

CONVERSION AND BEYOND:
THE CHANGING SELF IN VICTORIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis questions the idea that the Victorian autobiography is essentially a narrative of conversion.

In the Introduction, I examine the empirical evidence supporting such a claim. I then go on to expose the theoretical underpinnings of the equation of autobiography as a genre with conversion. I attempt to point out where they might be faulty or inadequate.

Chapter 1 makes a case for a re-reading of Victorian autobiography in the light of Leslie Stephen's strong resistance, in his Mausoleum Book, to the conversion-plot. I examine some of the roots of this aversion, and its effects on Stephen's own autobiographical practice.

Chapter 2 assesses Thomas Carlyle's contribution, in Sartor Resartus, to the secularization of the conversion narrative, and attempts to ascertain his commitment to that mode of Life-writing. Arguing from the basis of the ambivalent views expressed in the essay 'Biography' (contemporary to both Sartor Resartus and the first of the Reminiscences), I explore the possibility that Carlyle's interest in the genre went even further - to the testing of alternative modes of autobiography in the Reminiscences.

Chapter 3 takes a 'pseudo-' or 'fictionalized' autobiographical corpus, William Hale White's The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, and traces Hale White's love-hate relationship with conversion. I propose that, between the Autobiography and Deliverance, the hero Rutherford can be seen to lose faith in the conventional conversion structure, and begins to reconstruct his story on other grounds.

Chapter 4 addresses the Life of Thomas Cooper, a Baptist convert whose relationship to autobiography and to literary tradition is nevertheless skewed by his class position and his need to reclaim 'pre-conversion' experiences.

Chapter 5 takes the Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant, a work which bears few of the accepted signs of the conversion narrative, but which is self-evidently autobiography. I examine some of the alternative myths of self-hood devised by Oliphant for the purposes of autobiography, and offer an interpretation of these myths which takes into account the author's gender.

Chapter 6 draws together a number of women's autobiographies, concentrating mainly of those of Annie Besant. I posit a female alternative or addition to the pervasive conversion-plot, in the motif of self as 'failed martyr'.

I conclude by shifting the focus away from the 'redemptive moment', and towards the related typological motif of 'wandering, exile and return'. Is there similar evidence of resistance to, and divergence from, the typological norm?

INTRODUCTION

In his anthology The Unattended Moment, Michael Paffard speaks of 'ransacking' the shelves of autobiography and memoir - from de Quincey and Wordsworth to Koestler and Nabokov - for the epiphanies, visions, revelations, illuminations, fits and trances that make up his mystical and quasi-mystical collection.¹ As Paffard points out, what connects many of these sudden, unlooked-for, transcendental experiences is that, however 'worked over' they might have been in the imagination, the memory and the process of writing, they are very often pivotal in an autobiographer's life. They are moments of conversion:

one of the things that makes the unattended moment important and a subject of our special wonder, is that it does often seem to the people who have it that it transforms them.²

A. O. J. Cockshut, reversing Paffard's procedure and coming to conversion from the starting point of an analysis of autobiography, has elaborated the unattended moment thus:

But when [conversion] does come it appears as the practical enactment of something settled long before. It encapsulates a long process of thought, of weighing arguments, of rejecting old ideas and adopting new ones, or of developing old ideas in a new direction. Its momentary quality does not make it sudden. The thoughts that existed on the other side of the gulf of oblivion return, now vivid and operative, speculative no longer. A new life is waiting to be lived.³

It is the possibility of a relationship between Victorian autobiography and conversion - the moment which is momentous but not momentary - which is the starting point of this thesis. I shall examine the case in favour of the conventional reading of English autobiography as conversion narrative, before moving on, in the main body of the thesis, to suggest ways in which this reading might fail to take account of the complexity and variety of nineteenth-century experiments in the genre.

Literary historians have made many connections between the

development of autobiography and the evolution of the spiritual 'conversion' narrative. The problems inherent in the construction of such a history I shall discuss in Section Two, but for the moment I shall simply sketch its outline.

Conveniently, Augustine provides, in his Confessions, (c. 400,) the first recognized example of both genres, and a gesture is often made to this work as representing the beginning of autobiographical history. But the real 'seed-time' of both genres is deferred in most accounts another twelve hundred years, to the Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century. The conglomeration of factors involved in the generation of an 'autobiographical consciousness' - from the development of a concept of individuality and the Puritan horror of wasted time, to the technological advances in mirror-making and printing—has been discussed elsewhere,⁴ but most historians agree in seeing the particular character of Protestant theology as crucial. I follow George Landow in citing Karl Mannheim's view that

the Protestant movement set up in place of revealed salvation, guaranteed by the objective institution of the Church, the notion of the subjective certainty of salvation ... It was not a long step from the doctrine of the subjective certainty to a psychological standpoint in which gradually the observation of the psychic process, which developed into a veritable curiosity, became more important than the harkening to the criteria of salvation which men had formerly tried to detect in their own souls.⁵

Roger Sharrock likewise regards autobiography as receiving a special impetus from the Calvinist emphasis on election. From informal diaries and confessions, in which the writer, by enumerating doubts, sins and blessings, would gauge the state of his or her soul, there evolved a recognized literary form 'cultivated especially by the Puritans, and developed on more specialized lines after 1640 by the leaders of the radical sects.'⁶ Sharrock suggests a link, as early as the mid-

seventeenth century, between this nascent genre and the idea of social and moral authority:

There was a new development in spiritual autobiography in the period of religious ferment between 1640 and 1660. Baptists, Quakers, and Seekers injected fresh vitality into the form and applied it to new purposes. Bunyan and his like, socially inferior to the Presbyterian and Independent clergy and without formal education for the ministry, attempted to justify themselves and to establish their special calling by detailed accounts of the work of grace upon their souls.⁷

Such documents gradually became more detailed and more public, feeding off, and contributing to the 'psychological' novel and the 'method' of Methodism in the eighteenth century, and emerging, in about 1800, as an identifiable (that is to say, named) genre distinguishable from biography on the one hand, and fiction on the other. The proliferation of autobiographical writing from this point onwards was such that by 1826 J. G. Lockhart could complain that 'England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia'.⁸

It has been remarked many times that the 'classic' autobiographers of the Victorian period tend to describe the major event or events in their Lives in terms of conversion. It has also been observed that virtually none of these celebrated conversions represents a simple Pauline acceptance of Christianity. (In his extensive survey of English autobiography, Wayne Shumaker played down the importance of religious confession altogether because, as he saw it, 'of the "great" English autobiographies of the nineteenth century and later, only one, Newman's focuses on religion'.⁹) Most of them, indeed, involve reactions against some aspect of Victorian Protestantism: its defunct theology, its sectarianism, its sabbatarianism, its threadbare rituals, its perpetuation of intricate class distinctions, its repressiveness or its double standards in the areas of sexual behaviour or commerce. But to say that the great Victorian autobiographers rejected some aspect of Victorian Protestantism is to say little more than that they

objected to some aspect of Victorian society. It does not explain why even progressive unbelief resorted to the paradigms of Christian faith in order to explain itself, or why these paradigms were somehow seen to constitute the raison d'être of autobiography.

It has become, of course, a cliché to point out that the more orthodox theology came under fire, the more tenaciously the 'free-thinking' intellectuals of the nineteenth century adhered to the very concepts of duty, morality, and zeal which we associate with Victorian Evangelicism. William Hurrell Mallock remarked upon the persistence of moral earnestness among even the militant unbelievers of his time:

With an astonishing vigour the moral impetus still survives the cessation of the forces that originated and sustained it; and in many cases there is no diminution of it traceable, so far as action goes. This, however, is only true, for the most part, of men advanced in years, in whom habits of virtue have grown strong...¹⁰

The number and ingenuity of the attempts during the period to justify a qualified acceptance of the ethical or aesthetic side of Christianity - to retain a belief in the 'real meaning of the life of Christ' - without recourse to notions of immortality, and perhaps even without God - are well known. Volumes of tortuous theological debate often represented a deep-seated need, not to abandon, but to reclaim the values and assurances of the New Testament. Even Charles Darwin, who effected the most profound undermining of Christian orthodoxy, was compelled to acknowledge, in retrospect, his attraction to unquestioning, preferably unquestionable, faith:

Beautiful as is the morality of the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that its perfection depends in part on the interpretation which we now put on metaphors and allegories. But I was very unwilling to give up my belief. - I feel sure of this for I can well remember often and often inventing day-dreams of old letters between distinguished Romans and manuscripts being discovered at Pompeii or elsewhere which confirmed in the most striking manner all that was written in the Gospels.¹¹

Reading Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, (1833-34) John Henry Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua, (1864) Francis Newman's Phases of Faith, (1853) even the Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, (1887) one begins to suspect that there were as many tailor-made versions of Christianity as there were thinkers. John Addington Symonds is quite explicit about this salvage operation:

So then, having rejected dogmatic Christianity in all its forms, Broad Church Anglicanism, the gospel of Comte, Hegel's superb identification of human thought with essential Being, and many minor nostrums offered in our time to sickening faith - because none of these forsooth were adapted to my nature - I came to fraternize with Goethe, Cleanthes, Whitman, Bruno, Darwin, finding that in their society I could spin my own cocoon with more of congruence to my particular temperament than I discerned in other believers, misbelievers, non-believers, passionate believers, of the ancient and the modern schools.¹²

As Symonds hints, such modifications and adaptations are pragmatic: a means of living with oneself and society, without the deterrents and incentives of Judgement and Immortality. They are defences against the pain of spiritual desertion and isolation. But while these philosophical and religious experiments, and the concurrent need to reconcile reason with conscience, may account for the complexity and scale of the inner turmoil represented in these works, they do not explain why conversion, a specific form of spiritual revolution, should seem to be the appropriate model even for 'secular' autobiographies (and I include here 'fictionalized' works such as Mark Rutherford's Autobiography [1881] and Deliverance, [1885] and fictional narratives such as Kingsley's Alton Locke [1850]). Morality, after all, has little to do with conversion. One need only look to the Bible to realize that the patterns of fall and redemption, exile and return, death and rebirth - the patterns of conversion - survive changes in law, New Covenants, New Commandments. The 'crisis and conversion' sequence goes beyond mere struggle. It is not the spinning of a defensive cocoon. It is a dramatic process of total annihilation and

regeneration: the metamorphosis into an imago.

One cannot, then, argue that the obsession with spiritual upheaval was solely due to reactionary religiosity or left-over piety. I can think of no conclusive reason why moral earnestness per se should need to express itself through the figure of a radical change of heart. On the other hand, there is every reason why a convert should express him or herself earnestly. Must one then infer that the crisis-conversion sequence was common ground - a recognizable, shared model of experience, uniting writers and readers of autobiography; and that for this reason it 'gave interest' to some autobiographers? - that the benighted soul was a fellow-sufferer, and the converted character an ideal, heroic figure, just as he or she was in hagiography, in didactic literature, in spiritual testimony, in the New Testament? Certainly, the invocation of a supposed 'common denominator' and the projection of oneself as role model are regular features of the autobiographical project in the nineteenth century. One of the most challenging tasks which faced the Victorian autobiographer was to distill the general from the stubbornly particular details of a life, often at the expense of proportion and even of common sense. Annie Besant, whose route through life began with Anglicanism and ended with theosophical mysticism, traversing atheism, socialism and a string of other 'isms' on the way, found it necessary to derive universality from her patently unique experience thus:

Since all of us, men and women of this restless and eager generation - surrounded by forces we dimly see but cannot as yet understand, discontented with old ideas and half afraid of new, greedy for the material results of the knowledge brought us by Science but looking askance at her agnosticism as regards the soul, fearful of superstition but still more fearful of atheism, turning from the husks of outgrown creeds but filled with desperate hunger for spiritual ideals - since all of us have the same anxieties, the same griefs, the same yearning hopes, the same passionate desire for knowledge, it may well be that the story of one may help all, and that the tale of one soul that went out alone into the darkness and on the other side found light, that struggled through the Storm and on the other side found Peace, may

bring some ray of light and of peace into the darkness and the storm of other lives.¹³

In this passage from the Preface to her Autobiography, (1893) Besant builds up an exemplary profile of the nineteenth century pilgrim, and then slots herself into it. She describes herself, we note, as 'one soul'. It would seem that her only claim to interest is as just this: soul. Whatever her other experiences of life, as, for instance, mother, estranged wife, friend, campaigner or writer, these must be subordinated to the model of self as redeemed soul.

The structural usefulness of a role model such as that of pilgrim to would-be autobiographers is obvious: it sustains the necessary tension between community of interest (we are all the same), and a certain kind of individuality, (we are all alone, all unique). But conversion itself is not a role. It is an elaborate life model predicated on redemption. Avrom Fleishman, working from the starting point of St. Augustine's Confessions, has listed the components of the model as Natural Childhood, Fall and Exile, Wandering/Journey/Pilgrimage, The Crisis, Epiphany and Conversion, Renewal and Return.¹⁴

What is striking about the nineteenth century (and later) is that many of the autobiographers who adopt conversion as the structure of their life-histories are agnostics, or even atheists: writers who, according to the letter of the scriptures, are unregenerate. It would appear that we are dealing with a kind of conversion which can dispense with the moral and theological dogma of the Damascus Road, whilst retaining its psychological drama, its literary and mythical status.

