the persona and configured by the words, images, and events of the text.

Since both the persona and the figura of transformation share a network of words, images, and metaphors, it is easy to see how discussions of the inscribed self of the text can blur into discussions of the figura or mode of transformation. Taking care to keep them distinct for the moment, we can now ask, “How does autobiography describe and explain the life-change experience of the text?” “How does autobiography ‘say’ transformation through the figura?”

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY SAYS TRANSFORMATION AS FIGURA

While both John Stuart Mill and Harriet Martineau were Victorian political philosophers, there are distinctive differences in the life-change experiences inscribed in each of their autobiographies. Rousseau’s *Confessions* characterize his transformation quite differently from the way that Augustine’s *Confessions* characterize his. Black Elk “speaks” a different sort of life experience from the one that Fanny Crosby “sings” through her hymns of a saved life (perhaps not quite so different; it is interesting to note that like Crosby, Black Elk was converted; he was, in fact, baptized and became a Roman Catholic catechist, but Niehardt fails to mention this). If all life-change experiences were configured in the same way, we would hardly trouble to read them; yet, in our anxiousness to make sense of things, we often speak of transformation in the most general terms, as following mythological or universal patterns: quest, journey, initiation, redemption, gnosis. And we are aware that many autobiographers, particularly the earlier ones, employed these models to make sense of their lives and to present those lives to others. While the use of pattern or myth may be one very productive way to study autobiography (spoken, written, or sung), this approach tends to move us away from the unique, individual experience that identifies or “fits” a particular autobiographer with world and reader through text, and tends to herd the self, text, and reader into a pattern of action where signification is predetermined. Seeing autobiography (from the perspective of writer *or* reader) solely in terms of pattern or myth severely limits the scope of the autobiographical enterprise. In contrast, viewing autobiography from the perspective of the figura or mode of transformation allows us to read each life-change experience as both idiosyncratic and historical (in terms of what Peter Brooks calls the inner and outer narrative or “case history within history”<sup>14</sup>), as the singular (not single) transformation of a self in a time and place, and as it is voiced, figured, or emplotted.

*Figura* in its Latin context encompasses the notions of “figure of speech,” “visual image,” “emblem.” As rhetorical concept, in terms of

autobiography, figura is a metaphor that encapsulates, implicitly and potentially, the mode and ground of transformation that an autobiography describes (“mode” here suggesting type of transformation; “ground” implying its bases, locus, limits). Two contemporary notions may help in understanding how the figura functions: Kenneth Burke’s “representative anecdote” and Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s “frames.”

We might first think of the figura in somewhat the same way that Herrnstein Smith speaks of the “enclosures,” “frames,” “stages,” “versification,” and “pedestals” that keep us from mistaking art for nature. She suggests that it is not actual experience that surrounds a fictive work, but rather a frame which, like the painting, is itself created. With regard to her own work on poetry she concludes that it is “by virtue of the enclosure that the poem achieves its amplitude and infinitude.” Both the poem and versification are constituted objects.<sup>15</sup> The figura of autobiography, in Herrnstein Smith’s terms, would be the constituted boundary for the text. Figura is that and more. It not only provides the structure within which the other aspects of the text reside, it is also ground for the explanation of the transformation in the text.

Figura may be understood to function somewhat like Burke’s representative anecdote in that it both summarizes the terms of the transformation and implies the process. Similar to the first musical statement in a baroque piece,

the informative [representative] anecdote, we would say, contains *in nuce* the terminological structure that is evolved in conformity with it. Such a terminology is a “conclusion” that follows from the selection of a given anecdote. Thus the anecdote is in a sense a summation containing implicitly what the system that is developed from it contains explicitly.<sup>16</sup>

Here Burke is saying that the representative anecdote is both instigation and summation. As instigation a meaning system and terminology are developed from the anecdote; at the same time, the anecdote stands as summation of the very system it has initiated. Like the representative anecdote, the figura implies a unity, serves as a metaphor of that unity, and invites and makes possible participation in its vision. The figura contains all the elements of the system that it represents; unlike the representative anecdote, however, these elements are not explicit in the figura. The anecdote is representative, and as such, can function at a literal and representative level. A grammar, in Burke’s terms, can be developed from it. The figura, on the other hand, does not function

at a literal level; it is metaphorical; its resonances are multivalent. It would be difficult to extract or evolve a system out of such ambiguity, but it is just that ambiguity that makes for the potential of the figura.

The figura aids in the general validation or understanding of the transformation, while this general understanding is aided, in turn, by those individual images, metaphors, events, and actions (events and actions being both the “what happens” in the autobiography—Augustine’s stealing the pears—and linguistic events—Augustine’s speaking to God) as they comprise the figura. The figura is not to be understood as a pattern superimposed on the work by the reader, nor as literary device consciously applied by the autobiographer to give the work its coherence; it is neither myth nor tool.<sup>17</sup> Tool, pattern, myth would imply that each of the elements of the work fits together neatly at both a literal and a mythical level. The figura, on the other hand, is specific to the unique transformation of a particular autobiography. It is, as Mikhail Bakhtin would say, heteroglossic, dialogical—in “the language of the everyday” and of the author.<sup>18</sup> Within the boundary of the figura its many voicings, words, images, and metaphors may well be at odds, since it is locus for the contraries and tensions of the text and since it is enclosure and potential for the transformation. This is the value of exploring the autobiography from the perspective of figura. In mirroring the hermeneutic process, the figura requires that we move back and forth continually between the whole and the parts that comprise and are bounded by it as we come to understand the transformation experiences.

