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AUTOBIOGRAPHY/TRUTH/ PSYCHOANALYSIS¹

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“The foolish project he had of painting his own portrait...” We all know Pascal’s famous and somewhat acerbic comment on Montaigne. But in the modern autobiographical project (for this project has a history that we are only now beginning to trace), one sets out not so much to paint oneself as to *write* oneself, investing the word “write” with all the infusions of meaning it has acquired since Mallarmé. Admittedly, the aim for all such projects is to draw on the resources of language in order to reflect, within that language, the discursive subject, by giving individual form and imprint to the grammatical void of the shifter “I,” so that, among all the possible “I”s, the pronoun can designate only one proper name: I-Montaigne, I-Rousseau. With that goal in mind, the classical writer proceeds as a matter of course to superimpose the visible onto the legible. “I am of medium height, easy bearing and good proportions. I have a dark but fairly even complexion...” In his famous self-portrait, La Rochefoucauld, from the outset, takes stock of himself as an image: “I have just been examining myself and looking into the mirror to verify my findings.” One imagines him, in front of his sheet of paper, like Rembrandt between his looking-glass and easel. As is also true of painting, we are dealing here with a study: “I have studied myself well enough to know myself well.” Physical appearance (and this is true also of the no

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less famous self-portrait of Mlle. de Scudéry) takes precedence; it anchors the subject, delineates the spiritual profile (“qualities” and “defects”) according to easily definable contours; it fixes the ebb and flow of the mind in a precise and stable *Gestalt*. I is not another; it really is *me*. The discrepancy, the disparity between two distinct orders of reality are attenuated by subtle transitions from one register to another and by unexpected correspondences: “a somber air about my features tends to make me seem even more reserved than I am” (La Rochefoucauld once again). In the image of oneself, *res extensa* and *res cogitans* are united, converging with a certainty even greater than that in Descartes’ pineal gland, within the frame of a textual mirror.

Since it discards in principle any kind of complacency, (“I am content,” remarks La Rochefoucauld, “to be thought no handsomer than I say I am, nor better-natured than I depict myself, not wittier nor more sensible than I claim to be”), the classical self-portrait, repudiating any narcissistic self-indulgence, has only one justification: its function as *truth*. The game of “truths and forfeits” was a fashionable salon pastime of the day and this was enough to restrict its scope. However, the image that La Rochefoucauld gives us of himself is immediately challenged by the Cardinal de Retz in his *Memoires*, with respect to one crucial point on which the whole enterprise turns. The “I have studied myself enough to know myself well” of the former is opposed by the peremptory declaration of the latter: “he would have done much better to know himself”—all man’s misadventures here being attributed to a lack of knowledge from which one scarcely imagines the writer’s project escaping unscathed. Right from its classical origins, an unbridgeable gap separates what would be called, three centuries later, the subject’s being-for-itself and being-for-others. It is this failure of recognition that Célimène’s denigrating speech triumphantly exploits in the famous portrait scene of *The Misanthrope*, as she pitilessly corrects the defective image that each of us has of ourselves. It is the kind of denigration which, transferred from a social setting to the psychoanalytic couch and its attendant dialogues, could be that, we hope, of the analyst (minus Célimènian narcissism), speaking evil in the service of good.

So Pascal is right, and the undertaking to portray oneself is foolish, since it is simply not possible, given that *my* truth, to a considerable extent, is determined by the *other*. If my truth is the discourse of the Other (as is admirably illustrated once again in the portrait scene of *The Misanthrope*), how can I sustain a discourse of truth about myself? The problem cannot be circumvented and

Rousseau tackles it in the very first words of his *Confessions*: "I am determined to show my fellow-men a man in all the truth of nature and that man will be myself." With perverse dexterity, the subject of the confessional discourse retains absolute control over *his* truth: he is unique ("I alone"), having "fellow-men" only in appearance. "I am not made like any of the men I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any other man in existence." Only Rousseau can tell the truth about Rousseau. This fundamentally flawed point of departure lies at the root of all autobiography, or more precisely, of all "autography" in the widest sense of the term, if we don't discriminate between either mode of discourse: portrait or narration. The realization is at one and the same time totally vain (as Pascal well knew and as the La Rochefoucauld of the passages on vanity knew better than anyone) and yet ineradicable, consubstantial, so to speak, with the project of writing on oneself. I neither intend to trace the history of that project nor pretend that I have done so; I simply mention its significance for our illustrious ancestors as a means to situate better, to off-set, what is happening today.