Even an orthodox divine could discern that there might be two kinds of conversion. In the Spring Lecture of the Presbyterian Church of England for 1879, Alexander Grosart spoke of the highly-educated seventeenth-century Puritan John Howe thus:

Conversion out of fleshly dominion ("publicans and harlots") may in the first thought be more palpable and demonstrative, more

convincing of preterhuman interference; but conversion from intellectual sovereignty to sanctity, and to humility when before the 'spirit' was haughty, vain, unsubdued, is more precious and carries profounder insignia.¹⁵

Whilst conversion is, as Grosart insists, 'universally-needed', there is an almost imperceptible turning-up of the nose at the conversion of 'a man who has debased and polluted himself' or of the 'fanatic or (so-called) vulgar enthusiast, or raw, uneducated, untrained man'.¹⁶ One detects a certain embarrassment about that 'fleshly dominion.' Note the philosophical jargon, the inverted commas around anything that might look 'scriptural.' If a Presbyterian minister can site conversion in the brain, and can, moreover, make a qualitative distinction between fleshly and intellectual salvation, a completely undogmatic - even amoral - version of redemption begins to seem possible.

Just as, for Grosart, the traditional Bunyanesque 'chief of sinners' revolution had become something against which to posit an equally complete, but intellectualized, and hence more palatable transformation, so, for many middle-class autobiographers, it was reduced to a point of comparison with their own personality crises and conversions.

Of course, one must not oversimplify. Many of the autobiographers were neither atheists nor agnostics, and for those who could still call themselves Christian, the Damascus Road was still seen as a type or direct foreshadowing of their own experience, rather than a mere comparison. The tradition of uncomplicated Pauline testimony continued unbroken alongside other developments in autobiography, particularly in the memoirs of dissenting ministers. One could read, in 1870, a newly-published work by the Lancashire preacher John Kershaw, in which typology still meant pure re-enactment rather than literary motif:

I found I was a brother and companion with Paul in this path of internal tribulation and Christian experience. I hastened home to

get my Bible, in order to examine the chapter through. I read it with such light, power and comfort as I had never felt before.¹⁷

Again, in his Apologia Pro Vita Sua, John Newman stands by his consciousness, at the age of fifteen, of a 'great change,'¹⁸

I fell under the influences of a definite Creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured.¹⁹

(But even this change, we note, is referred to intellect). He speaks of an inward conversion 'of which I still am more certain than that I have hands and feet', though he immediately qualifies his remark by pointing out that the Calvinist doctrine of final perseverance he absorbed at the time of his conversion has since been rejected.²⁰ Apart from this single, emphatic declaration of certainty, the account of the experience is matter-of-fact, almost parenthetical.

It must be borne in mind that Newman's Apologia as a whole is polemical: structure and content are controlled by its retaliatory role. Charles Kingsley had published a thinly-disguised attack upon Newman's character and integrity, to which the Apologia was a response. Though it is a spiritual rather than a secular work, the main issue under scrutiny is Newman's Catholicity rather than his Christianity. Nevertheless, it is surprising to find what must be the most significant experience of a Christian's life reduced to so subordinate a factor in his spiritual history.

The real focal point of the Apologia is not Newman's conversion into faith, but his secession, thirty-nine years later, from the Anglican Church, and adoption of Roman Catholicism. But interestingly, despite the different ideological framework of the event, this second change of heart manifests all the psychological symptoms, and employs the literary motifs, that are missing from the youthful episode. Newman himself calls it 'my conversion' and 'that great revolution of

mind, which led me to leave my own home, to which I was bound by so many strong and tender ties'.²¹

The Damascene imagery of blindness and light, absent from the earlier episode, now forces itself into play almost in spite of the author himself, as he tells of a time of perplexity and dismay 'when, in spite of the light given to him according to his need amid his darkness, yet a darkness it emphatically was'.²² In contrast with the factual tone we have observed, now Newman's prose becomes rhythmic, his language metaphoric, as he ventures upon 'a cruel operation, the ripping up of old griefs':²³

It is both to head and heart an extreme trial, thus to analyse what has so long gone by.²⁴

For Newman, withdrawal from the Anglican church involves a period of crisis which can only be likened to a death-bed scene. Identity fades, and chronology becomes meaningless, as Newman reaches his theological Gethsemane:

A death-bed has scarcely a history; it is a tedious decline, with seasons of rallying and seasons of falling back; and since the end is foreseen, or what is called a matter of time, it has little interest for the reader, especially if he has a kind heart. Moreover, it is a season when doors are closed and curtains drawn, and when the sick man neither cares nor is able to record the stages of his malady.²⁵

After such years of torment, the acceptance of Romanism represents, Newman claims, not a new set of opinions or a new creed, but the slotting into place of beliefs long held: it is his homecoming, his discovery of oneness, stillness, continuity, serenity:

I was not conscious to myself, on my conversion, of any change, intellectual or moral, wrought by my mind. I was not conscious of firmer faith in the fundamental truths of Revelation, or of more self-command; I had not more fervour; but it was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption.²⁶

Thus, by means of such recognizably Judaeo-Christian metaphors as

death and rebirth, exile and return, Newman's arduous, closely-followed and minutely-argued theological progress is granted mythic status: doctrinal debate becomes spiritual testimony.

In Newman's case, assurance of catholicity and of personal salvation go hand in hand, and the resultant conviction is identified as Christian. There is, however, another kind of conversion, which comes more and more to the forefront in autobiography as the century progresses: the 'inverted' conversion, or dramatic loss of faith. This usually occurs against a background of rigid parental restraint and religious snobbery - a combination bound to produce some degree of social inadequacy. Harriet Martineau's depiction in her Autobiography (1877) of 'Theological Perplexities' (beginning, by her account, at the age of eight), is a typical story.

Martineau came from a family whose orthodox Calvinism had degenerated over the centuries into Unitarianism, a form of dissent remarkable for its wholesale and seemingly arbitrary dismissal of many of the chief tenets of the Christian faith (including the existence of Hell, the divinity of Christ, and hence the necessity of personal salvation through the blood of Christ), whilst it stressed the loathsomeness of sin, and contrived to remain beneath the moral umbrella of Christianity.

Martineau portrays herself as a Fanny Price-like child, anxious to please, but gauche, over-serious and inclined to priggishness. She is nudged by circumstances and by a habit of introspection into premature religious fanaticism, only to find it aggravate her morbid sensitivity and self-hatred. The illogicality of her sect leaves her intellectually unsatisfied from an early age, and worse still, the absence of conversion in Unitarian doctrine means that her creed affords her no relief from constant self-accusation, no sense of long-term redemption, so that she;

desired punishment or anything else that would give me the one good that I pined for in vain, - ease of conscience.²⁷

The spectacle of an eight-year-old child whose most fervent wish is to be punished out of sinfulness is faintly comic, though containing, one might expect, the seeds of tragedy. At the end of the section on childhood, she sketches the 'gradations' through which she had to pass before 'my chain snapped, - a free rover on the broad, bright breezy common of the universe' but the reader must wait about six hundred pages, and over thirty years of autobiographic time to witness this dénouement.²⁸

Martineau's Fifth Period finds her, by a relentless logic, reaping the fruits of a mismanaged childhood spent 'expecting early death till it was too late to die early'.²⁹ After a few brief years of literary fame and prosperity, she is in Tynemouth, in almost complete isolation; a victim of overwork and anxiety; suffering what she is convinced is a fatal illness; haunted by the death of friends and by guilt-ridden nightmares in which her mother dies of neglect; and still deprived of the consolations, the emotional relief, which her Christianity should have granted her. The scene, one of 'latent fear and blazoned pain',³⁰ is set, not for a death-bed repentance, but for a conversion of a different kind:

A large portion of the transition from religious inconsistency and irrationality to free-thinking strength and liberty was gone over during that period.³¹

The reader is by now prepared for Martineau's subsequent, startling recovery through mesmerism: a recovery regarded by some as an 'unpardonable offence'.³²

It is not possible to pinpoint the exact 'moment' or means of Martineau's revelation, which she describes variously as a Comtean emancipation from the 'débris of the theological'³³ and as a Carlylean

acceptance of the unknowable. But the transition is perhaps best, and most simply expressed as learning, in her time of crisis, 'to be faithful to my best light, - faint as it yet was.'³⁴ The phrase recalls Newman's, quoted earlier. It is this simplicity of diction and metaphor, in fact, which most clearly signals the change in her: the biting criticisms directed towards the selfish and cowardly half-believer open out into the glad acquiescence of the philosophical atheist:

I did not know, ten years ago, what life might be, in regard to freedom, vigour, and peace of mind...During this last sunny period, I have not acquired any dread or dislike of death...³⁵

Peace of mind, victory over (fear of) death: the same elements recur time after time. The ironies inherent in such an inverted motif as 'conversion out of faith' become even more apparent when the subject has already undergone, or, as it seems in retrospect, enacted, a straightforward Pauline conversion. Such 'Turning Figures', as Avrom Fleishman calls them, occur mainly towards the end of the century, in such 'novelistic' works as Mark Rutherford's Autobiography and Edmund Gosse's Father and Son (1907). In these works, a pattern of childhood piety, hypocrisy and premature conversion (stagemanaged by over-zealous parents), forms a parodic counterpoint to adult trial, doubts and the quest for self-discovery. (John Addington Symonds's boyhood love of church architecture and music, and his sexual attraction towards choir-boys, affords another variation of this type of writing.³⁶) The result is explosive: the autobiography becomes a battle-ground between old and new versions of the same metaphors. Fleishman, in his study of 'turn of the century' autobiography, expresses the lasting vitality of the paradox:

Despite their avoidance of the norms of historical narration, these works come into an exemplary status for their period, becoming more representative than the historically minute memoirs. And by a delicate irony, these writings of the iconoclasts - or, failing that, of the experimental artists and freer spirits of the

time - are those which more fully utilize the traditional figures of autobiography, even in the act of casting off the weight of inherited religious and social commitments.³⁷

While it is to be expected that autobiographers with Anglican or Calvinist backgrounds should employ scriptural motifs to describe doctrinal doubts and decisions, it is more astonishing to find John Stuart Mill, at the opposite end of the Victorian spectrum of belief, recounting similar psychological reflexes, in a similar idiom. As he points out himself, he was one of the very few who had 'not thrown off religious belief, but never had it'.³⁸

Mill's Autobiography (first published posthumously in 1873), begins 'characteristically'. Its organization is from the start methodical, - and, like its theme, Mill's education - rational to the point of being almost mechanical. That is not to say, however, that Mill's approach is dull. It is easy to overlook, amidst Mill's unremitting search for cause and pursuit of effect, his often acute awareness of the shifting, complex relationship between metaphor and subject in autobiography:

I conceive that the description so often given of a Benthamite, as a mere reasoning machine, though extremely inapplicable to most of those who have been designated by that title, was during two or three years of my life not altogether untrue of me...There is nothing very extraordinary in this fact: no youth of the age I then was, can be expected to be more than one thing, and this was the thing I happened to be.³⁹

After chapters devoted to such subjects as education, influences and propagandism, the reader is suddenly confronted by 'A Crisis in my Mental History.' Phrases such as 'important transformation' and 'actual revolution' infiltrate Mill's sober prose.⁴⁰ In a famous passage, Mill explodes the myth of selfhood he has been constructing so meticulously:

But the time came when I awakened from this as from a dream. It was in the autumn of 1826. I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, becomes insipid or indifferent; the

state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first "conviction of sin."⁴¹

Again, traditional conversion appears, but as a point of comparison; the inverted commas might almost imply sarcasm: this is a universally-experienced malaise, of which the Methodist response seems to Mill to be an evasion. However, whilst in the grip of depression, Mill mentally forces his own ideals to their logical conclusion - the completion of all his longed-for reforms - and finds an emotional void. Would he be happy if his objects were achieved?

And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, "No!" At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.⁴²

Mill does not suggest the kind of divine intervention experienced by St. Paul or St. Augustine; but, in the context of the life he has been describing, the interference of an antagonistic, uncontrollable, irrational voice, an 'irrepressible self-consciousness,' acquires the status and impact of a supernatural event. The word 'charm' with its magical overtones, is now used twice to sum up what is lacking in his life.⁴³ The same displacement or dispersal of responsibility is evident in many of the autobiographies of the period. A revolutionary decision or life-saving insight is accounted for in terms of an inexplicable, irresistible stimulus or impulse: an independent force. This has the effect, not only of sanctioning the resultant personality-change, but also, by implication, of sanctifying the autobiographical project itself.

When salvation comes, it is rescue from despair, from the death of the heart:-

The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone.⁴⁴

and it is brought about, in the first place, by reading of Marmontel's 'sudden inspiration' as a boy, and secondly, and permanently, by reading Wordsworth.

The main impression one gets of Mill's final redemption through the mediation of poetry is of a prosaic mind struggling to express excitement, pleasure, peace. Even so, redemption it undoubtedly is, and redemption in which Mill is the passive recipient of an ineffable gift one is tempted to call 'grace':

In [the poems of Wordsworth] I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy...From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed...I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation.⁴⁵

Even for the unspiritual Mill, it would seem, the idea of conversion is central to the autobiographical endeavour.