The figura, as it encapsulates, summarizes, and grounds the notion of change in autobiography, must be a metaphor that “names” the transformation. That is why “economy” works as a suitable figura for John Henry Cardinal Newman’s transformation in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. It works to explain Newman’s transformation in the same way that “pilgrimage” works for Bunyan, as “vision” does for Augustine, as “unfolding” does for Vico, as “re-education” does for Mill, and as “evolution” does for Darwin. The configuration of images that characterizes the mode of John Bunyan’s transformation from sinner to saint describes change in terms of a pilgrimage, a long, lonely journey (with his wife and children crying after him to return), where “I could not rest content until I did not come to some certain knowledge whether I had faith or no.”<sup>19</sup>

The images and events that characterize and explain John Stuart Mill’s transformation from reasoning machine to humanistic political philosopher suggest a “conversion” experience. But unlike the reli-

gious transformations of Augustine and Bunyan, Mill's conversion is the conversion of "re-education." Within the figura of re-education, references to the unusual and rigorous intellectual training provided by Mill's father are displaced by images that suggest a new sort of education. These sets of images clash against each other, "old" mentality, "new" mentality—father and son. Following the re-education experience, Mill is ready to "unlearn" a deference to logic and learn appreciation for poetry. Converted from Utilitarian to Romantic, he must now unlearn total dependence on the intellect and learn reliance on the imagination.<sup>20</sup>

"Survival of the fittest," "natural selection," and "struggle for existence" are metaphors that Charles Darwin uses to explain both his theory of species and his own development as a scientist. Taken together they describe transformation as a gradual evolution. "Evolution" is Darwin's summative word for change; it is used, as well, as the "instigating" term or ground of the change; and finally, "evolution" serves as boundary or frame for the self-portrait.

Within the framework of evolution, Darwin's development is described in terms of his "innate capacity" working in concert with the "wonderfully complex and changing circumstances" of the environment. In relating his early capacities for science, Darwin tells of his youthful experiences with bug-collecting; he tells how, with a beetle in both hands, his youthful zeal caused him to pop one of the beetles into his mouth so as to free a hand to grab another specimen; the taste was so acrid and stinging that he spit out the first beetle and lost all three. In relating the "wonderful . . . circumstances" of his environment, he tells of his early exposure to famous scientists in his own home; he walked and talked with great men of science like John Stevens Henslow, Charles Lyell, Adam Sedgwick, Joseph Hooker, and Thomas Huxley. He tells of the opportunities afforded him to explore the natural world—from his first geological expedition in North Wales to his famous *Beagle* voyage to the Galapagos. In contrast to this wealth of personal resources and his rich environment, Darwin speaks of his deficiencies; of his musical talent he recounts: "I was utterly destitute of an ear, cannot perceive a discord, or keep time or hum a tune correctly." Darwin's innate capacities lead in directions other than the artist. He is to become an acclaimed naturalist, not a concert pianist. There are limits to Darwin's development, then, and those limits are circumscribed by the figura of evolution as it incorporates the notion of "innate capacity" within its boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

To return to Newman, the operative metaphors dealing with the

gradual transformation from Anglican to Catholic in the *Apologia* cluster around the idea of “economy”: “new assemblage of possibilities,” “dispensations of the Eternal,” “gradual disclosure.” They communicate a sense of spiritual progress that is brought on by the slow but steady disclosure of God’s working in history. As Newman partakes of and participates in this divine economy, he is transformed from Anglican apologist to Catholic Cardinal. “Economy” functions as ground for the process of transformation in the *Apologia* and is the figure or image of this transformation. It is through the metaphor of economy that Newman “makes sense of previous occurrences and forecasts events yet to be revealed.”<sup>22</sup>

The Principle of economy is familiarly acted upon among us every day. When we would persuade others, we do not begin by treading on their toes. Men would be thought rude who introduce their own religious notions into mixed society, and were devotional in a drawing-room. Have we never thought lawyers tiresome who did *not* observe this polite rule, who came down for the assizes and talked law all through dinner?<sup>23</sup>

For Newman “economy” is both workable and good manners! As metaphor, economy presents a picture of what Newman’s text is/can/will be about. It is a rhetorical figure that encapsulates or “images” the transformation. As metaphor or figure for the process of transformation in the text, economy identifies the type of transformation experienced by the persona and stands as ground and explanation of the transformation.

Pilgrimage, re-education, unfolding, evolution, economy—the concept of figura encompasses both the figure of speech and the visual image that stands behind it as generative and aggregate. Are these the only figural perspectives that can be taken with the autobiographies discussed above? As with the persona, the figura is heuristic; it is but *one* way of getting at how the autobiography says transformation. We could, just as readily, explore Newman’s autobiography from the perspective of the figura of “development,” drawing on both the general sense Newman gives us of the nature of his transformation and on the title of his major treatise, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, as its construction bears heavily on his transformation from Anglican to Catholic. Both terms, “economy” and “development,” reside in the text as summative and generative. We as readers may see the latter as more general, the former as more specific in terms of Newman’s own understanding of his religious transformation and as it is shared in the “language of the everyday”—household “economy” (the

picture in the Greek is one of setting a household in order, straightening up the room), and in the language of commerce—via Malthus and Adam Smith.