So it is not as a historian, which I am not, but as a practitioner of autobiographical writing, which I am from time to time, that I would like to contribute something of my experience and offer some personal reflections. In the great flood of autobiographical writings that are a feature of our age, the nature and function of the writing immediately establish a fundamental distinction. On the one hand, the referential aspect of language produces a "documentary" literature. "Well" or "badly" written—or even written by other people—these texts by people active in the areas of history, the stage or the screen and now turned author, set down for the delight or the instruction of their public their doings and sayings. The written communication (which could be televised) is simply a means of conveying to others the truth of an existence constituted and lived elsewhere. At the opposite pole, the poetic power of language, to use Jakobson's terminology, is itself the domain in which sense is elaborated; if it doesn't erase the reference, it makes it problematic insofar as it subordinates the register of life to the order of the text. We are all familiar with the liberties taken by Chateaubriand or others which we can describe as poetic or deceitful depending on the criteria we apply. From the dawning of the genre right up to the present day and even in its contradictory postulations, the auto(bio)graphical text is governed by one supreme law: to speak the *truth* (about oneself and incidentally about others) which makes common cause with reality, as opposed, of course, to

fiction. “What I was trying to do was condense, virtually untreated, an ensemble of facts and images that I refused to exploit by allowing my imagination to work on them: in short, the negation of a novel.” This introductory declaration by Michel Leiris from *L’Age d’homme* (*Manhood*) sets forth very well the most radical and successful attempt at modern auto(bio)graphy, within the laws established by tradition, in the spirit of what Leiris calls the “fundamental rule (to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth) to which anyone making a confession is subjected”—even if, like the toreador, the writer observes all the formalities. It is not altogether a surprise then to discover that the beginning of *Manhood*—“I have just turned thirty-four, the half-way point in life. Physically, I’m of medium height, on the small side. I have reddish-brown hair cut short...” —takes us back to La Rochefoucauld’s self-portrait.

Confronted with this image of himself, which necessarily comes to him as other and separates from the start the object of his vision and himself as seeing subject, how does the modern writer undo the classic aporia of the project of depicting oneself—that it is “foolish” because impossible? Is it enough to allow, as Leiris does, his vision to collapse into the exaggerated brutality of inverted narcissism? “I hate suddenly catching sight of myself in a mirror, since without any chance to prepare myself, I always find myself ugly to a quite humiliating degree.” Or can one, perhaps, by a systematic use of photographs, escape the traps set by the image? “Conceiving my project in terms of a photo-montage and choosing as objective a tone as possible to express myself...” (*Manhood*) For my own part, I think that Leiris’s originality lies elsewhere, in the apparently anodyne sentence: “To write a book that would be an act is, basically, the goal I felt I ought to be pursuing when I wrote *Manhood*. An act in relation to myself, because I intended, in writing it, to elucidate by virtue of that act of formulation certain things that were still obscure, to which psychoanalysis had alerted me, without making them altogether clear when I had tried it out as a patient.” The experience of psychoanalysis, which has only been possible since Freud, is in fact the first attempt at or means of breaking out of the classical dilemma of self-knowledge cut off from itself as a dimension of the other, since it is only from the other’s position as listener that the truth of his discourse is made apparent to the subject. But writing cannot be reduced to the effort/effect of listening, because formulating writing as “an act in relation to oneself,” tends to emphasize the elucidation of what is said, which is never completely clarified by the (inter-

minable) analysis. Leiris warns against the illusion of purely transcriptive, referential, innocent writing.