The autobiographies outlined above have not been discussed in chronological order (to do so would be problematic: Martineau's Autobiography, for instance, was written before Newman's or Mill's, but published after both). My aim has been to demonstrate the incidence of conversion in works spanning the full scope of religious background and belief. Examples might be multiplied ad infinitum, to show further ramifications of the 'Damascene' conversion: the momentous acquisition of a political identity (as in Alexander Somerville's pseudo-crucifixion for mutiny in The Autobiography of a Working Man [1848]); the inspired discovery of a vocation (as in Josephine Butler's decision to devote her life to the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts); or the climactic shaking-off of sexual tyranny (as in Annie Besant's Autobiography⁴⁶). What all these cases demonstrate, is that, in the Victorian period, the crisis-conversion structure inherited from Augustine remains influential, despite the fact that the 'matter' of autobiography is clearly becoming diversified, secularized and

cerebral, and despite the fact that, for many writers, the dogmatic foundations of the motif have been seriously, if not totally, undermined.

ii THE CANON

In Section One I examined, in a specifically Victorian context, what Michael Paffard called the 'unattended moment' in autobiographical writing. Paffard himself admits that in so far as these experiences have been subjected to autobiographical scrutiny and reconstruction, 'unattended' moments is a misnomer. I would go further, and suggest that they have been all too thoroughly attended to by anthologists such as Paffard, as well as by literary critics, psychologists and taxonomists of spirituality, brainwashing, mental crisis and breakdown. It is tempting to conclude that these moments of crisis and conversion are the only 'attended moments' in the whole biography of autobiography. In this section I shall examine a number of secondary texts to discover what they have to say about conversion in autobiography, and to assess their relationship to autobiographical tradition.

Of the nineteenth-century devotees of the 'unattended moment', William James is perhaps the most revealing. For his pragmatic account of the psychology of personal religion, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), James draws for his evidence on many of the major and minor classics of Christian literature: Augustine's Confessions, Fox's Journal, Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, and Catholic, Wesleyan and Quaker hagiography. He also calls familiarly on many of the best-known Victorian Lives: John Henry Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua, John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, William Hale White's fictionalized Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, Annie Besant's An Autobiography, and Horatio Forbes Brown's Life of John Addington

Symonds (1895). Inevitably, he alludes extensively and pervasively to Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. A recognition of the currency of such works in the Victorian period, as part of a recognizable genre and as sources of a certain kind of psychological data, is one of the premisses of this thesis.

James's immediate subject, of course, is the content, structure and value of religious experience, rather than the content, structure and value of autobiography. Nevertheless, his discussion casts interesting side-lights on prevalent assumptions about the relationship between spirituality and autobiography: between life and Life.

When describing psychological change in general, and conversion in particular, James is continually hampered by his lack of an analytic language. He tries out the symbolism of nature: phrases such as 'hatching out' and 'burst[ing] into flower'.⁴⁷ He bemoans the need to resort to the 'hackneyed symbolism of a mechanical equilibrium' and speaks of a 'shift in one's centre of energy'.⁴⁸ He even borrows from the Binet/Breuer/Freud school the notion of un- ('sub') conscious interventions in the mental life, and discerns

whole systems of underground life, in the shape of memories of a painful sort which lead a parasitic existence, buried outside of the primary fields of consciousness, and making irruptions thereinto with hallucinations, pains, convulsions, paralyses of feeling and of motion, and the whole procession of symptoms of hysteric disease of body and of mind.⁴⁹

But whichever symbolism he adopts, he is condemned to substitute one set of metaphors for another. The only alternative seems to be to return to the language he is intent on examining: the language of the spiritual narratives themselves. With uncanny consistency, James's descriptions and analyses of psychological phenomena turn out to be descriptions and analyses of autobiography, or accounts of accounts. Discussing what he sees as the two categories of religious constitution, for instance, he observes:

two ways of looking at life which are characteristic respectively of what we called the healthy-minded, who need to be born only once, and of the sick souls, who must be twice born in order to be happy. The result is two different conceptions of the universe of our experience. In the religion of the once-born the world is a sort of rectilinear or one-storied affair, whose accounts are kept in one denomination, whose parts have just the values which naturally they appear to have, and of which a simple algebraic sum of pluses and minuses will give the total worth... In the religion of the twice born, on the other hand, the world is a double-storied mystery. Peace cannot be reached by the simple addition of pluses and elimination of minuses from life... There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other.⁵⁰

With the elusiveness characteristic of autobiographical referents, the unattended moments dissolve only to reconstitute themselves in - or as - James's own discourse.

This is a complicated way of saying that James's logic is circular because it disregards the issue of representation. The issue of representation refuses to go away, and, taking advantage of this blind spot, sneaks back into the text at important points.

On the surface, James's thesis is perfectly clear. According to his theory, we all inhabit a continuum between healthy- and sick-mindedness. Healthy-mindedness is characterized by happiness and conscious or unconscious mental unity (depending whether the health is innate or achieved). Sick-mindedness is characterized by melancholy and various kinds of inner division.

Now in all of us, however constituted, but to a degree the greater in proportion as we are intense and sensitive and subject to diversified temptations, and to the greatest possible degree if we are decidedly psychopathic, does the normal evolution of character chiefly consist in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self.⁵¹

As James avers, the acquisition of a religious certainty is only one of the ways in which the divided self might achieve unity:

the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and license; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge

or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event, - a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency.⁵²

But whatever the particular form of the new birth, its result is always the same: 'a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy'.⁵³

The divided self, fostered alike by psychoanalytic criticism and modernism, is today the protagonist in most histories of Victorian literature, whilst the unified self, on the other hand, persists largely as an ungainly dinosaur of aesthetic principle. James's model, however, requires both, and his argument is haunted by the question of what it means to be 'unified and consciously right, superior and happy', and how these properties are related to his autobiographical sources. My reading of Victorian autobiography suggests that it is very often in the interrogation of this concept of the unified self, rather than in the deployment and multiplication of divisions, that the most interesting and innovative nineteenth-century autobiographical experiments take place.

As we have seen, the matter of literariness makes a number of fascinating incursions into James's text. The properties of saintliness, he asserts, are asceticism, strength of soul, purity and charity.⁵⁴ But what is the value of saintliness? 'The saints', he replies, are authors, auctores, increasers, of goodness.⁵⁵ On the fact that often his saints are (literally? metaphorically?) authors of themselves James makes no comment. Nor does he consider his definition of religious geniuses to be problematic:

Often they have led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy during a part of their career. They have known no measure, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas, and frequently they have fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological. Often, moreover, these pathological features in

their career have helped to give them their religious authority and influence.⁵⁶

Time and time again James uses the aesthetics of personality and the psychology of literature, or the psychology of personality and the aesthetics of literature, to explain each other:

And life, when full of disorder and slackness and vague superfluity, can no more have what we call character than literature can have it under similar circumstances.⁵⁷

Obviously, the aesthetics of autobiography and James's humanist discourse intermesh because he is deriving his psychology mainly from autobiography. But the picture is more complex. His particular selection from the range of available autobiographies - spiritual narratives - to some extent predetermines the parameters of his psychological insights, and vice versa. Furthermore, his views on human psychology affect his evaluation of his chosen autobiographies. Hence, for example,

Augustine's psychological genius has given an account of the trouble of having a divided self which has never been surpassed.⁵⁸

This impenetrable system of relationships does not even begin to take into account the immensely complicated material interests vested in the ideologies of genius, perfectability and authority, or in the production and consumption of autobiographical and, say, psychological books as commodities. When all these mechanisms are brought into operation, not just by one psychologist, but by reviewers and publishers and literary critics and historians and mediators and producers of culture generally, then a literary canon comes into being.

The canon of nineteenth-century British autobiography might look more or less like this: Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua (as classically perfect example); Mill's Autobiography (as most psycho-

logically interesting); and Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (problematic as autobiography but crucial as revivifier of the genre). There might also be a nod to poetry, (Wordsworth's The Prelude or Tennyson's In Memoriam, both first published in 1850); to women's autobiography, (probably Harriet Martineau's Autobiography of 1877); and possibly to formal decadence (Ruskin's Praeterita of 1885-9 or Edmund Gosse's Father and Son of 1907). Innumerable variations on this list might be drawn up without obscuring the impression that the pantheon of classic Victorian autobiographers coincides more nearly with the pantheon of Victorian 'sages' than with any other likely group of 'greats': novelists, poets, or politicians, for instance. Given such an assemblage of text, on the other hand, one would be hard put to deduce their generic features. (Criticism of autobiography has been dominated by the debate over genre.) With the exception always of Sartor Resartus, these works are all in the first person; they are all largely retrospective, and they are all concerned with the development of the self. On the other hand, they are not all in continuous prose, and they vary greatly as to the scope of their retrospective, their degree of exclusive absorption with the self, and their rhetorical posture, (such as confession or apologia). What they do share, however, is an investment in Christian conversion as a figure of personal change. (And this despite the fact that none of the autobiographers has what might be called a straightforward relationship to Protestant Christianity.). Hence the canonical texts overlap to a considerable extent with James's primary materials.

Much the same assumptions as are evident in The Varieties of Religious Experience are to be found sixty years later in John C. Morris' Versions of the Self (1966). Adopting an uncompromisingly 'twentieth-century' vantage-point, Morris observes that

The experiences recorded in nineteenth-century autobiography are

... secular counterparts of the religious melancholy and conversions set down in the autobiographies of earlier heroes of religion.⁵⁹

but admits that

The manner in which the earlier styles of experience made themselves available to Wordsworth and Mill - and eventually and remotely to us - is a mystery I cannot penetrate.⁶⁰

According to Morris' reading of autobiographical history, the 'normal vision' of a Roger North or an Edward Gibbon, while admirable in many ways, is ultimately of lesser value because its possessors do not 'share the talent for extreme experience that brings the apocalypse home to the individual soul'.⁶¹ Cowper, on the other hand, is crucial because he is the first autobiographer to recognize the link between religious experience and mental breakdown: thus paving the way for the secular convert of the nineteenth century. For Morris, the point is that, during the nineteenth century, 'consciousnesses capable of supporting such experience [crisis, collapse and rebirth] came more and more to predominate and to see in the suffering they had endured the source of that insight and wisdom that was their title to power'.⁶² It is not made clear how consciousnesses are able to see themselves, nor does Morris question either the wisdom or the entitlement to power of his convert-autobiographers. This is because conversion, as he sees it, is fundamental to 'modern' consciousness:

However thoroughly we may have cheapened and vulgarized the idea, we still believe, in some very general sense, that to be really serious people we must be 'twice-born' - through psychoanalysis, perhaps, or neurotic collapse, or some other deep personal distress.⁶³

As in The Varieties, psychology, autobiography and aesthetics interpenetrate each other, this time in a 'modernist' guise, but with very similar results. Conversion confers 'seriousness'; seriousness guarantees worthwhile autobiography; worthwhile autobiography contains

conversion. Such circular arguments abound even in recent autobiographical criticism, of which A. O. J. Cockshut's The Art of Autobiography shall serve as an example. Cockshut's definition of the greatest autobiographies is that they

are controlled by a leading idea, a pattern strong in its simplicity, but endlessly hospitable in receiving detail. At the same time, subject and object, the voice of the writer and the person described are experienced by the reader as a living unity.⁶⁴

Byron, Boswell and Harriette Wilson are only 'half-way' to Autobiography because they are not consistent: they do not fully synthesize their materials. Of Byron, Cockshut argues that 'Intelligent and reflective though he can be in analysing parts or aspects of his life, he is incapable of drawing them into unity'.⁶⁵ Cockshut relates this aesthetic criterion to personality, and, more obscurely, to sexual continence: his main interest in his 'failed' or 'lesser' autobiographers would seem to be their promiscuity. Continence, in turn, is related to the aesthetics of autobiography:

And though the distinguished autobiographer may equally be celibate or happily married or sexually promiscuous, there is something inherently virginal about his aim. He is retreating from life, temporarily, to find something in himself that the ordinary round of life, both domestic and professional, ignores or pushes to one side.⁶⁶

Cockshut submits that autobiographers of quest and conversion are 'the purest (which does not necessarily mean the best) autobiographers'.⁶⁷ The mysterious nature of the conversion experience, which ultimately defeats the descriptive powers of a Wordsworth or the analytical skills of a Newman, is crucial to its significance. The autobiographers of conversion can do no more than 'grope for illustrative metaphors'.⁶⁸

This is all the critic can do. What emerges from the writings of James, Morris and Cockshut is a sense of the continuing validity of

conversion as the autobiographical figure, according to certain interconnected standards of aesthetic 'unity', authorial 'integrity', and psychological 'wholeness'.

111 THE FUNCTION OF CONVERSION

That conversion (or at least profession of conversion) was often a cultural imperative in Nonconformist and Evangelical quarters, both as a bonding mechanism and as a means of entry into circles of privilege and influence, has been documented by historians of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ In literary terms, however, the truthfulness of any account of conversion is beside the point. It is virtually taken for granted by theorists that autobiographers in the Western Tradition will adhere supererogatively to Judaeo-Christian narrative structures for the form of their Lives, and will employ Judaeo-Christian allusion as a point of reference. Increasingly, scrutiny has shifted away from the 'spiritual content' of the conversion experience in autobiography - which is neither verifiable nor quantifiable - and has focussed on conversion as a 'narrative structure', 'plot', 'figure', or 'myth'. This kind of analysis has taken a number of forms, some of which I shall outline below.⁷⁰ All, however, reproduce the cyclical definitions we have observed in James, Morris and Cockshut.