There is, then, no one *right* figura for an autobiography. As heuristic, figura can be seen to participate in those understandings we derive from “old stories,” yet its potential both precedes and goes far beyond that of pattern and myth.

To summarize its nature and functions:

- 1) Figura consists of images, words, not abstractions, that function as tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony. (The figura may *seem* to be an abstraction; I am here calling attention to the image under the word; evolution—to *roll on*, conversion—to *turn around*, economy—to *set in order*.)
- 2) It involves the notions of reduction and representation; it is what the text is about. It summarizes emblematically the action or events it describes. It is the idea of the text drawn small and so states a part/whole relationship. Conversely, it is the idea of the text drawn large; it is the place of signification and so is a whole/part relationship.
- 3) It provides definition; that is, it sets the boundaries of the text by providing a context for the elements of the work.
- 4) As extended through the text, it serves as structure or design for the discourse, establishing relations between the several elements of the work. It is the locus of the assumptions and contraries of the text.

Given that we have taken care to distinguish between the configuration of metaphors and images that constitutes the transformation “type” or figura (“pilgrimage,” “re-education,” “evolution,” “economy”) from the qualities and characteristics or names of the persona (“beetle collector,” “naturalist,” “sinner,” “saint,” “slave,” “free,” “Anglican,” “Catholic”) we are able to see how autobiography “says” transformation from two unique and distinct perspectives. We may conclude that while it is inappropriate here to ask (as do the historians), “Did the actual personage go through a change exactly as the autobiography describes it?” or “Is there really such a thing as personality change?” (as perhaps the psychological critic might), we have answered the question of how the autobiography characterizes the transformation or life-change experience of the persona within the rhetorically constructed context of the figura.

Having answered this question, we are led, quite naturally, to a

related one: “How does the persona, within the surround of the figura change from ‘was’ to ‘is?’ ” In other words, what is the dynamis, the force, power, or motive that accounts for transformation in autobiography? Answering this question will require that we investigate autobiography from a third rhetorical perspective, that of its dynamis. On completing this investigation we will have examined heuristically “what” and “how” autobiography “says” through a comprehensive set of rhetorical perspectives: persona, figura, and dynamis. We will move, then, in the concluding section, to a discussion of what autobiography might mean, or to the final question of this exploratory or heuristic approach to the genre, “What is autobiography’s unique contribution to the discourse?”

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY SAYS TRANSFORMATION AS DYNAMIS

Exploring the autobiography from the perspective of dynamis—beginning with Augustine, who sees God as the transforming force or dynamis of his life, and concluding with Roland Barthes, who insists that writing is itself the transforming dynamis—we discover a variety of attributions that account for or “say” transformation in autobiography. To attribute transformation to the dynamis is to recognize the metaphors that suggest the motive for transformation; “something is always happening” in the text, and that “something” reveals the operation of motive forces that account for transformation.

And Thou knowest how far Thou has already changed me who first healest me of the lust of vindicating myself, that so Thou mightest *forgive all the rest of my iniquities, and heal all my infirmities and redeem my life from corruption, and crown me with mercy and pity, and satisfy my desire with good things* who didst curb my pride with thy fear, and tame my neck to Thy Yoke.<sup>24</sup>

The text of St. Augustine’s *Confessions* ascribes transformation to the gracious action of God, who changed him from boyhood thief to “Perfected” and “Preserved” of the Lord. It is God who is to be praised for precipitating every event that brings Augustine closer and closer to Him.

In his autobiography Giambattista Vico contends that the development of human nature and the unfolding of history are the same. He concludes that the stages of development—the age of gods, the age of heroes, the age of men—correspond to the stages of language, institutions, forms of knowing, and to the history of his own transformation. All these changes are attributed to “providence.” God’s providence is responsible for both the intrinsic order of things and the ability to

know this order; the events of the life are corollary to this notion of history, and, thus, as unfolding according to a providentially determined structure. Autobiographies prior to Vico's had spoken of conversions, crises, visions—"one-time" experiences of transformation. These attributions are rejected in the Vico text; transformation is actualized by a providential power that is slowly opening out to its God-given potential. Thus, in terms of this study, the figura of Vico's autobiography is the harmonious unfolding of macrocosm and microcosm. The persona is presented as "folded" and "unfolded" and the underlying force or dynamis of transformation is imaged in the providence of God.