The question I would like to raise at this point follows naturally from the one asked by Leiris: what is it in the act of writing itself that captures and elucidates in its very formulation "certain things that are still obscure," to which the experience of psychoanalysis draws the subject's attention? Most of the time, the texts of those who have undergone psychoanalysis, so fashionable nowadays, have a documentary purpose: they relate or reproduce, sometimes quite skillfully, the act that represents for each analysand his or her psychoanalysis; they incorporate "truths" already worked out in the "elsewhere" of the sessions. From the log-book to the stylized narrative, writing functions as a vehicle. It doesn't carry writer or reader much further into the intimacy of a being than the point at which the analysis has been halted. These are possible and perfectly honorable ventures of writing: the "transcription" in the analysand's account is the exact reverse, the mirror-image of the "explication" in the analyst's case-histories. But Leiris has another purpose for writing which is linked, certainly, to the experience of analysis but aims to carry it further, perhaps even to go beyond it; here, writing takes up a position not within but outside the boundaries of an experience bound up with speech to become an (autonomous) experiment. In a previous study: "Writing One's Psychoanalysis," I have tried to analyze the textual procedures that my novel *Fils* put into play: that is, substituting the resources of consonantal association for traditional syntactical and discursive sequences, in order to elaborate, not a writing *of* the unconscious (which doubtless does not exist), but *for* the unconscious (which is what analytical writing has been trying to do, without really knowing it, for as long as it has existed). Here, I should like to tackle that novel from another point of view, that of its narrative strategy in relation to the global strategy of autobiography, more precisely, in relation to the notion of "truth" on which it subsists, in contrast to any form of "fiction". To anyone surprised to see an author surveying once again, this time as a critic, the text he has produced as an author, I would reply that "auto-criticism" (cf. Gide, Barthes, Ricardou and others) is one of the additional forms assumed by modern autobiography.

I am bound to recognize—one can hardly do otherwise when one rereads oneself—that my self-portrait, in the broadest sense of the term, begins (or nearly so) in *Fils* in accordance with the classical norm of the writer in front of his mirror: "Looking good. Well preserved. An appearance. The two phosphorescent

tubes produce a flash, spit out a zig-zag streak of lightning, settle down into a stream of pale phosphorescence. THAT. ME. My face. Disgusting... I hover, a phantom. An errant image between the two metal mountings, in the mirror." What is important here seems to be not so much the disparagement of the face and body itself which the subject needs to grasp his reality, as the way in which that reality is challenged. "Nice black hair, a good head-full" (*ibid.*) is, after all, only an "appearance". The reality of the self-observer is his unreality, his pure "image"—and a "hovering," "errant" image at that. The "I" (visible in the mirror) is thus faced with the "id/it" (invisible and the last order of the real), investing both of these terms with all the post-Freudian implications one wants. The textual prerogative of the latter is established in the very order of the exposition: a series of disjointed, decentered memories/fantasies are played out on an Other Stage, before the "I" surfaces and grasps itself in the immediacy of an image. The entire introduction to the book ("Strates") is built on the opposition between a present but fragmented nucleus (the narrator wakes up, gets up, takes a shower, does his exercises, etc.) and a succession of memorative and fantasmatic layers which wrap themselves around it. This is recognizably one of the favorite narrative techniques of the Nouveau Roman. But, whereas in *La Jalousie* or *La Route des Flandres*, perceptual, imaginary and remembered experiences are absolutely equivalent, so that in the long run their status does not allow for differentiation (which eliminates the reality/fiction opposition as far as the narrative order is concerned), the autobiographical project, because of its referential dimension, implies a disentanglement of these different registers. The subject, hidden in the fantasmatic web, will of necessity be caught in a mirror, if not a material one, then at least a face-to-face confrontation with truth. The implicit resonance of the astonished interjection—"I. That."—in the central section of *Fils*, establishes the therapeutic confrontation as a place of unraveling, unknotting, and disrobing, that is to say, as the place of truth. The six parts of the narrative - "Strates," "Streets," "Rêves," "Chair," "Chaire," and "Monstre"—are in fact distributed according to a tri-partite structure: the ante-truth (the pre-analytical experience); the battlefield of truth (the analytical session); and the after-truth (the post-analytical experience). Immediately, the banality of the narrative formula: "a day in the life of J.S.D."—during which we follow the professor of French Literature at New York University, from the moment he wakes through his lecture at the end of the afternoon—acquires a symbolic value (a narrative recount-

ing of the effects of analysis) and even a mythical dimension (the sequence life-death-resurrection).