One of the causes of this critical consensus is easy to determine: the paucity of positive generalizations that can be made about autobiography. George Landow's description is typical:

To qualify as autobiography, a work must not only present a version, myth or metaphor of the self, but it must also be retrospective and hence it must self-consciously contrast two selves, the writing "I" and the one located (or created) in the past.⁷¹

Anxiety about the paradox of representing a 'past self' whilst burdened with a 'present self'; and about how, when and why these constructed

selves might come into contact, informs most autobiographical criticism. It is a small step from this notion of 'contrast between selves past and present' to the idea of conversion as the appropriate 'version, myth or metaphor'. Thereafter, a critical programme emerges: that of theorizing autobiography as conversion-narrative, and of eliminating any 'extra-generic' excrescences en route. Karl J. Weintraub, for example, sees the 'autobiographic effort' as motivated by a desire to assign meaning to a life:

This effort is usually dominated by the writer's "point of view," in the most literal sense of the coordinate point in space and time at which the autobiographer stands to view his life. The essential issue is that such a point in time is located on the lifeline of the writer somewhere beyond a moment of crisis or beyond an experience, or a cumulative set of experiences which can play the same function as a crisis...At such crisis points lives undergo a wrenching; personal matter in diffused suspension is catalyzed to take on clarified form; the personality gels like the crystal on its lattices. It is as if scales fall off the eyes which now begin to see purposes only seen confusedly before.⁷²

According to this view, the crisis-conversion motif is a prism through which the writer is able to perceive and diagrammatize his or her relationship to a previous self. This holds true whether the present self is regarded as an entirely 'new creature', as in pure spiritual testimony, or simply as a redirected, consolidated being, as with Martineau or Newman. Looking back to the moment of reckoning, the self is able at once to confront, reject, and absorb its previous incarnation, by reliving or 'writing out' the experience. If this process is absent, then an autobiographer will 'fail':

When the autobiographic effort lacks the prior illumination securing the author's retrospective view on a patterned experience, the autobiographic function tends to become self-orientation, and the autobiographic form is either crippled or underdeveloped.⁷³

While I would not deny that many Victorian autobiographers do opt for the traditional solution to the problem of self-presentation through time, I am alarmed by the supposition that adopting the conversion

structure is the only means of assigning meaning to a life.

Jean Starobinski, in an influential essay of 1971, has related conversion to 'The Style of Autobiography'. He begins by offering a disarmingly flexible definition of autobiography - one which will serve as my own for the purposes of this thesis:

A biography of a person written by himself: this definition of autobiography establishes the intrinsic character of the enterprise and thus the general (and generic) conditions of autobiographical writing. But this is not merely the definition of a literary genre: in their essentials, these conditions ensure that the identity of the narrator and the hero of the narration will be revealed in the work. Further, they require that the work be a narrative and not merely a description. Biography is not portrait; or if it is a kind of portrait, it adds time and movement. The narrative must cover a temporal sequence sufficiently extensive to allow the emergence of the contour of a life. Within these conditions, autobiography may be limited to a page or extended through many volumes. It is also free to "contaminate" the record of the life with events which could only have been witnessed from a distance. The autobiographer then doubles as a writer of memoirs (this is the case of Chateaubriand); he is free also to date precisely various stages of the revisions of the text, and at the moment of composition to look back upon his situation. The intimate journal may intrude upon autobiography, and an autobiography may from time to time become a "diarist" (this, again, is the case with Chateaubriand).⁷⁴

This circumspect account would seem to be refreshingly free from the prescriptive equation of 'self' with 'soul' (and hence 'Life' with 'Inner Life') which underpins most autobiographical criticism. Starobinski goes on to engage Emile Benveniste's categories of discourse ('a "statement presupposing a speaker and an auditor; and in the first-named, an intention of influencing the second in some way"', and historic statement ("narrative of past events"') to describe the style of autobiography as contaminated by memoir.⁷⁵

But why does autobiography come to be thus contaminated? The answer, given almost as an aside, is the one we have come to expect:

Let me add this remark: one would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life - conversion, entry into a new life, the operation of Grace... It is the internal transformation of the individual - and

the exemplary character of this transformation - which furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which "I" is both subject and object.⁷⁶

Since the 'I' is a linguistic constant, the element of time (and in French in particular, the various past tenses) must carry the burden of denoting change:

The changes of identity are marked by verbal and attributive elements: they are perhaps still more subtly expressed in the contamination of the discourse by traits proper to history...⁷⁷

Starobinski's argument raises a number of useful points. One is the idea of 'pure' and 'impure' autobiography. Such categories have long obsessed critics and theorists. A review contemporary with James's The Varieties of Religious Experience, for instance, asserts that

we are quite serious, or as serious as we ever like to be, in maintaining that autobiography as a species shall keep itself as unmixed as possible. Let there be reminiscence proper, and autobiography proper, and let the mixture of the two be regarded as measurably improper.⁷⁸

But 'ne'er the twain' distinctions, fine and crude, have preoccupied critics rather than autobiographers themselves - who nonchalantly or conscientiously ignore them. As Starobinski suggests, autobiographers typically violate any rule requiring them to concentrate exclusively on themselves, finding that, in practice, discussion of the self is arid without reference to others, and that the exploration of relationships is often the most congenial mode of self-presentation. Nineteenth-century autobiographers move freely between confession, apology, reminiscence, memoir, biography, diary and chronicle, so that the various modes supplement and complement each other. According to Starobinski, memoir (or 'history') invades autobiography to serve the latter's essential conversion structure.

My own reading suggests the reverse: that autobiographers will

resist the conversion plot in order to explore different kinds of 'identity change'; or to posit a continuous identity; or to problematize identity itself; and that memoir (or diary, or reminiscence) will often be brought into play in proportion to the extent, strength or success of this resistance. The nature of the contribution of the reminiscent, journal and biographic modes to autobiography is one of the incidental subjects of this thesis. A number of the works I shall examine - and the traits they manifest - simply do not figure in descriptions of autobiographical tradition, because they do not accord with a (to my mind impoverishing) critical doctrine. If they are read at all (and most have been reprinted - and remaindered - since 1970), they are read, not as autobiographies, but as social history, or fiction, or 'history of ideas', or as supplemental to a more conventional (i. e. conversion-centred) autobiography or biography.

Another suggestion put forward by Starobinski is that the autobiographical conversion is 'exemplary'. There are two ways in which such a conversion can be exemplary: by establishing a didactic relationship between writer and audience; and by invoking a powerful literary and exegetical tradition.

The idea of autobiography as preaching (and therefore morally necessary) has its roots in the New Testament, where commitment and avowal are two sides of the same coin:

The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ⁷⁹

and before that, in the words of the Psalmist:

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy
praise.

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou
delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a
contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.⁸⁰

The appeal to 'testimony as duty' is perhaps as much a matter of
rhetoric as of ideology by the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless,
it is a rhetoric which neatly solves the problem of what Fleishman
calls 'the firm restraints on public posturing'⁸¹ which, in theory for
men and in practice for women, obtain in the Victorian period. The
'evangelical motive' may be acceptable where the purely confessional or
apologetic are not. It is also a rhetoric which goes some way to
resolving what Howard Helsingher has called the 'difficulty of
establishing a basis for belief', or more precisely, the 'problem of
creating an appearance of honesty'.⁸² In default of any other claim to
the reader's attention, the convert can claim authority on the basis of
a definitive experience. In his 'Notes on the Construction of
Sheepfolds' Ruskin maps out some of the theological terrain for this
manoeuvre:

There is, therefore, in matters of doctrine, no such thing as the
Authority of the Church. We might as well talk of the authority
of a morning cloud.⁸³

He goes on to point out that

The whole function of Priesthood was, on Christmas morning, at
once and for ever gathered into His Person who was born at
Bethlehem; and thence-forward, all who are united with Him, and
who with Him make sacrifice of themselves; that is to say, all
members of the Invisible Church become, at the instant of their
conversion, Priests...⁸⁴

The passage is a useful one, as it brings to light the second way in
which conversion is exemplary. Ruskin states succinctly the

typological significance of individual conversion as the figuration and exemplification of the Christian redemptive scheme. The experience of the convert, the Life of Christ, and all its biblical equivalents are called up simultaneously in any typological reference. All are 'historical events' but refer back and forth to each other for their wider significance.

Conversion, then, is at the centre of typological representation and hermeneutics, both of which underwent a revival in the Victorian period. George Landow's work on Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites has illuminated the many uses to which Victorian writers and artists (both Christian and atheist) put typology. I will mention only a few ways in which typology might be said to be of service to autobiographers.

In typological symbolism, both signifier and signified have importance in their own right, so the autobiographer can call on the whole 'imaginative cosmos' of Judaeo-Christian culture for self-representation,⁸⁵ whilst retaining his or her individuality and individual significance. Typology fuses realism with symbolism, and thus affords a language of autobiography which 'participates in eternity'.⁸⁶ Because a single typological reference generates the whole Gospel scheme, it has enormous resonance; and even, perhaps, the mythic status which, according to Fleishman, has 'significance for any reader irrespective of religious affiliation or ... cultural context'.⁸⁷ By this route, so Fleishman's theory goes, an autobiography can become accepted as a work of art.

Fleishman also argues that the particular texture of Victorian typological usage is the result of the autobiographer's irregular 'exfoliation' of later aesthetic versions of the original type.⁸⁸ Hence, for instance, Mill reaches back, now through Methodist autobiography, now through Wordsworth or Marmontel, to the biblical type of his experience. As should now be clear, it is not the

simplicity of a Damascene experience which recommends it to critics of autobiography. John Kershaw's claim to be a 'brother and companion with Paul' does not grant him access to the great tradition of Victorian autobiography. The more intricate an autobiography's accommodations to and elaborations of the conversion structure, the greater its chance of acceptance as a 'classic' of the genre.

A great deal of critical effort has gone into isolating the typological components of Mill's and other 'classic' autobiographies: standard incidents, recurrent metaphors, biblical allusions, and so on. In a sense, my interest begins where this work ends: in the autobiographical writing which does not respond, or does not respond fully, to typological exegesis.

In order to clarify my position in relation to this 'typological' school of autobiographical criticism, I shall briefly discuss the work of one of its most recent exponents. In her Victorian Autobiography. The Tradition of Self-Interpretation, Linda Peterson shares with many critics (and with myself) the starting-point of her observations: a recognition of the impact on Victorian autobiographers of the tradition of spiritual testimony. Though our approaches to the subject -and our findings in it - differ widely, our routes coincide and cross at some points. Rather than mechanically indicating these moments of convergence (and parting) along the way, it might be more useful to give a broader overview of my relation to her thesis generally.

The kind of reading Peterson undertakes is essentially a Bloomian, revisionist one:

In the autobiographical tradition, prior works of the genre do somehow possess each new autobiographer's self: they determine how he views his experience, how he understands the self, how he orders the contours of his personal history. Yet if the autobiographer cannot escape the power of generic conventions to shape his self-conception, it is equally impossible to imagine an autobiography (that is, a history of an individual self) that merely repeats the conventions. In order to write an autobiography, the autobiographer must in some way violate the

generic tradition or deviate from it - and, in so doing, discover the self.⁸⁹

I have no difficulty in concurring unreservedly with this formulation, as far as it goes. Where I cannot follow Peterson, however, is in her definition of autobiography's 'generic conventions'. When she contends that English autobiography (as opposed to French) is characterized by its commitment to systematic self-interpretation (as opposed to self-presentation) I become uneasy on a number of counts.

The first is substantive. I cannot allow that the distinction between narrative 'presentation' and 'interpretation' is nearly as clear cut as Peterson's mode of analysis requires. Self-presentation, being a process of selection, organization and so on, is necessarily interpretative, while the hermeneutic components of an autobiography, however rigid and formalized they may appear, are inevitably bound up with the projection of a self-image.

Secondly, Peterson's insistence on the 'hermeneutic imperative', and on English autobiography in the nineteenth century as the direct descendant of typological exegesis, has the effect of foreclosing the genre at the very point at which dramatic changes begin to happen: the point at which, in other words, my work begins. Peterson's version of the literary history of autobiography hinges on the varying relationships between narration and exposition exhibited in her chosen texts: the complex ways in which her autobiographers capitulate to, negotiate with, or transform the hermeneutic method inherited from Bunyan and his contemporaries. With the surprising omission of John Stuart Mill, her work focusses on the commonly acknowledged 'classics' of the Victorian period. We see Thomas Carlyle, in Sartor Resartus, reconstructing himself by revising the conventions of biblical hermeneutics to incorporate a post-rationalist Higher Criticism; John Henry Newman, in his Apologia pro Vita Sua, rehabilitating Augustine's Confessions and ecclesiastical hermeneutics alongside Bunyan and evangelical typology,

to produce the 'culminating English example' of the spiritual autobiography;⁹⁰ Harriet Martineau, in her Autobiography, struggling to produce an anti-theological, Comptean method of interpretation; and Edmund Gosse, in Father and Son, parodying biblical forms, experimenting with scientific and literary hermeneutics, but ultimately rejecting system altogether in favour of localized, discrete, and often self-neutralizing modes of exposition - thus exemplifying, in Peterson's terms, 'generic demise'.⁹¹ Under the pressure of Peterson's own hermeneutics, the genre literally (and, one might add, conveniently), disintegrates at the close of the Victorian period:

The autobiographical impulse still found expression in other literary genres, but bereft of the hermeneutic imperative that had made Victorian autobiography a self-conscious literary tradition.⁹²

In order to maintain its clean trajectory from Bunyan through Cowper to Gosse, Peterson's autobiographical tradition 'bypasses more prestigious men like Edward Gibbon and Roger North who wrote in the public, res gestae mode'.⁹³ This is the root of my third anxiety about her approach. Like John N. Morris, whom she cites in this respect, Peterson admits very little room for manoeuvre between the most private, 'self as soul' and the most public 'res gestae' forms of life-writing - the former being 'literature' and the latter (implicitly) not.⁹⁴ My research suggests, and my claim hereafter will be, that it is just this space, between soul and 'matter of fact.', that later Victorian autobiographers were beginning, tentatively, to explore. This space, virtually unimaginable from most accounts of autobiography, can accommodate personal relationships, domestic life, and work, for instance, and affords opportunities for the consideration of, among other matters, the autobiographical self as gendered, social being.