To look at the dynamic aspect of the process of transformation, to understand and account for the transforming action between the old and new persona, is to view the text from the perspective of "dynamis." Barrett Mandel uses the word "dynamis" to describe that aspect of a work that shapes the choice of personae and the form of autobiography. For Mandel the dynamis is the "governing focus," the "organizing principle," the "synthesizing purpose" of the autobiography. Here, it seems to me, Mandel collapses mode (what I call figura) with the motive or force of transformation into a single aspect, dynamis. Given his use of the term, the critic's job would be to examine to what extent the narrative voice is consonant or dissonant with this dynamis.<sup>25</sup>

The term dynamis has, etymologically, a wider sense. The Greeks gave dynamis at least seven senses: 1) dynamis is power of might, bodily strength—both of one's own and outward power; 2) dynamis is faculty, capacity, agency, art or craft, potency; 3) dynamis is the power, force, or meaning of a work; 4) it is capability; it is the opposite of actuality; 5) it is mathematical power, exponential; 6) it is the actuation of divine power; 7) it is manifestation of divine power, miracle. In the Latin dynamis was used in the mathematical sense as exponential power and to mean "store," "plenty." These definitions of dynamis offer an astounding range; I borrow something from all the above notions to characterize that force or power that rhetorically accounts for the transformation of the persona within the autobiography. The persona, within the surround of the figura, is transformed through the potential, capacity, agency, power of the dynamis. An imaged construct—for Vico, "providence," for Augustine, "God," for John Stuart Mill, the "imagination," for John Henry Cardinal Newman, the "Living Intelligence"—conveys the idea of the dynamis of transformation in these autobiographies. While the assumptions underlying the

notion of transformation cannot be demonstrated outside the figura, the point here is that transformation through the power of a dynamis is *assumed* within the boundaries of the figura.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, within the figura of a confessional, is transformed from adventuresome youth to misunderstood social reformer.

In the storm which has since broken over my head, my books served as a pretense, but it was against my person that every shaft was directed. My persecutors gave themselves but little concern about the author, but they wished to ruin Jean Jacques.<sup>26</sup>

Rousseau's *Confessions* assert that, given a less flawed universe, the reformer would have accomplished much. The persona, however, becomes so concerned with self-justification, aggrandizement, and vindication that the powerful dynamis of individual potential is displaced by personal ethos.

Roland Barthes in his autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, constructs an ironic figura—Roland Barthes himself (his memories, experiences, and expressions)—to serve as metaphor for the process of writing, textual transformation. “Barthes” serves as figura in two senses. In the first instance he is the focus of the text. Roland Barthes's body (mind and sensations) serves as a reservoir of experience, memory, and initial image-repertoire. In the second instance it is the scene of displacement. The text pushes against the stereotype, the old image-repertoire, toward a new textuality. The “life”/“autobiography” of Roland Barthes (figura) is actualized through the dynamis of writing (text production). At the same time, the “new” Barthes, the persona, exists as text.

The image-repertoire will therefore be closed at the onset of productive life (which for me was my departure from the sanatorium). Another repertoire will then be constituted: that of writing. And for that repertoire to be displaced (as is the intention of this book) without ever being hampered, validated, justified by the representation of an individual with a private life and a civil status, for the repertoire to be free of its own, never figurative signs, the text will follow without images, except for those of the hand that writes.<sup>27</sup>

Barthes hopes, through the writing, to constitute a new repertoire that is not coterminous with the images of childhood, but that will correspond only to writing itself. The writer, the “was” aspect of the persona, within the figura of autobiography, creates a new life that “is” the text. The dynamis of writing proceeds by means of two movements:

the *straight line* (advance, increase, insistence of an ideal, a position, a preference, an image) and the *zig zag* (reversal, contradiction, reactive energy, denial, contrariety, the movement of a Z, the letter of deviance).<sup>28</sup>

The figura is ironic; the dynamic is deconstructive; the “life” becomes the life of the text.

The autobiographies mentioned above display, as we as readers discover, a wide range of attributions or motives for change: dynamis is “God,” “providence,” “Living Intelligence,” “imagination,” “writing.” Each assumes that change is possible and characterizes the dynamic quality of that change through a unique construct that is rhetorically constituted within the boundaries implied by its figura and persona. In viewing the autobiography from the perspective of the dynamis, we might summarize its nature and function in the following ways:

- 1) Dynamis, an abstraction, a relationship, or an image, is the power, force, potency (of and in the autobiography) to which transformation is attributed.
- 2) It is the dynamic aspect of the autobiography.
- 3) Dynamis “exists” in the text as a construct of the relationships established by the figura as those relationships imply action, movement, change. (I use “exists” metaphorically here. As with the perspective of persona and figura, perceiving the autobiography as dynamis is an interpretive act between writer and reader that converges in the text.)
- 4) Dynamis moves the text by reflection and extension. Turned in on itself the dynamis twice convinces: first by the “memory” as it is rhetorically constituted in the “was” persona, and again through “reflection” as it is rhetorically constituted in the “is” persona. As extended, the dynamis specifies and elaborates the power for change.

#### HOW DOES AUTOBIOGRAPHY MEAN?

In the foregoing we examined what autobiography says and how autobiography speaks. We assumed 1) that in autobiography “something is always happening,” 2) that the presentation of these experiences may take many forms: oral—spoken and sung— or written—traditional and non-traditional, 3) that as the autobiography is introduced into the discourse, it presupposes a speaker and an auditor, with the former intending to influence the latter in some way, 4) and that as discourse,

we can take a rhetorical approach (as opposed, or in addition to, psychological, historical, literary) to make sense of what autobiography says. We might now concur that autobiography “says” transformation through the rhetorical aspects of persona, figura, and dynamis. Having applied a rhetorical/heuristic approach that attempts to be a comprehensive system for investigating autobiography to get at “what” and “how,” it “says,” we are now in a position to consider how autobiography might “mean.” Stated another way, the final question of this heuristic exploration becomes, “What is autobiography’s place in or unique contribution to the discourse?”