The singularity of *Fils* is not referential: the narration of analysis, detailed log-book, or posthumous reconstitution by the patient has become almost a literary genre, which, incidentally, it would be interesting to study in parallel with the clinical narrations that originate from the other side of the couch. The particularity of *Fils* seems to be more of a textual order: how the relating—not of an analysis but of an analytic *session*—functions within a textual ensemble of which it forms the nucleus or core. Unlike traditional narratives, the “psychoanalytic” text constitutes only part of the whole text, and unlike the text as proposed by Leiris, the writing is not made to work within a post-analytic space, but in the space of the analysis itself. More exactly, it seeks to open up that space in the text itself by producing a before-and-after of the experience within the texture of the narrative. I can’t examine all the effects of this technique: I shall content myself with trying to make clear (as it appears to me retrospectively) what is at stake in this strategy. In *Le Pacte autobiographique*, Philippe Lejeune distinguishes between what he calls the “novelistic pact” and the “autobiographical pact,” and beginning with the criterion of identity or non-identity of the author and his protagonist, he identifies, with the aid of a sophisticated and subtle chart a certain number of “empty squares”. “Can the hero of a novel, presented as such, have the same name as the author? There is nothing to prevent the existence of such a case and it is perhaps an inner contradiction which might be exploited to produce some interesting effects. But in practice, no example of this kind of research comes to mind.” With respect to Lejeune’s taxonomy, it is as if *Fils* had been written to fill this empty square! In what way? If I try to answer this question retrospectively, I would say that I wrote “novel” on the cover simply because I felt obliged to, thus instituting a novelistic pact by asserting fictitiousness, in spite of the tireless insistence of historical and personal reference. This book really is about me, who appear first in the form of my initials *J.S.D.*, then my explicit forenames, *Julien Serge*, and finally my surname, *Doubrovsky*. Not only do author and character have the same identity, but the narrator too: in this text, *I* is once again *me*. As in a good and scrupulous autobiography, everything that is said and done in the narrative is drawn literally from my own life. Places and dates have been verified with maniacal insistence. The role of so-called novelistic invention is limited to providing the framework and the circumstances of a fictitious day which serves as a kind of store-room for my memory. Even the dreams cited and

partially analyzed are real dreams, noted down in a notebook at the time. The letter from the sister, recounting the death of my mother, is a letter from my sister, and so on. In addition, the identity of writer and critic allows me to vouch here for the referential register. But why and how has the autobiography been transformed in my hands into what I have felt obliged to call "autofiction"?

The note to the reader I composed at the time offers two reasons: "Autobiography? No, that is a privilege reserved for the great people of this world, in the autumn of their years and in the grand manner: fiction, from events and facts that are quite real; *autofiction* perhaps from having entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language..." In this case, fiction would be a narrative ruse; not entitled by his merits to write an autobiography, the "man in the street" that I am has to palm off on his readers his real life in the more pretentious guise of an imaginary existence in order to gain their reluctant attention. The humble who can lay no claim to history, can still thus claim the novel. The other reason involves the writing. If one abandons chronological-logical discourse in favor of the poetic meanderings of language let loose, where words take precedence over things and even take themselves for things, then the scale is tipped against realist narrative in favor of a fictional universe. A curious and contradictory spiral becomes visible: as fake fiction of a real life, the text, in the very dynamics of its writing, slips instantaneously out of the patented register of the real. Neither autobiography nor novel, then, strictly speaking, it exists in a perpetual oscillation between the two, inhabiting a space that only the operation of the text makes possible or accessible. Text/life: the text, in turn, operates within a life, not a void. Its divisions and hiatuses, its dismemberings are the very same as those which structure and punctuate the existence of the narrator; his indefinite suspension between two countries, two professions, two women, two mothers, two languages, two given names is an asymmetric duplication in which the two halves cannot be superimposed, an unmastered duality. Endlessly caught up in the double-meaning of puns, perpetually sliding along ambivalent paths, creating an ambiguous, androgynous genre of its own, the writing is invented by neurosis. With this difference, however, that if the ultimately unbearable contradictions force the schizoid subject into analysis (putting, in Proustian terminology, the narrative "hero" in the position of analysand), the "narrator," for his part, puts himself in the position of analyst as he maps out the terrain. The textual agency assigns the roles, provides the cues and allows the associations a cer-