Where Peterson discerns a 'hermeneutic imperative' as the sine qua non of autobiographical aesthetics, I find the conversion motif. The view of the autobiographical self as convert is, to me, the convention with which autobiographers must negotiate, and which they must sometimes violate in order to come into being. The typological scheme she identifies, with its wilderness wanderings, its moment of recognition and its final 'Pisgah vision', is, of course, that of conversion. And Peterson's notion of the 'convergence' of protagonist and narrator at the moment of illumination parallels my sense of conversion as the primary organizer of time in conventional autobiography.⁹⁵ But for Peterson, this scheme is merely a function of, and finally subordinate to, the operations of the hermeneutic system. What she recognizes as the autobiographical 'closure' ensured by the redemptive framework is, in my reading, the informing principle of the genre as the Victorians inherited it.

This is not merely a matter of emphasis: the difference in our perspectives has profound implications for the relative possibilities of the genre. To give an example, Peterson's treatment of Harriet Martineau's Autobiography rests on the assumption that women in the nineteenth century possessed neither the experience nor the authority to employ biblical hermeneutics and to 'speak the language of biblical types'.⁹⁶ Martineau is consequently represented as an exception to this rule, 'one of the few instances (perhaps the only instance) of a spiritual autobiography written and published by an Englishwoman during the nineteenth century'.⁹⁷ In the course of my reading I have come across several autobiographies by Victorian women who employ 'the language of biblical types' (though perhaps not the usual ones), and who interpret their lives systematically as manifesting evidence of Divine Grace and Providence - suggesting that it was not experience and authority in biblical hermeneutics that women lacked.⁹⁸

The problems experienced by women autobiographers, it seems to me,

had more to do with their discomfort with the persona of convert, implying as it must authority and even prophetic power. The gendered nature of the conversion motif, I shall argue, affects, in different ways, both male and female autobiographers. Put crudely, if the process of conversion is divided into its most basic components - suffering and crisis (whether neurotic or spiritual or emotional) on the one hand and 'assurance' on the other - it can be seen how gender might cut across it. By the mid-nineteenth century, excessive Romanticism and emotionalism were beginning to be seen as incompatible with true manliness. Meanwhile, assurance, confidence and authority were increasingly seen as masculine traits to be regarded with deep suspicion in a woman. Whether or not they eschew the prophetic role, women who attempt any kind of internal history tend to adopt the stance of the would-be (failed) martyr; their stories are overshadowed by an existential dilemma - they have failed to die young.

Avrom Fleishman approaches this position when he comments that Victorian autobiographers

inherited the resources of writing life stories from a tradition at once confessional and affirmative, they also inherit the diffidence already observable in some of the Romantics, not merely about the "unmanly" or "ungentlemanly" attention which self-publication draws, but about the self-exaltation which a Victorian "prophet" must draw back from... Yet one and all make the effort to universalize the self in figural terms, aware of the necessary failure of the disguise yet resigned to bear the consequences - fully realized in the debunking biographies by modern critics.⁹⁹

Fleishman is surely right to suggest an ambivalence in Victorian autobiography to self-publication, self-exaltation, and all they entail. He is right also to sense that this ambivalence may sometimes be related to a consciousness of gender or class, though not always in the ways he assumes. By examining texts from the outer reaches of the autobiographical canon, I hope to show in this thesis that the 'figures' adopted by Victorian autobiographers were not necessarily

Augustinian, nor were they necessarily failures. In the end, I am drawn to Wayne Shumaker's rough-and-ready conclusion that

one has not the right to suggest that some ways of reliving bygone experience are more legitimate than others.¹⁰⁰

CHAPTER 1

TO THE DARK HOUSE:

LESLIE STEPHEN AND THE MAUSOLEUM BOOK.

A man who expects that future generations will be profoundly interested in the state of his interior seems to be drawing a heavy bill upon posterity.¹

So wrote Leslie Stephen in his collection of essays Hours in a Library (1892). Yet the very fact that he should make such a statement - and that he should devote a whole essay to the subject of autobiography - bears witness to Stephen's own willingness to 'cover' the bill. Stephen was at once amused and intrigued by autobiography, and, as the essay quoted above illustrates, had a clearer-than-average notion of what makes autobiography so fascinating:

It may be reckoned, too, as a special felicity that an autobiography, alone of all books, may be more valuable in proportion to the amount of misrepresentation which it contains.²

Despite, or rather because of, his insight into the way the genre works, Stephen himself was reluctant to tackle directly the task of writing his own Life. His awareness of autobiographical conventions, and of their possible misuse, made him deeply distrustful of the genre. We can, however, learn much about the state of autobiography in the late nineteenth century from Stephen's very reticence.

Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book (1977, written 1895), was intended, as he states in the opening paragraph, to be a private letter to his children about their mother.³ Julia Stephen had died about two weeks before the work was begun; its avowed function was therefore elegiac (and hence therapeutic). Despite this prescription, the book is no longer a private communication, neither is it regarded as biography. Today, as readers, we are not embarrassed to appropriate the work as 'literature' (and hence public property), and do not hesitate to file it in the capacious canon of autobiographical literature.

That elegy should, in practice, overlap with confession is not

without precedent: Lycidas and In Memoriam, for example, both have this two-fold function. Nor is it surprising, though disconcerting, perhaps, that the biography of a wife should turn out to be substantially the story of the husband. What is problematic, if one shakes off, for a moment, well-ingrained habits of reading, is that the Mausoleum Book, a document so emphatically intimate, should now be treated as public property.

Yet our lack of scruples is anticipated, perhaps even justified, by Stephen himself. After tactfully declining to impose restrictions upon his children's use of the manuscript after his death, he continues:

Indeed it might possibly be worth while for somebody to look through what I have written and make some use it, if anything at all has to be said about me...

I wish to write mainly about your mother. But I find that in order to speak intelligibly it will be best to begin by saying something about myself. It may interest you and it will make the main story clearer. Now I have no intention of writing autobiography except in this incidental way. One reason is that my memory for facts is far from a good one, and that I really remember very few incidents which are at all worth telling. Another reason is that I could give you none of those narratives of inward events, conversions or spiritual crises which give interest to some autobiographers. I was amused lately by reading Horatio Brown's life of Symonds, virtually an autobiography, and reflecting how little of the same kind of internal history could be told of me. My mental and moral development followed a quiet and commonplace course enough. I do, indeed, remember certain facts about myself. I could give a history of some struggles through which I had to pass - successfully or otherwise: but I have a certain sense of satisfaction in reflecting that I shall take that knowledge with me to the grave. There was nothing unusual or remarkable about my inner life; although I may also say that without a knowledge of the facts to which I have referred, nobody could write an adequate history of my life. As the knowledge is confined to me and will never be imparted by me to others, it follows that no adequate history of my life can ever be written. The world will lose little by that. (p.4)

The passage is worth quoting at length for the hints it gives about the status of biographical data, both in this case, and more generally. The argument as a whole assumes that life-writing, whether of the self or of another, is inevitable and to some extent desirable. The genre, Stephen implies, has its own momentum, enforces its own

norms: theory is derived from practice rather than vice versa. All this, however, is between the lines. Perhaps the most immediately striking aspect of the passage is the presence of a small group of fellow-practitioners - Life writers - available to justify these norms.

The figure of the 'mother' appears only in passing as the latest in a line of sometimes overlapping subjects and objects. Stephen himself is present here both as biographer and autobiographer (if only 'incidentally' the latter). In the background, or rather, in a footnote appended by the author himself,⁴ lurks the formidable figure of Stephen the professional Biographer with a capital B, writer, editor, systematizer and demystifier of Lives, accustomed, albeit begrudgingly, to dealing with them primarily as units in a vast but finite alphabetical series: 'Blessed are the index makers; or at least they ought to be'.⁵ This is the Stephen of the DNB, who insisted upon 'brevity, scholarship, punctuality and business-like precision' from his contributors;⁶ who, in the footnote mentioned above, enlists F. W. Maitland as his own biographer; and who shrewdly foresees that the impromptu outpourings of the Mausoleum Book will be plundered as source material in the future.

Stephen's participation in Life-writing is thus both active and passive: he is simultaneously conscious of writing a Life and living a Life. Naturally enough, this involvement extends to reading - in this instance, Horatio Brown's biography of Stephen's old friend John Addington Symonds.⁷ As Stephen points out, Brown's biography of Symonds is almost entirely in the first person, being compiled from letters, journals and, needless to say, a manuscript autobiography, all of which were bequeathed by Symonds to Brown to use as he saw fit. (The exact use Brown made of this trust is another, but related matter, to which I shall return.) Symonds, finally, was well known not only as the biographer of Michelangelo (1892), but as the translator of autobiographies by Cellini and Gozzi (1887, 1890).

Implicit in the passage, then, is the presence of a fairly close-knit group of writers who, though they might prefer to think of themselves as Philosophers, or Men of Letters, or Historians, or Critics, dabbling in biography as a side-line, gain, not perhaps their bread and butter, but at least their reputation, from life stories. Such being the case, they may well claim the right to theorize, to make rules, even to pontificate upon the subject. Meanwhile, somewhere behind this citing of authorities, looms the notion of the 'official', or 'authorized', or 'definitive' Life. It is worth noting that no differentiation is made between autobiography and biography in the Stephen's argument.⁸ Furthermore, the possibility, granted the availability of a certain body of knowledge, of writing an 'adequate history' of a life, whether in the first or third person, appears to be accepted without question.

The impression created is of a sizeable, well-established sphere of middle-class activity, in which access to privileged information is carefully controlled, and whose status lies between that of a trade, with its élite artisans, its mysteries and skills transmitted from generation to generation, and that of a booming information industry stimulating and feeding the appetite of the public for details about the lives of the eminent. A sense of power, of being in control of the creative process, underlies Stephen's attitude to the work in hand. Initiated into the mechanics of what makes an 'adequate history' of a life, he considers himself able to throw a spanner in the works simply by withholding 'certain facts' about himself. This policy he adopts consistently. When, for example, he is describing his uncharacteristic indifference to his fate after resigning his position at Cambridge, he refuses to explain his behaviour because 'I could only do so by making some of those personal disclosures from which I have resolved to refrain' (p.7).

This seeming diffidence is partly - but only partly - explicable in terms of Stephen's relationship with his immediate readership. On the surface at least, the Mausoleum Book is a private, confidential letter to his children. But it would hardly be expected that the habits of reserve and the severe, life-long constraints of the stereotypical Victorian father-child relationship should be abandoned in writing - especially late in life. The 'privacy' of the Mausoleum Book is thus rigidly formalized. An avoidance of real intimacy, and a rigorously didactic approach to life's experiences had long been conventional in offspring-directed autobiography. In Stephen's case, a model was close at hand: the Memoirs of his paternal grandfather, James Stephen 'Written by Himself for the Use of His Children', (written c.1819-32, published 1954). This work, to which the author self-consciously refers as an 'auto-biography', is assumed, in the 'Introductory Reflections', to be both required and sanctified by the responsibilities of parenthood. It is the duty of a parent to instruct his descendents in the operations of divine providence as he has witnessed them:

It is desirable at least that the attestation of a Parent's experience in a private way should not be withheld from his children.⁹

Stephen's reserve, then, is to some extent a function of the formalized, didactic self he is inscribing for the benefit of his children. But this cannot be the whole story. For one thing, Stephen is not systematically reserved. About his domestic squabbles, his relationships with Minny and Julia, and his sense of grief and loss, Stephen is remarkably open, and the Mausoleum Book can be read as one of the most overtly self-pitying documents of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ For another thing, in this anti-autobiographical preamble, Stephen is not just silent, reserved and secretive, he is emphatically so. He flirts with disclosure, then tantalizingly withdraws. What point is he

trying to make in this uncharacteristically roundabout way?

That Leslie Stephen should retreat from overt autobiography out of modesty, squeamishness, or a sense of his own obscurity seems unlikely, since the passage is littered with loopholes for the benefit of his future biographer(s). The Mausoleum Book is, I would argue, only ostensibly a private letter. The epistolary form, the introductory apologia, even the built-in intimacy of tone and stress on privacy, all these elements had already been assimilated, as Stephen would surely recognize, into the traditions and rituals of autobiography. It is, at best, a mimic privacy. With or without his complicity, he was involved in a public act.