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY CONTRIBUTES TRANSFORMATION TO A CORPUS

Just as my Accuser asks, “What, then, does Dr. Newman mean?” . . . I reflected, and I saw a way out of my perplexity. Yes, I said to myself, his very question is about my *meaning*: “What does Dr. Newman mean?”<sup>29</sup>

It is one of the major contentions of this essay that autobiography adds the dimension of transformation to the body of texts that are signified by the “persona” that names the corpus. What do *we* mean when we say “Newman” or “Newman says, ‘thus and so?’ ” If we adopt an historical approach, we would mean the actual Newman and his actions. We would speak of Newman in terms of his historically documentable activities and accomplishments. If we take a psychological approach, we would mean Newman as a complex psyche. We would speak of Newman’s activities and attitudes in terms of their psychological causes. The approach of this essay suggests another, quite different sense; for the literary critic or the general reader “Newman” means a body of texts. “Newman” stands metonymically for the corpus of his works, as shorthand for *Idea of a University*, *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, and *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. The “Name” is, in this sense, the corpus.

Autobiography provides a model of what we mean when we say that “Newman” initiates a dialogue of transformation and establishes a place for himself in the discourse community. We are not simply speaking of a historical Newman pleading for his reinstatement into the society of nineteenth-century Englishmen or his acceptance into the Roman Catholic community. Here it is, rather, that the autobiographical persona, as it is an aspect of “Newman” (the corpus of his works), serves to establish Newman’s place in the discourse. The autobiography of *Apologia* is “Newman’s Newman,” the rhetorically constituted and transformed persona of the corpus.

The *Apologia* adds a dimension to our reading of Newman's corpus that is not available in the other texts. Without the autobiography his corpus consists mainly of theological or philosophical works, and the criteria which are applied to these works are generally the criteria of these disciplines. We do not apply such standards to the autobiography; the *Apologia* does not contribute disciplinary material, as such, to the corpus. It is neither theology nor philosophy. It offers a perspective that cannot be presented in Newman's disciplinary treatises, and perhaps this is one of the reasons why Newman insisted that the *Apologia* always stand as Volume I in any collected edition of his works. Thus, we can, because we have Newman's *Apologia*, understand the change that occurred between the *Via Media* and *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. We can, on reading Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography*, understand the exigences that led her to make her "first appearance in print" with "Female Writers on Practical Divinity" and those changes that saw her work conclude in *Positive Philosophy*, articles for the "Daily News," and the *Atkinson Letters*. We can, on reading Darwin's *Autobiography*, understand how he came to change his practice of science from that described in his first paper to the Plinian Society on the "Ova of Flustra" in 1826 to that described in his monumental work on the *Origin of Species* in 1859.

We can, on reading John Stuart Mill's autobiography, discover that:

The experiences of this period had two very marked effects on my opinions and character. In the first place, they led me to adopt a theory of life, very unlike that on which I had before acted, and having much in common with . . . the anti-self consciousness theory of Carlyle. . . . Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on . . . the happiness of others. . . . The other important change which my opinions at this time underwent, was that I, for the first time, gave proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual.<sup>30</sup>

Most of Mill's writings belong to the set of texts that comprise political philosophy: *Principles of Political Economy*, *On Liberty*, *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, to mention only a few. These treatises contribute important political material to the discourse. A comparison of these texts illustrates that changes have occurred in Mill's political thought. They give evidence that he shifted from a Utilitarian philosophy of government to an organic one. They suggest that once Mill discovered the limitations of Utilitarianism, he shifted from one paradigm of political philosophy to another. Though the reader can, and indeed must, infer that Mill changes his position, these texts illustrate

that a change has occurred, but do not advert to the changes explicitly, nor do they bother to elaborate the reasons. None of Mill's disciplinary texts explicate the transformation experience. It is from his autobiography that we come to understand the "important change" that led to his "giving proper place . . . to the internal culture of the individual" in his political system. The *Autobiography* is "Mill's Mill."

Autobiographies, then, are those texts that describe the transformations that underlie writers' other works, naming, identifying, and characterizing the personae and explaining the life-change experiences. Writers' other works appropriately do not explicate the processes of transformation nor ascribe motivations for these new ways of thinking. It is their autobiographies that add this dimension to their corpora. Where no autobiography exists, biography supplies a version of the life-change experience. Peter Ackroyd's biography of T. S. Eliot, for example, attempts to explain the differences evidenced between *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Biography functions, in place of the absent autobiography, to account for the transformation in Eliot's contributions to the discourse.<sup>31</sup>

Autobiography, then, speaks its meaning, actualizes its transformation—makes its contributions to the writer's corpus—through its rhetorical figuration. "Existing" in the text both implicitly and explicitly, figura, persona, and dynamis function beneath the necessary facts, objects, and events to constitute this contribution. They focus on the significance of the transformation rather than on the events, dates, and facts in the individual autobiographer's life.<sup>32</sup>

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY CONTRIBUTES TRANSFORMATION TO THE DISCOURSE

As particular autobiographies image forth transformation in an individual writer's corpus, autobiography, as genre, stands as text of transformation in the larger discourse community. Through the medium of the autobiographical persona, as it names the inscribed self of the corpus, the self makes entrance into the universe of discourse, and as autobiography is "life-discursive," it establishes the place of the rhetorically constituted and transformed self.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, autobiography, as text of transformation, turns on itself, becoming "still point," place of identification, permanence, metaphor for belonging in corpus and discourse.