tain supervised liberty—in short, calls the tune. Here then, we see reflected, in the very space he had conceived to “heal” or “resolve” it, the subject’s disintegration, the dual but opposed postulation of his desire: to occupy simultaneously two antithetical places. “I want it all. You and her. One shore and the other. One life and the other. Me and me. I refuse to disembowel myself, to cut away my flesh.” By means of the fiction that it institutes, the writing furnishes the fantasy with the successful realization that it is always denied in reality. In a curiously vicious circle, in the guise, or rather, under the cover of relating its analytical experience, it spares the subject from confronting castration which had made his recourse to analysis necessary in the first place! The surplus, beyond writing, in relation to the domain of speech which chronologically preceded and supported it, opens up the space of a new and forbidden pleasure: to occupy the two symmetrical and incompatible positions, that is to say, to join the two sexes: “MONSTER not half-male half-female, but ALTOGETHER MALE AND ALTOGETHER FEMALE” (*Fils*). Language is by no means an extra-sexual phenomenon. It is a supplementary inscription of sexuality. Far from being a way out for the alienating imaginary, the symbolic functions there in turn, and far beyond, at least as far as literary discourse is concerned. The question of *sex*, for writing, structures both genre and gender as well. If we continue the previous quotation:

ALTOGETHER MALE AND ALTOGETHER FEMALE
 opposites not separated bipartite but rigorously co-
 extensive with the totality of his being occupying the
 whole of his territory leaving the subject literally NO
 OTHER PLACE no image in which he can represent
 the Father the Woman (*Fils*),

we can arrive at the exact self-definition of the book by replacing the word *being* by the word *text*, since the text, of course, is the being of writing. The fact that it is impossible for the narrator to anchor himself, as we have seen, in the *image* of his own body, errant and hovering in the mirror, can be explained within the textual order itself, since it is stolen or broken up in advance by two images that appear successively: the mistress/mother, whose “BREASTS” are typographically underscored, and the father, slayer of cats. Contrary to what takes place in the classical self-portrait, the image itself is rendered incongruous or at least uncertain here. Self-perception on the part of the subject cannot be the bearer of any truth. ME. THAT. In order to bring ME to the point where THAT steals and envelops it (the insistence of signifiers of fog, mist, etc. in the whole of the first part is striking), the narrator, a hundred pages further on, will rush off to see his

“shrink”: what he will see there, apart from the banality of a guy sucking a piece of candy (this is America), is *another image*, that of a dream in which a sea monster with the head of a crocodile and the body of a turtle emerges from the water. This *displaced* image (it functions in place of the classical self-image, since the subject seeks desperately to see himself in it, to establish his being securely within it, after ten successive interpretations—and there are surely another ten to come) welds together in an impossible (monstrous) unity the two separate images of the Woman and the Father of the first part; indeed, it *re-replaces* them. But the *place* proper to the *subject* remains stubbornly blocked off: in the dream, he appears with his toy rifle, trying in vain to shoot at the animal. Some will argue that the securing image is not “liquidated,” because the analysis is not “finished” (the narrator supposedly has taken care to present to the reader “one” session among a hundred others, rather than offering a retrospective narrative of a complete case). Maybe so. But what is important, I think, is to see how in the writing the fantasy is constituted at the very moment when it comes up against the impossibility of dissolving the image through interpretation.

Lévi-Strauss, it will be remembered, saw in the Oedipus legend a “logical instrument” for bridging the initial problem: “Is one born of only one person or two?” and the problem derived from it: “Is the same born of the same or of the other?” (*Structural Anthropology*). Classical autobiography believes in scriptural parthenogenesis: the subject therein is born of one person only. Self looking at self, self narrated by self, the same is always born of the same. We have seen that the contradiction literary myth attempts to veil is very apparent from the beginning; the “I have studied myself well enough to know myself well” of La Rochefoucauld is immediately countered by the judgement of Retz: “he would have done better to know himself.” But how is one to know *oneself* if self-knowledge proceeds through recognition by *the other*? This circuit, the necessity and impossibility of which had been grasped as early as the 17th century and before (hence the “stupidity” referred to by Pascal), is now being instituted by the 20th century in the space of the psychoanalytic session. This famous *two-body psychology* is finally making the dream (my dream) real: the two-headed eagle, so to speak, a kind of self-knowledge with two participants. It’s not surprising that the Oedipus question should in principle be resolved, since the process itself solves Oedipus’ problem: *one* is born of *two*, the same comes from the same *and* the other.