A more intriguing, and (judging by his evident satisfaction) more plausible possibility, is that Stephen's withdrawal from full confession is an act of sheer bloodymindedness: a deliberate attempt to subvert the endless cycle of Life-writing which has cost him so much drudgery. There is something slyly provoking about Stephen's strategy, (I could... but I'm not going to), which prevents this suggestion from being completely absurd.

But there is a third possibility, which cannot be ignored: that Stephen's tactic may be the result of a recognition that the kind of life-story which had become the norm, had also, perhaps consequently, become a cliché. Had it outlived its usefulness, become an evasion? If this was the case, the 'world [would] lose little' by his refusal to comply.

Whatever the true reason, there is clearly something important at stake. The crucial question remains: what is all the fuss about? What is the nature of this closely-guarded information, these 'personal disclosures' which are not to be disclosed?

Stephen is adamant that it has nothing to do with externals, with dates, anecdotes, incidents or famous acquaintances. This is the kind

of thing Stephen dismisses as forgettable, and later relegates to the category of 'reminiscences' (p.8). (It is, I think, highly significant that, a few years later, it would be to this same low-status genre that Stephen would resort when attempting a sketch of his life.)

The key phrase is 'narratives of inward events, conversions or spiritual crises'. In Stephen's opinion, these are so fundamental to the concept of a life-story that even biography - a life viewed from the outside - would be incomplete, 'inadequate' without them. These 'inner struggles' (note how readily the interchangeable terms flow from the pen), achieve the status of 'facts', and are related, but not identical, to 'mental and moral development'. Though it is not specifically mentioned, there is no doubt that the issue is spirituality, the life of the soul.

So what emerges, by a process of elimination, from Stephen's painstaking account of the limitations of his project, is a working definition of autobiography. This he sees as a genre demanding a good memory, but also, more importantly, demanding a faithful history of one's inner or spiritual life. Such, as he perceives it, is the conventional and accepted matter of autobiography: a perception borne out, as we have seen, by most of the acknowledged 'classics' of the genre from Augustine to Newman and from Bunyan to Mill.

That Stephen, the militant agnostic, should consider his life inadequately described without an accurate account of the crises and conversions of his inward experience, bears witness to the potency, not only of the faith against which he reacted, but of the patterns and exempla of its literature. By the time Stephen came to write the Mausoleum Book, a form of autobiography had been developed which, whilst it could with impunity renounce Christian theology, nevertheless retained some of the traditions, preoccupations and motifs of spiritual testimony originated (arguably) by St. Augustine, and could remain in the mainstream of confessional literature. It would seem

that, whilst acknowledging the salience of the spiritual in autobiographical and biographical writing, Stephen was wary of according it exaggerated prominence. Could it be that, because of the potency of the conversion model of autobiography, Lives were in danger of being reduced to their spiritual components? Could it be that the traditional conversion structure was an easy option, adopted, not out of conviction, but as an alternative to picking a route through forbidden or sensitive subjects, such as money, sexuality, domestic relationships, or class identity?

Given Stephen's outspoken criticism of excessive concentration on spiritual events, it is ironic that the relocation of Stephen's 'Loss of Faith' is at the centre of Noel Annan's massive biography.¹¹ Ultimately, however, the process of comparing an autobiographical text with our composite image of the 'real person' must be unsatisfactory. The evidence for such comparisons being inevitably documentary, and the documents themselves sometimes subjective, always culturally-determined in some way, the resultant equation must rely upon an unwieldy number of variables - degrees of accuracy, frankness, realism, and so on.

Hence, the Life to which Stephen refers, Horatio Forbes Brown's John Addington Symonds (1895), is invaluable to us. It offers us a precise literary context in which to place Stephen's doubts about contemporary autobiographical practise. It demonstrates, not only the kind of censorship that took place, but also the sort of material that had become acceptable in a solid, respectable, middle-class Life. Brown's drastic attempt to cram the autobiography of his unconventional friend into a conventional mould allows us to illustrate this tendency without getting involved with what is in itself an act of biography.

Symonds wrote his autobiography (begun 1889) for two reasons. In the first place, he wished to offer himself as a case-history: to expose the secrets of his extraordinary temperament as pathological

data for the new breed of sexologists - of whose 'science' he was both victim and beneficiary. Secondly, he wanted a hearing, as a homosexual, on behalf of homosexuals. His aim was to gain sympathy for others like himself: the 'not ignoble victims of a natural instinct reputed vicious in the modern age'.¹² 'You see', he wrote, 'I have "never spoken out"'.¹³

Based on such principles, the autobiography was perforce ahead of its time, not only as a moving and detailed study of homosexuality within an increasingly homophobic society, but, with its emphasis on dreams, fantasies and formative sexual experiences, as an exploration of different levels of consciousness.

It was not, however, intended to be ahead, but of its time: it is an urgent document, demanding a place in the Victorian literature of ideas. The fact that it now appears to be such an extreme deviation from the autobiographical norm of the late nineteenth century must be attributed partly to the fact that, due to Brown's successful suppression of the work for almost a century, it was never assimilated, even reluctantly, into the autobiographical canon. (It was first published as The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds in 1984)¹⁴ The posthumous Symonds presented to the public by Brown in 1895 was a Symonds filtered through the intricate and rigid web of Victorian literary conventions.

In order to ascertain the result of this process of systematic censorship, it is worth examining what became of Symonds' great crisis scene: his breakdown at Cannes in January 1868. Much of the material overlaps between the two works, but it is possible to isolate various crucial differences of treatment.

According to Symonds' Memoirs, 1867 finds him travelling with his wife on the continent, and busy with an essay on Greek platonic love. To Symonds, this is in itself a danger signal, as it marks the resurrection, after some time, of his obsession with the male sex. By

the end of the year, at Cannes, he is ready to crack. He sums up his ominous condition thus:

All the evil humours which were fermenting in my petty state of man - poignant and depressing memories of past troubles, physical maladies of nerve substance and of lung tissue, decompositions of habitual creeds, sentimental vapours, the disappointment of the sexual sense in matrimony, doubts about the existence of a moral basis to human life, thwarted intellectual activity, ambitions rudely checked by impotence - all the miserable factors of a wretched inner life, masked by appearances, the worse for me for being treated by the outside world as mere accidents of illness in a well-to-do and idle citizen, boiled up in a kind of devil's cauldron during those last weeks at Cannes, and made existence hell.¹⁵

By means of his usual narrative technique of adducing Symonds' correspondence from other sources as evidence, Brown builds up a slightly different picture. He gives prominence to Symonds' general ill-health and sprained ankle, and includes a letter which depicts John and his wife Catherine plodding listlessly through Clarissa Harlowe for want of anything else to read. A mood of depression and numbness, not unlike that described by Mill in his Autobiography, is evoked. Against this background, Symonds' troubles, enumerated above, are quoted, minus the matrimonial problems.¹⁶ The omission of a single phrase changes the complexion of the passage: the element of frustrated sexuality is eliminated, tipping the scales in favour of spiritual confusion.

Both versions dwell upon the Carlylean 'state of entire negation', but Brown carefully excludes the real catalyst: Symonds' realization that, though he has not indulged in 'carnal vices', his dreams betray him into 'sin' nonetheless. He comes to the conclusion that he must either accept, embrace his sexuality, or settle for a life-time of guilt. His decision marks a turning-point in his life:

Among my papers of that period, written after I had escaped from Cannes, is an incoherent document, from which I can quote certain passages to prove how terrible the crisis had been. In another nature, acting under other influences, the phenomenon of what is called 'conversion' might have been exhibited. With me it was different. I emerged at last into Stoical acceptance of my place

in the world, combined with Epicurean indulgence of my ruling passion for the male. Together, these two motives restored me to comparative health, gave me religion...¹⁷

The published version ran thus:

In another nature, acting under other influences, the phenomenon of what is called 'conversion' might have been exhibited. With me it was different. I emerged at last into stoical acceptance of my place in the world, combined with epicurean indulgence. Together, these two motives restored me to comparative health, gave me religion...¹⁸

The difference is obvious: for Symonds, deliverance comes through a kind of sexual liberation; not, as he points out, through spiritual conversion. Recent work on the history of gender has begun to unravel the interrelationship between spirituality, conversion and the specific construction of masculinity in the nineteenth century,¹⁹ and it is to some extent with this dialectic that Symonds is engaged. However, though the narrative does employ religious language and includes despairing letters about religion, these are invariably subverted by passages of self-mockery ('Then I turned to bewail my wretched state' etc). For spirituality is not Symonds' primary concern. He ends the chapter uncompromisingly, with a poem entitled Phallus Impudicus.

Brown is able to manipulate the original language so as to imply that it was indeed a spiritual conversion. As we have seen, the conversion motif has become so far divorced from theological issues that it can without difficulty be presented as based entirely on the interplay between abstract speculations and unexplained moods. Brown backs up his 'interpretation' with one of his rare authorial interventions:

This terrible and lonely communing of his spirit face to face with the widest abstractions which his intellect could compass, seems to me to contain the essence of Symonds's psychological quality. He had carried speculation in the abstract, and the audacious interrogation of the Universe, to their utmost limits. It was inevitable that, if he survived the strain, he would ultimately abandon the vacuum of abstractions in which he was stifling, for the concrete world of men and things about him.²⁰

Brown continues to discourse at some length upon the 'instinct of self-preservation' which facilitates Symonds' recovery, and causes him to cling to 'the concrete manifestations of life, actual, visible, sensible'. The direction of Brown's argument allows him to explain Symonds' sudden decision, on his return to England, to teach at Clifton College, as a by-product of his new-found freedom of action: it is part of a period of frenzied activity and productivity. Symonds, on the other hand, is categorical about his reasons: he is attracted to a student, and obtains an invitation to lecture 'In order to approach him'.²¹ The chapter is simply called 'Norman'.

The sinister side of all this is that, given the autobiographical tradition within which both are working, Brown's desexualized account is utterly plausible to anyone without an intimate, esoteric knowledge of Symonds the man. Whether one likes it or not, it is a version - and in so far as it is provable with documentary evidence, a 'true' version - of Symonds' life. As such it is valid biography. The deception lies in the fact that it masquerades as a kind of autobiography: an enlarged, improved autobiography. Actually, the original has been stripped of what Symonds considered to be its main purpose, its most significant events, its most profound relationships, as well as hundreds of lesser, but still meaningful encounters, dreams and impressions. All that is left, the skeletal crisis-conversion structure, is white-washed, and fleshed out with anecdotes, letters, and more trivial matters. An easy option, not to say a betrayal of trust.

Yet so careful and consistent is the editing and 'splicing' of Symonds' own words, that few questioned the accuracy of the picture, and the work was long regarded as a model of its kind. The biography accorded perfectly with what the public had come to expect from an intellectual and aesthete such as Symonds:

It has a special charm for those who like to see and watch the inner state and growth, action and reaction, joys and pains, likes and dislikes, hopes and despairs, of a delicately textured soul. The outside of Symonds' life did not hold much for the biographer; but the interior was full of good and gorgeous material, as rich and religious, as dim and as light-coloured, as that of the cathedral at Milan on a sunny day.²²

The fact remains that Symonds' sexuality, both in posse and in esse, is as near to the core of his personality as his soul, delicately textured though it may have been. Not surprisingly, therefore, the readers of the book who knew Symonds personally reacted rather differently. Whether or not they were consciously aware (as were Edmund Gosse and Henry James for instance) of Symonds' 'passionate subterranean crusade'²³ on behalf of homosexuals, there is evidence of mixed feelings among his friends when they first read Brown's account. Their reactions were cautious, and some were tinged with what could be construed as a mixture of disbelief and relief. In her sensitive biography of Symonds, Phyllis Grosskurth notes the epistolary nods and winks between James and Gosse, and goes on to quote a bewildered T. E. Brown:

I confess that I had not known Symonds. That is, I had not known what an important part of his life was borne by the sceptical agony, or, rather, agonising...I fancy I can recollect a different Symonds, full of enthusiasm for favourite authors, outspoken, critical, of course, but brimming with love for those he preferred. What has become of this rapture? I think it was the normal mood, & the other the abnormal.²⁴

Many expressed this confusion, this sense of unreality. Was the tormented soul whose inner struggles filled Brown's pages identical with the flesh-and-blood creature they had dined with?