"Transformation," however, as it is inscribed in the text of the autobiography, is a perverse term that will not itself stand still. Autobiography declares that change itself changes. If we examine a set of autobiographies from Classical to Post-Modern times, we discover that the

rhetorical aspects of persona, figura, and dynamis give evidence of their own transformations, and, in turn, display just how much the discourse of change has changed.

In examining the autobiographies from Augustine to Barthes we discover that the “before” and “after” qualities and characteristics of the personae mark out a significant change. Augustine is first pagan, then Christian; Montaigne is first essayist, then essayist changed by his *Essays*; “I have no more made my book than my book has made me.”<sup>34</sup> Rousseau is first innocent child of nature, then failed Romantic; Gertrude Stein is first Alice’s Gertrude Stein, then “everybody’s” Gertrude Stein; Roland Barthes is first old “image-repertoire”—language images of the body—then “text.” The transformations of the personae taken across this set of autobiographies give evidence that the ways of inscribing the self or persona in autobiography have changed from a Christian or spiritual self to a secular or public self, to a Romantic self of feelings, to a Modern self—concerned only with its surface manifestations, and a Post-Modern self—a self displaced.

The figurae taken across this same set of autobiographies reveal how the types or modes for explaining transformation have changed. Augustine describes his transformation in terms of a spiritual “vision,” Montaigne in terms of “essay,” a dialogue between the man and his book. Rousseau characterizes his transformation as “confessions” of his true internal feelings and motives, “I shall say each thing as I feel it.” Gertrude Stein characterizes her transformation in terms of “surfaces” or verbal portraits that are free from the unconscious and that disregard all internal feeling. Barthes presents his transformations as “displacements”; the self-images (or language of the body) are displaced by text—language. These various figurae of transformation suggest that where once transformation was seen as spiritual, it is subsequently encapsulated as secular or public, then as internal, then as external or surface manifestation, and finally only as text or “words.”

Dynamis, taken across the autobiographies above, also gives evidence of change. The power of Augustine’s transformation is attributed to God, “great is thy power”; Montaigne sees the dynamis of his transformation arising from the critique of himself in his essays, his curiosity and detachment, his spontaneity, chance: “In this case we go hand in hand and at the same pace, my book and I”<sup>35</sup>; subsequent revisions of the *Essays* result in further transformations. Rousseau sees *himself* as the force of transformation. It is only the circumstances of life and the deceitfulness of those around him that keep him from realizing his full potential. Gertrude Stein sees the artist’s craft as power

or dynamis of her transformations. She enlarges or transforms the self by juxtaposing surface portrait after surface portrait in the creation of her own multifaceted (and “multifaced”) self. Roland Barthes attributes his transformation to the dynamis of writing; writing is the power of displacement; it becomes for Barthes a dynamis of “deviance.” These various attributions of dynamis suggest that the ways of explaining the power or force of transformation have changed: from God to an enlightened spontaneity, and subsequently, to an individual ego, to artistic or multiperspectival portrayal, to writing, absent of images “except for those of the hand that writes,” a new kind of writing—chirography.

Taken together, the transformations of the persona from Augustine to Barthes show how the inscribed self of autobiography has changed from a self secure in the presence of God to the total absence of self. At least this is Barthes’s hope; in his autobiography, however, readers do see a self, a self that “believes” it is only text. Transformation shows its perversity, its predilection to change through the persona. With each new depiction of the self an old way of viewing self and inscribing it is overturned. This suggests that in the autobiography we have a history of “deviating personae.”

Taken together, the transformations of the figura show how the types or figures for inscribing transformation have changed from spiritual vision to total displacement. Figuration itself is transformed by the misreading of prior figures. Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a “misprision” of earlier autobiographies, with their excessive expression of internal feelings and motives. Stein gives us a new type of figura, that of transactions, believing that only that which is visible, conscious, at the surface can or should be conveyed by the autobiographer.

Taken together, the transformations of the dynamis show how the power of transformation in autobiography has changed from the power of God—the Logos, to the power of writing—logology or to the perversity of word games—*dissoi logoi*.

Persona, figura, and dynamis taken together, then, give summary evidence that change, as it is inscribed in autobiography, has itself changed. The transformation of a self, central to autobiographical discourse in earlier times, has changed to a consciousness of textual transformation—from the self speaking language to language speaking the self.