Classical autobiography, discredited at the alethic level (God knows how many errors and lies have been counted in the pages of Rousseau and Chateaubriand), is replaced in the post-Freudian era by two types of narrative, distributed according to two intersubjective poles: the case-history, related from an informed perspective of the subject by the other (the analyst), is a special form of biography; but told from the point of view of the subject (by the patient), the narrative is a new species of an ancient genre—autobiography. Its essential novelty lies in its radical dissipation of Romantic solitude, the “I alone” of Rousseau. The ex-patient knows too well that the same is not born of the same, that his self-portrait is in fact a hetero-portrait which comes to him from the realm of the Other. This other appears specifically by name; thus in *The Words to Say it*, Marie Cardinal pays (handsome) tribute to the wisdom displayed by the “little man” she has been visiting for so many years, in the telling of her own life, now restored to its true logic. This wisdom is unassailable, since it is situated outside the text; “he” [the analyst] remains, admittedly, not in the margins of the book but on its threshold, communicating at strategic points in the narrative from his discreet but productive retreat, just enough to ensure that the autobiography becomes a kind of undeluded self-knowledge, that is to say, incorporated heteroknowledge. Within the system thus created—Autobiography/Truth/Psychoanalysis—it is psychoanalysis which becomes the regulatory agency, mistress of the two others, ensuring from without their proper functioning.

It is that function that *Fils* perverts, by annexing the analytical experience to the text itself; that is to say, by transforming into fiction the process by which the truth is revealed. By fiction must be understood, very simply, a “story” which, whatever the accumulation of referential details and whatever their accuracy, has never “taken place” in “reality,” whose only real situation is the discourse in which it operates. Naturally, historicity/fiction are only the poles of an ideal opposition, like “normal” and “abnormal”. Enough has been said of the degree of imagination that animates Michelet’s kind of history or, alternatively, if we consider the literary universe of Balzac or Flaubert, of the barely transposed borrowings from their own lives and era. A critique of contemporary testimony alone is enough to demonstrate the irreducible role played by “fiction” in any attempt to establish the “facts” from the moment one *narrates* them. “You have to choose: either to live or to tell stories,” says Sartre’s Roquentin at the precise moment when he chooses to recount his life in the would-be truthful fiction of a

"journal intime". To re-institute a distinction which is necessary after all, at an empirical level, there seems to be no better way than to invoke the nature of the pact which, according to Philippe Lejeune, binds the author and the reader—the textual signals which point out: "careful, this is an imaginary story" or "that's really the way it happened". Such is the reading contract, which alone, depending on the reader's type of reception, can determine and even separate the genre "novel" from the genre "autobiography". Diametrically opposed to the traditional "autobiographical novel," which presents a (more or less) true story as fictitious by disguising the proper names, *Fils* offers an authentic story with authentic proper names under the rubric "novel". It will be remembered that Michel Leiris used to define autobiographical scruple as the refusal to allow the imagination to work on the facts, "in short, the negation of a novel". So that the reversal brought about here is anything but innocent.

A first (re)reading has allowed us to discern in this procedure an articulation of the system of writing with the fantasmatic dynamics that govern both the life and the pen of J.S.D. This elusive being, perpetually divided, establishes the account of his personal history in continual equivocation: "I am a bird, look at my wings.../ I am a mouse, long live rats!" Autobiography? Fiction? The answer is: autofiction. But what does it mean exactly to substitute the individual tactics of the writer for the strategy of genres, defined in terms of the reading that it aims to introduce? As a first approximation, we can identify a "narrative ruse". If one grants, without being able here to enter into the details of a complex analysis (noting in passing how much French criticism lacks the equivalent of American research into the *reader's response*), that the reading of fiction expressly presented as such allows for processes of participation, identification or idealization quite different from those governed by the "reality principle," then the ambiguity of register in *Fils* aims at having a foot in both camps. Is it fiction you want? We'll provide a narcissistic construct to ensnare the reader, reflecting the writer's own capture, by making ourselves "interesting" to others as well as to ourselves as the "hero of a novel". The mediocrity of the common man is now transformed by his metamorphosis into a character. But, in turn, I have no intention of letting this "character" rob me of my persona; I don't want the reader to "make me his," so that *I* become *him*, since, on the contrary, the object of the exercise is to ensure that, through captive identification, *he* should become *me*. To prevent the disappropriation inseparable from any repeated reading—the "posthumous infidelity" of Albertine so dreaded by the Proustian narrator—the fictitious charac-