Thus it was that a book so unremittingly serious as Brown's Symonds provoked in some readers a degree of bafflement and amusement surprising even to themselves. The unease occasioned by the work even filtered through to practising autobiographers such as Margaret

Oliphant and Stephen, and was at least partly responsible for their reaction, however muted, to the conventions so successfully exploited by Brown on Symonds' behalf, and for their reconsideration of the trend in autobiography towards an exclusively introspective account of self. The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant (1899) contains the following reaction:

I have been reading the life of Mr Symonds, and it makes me almost laugh (though little laughing is in my heart) to think of the strange difference between this prosaic little narrative, all about the facts of a life so simple as mine, and his elaborate self-discussions. I suppose that to many people the other will be the more interesting way, just as the movements of the mind are more interesting than those of the body, or rather of the external life.²⁵

This is more than a self-deprecatory reflex on Oliphant's part, though some would argue that such a response is entirely consistent with her autobiographical modus operandi. Her hasty substitution of 'external life' for 'body' is intriguing. It suggests a decorous 'ladylike' squeamishness about alluding to 'the flesh.' It also expresses her rejection of the 'ladylike:' her assertion of the right to an 'external life', and her reluctance to entrench herself, as a woman, on the ideologically devalued, 'feminine' side of a mind/body - and hence a culture/nature - dichotomy. Despite her ambivalence, these apparently ingenuous remarks beg a crucial question about the relative importance of 'elaborate self-discussions' and the 'facts of a life', the movements of the mind, and those of the body. Is any life so simple (especially to the 'liver') that its external manifestations are without interest or significance? Oliphant feels, obscurely perhaps, but as it turns out rightly, that this disembodiment of Symonds does an injustice to the man in his complex relation to the external world. For her own part, it is to her memory of Symonds as a loving and lovable friend that she prefers to cling: 'Good Mr Symonds, a pleasant, frank, hearty man, as one saw him from outside! God bless him!'²⁶

Margaret Oliphant's kindly, avuncular Symonds may be no nearer the mark than Brown's tortured aesthete, but the need to redress the balance is sincerely felt. Whether or not Oliphant or Stephen were conscious of Symonds' homosexuality (and I have come across no decisive evidence either way) is beside the point. Somewhere, in the midst of the spiritual 'agonizing', the personality of the man has been lost. As we shall see in a later chapter, Margaret Oliphant's own autobiographical practice reflects her concern to depict the external as well as the inner life, and to replace the 'soulful' first person of autobiography with a 'hearty' one.

Symonds seems to have projected different personalities, and in particular, different styles of masculinity, to his acquaintance, partly in response to their expectations of him. Ironically, it is in this very area that Brown's 'heterosexualized' Symonds falls short of their expectations.

In the light of this, Leslie Stephen's wry comments in the Mausoleum Book must be re-examined:

I was amused lately by reading Horatio Brown's life of Symonds, virtually an autobiography, and reflecting how little of the same kind of internal history could be told of me...I could give a history of some struggles through which I had to pass...but I have a certain sense of satisfaction in reflecting that I shall take that knowledge with me to the grave. (p.4)

Stephen's rejection of the conversion model is not only gesture of atheistic iconoclasm - though it can be read as such. One of Stephen's preoccupations would seem to be the lack of gendered identity in a genre he sees as 'neutered' by its dangerously androgynous conception of self as soul. Later, in another context, Stephen would elaborate on his reactions to Brown's book, describing his own encounter with Symonds the invalid at Davos:

He was keenly interested in all manner of literary and philosophical questions, and ready to discuss them with unflagging vivacity; he was on cordial terms with the natives, delighted in

discussing their affairs with them over a pipe and a glass of wine, and not only thoroughly enjoyed Alpine scenery aesthetically, but delighted in the athletic exercise of tobogganing. Far from libraries, he turned out a surprising quantity of work involving very wide reading, as well as distinguished by an admirable literary style. His weakness was perhaps his excessive facility; but no man ever encountered such heavy disadvantages with greater gallantry. His remarkable biography [i.e. Brown's] contains some revelations of an inner life which would not suggest this side of him. Readers would hardly expect to find that the aesthetic philosopher had the masculine vigour which made him the most buoyant of invalids.²⁷

It is difficult not to read this as a counter-attack on Brown's 'remarkable' biography. By concentrating on his subject's mind, Brown leaves too much to the imagination; and Stephen goes out of his way to compensate for this deficiency. Stephen's armoury is impressive: an array of manly attributes representing the full kit of Victorian masculinity: chivalry, industry, intellectual tenacity, athleticism. And, just in case, Symonds is also depicted as the jovial pipe-smoker with the 'common touch.' The only concession to Symonds as other than the archetype of nineteenth century manhood is the suggestion of his 'excessive facility'. But even this apparent admission has its part to play in the polemic, for one who is facile would not struggle interminably with the intellectual problems which are the almost exclusive preoccupation of the John Addington Symonds of the biography.

Stephen's 'anti-autobiographical' stance can be read as based on a deep-rooted suspicion of certain modes of self-revelation: ways of delineating a life which purport to expose its inner workings - and which as a consequence claim a kind of intellectual currency - but which rely on overused formulae and thus give very little away. Defrauded in the deal, the reader will have every right to look between the lines for the promised secrets. And, as we have seen in the essay 'Autobiography', this is exactly the kind of reading Stephen himself advocates, recognizing the value of misrepresentation as autobiography's 'special felicity'. It is worth returning briefly to this essay from Hours in a Library, to see whether Stephen's anxieties

about the conventions of autobiography (as they emerge in the Mausoleum Book) have any effect on his analysis of autobiographical 'misrepresentation' - that is, on his particular misreading of autobiography.

The kind of reading Stephen espouses has a curiously levelling effect. The autobiographies of rationalists such as Gibbon and Mill, he implies, are as amusing and instructive as the profundities of an Augustine, a Bunyan, or a Rousseau. Moreover, Bunyan's lack of 'morbid affectation' is neither more nor less interesting than Rousseau's superabundance of it.²⁸ While admitting that conversions figure strongly in many of the books he examines, Stephen is inclined to 'work round' accounts of inner struggles, finding sources of insight elsewhere. He even goes so far as to suggest that Bunyan's almost exclusive concentration in Grace Abounding on his inner state, to the neglect of the 'external' facts of his life, deprives the book of 'autobiographical interest'.²⁹ And Gibbon, above all, delights him:

In the lives of most great men the history of a conversion is the record of heart-rending struggle, ending in hard-won peace. Gibbon merely changed his religion as he changed his opinion upon some antiquarian controversy.³⁰

The sleek, unruffled lineaments of Gibbon's life - an existence full of work and enjoyment but 'without ... any awkward deviations in the direction of martyrdom', appeal to Stephen's sense of proportion - and humour.³¹ As we shall see later, it is often to the light-hearted eighteenth century biographers and autobiographers - to Boswell and Gibbon, for instance - that jaded post-Romantics look for an alternative to the self-conscious heroism and unremitting seriousness of the spiritual testimony.

The transaction between writer and reader, Stephen suggests, is a complex and precarious one, because the 'bill' the autobiographer 'draws on posterity' may, like Shylock's loan to Antonio, be 'called

in' in different coin. Stephen himself points out in the essay 'Autobiography',

As every sensible man is exhorted to make his will, he should also be bound to leave to his descendants some account of his experience of life. The dullest of us would in spite of themselves say something profoundly interesting, if only by explaining how they came to be so dull...³²

This portrait of the autobiographer as dull, sensible, conservative businessman, who, given a dose of flattery, leaves himself as hostage to fortune, is only partly mischievous. To Stephen's mind, it contains more than a grain of truth.

In fact, Stephen's reading of autobiography as misrepresentation extends, not just to the content, but to the form itself.

We have a delicate shade of conscious superiority in listening to the vicarious confession. 'I am sometimes troubled,' said Boswell, 'by a disposition to stinginess.' 'So am I,' replied Johnson, 'but I do not tell it.' That is our attitude in regard to the autobiographer. After all, we say to ourselves, this distinguished person is such a one as we are; and even more so, for he cannot keep it to himself.³³

The relationship between autobiographer and audience, like that between penitent and confessor, is based on the dubious premiss that the very act of revealing the 'truth' will be rewarded by compassion and forgiveness: will be, in effect, 'liberating'. Stephen suggests that the routine exacting of confession is actually a means of establishing 'superiority,' and the harder the autobiographer strives towards some kind of essential 'truth,' the more fool he or she. In his introduction to the Mausoleum Book Alan Bell recounts how, when asked to contribute to William James's The Varieties of Religious Experience, Stephen refused on the grounds that his inner life was painfully commonplace; that he merely shed some old formulae'. (We are reminded of Stephen's version of Edward Gibbon, easily shrugging off of one religion in favour of another) As Alan Bell points out, 'Such a

spiritual non-history enabled Stephen to take a disrespectful view of the Varieties', thus reversing the usual power relation.³⁴ Stephen's argument in the essay 'Autobiography' has a strangely Foucauldian ring to it, implying as it surely must that the idea of a naked, inner truth about one's personality and life is no more than a carrot dangled before one's nose; a dangerous chimera luring the autobiographer to ever more ludicrous exhibitionism.

It is this peculiar insight into the economics of autobiography which makes Stephen unusual among his Life-Writing peers. As producer of autobiography, he attempts to be cautious, circumspect, and generally tightfisted. As consumer he is aware that his tightfistedness itself is potentially interesting. The effect is of a dog chasing its own tail.

Stephen was not averse to writing about his life, but when he did so it was either indirectly, as in the Mausoleum Book, or in a manner defiantly superficial and elaborately fragmentary.

The Mausoleum Book is made up of a number of serious - and often solemn - attempts to find a formula for 'plotting' a life without resort to the pattern of redemption. Perhaps Stephen's most forlorn experiment is with a variant of the Utilitarian felicific principle.

I have tried to reconcile myself to the sadness of some life stories by a kind of arithmetical computation. (p.61)

It is a little painful to watch as Stephen tries to calculate what proportion of his second wife's life could be said to have been happy, and what proportion sad; and to observe him stumbling lamely across the difficulty that happiness and sadness are not experienced 'in proportion' to an unknown life-span. Rejecting the moral coherence and the chronological structure afforded by the conversion model, Stephen must struggle to find a narrative pattern which will accommodate both continuity and change, and which will express a sense of self which is

at once unresolved and yet comprehensible. His most consistent method is to proceed through a series of substitutions: to speak of Julia, he must first speak of himself; to describe his own life, he must first dwell on his first marriage to Minny Thackeray, and

I can best tell you what I care to tell about Minny by first speaking of Anny. (p.12)

The narrative circles wistfully round, each relationship illuminating another; each comparison illuminating Stephen's own peculiarities:

I have digressed a little: partly, perhaps, because, as I find from my letters, when Anny lived with me, I was constantly framing theories to account for her... But it is also true, as I said, that anything I can say of Minny must start by a reference to Anny. (p.15)

Stephen returns, again and again, to his untheorizable, illogical, bewildering sister-in-law Anny Thackeray, in a tone which fluctuates between stern disapproval and grudging admiration. He recounts with delight Anny's propensity to 'chaotic jumble', noting that the last chapter of one of her novels was once printed in the middle of the story, - without apparent harm to the book as a whole. This flaunting of logic and linearity he relates to her (implicitly feminine) ability to 'work round to sound opinions by intricate and apparently absurd processes' (p.14). Yet Stephen's own, digressive, meandering narrative, with its conscientious disregard of chronology, has a very similar effect.

A recurrent characteristic of the unredeemed, unresolved autobiographical self is a certain ambivalence about personal achievement. In the case of professional writers such as Stephen, this tension is particularly complex: self-evident authorship and the refusal of autobiographical authority exist in an uncomfortable stranglehold. The lack of what Stephen regards as the writer's 'proper self-confidence' (p.93) leads to defensive professions of under-achievement and to

coyness about real achievement. 'I will add, to get rid of my literary history, that I contributed...' (p.88, my emphasis). As we shall see, Stephen shares this sense of disposability with Margaret Oliphant, another prolific writer of period. And with her, too, he shares his ambiguous role model. In one of the occasional journal entries appended to the Mausoleum Book, he notes

I am writing Sir W. Scott for the dictionary and often feel that I wish the fag end of my life to be like his - barring the debts. I must not work myself to death: but I don't know that I shall do anything better. (p.102)

For both Stephen and Oliphant, Scott - the Scott of the Journals - provides a dubious ideal: the warding off of despair through the act of writing. Like the other autobiographies of bereavement in this study, the emphasis in the Mausoleum Book is on, not the celebration of the works of salvation, nor the working-out of salvation, just 'working to death'.

However, this grim fatalism is mitigated by a reconsideration (prompted by the loss of two wives) of the concept of work itself, and of achievement in its turn. We have already seen how Stephen is at once enthralled and appalled by Anny Thackeray's profuse, unsystematic style of literary production. But what of women's non-literary work? The book is brimming with idealized portraits of Julia Duckworth as the Angel in the Stephen house, and the inevitable summing-up of Julia's contribution to Stephen's welfare provokes a set of 'feminine' images and observations anticipating Virginia Woolf's Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse. Julia's influence is 'knitting together our little circle' and

if at this time there is any aspiration deeply fixed at the very core of my heart, it is... to carry on her work and to keep close together... (p.96)

In the course of sketching his life in terms of his marital

relationships, Stephen feels bound, despite this sacred aspiration, to defend himself more than once against the charge of making much of trifles. Julia's acts of affection, generosity and compassion are validated by recourse to male authority: Wordsworth's commemoration in 'Tintern Abbey' of 'little nameless unremembered acts/ Of kindness and of love' (p.82). Yet perhaps because he goes into some detail about what Wordsworth leaves enigmatically 'nameless', Stephen feels a more elaborate defence than poetic allusion is necessary. Hence he reinterprets his wife's (to him) mysterious and capricious gift-giving routines, her 'too anxious' striving after anonymity in deeds of charity, her zealous devotion to others and her promotion of love-matches as 'parts of a system ... a kind of religious practice'(p.82). This discovery of rigorous discipline and system in the 'trivial' minutiae of domestic relations is the autobiographical revelation towards which the Mausoleum Book, with its indirect, biographical approach, seems to tend.