More recent autobiographers, tired of word games and dissatisfied with absence of self, have refused to write the self out of existence

(over and over again). They have begun to write in innovative modes and have grounded the transformations of the self in the imagination as it keeps the notion of selfhood alive in the world of autobiography.<sup>36</sup>

Maxine Hong Kingston, for example, employs language to create a self taking control of language. She attests in *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* that she is unwilling to allow the self to be displaced by language. Creating new “talk-stories” of her own, she reconstructs a self that language, her Chinese mother’s “talk-stories,” has stripped from her. The autobiography of *The Woman Warrior* can be seen as Kingston’s revenge on language and its power to terrify or scare away the self. She tells how she screamed at her mother:

“And I don’t want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won’t tell me a story and then say, ‘This is a true story,’ or, ‘This is just a story.’ I can’t tell the difference. I don’t even know what your real names are. I can’t tell what’s real and what you make up. Ha! You can’t stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn’t work.” So I told the hardest ten or twelve things on my list all in one outburst.<sup>37</sup>

Kingston “masters” language with her own “words.” Forbidden by her mother to speak of her aunt, the “No Name Woman,” because the aunt has violated the code of the community and shamed the family honor by committing adultery, Kingston deliberately retells the aunt’s story. In so doing, Kingston makes a place for the aunt and for herself that has been denied them by the traditions of Chinese discourse. Kingston also tells of the mighty woman warrior, who with family oaths carved on her back, avenges her people. She tells of the captured poetess, Ts’ai Yen, whose songs rose high and clear above the barbarian reed pipes, and when brought back from savage lands, were sung with Chinese instruments.

Contrast this fully integrated persona, characterized as courageous and creative, adorned with ornate back and beautiful voice, to Barthes’s disappearing self—only “the hand that writes.” Contrast Barthes’s narrative of transformation—“zig zag,” mere marks, writing motion—to Kingston’s life stories. Constructing a text of a life that draws on and mimics an oral tradition, in opposition to one that displays itself through the means of marks and letters, Kingston’s narratives are revisions or retellings of earlier stories; the *Memoirs* becomes a tale of a woman retelling tales. Kingston’s autobiography portends what Barthes’s, with its narrowed, distanced, and disappearing self

(hand) cannot, a new kind of autobiographical self, a self of plentitude, one that fully integrates the old and new, East and West, male and female. It is a talk-written self, a self of continuity *and* change. Language sabotages Kingston no longer; telling her own truth, making language serve her, Kingston continues to wrestle the old ghosts that sit on her head. Within the figura of “talk-story” the Chinese girl with the “dried-duck voice” has changed to woman warrior—poetess avenger—talk-writing of living, sorting, changing.

The throat pain always returns, though, unless I tell what I really think. . . . I continue to sort out what’s just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living.<sup>38</sup>

Autobiography is the literature of transformation. Spoken, written, or sung, autobiographies are the set of texts that provide us with an understanding of how change occurs and how that change, once performed, presented, or inscribed, finds its “place” or meaning in the discourse. Samuel Taylor Coleridge reminds us that

Every man’s language has, first, its *individualities*; secondly, the common properties of the *class* to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of *universal* use.<sup>39</sup>

The autobiographical transformation, as it is reflection on experience, is, at first, individual. As it is constituted by language and directed toward its contemporary audience, it “speaks” through metaphors that are held in common, that are shared by the texts that surround it. As it is taken up into the ongoing discourse, autobiography establishes its place as universal “word” for transformation.

E pur si muove.

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#### NOTES

1. Since the historical approach to the genre has come of age (this is to be distinguished from the use of autobiography *as* history, to fill in the gaps where other sources are wanting: Black history, women’s studies, area studies), there is no need to provide extensive citations; they are available in most bibliographies. I mention two outstanding histories: Karl J. Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) and William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978). Georg Misch’s two-volume work, translated by E. W. Dickes, is out of print.

In terms of the psychological approach, I am unaware of any works that use autobiography as the sole source for psychological study. Generally it is one of sev-

eral documents used to diagnose normality or abnormality in the author's life. Problematic are those earlier critical works that shift back and forth between psychological, literary, and historical approaches. Margaret Bottrall's *Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth Century Autobiography* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972) is a case in point. Bottrall characterizes the history of autobiography as developmental, but unlike Weintraub (above), she fails to consider that the idea of the self might also be developmental. Shifting to a psychological approach, she assumes as well-formed and constant in the seventeenth century the contemporary idea of the individual as an independent and autonomous self. "Genuine autobiography," she tells us, "can only be written by someone acutely aware of his own existence as an individual" (p. 12).

More recent studies that take a psychological perspective are concerned with case study as narrative within narrative and investigate the "rewriting" of the patient's narrative through the joint effort of patient and therapist. See, for example, Peter Brooks, "Fictions of the Wolfmann: Freud and Narrative Understanding," *Diacritics* 9 (1979).

The literary approach to autobiography is too extensive to detail here. New literary/critical approaches have replaced those earlier essays that characterize autobiography as being "like" other art forms or literary genres. For example, while William Howarth's discussion of autobiography as being "like" oratory, drama, and poetry makes for interesting reading, it does little to increase our understanding of the method and meaning of autobiography itself. See William L. Howarth "Some Principles of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 84-114.