ter will be made indistinguishable from my person: names, qualities (and defects), every event and incident, every thought, even the most intimate, everything will be *mine*, by virtue of the magic wand of truthful reference.

In this respect, the interest of *Fils* (I leave aside the author's narcissistic implication as well as its literary success which it is not for me to judge) lies in its putting in a clear, even a harsh light the question: *When one writes, who eats whom?* It is well-known that the impassioned reader "devours" a book. But the contrary impulse is no less strong. Speaking of Proust's "madeleine," of that Albertine who was not, as the author discovered to his consternation, "wholly comestible," I had been led in my book to examine the alliance that links the most refined writing to the most primitive orality. It is in fact that register, at first discovered (naturally) in someone else, that governs, I believe, the enterprise of *Fils*. On the thematic level, if the "illness" which prompts the narrator to undergo analysis is the nexus of a dual relationship with his mother which the father could never infringe on and which only the death of the mother has brutally severed, one can read the entire book as an attempt by the narrator, until that point "absorbed" by his mother, to "re-absorb" her in his writing. The entire section dealing with the psychoanalytic session, which imitates the analytic "construction," seeks to integrate the literal discourse of the mother into the movement of the text itself, to dissolve it into the desire/delirium of interpretation through a slow process of digestion. In the same way, the analytical experience, by incorporating into the very tissue of the novel associations and interpretations which make up the web of every real analytic session—indeed, by using them as the generative principle of the narrative—finds itself little by little assimilated by the fiction, taken over by the text. The tripartite narrative structure, which we had discovered "before-during-after" the session and which seemed to favor the latter term by making it the pivotal point of the book, also has the opposite effect: by situating the analytic experience in the center of the book, the text closes over it and swallows it up.

"Who eats whom?" At the unconscious level, this is ultimately a version of the Hegelian fight to the death of consciousnesses, the celebrated struggle for "recognition". Which (of the two) is the real human subject or the *truth-bearing* subject? The analytic session, like lovemaking, requires two participants. But the emergence of this truth, produced in tandem, remains something solitary. The patient is alone in the ultimate assumption of the image reflected back to him in the circuit of the other, just as the analyst is alone in assuming his own under-

standing of the “case,” from the long progression with and through the other, Together/alone: in this human relationship as in every other. If the psychoanalytic couch is the place of solidarity and speech is its field of action, the writing-desk is irremediably solitary. For the patient as for the analyst, this solitude is the consequence of a murder: that, precisely, of the other. André Green had the courage to say so: “If one accepts that one always writes with reference to analytic practice, the moment of writing is always that in which the analysand is absent.” In the sense that the word, for Mallarmé, was a murder of the thing, writing, for the analyst, is the murder of the patient. But it is not just any form of execution: as has been so well put, psychoanalytic writing is “fed” by experience. The patient is not killed so much as digested. Out of the product of this digestion, the analyst “forms” his theory. *Psycho-analysis: psycho-anality*. This then is the place where the drive for mastery is inscribed: in the writing. As a means of control and review of what has passed through the mouth, writing is indeed that elaboration at the other end. Beyond the psychic stakes—the liquidations of transference and countertransference—writing is the revenge taken on the spoken word by adsorption. Set out in the form of a “clinical case,” the patient’s sentences are put into another context: that of the analyst’s text. The live spoken word is (re)written *from his point of view*. The textual life-and-death struggle is a fight for narrative supremacy. Who eats whom will decide whose perspective is to prevail.

In *Fils*, [the writer takes the place of the analyst, just as the protagonist tries to claim his place at the expense of the mother, which is all the more logical since the analyst is taking the mother’s place!] Such are the threads (“fils”) out of which the narrative is woven, constantly needing to be twisted anew—the very process by which they were initially constituted. It is here that autofiction is created and shaped: the image of oneself in the analytic mirror. The “biography” which sets up the cure is the “fiction” which for the subject will be read little by little as the “story of his life”. The “truth,” here, cannot be any kind of certified copy, for obvious reasons. The meaning of a life doesn’t exist anywhere; it doesn’t exist. It is not something to be discovered but something to be invented, not from scratch but from a multiplicity of traces; it is something to be *constructed*. That, after all, is what analytic “construction” is: *fingere*, “to give form to,” a fiction which the subject assumes. Its truth is tested like a surgical graft: acceptance or rejection. The fictitious implant that the analytic experience proposes to the subject as his real and true biography is true when it “works,” that is, if it permits

the organism to live (better). If it is inexact or incomplete, even harmful, it is rejected (cf. Dora-Freud and quite a few others). Just as no analysis is ever "finished," no fiction is ever quite adequate. With every new analyst, the fiction changes (cf. in this instance, the Wolfman). Autofiction represents the fiction that I have decided, as a writer, to make of myself and for myself, incorporating therein, in the fullest sense of the term, the experience of analysis, not just thematically but in the very production of the text. Does post-analytic autofiction contain more "truth" as autobiographical writing than the classical self-portrait that we drew on at the outset? In terms of being adequate to any "reality" whatsoever outside of the narrative which would serve as its touchstone, I doubt it. But it may be truer in terms of refracting the narrative itself, in discovering and in obscuring new paths which make more complex the self-image that the subject pursues as his asymptotic phantom. Novelistic truth has ultimately the same status as analytic truth, as Freud, late in the day, was able to define it: the "guarantee" of the "construction" is neither refusal nor adhesion on the part of the subject but accretion, a perpetual surplus of expressive material. In that sense, a post-analytic autobiography, as compared with a classical autobiography, can only be more true by being more rich in the sense in which one says that uranium, as a result of being *treated*, has been *enriched*. If it isn't, it's simply a failure.

By virtue of a final reversal, however, all these new riches return in the end to the most ancient thesaurus imaginable: that of myth. The self-portrait maker/Narcissus has no other mirror to reflect his image. If a subject's truth is the fiction rigorously built up from it, the truth of a fiction is fictitious. To put it another way, what is fictitious for a given subject is the order of reality. Fiction is not fantasy, just as it is not enough to wish oneself mad to be so—one can't be fictitious at will. For any given culture and its subjects, the register of fiction is governed by the system of its myths. One way or another, the psychoanalytic enterprise always comes up against the rock of myth. At the most personal, the most intimate moment of his investigation into *his* dreams, in the most secret places of this oneiric autobiography, Freud is suddenly obliged to introduce the curious category of *typical* dreams. For the autobiographer, this exemplary proceeding is ineluctable. His painstaking ontogenesis is suddenly dispersed in a hypothetical phylogenesis. This is the path I was forced to take in "Monstre," the final section of my book (*Fils*), in which the dragon-bull of Thérémène's soliloquy in Racine appears linked to the crocodile-turtle of my own dream, and in which the analysis of the Racinean text both replaces and extends the analysis of

the dream text. The truth (my truth), is there, somewhere, between the two analyses. Never formulated, and probably beyond any possibility of formulation, it is always in between—a circuit of meaning that is forever ambiguous, where no final judgement is possible, where the flow of everything is caught up in a contrary current, because myth is essentially veiled contradiction and the impossibility of any resolution. It is this impossibility that makes every subject mythical and every narrative of the subject mythical as well, even in “theoretical” form. Oedipus-Hamlet, Eros-Thanatos. My ghost is the one which already haunts Racine’s tragedy—professionally, since I am a professor of literature—a reciprocal operation of the text on the reader, a process already at work in Racine, in the epiphany of his “monster” which has become mine. It is in the hetero-clite or hetero-geneous that, after all the trouble I have taken in my life and in my text to sort them out, all the threads (“fils”) of my *auto* biography/fiction/analysis/critique become inextricably entangled once more.