2. Michel de Montaigne, *Essays and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Donald M. Frame (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), pp. 316-317.
3. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 1.
4. Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 9.
5. Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879).
6. Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); Susanna Egan, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Gordon O. Taylor, *Chapters of Experience: Studies in Modern American Autobiography* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1983); Stuart L. Charmé, *Meaning and Myth in the Study of Lives: A Sartrean Perspective* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Shirley C. Neuman, *Some One Myth: Yeats' Autobiographical Prose* (Mountrath, Portlaoise: Dolman Press in association with Humanities Press, 1982); James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
7. Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in Olney, *Autobiography*, p. 78.

8. Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," p. 76.
9. Heuristic procedures are not to be confused with rule-governed procedures. A rule-governed or algorithmic procedure specifies a finite series of steps that when carried out in mechanical fashion results in a correct answer. Rule-governed procedures are those that can be simulated by a machine. Heuristic procedures, on the other hand, provide a series of questions or operations that guide inquiry and increase the chance of discovering workable solutions. A heuristic approach serves three functions: 1) it aids the investigator in retrieving relevant information that is stored in the mind, 2) it draws attention to important information that the investigator does not possess but can acquire by direct observation, reading and experimentation, and 3) it prepares the investigator's mind for the intuition of any hypothesis, insight, or a new understanding. "Heuristic search, although systematic, is never a purely conscious, mechanical activity; intuition is indispensable and some trial and error inevitable." For this discussion on heuristic procedures I am indebted to Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), pp. 120–121.
10. Elizabeth Bruss, "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film"; Louis Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination," both in Olney, *Autobiography*, pp. 296–320; 268–295. See also Philippe Lejeune, "Autobiography in the Third Person," *NLH IX* (1977), pp. 27–50.
11. John Morris, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill* (New York: Basic Book, 1966); Patricia Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); for Olney, see note 6.
12. I am indebted to Thomas E. Porter, *Myth and Modern American Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), for this discussion on persona.
13. In many ways my characterization of the persona is quite similar to that of Eugene Vance and Paul de Man. Paul Jay summarizes their interest in the autobiographical "I" in his recent article: "What's the Use? Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography." See *Biography*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 39–54. Jay believes Vance's central point to be that "the 'I' is not *fixed* in relationship to its author, and that its identity is generated less in relationship to Augustine's than in relationship to the 'specific code' of the *Confessions* 'discourse.'" He sees de Man's interest as much the same: "de Man attempts to illustrate how the subject in autobiography is defined less by its history (i.e., its author's past) than by its status as a linguistic referent, a trope." See also Eugene Vance, "Augustine's *Confessions* and the Grammar of Selfhood," *Genre*, No. 6 (1973) and Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," *MLN*, Vol. 94 (December, 1979). The self in this tropological status, however, does in fact reside in *autobiography*, suggesting a valuing of the "life lived," while acknowledging that the self exists as text.
14. Peter Brooks, "Wolfmann," p. 72.
15. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. ix.
16. Kenneth Burke, *Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1969), p. 60.
17. Susan Egan in *Patterns of Experience* sees her four narrative patterns—paradise,

journey, conversion, confession—as “effective tools for the autobiographer. Each of these ‘myths’ is capable of describing the quality of his secret and inner experience both because it acts as an emotionally and generally accurate description of that experience and because it means much the same thing to him as it does to his reader” (p. 5).

What I am suggesting, to the contrary, is that figura, like the life-change experience itself, is both idiosyncratic and shares some common features with other life inscriptions. To rely solely on myth, however, to explain or interpret the life makes the autobiography little more than a retelling of the “same old story” and makes the autobiographer little more than a “carbon copy.”

18. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 315.
19. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress and Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. James Thorpe (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), para. 49.
20. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 85.
21. Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809–1882*, with original omissions restored and edited by Nora Barlow (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1958), pp. 62, 90.
22. John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. David J. DeLaura (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968), pp. 29, 34.
23. Newman, *Apologia*, “Note F, The Economy,” p. 259.
24. St. Aurelius Augustinus, *The Confessions*, trans. by Edward B. Pusey (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909), p. 21.
25. John Barrett Mandel, “Bunyan and the Autobiographer’s Artistic Purpose,” *Criticism* 10 (1968), pp. 225–243.
26. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (London: William Glaisner, 1871), p. 327.
27. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 4.
28. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 91.
29. Newman, *Apologia*, p. 102.
30. Mill, *Autobiography*, pp. 85–86.
31. Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot—A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
32. While my work deals almost exclusively with inscribed discourse, investigating the oral life-narrative and its relationship to the “corpus” of the tribal or community storyteller might yield quite different conclusions from those above. I suspect that there are not such clear lines of definition between the oral autobiography and other oral narratives. The storyteller interjects him/herself into every narrative. This is most likely true for collections of letters and journals as well.
33. Gunn (above) argues that “the *autos* of autobiography cannot be realized in disjunction from its *bios* and further, that the relation between *autos* and *bios* is enacted, not sabotaged, by language or the *graphie* of autobiography” (118).
34. Montaigne, *Essays*, p. 281.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
36. See Philippe Lejeune, “Peut-on Innover en Autobiographie?” *L’Autobiographie* (Aix-en-Provence: VI<sup>e</sup> Recontres psychanalytiques, 1987).

37. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 235.
38. Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, p. 239.
39. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 281.