The moment of recognition is, however, fleeting. Lacking, or rather attempting to dislodge the inner self as the unifying centre of attention, the Mausoleum Book too often becomes a battlefield between public and private interests. Stephen describes a holiday at Santa Catarina and Primiero, concluding thus:

We spent some delicious weeks at the two places. In 1870 came the war between France and Prussia. Minny was expecting her confinement and suffered a good deal of discomfort. We took a little house on the Thames near Kingston... (p.20)

Much of the book is in this vein: not so much a series of compromises, as a series of unresolved tensions - between history and domestic chronicle; between domestic chronicle and domestic idyll.

For the taboo against autobiography of domesticity is double-edged. Not only do such revelations lay their author open to charges of triviality, they also violate the code which protects the Victorian

middle-class home from critical scrutiny. The notorious precedent here, to which Stephen alludes twice in the course of the Mausoleum Book, is that of Carlyle's Reminiscences, published in 1881. Carlyle's intimate domestic exposés had been almost universally vituperated, not on grounds of literary merit or accuracy, but on moral grounds: on the basis either of Carlyle's wrongheadedness in domestic matters and culpable behaviour to his wife, or of Froude's betrayal in making posthumously public his friend's confessions. Stephen's identification with the Carlyle of the Reminiscences is both positive and negative. He is eager to exonerate Carlyle,

I thought better of Carlyle's conduct than most people were thinking at the time of the Reminiscences. (p.69)

whilst defining himself in opposition:

If I felt that I had a burthen upon my conscience like that which tortured poor Carlyle, I think that I should be almost tempted to commit suicide. I cannot, I am thankful to say, feel that. (p.89)

The position is, of course, virtually untenable. Throughout the Mausoleum Book, Stephen follows in Carlyle's footsteps, wavering dangerously between confession and apologia as he delves into the private world of friendship; courtship and marriage; domestic habits and finance: 'trifles and things which were not quite trifles' (p.89).

In the Mausoleum Book, then, Stephen can be seen to be grappling with themes - relationships, the trivial, failure - which are not the stock themes of 'classic' autobiography. The choice of these themes is not merely the result of a self-pitying, bereaved framed of mind (though this must be taken into account), but of a deliberate effort on Stephen's part to talk about his life in a way which does not take for granted an autonomous, enlightened inner self: which does not, in other words, rest on any redemptive scheme. As well as influencing the autobiographical themes of the Mausoleum Book, these negative

considerations have important consequences for its narrative form. The absence of a climactic moment of rebirth and resolution throws into doubt and almost into disuse the systematic chronology of conventional autobiography. It is not just grief, but also a determination to chart his life in terms of gain and loss which leads Stephen to employ the bitter 'obituary' story-line of the Mausoleum Book:

I have been dropping into narrative, but I must now take things in a different order. I will in the first place speak of the persons whose deaths during her [Julia's] life brought some of her heaviest sorrows but called forth some of her most characteristic qualities. It may seem a melancholy scheme to mark a life by these most painful milestones. I have, however, sufficiently warned you against the possible illusion; and to me, I fear, the method seems only too natural. The loss of my darling is something to which no other loss can be for an instant compared. And yet my solitude is, I can feel, the more intense because so few of those with whom I started and upon whose sympathies I could have counted, survive to care for me. (p.66)

That the 'milestones' in the Life of an uncompromising agnostic should be gravestones; that the alternative to a redemptive framework should be a 'melancholy scheme', gives me pause. Must the abandonment of a conversion framework leave us with autobiography as obituary? It should not be overlooked, however, that these markers commemorate and celebrate relationships, and that even in professing 'solitude', Stephen is attempting, in however limited a way, to construct himself as a social rather than an abstractedly 'independent' being. And this is the lesson he has learnt from Wordsworth, - and from his two wives:

[Julia's] sister's life sacrificed and the complete disappointment of all the ambitious hopes of Vaughan and his friends were texts for a sermon on the vanity of human wishes. She felt such things as she could not but feel them. I must add that deep as was my darling's grief, like all her grief, [it] became 'transmuted' into affection for the survivors. In regard to this phrase, I add a note. The article in my Hours in a Library which seems to have given most pleasure, judging from what I have heard, is one upon 'Wordsworth's Ethics'. I mention this because you will find it the fullest comment I can give upon this 'transmutation'. Grief, I have said in substance, is of all things not to be wasted. I wrote the article under the impressions produced by my Minny's death. (pp.70-71)

What then are the wider implications of Stephen's apparent 'auto-biographobia' - a phobia made up of both fear and compulsion, and resulting, therefore, not in silence, but in kinds of writing about the life of the self which attempt to go against the grain of conventional autobiography, and to be, in a sense, anti-autobiographical?

James Olney's reading of autobiography as 'intentionally or not, a monument of the self at the summary moment of composition'³⁵ suggests that the autobiographer is engaged in a project which, willy-nilly, confers on the subject the iconic authority of the heroic dead. Stephen, as we have witnessed, is constantly at pains to dismantle the autobiographical I by abnegating authority over his own story ('I could give you none...' 'I shall not try to follow the story...') In a more complex formulation than Olney's, Paul de Man, in his essay 'Autobiography as De-facement' has argued that autobiography, far from being a genre, is actually a specular figure of reading, wherein the autobiographer recognizes him/herself in the text.³⁶ In other words, not only is autobiography a monument of the writing self, but the writing self as autobiographer is such (i.e. an autobiographical self) because of its identification with the self in the text. The interest of the autobiographical text, according to de Man, is in observing the efforts expended by the autobiographer in the (doomed) attempt to elude this specular moment, and to 'come into being' outside the reflexivity of the text.

Like Olney's, de Man's argument rests heavily on the iconography of death. Taking the Essays on Epitaphs, Wordsworth's expansive discussion of the poetry of the graveyard, as his text, de Man suggests that the alignment between the (seeing) sun and the (in-scribed/speaking) gravestone is the perfect metaphor for the moment of mutual recognition which constitutes autobiographical subjectivity. Generalizing from this, de Man claims that

The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is... the prosopopeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave...³⁷

Yet, as de Man demonstrates, Wordsworth attempts to subvert his own 'closed' system of metaphors by suggesting that the fiction of the first-person epitaph has the sinister effect of at once animating the dead and petrifying the living (the reader and the writer as reader) in a deathly recognition of mortality. Hence Wordsworth's bizarre and illogical preference for 'third person' over 'first person' epitaphs: a preference which merely substitutes one set of fictions for another. Wordsworth's apparent illogicality is compounded by his arguing against his own poetic, metaphorical language: a language which, whilst it strives to make accessible the inaccessible - to 'incarnate' the self - simultaneously displaces the self by its own tropological substitutions. Hence, as de Man puts it, 'Autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause'.³⁸ Like Wordsworth in the Essays of Epitaphs, Stephen attempts to escape from this 'revolving door' (to adopt de Man's phrase) by prioritising the third person over the first, and by substituting a biographical for the primary autobiographical fiction. (As for Wordsworth, epitaphs by survivors are preferable because less 'fictional' than the exhortations of the dead, so, for Stephen, memories of others are more immediate, more vital, more significant than memories of himself).

The difference, as we have seen, between Wordsworth's position (as de Man reads it) and Stephen's, is that Stephen's bid for freedom from the specular moment is motivated, not by any anxiety about the representative function of language, but by a peculiarly late-Victorian mistrust of the Romantic notion of mind as self as soul which autobiographical language has come to predicate.

Stephen's own appropriation of the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave is, as we have seen, teasing: 'I shall take that

knowledge [i.e. of my inner struggles] with me to the grave'.³⁹ Despite this, however, the pseudo-biographical narrative strains in the direction of autobiography, being in the end a conscious, artificial displacement of the latter. In a strange parody of de Man's prosopopeic fiction, the grave/text becomes a ventriloquist's dummy, behind which Stephen, lips firmly sealed, conceals himself. Thus, in Stephen's case, autobiography can be said to cause an inscription of the mind of which it is itself the veil. As Stephen is only too aware, the more cryptic his allusions to his inner history, the more convinced the reader becomes that Stephen not only has such a history, but that he is making a point by concealing it. To that extent, Stephen is trapped in, and colluding with, the conventions against which he is protesting; and the 'grave' to which he takes his secrets is the text itself. However, the family name for the work, Mausoleum Book, has a secondary application. While the Mausoleum must represent (or misrepresent) Stephen himself, its grandiose construction commemorates not one, but several lives. By showing us into the dark house of his widowhood, rather than the temple of his understanding, he is making a significant break with autobiographical tradition.

It remains to say something about Stephen's second autobiographical effort. His reminiscences, first published in 1903 as a series of essays in the National Review and brought out posthumously in book form in 1924, were simply called Some Early Impressions.⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, Some Early Impressions opens with a rather gruff exposition on the untrustworthiness of autobiography. Stephen takes as his text two lines from Dryden's translation of Juvenal:

Not heaven itself upon the past has power
But what has been has been; and I have had my hour.⁴¹

His gloss on this is that the past may be immutable, but his memory for facts, for sayings, and even for his own motives is unreliable and

subject to unconscious distortion. He gives an example. He had long recollected a certain (unspecified) passage of his life as meritorious, only to discover from (again unspecified) written evidence (now lost, and its contents forgotten) that his motives had been tainted by self-interest. The point seems to be that, in Stephen's personal mythology, his behaviour had been 'creditable'.⁴² The notion of 'credit' is crucial. To the autobiographical self, the credible too often coincides with the reputable and admirable. Stephen forces the reader to recognize that his (Stephen's) credit is bad. He will not even pretend to 'give anything away' - even his confession of self-deception is insubstantial. The parable ends with a kind of credo: 'All I know is that my story of my own conduct is a misrepresentation'.⁴³ This is clearly a kind of pre-emptive attack on future readers who might attempt to re-write Stephen's history; to take away 'his hour'. One is reminded of Brown's rewriting of Symonds' 'conversion,' for it is precisely his own inner life that Stephen is at pains to protect. Heaven itself may not have 'power upon the past', but story-making does have that power. He continues,

Clearly I am not qualified for autobiography, nor, to say the truth, do I regret the circumstance. I have no reason to think that the story of my "inner life" would be in the least interesting, and were it interesting, I should still prefer to keep it to my self. When, therefore, I summon up remembrance of things past, I am forced to confess that my little panorama is full of gaps, often blurred and faded, and too probably distorted in detail.⁴⁴

Behind the smoke screen of qualifications and disclaimers, Stephen remains impenitent. He is making two assertions. The first is identical to that put forward in the Mausoleum Book: his inner life is not interesting, therefore he cannot be a 'real' autobiographer. The second is that he will not write the story of his inner life: therefore it does not exist. His refusal to admit his 'soul' as a subject of discourse is tantamount to a challenge to autobiography as a genre.

He offers no naked truth, and demands that his audience read his Life in other terms. The elaborate apologia concludes thus:

Yet I preserve a good many tolerably vivid impressions of the people among whom I have lived, and of the general influences which they have exerted upon me. Some of these may be worth a record. If my confession implies that they must be taken with a certain reserve, an impression is in its way a fact.⁴⁵

His narrative will not be about his 'spiritual' life but about his relationships; it will not consist of a baring of his soul but of a record - and an avowedly untrustworthy one at that - of general influences and impressions. The engaging modesty of the title Some Early Impressions (which discreetly hints that though partial, these reminiscences are useful because supplementary or prefatory to the real autobiography,) turns out to be stern insistence: this is the whole story.

As usual, there is a certain amount of bluffing in all this. Domestic influences are carefully eschewed in these essays, and the humble intention to stick to accounts of other people and to trace their influence on him looks a little less humble when we realize that Stephen's circle of acquaintance included, at one time or another, many of the religious, political and intellectual leaders of his day. Thus his exposure to the prevailing 'isms' was in a sense identical with his relationships with his contemporaries. Stephen might be said to be in the special position of having his internal development signified by his external movements. However, he is always quick to point out features of his situation which would refute this claim - such as his immunity, as a typically 'commonsensical' Cambridge man (à la Charles Kingsley,) to the feverish enthusiasms and affiliations gravitating around Oxford. He is adamant that he never fell under the spell of any one mentor, regarding any susceptibility to hero-worship with some disdain. Yet again, he betrays his glee in frustrating what he perceives to be his readers' expectations:

At this point I feel that I may naturally be expected to speak of some spiritual guide who pointed to the promised land. I should acknowledge a debt of gratitude to some Carlyle or Emerson or Newman, who roused my slumbering intellect and convinced me that I had a soul. It was, however, one of the great advantages of Cambridge that there was no such person in the place. Spiritual guides are very impressive but sometimes very mischievous persons. Prostration before a prophet is enfeebling.⁴⁶

The distrust of the idea of the autobiographical self as 'soul' harks back to the Mausoleum Book. But the terms of the debate have shifted. It is less an opening up of literary possibilities - of styles of being, thinking and writing, and more an affirmation of masculine authority; and is loaded in favour of Stephen's own strength of character in avoiding the emasculating effects of spiritual abasement. (Stephen, we note, lives among 'people'. 'Persons' are always a little absurd.) The mocking use here of the Puritan and Quaker language of convincement and pilgrimage is typical of Some Early Impressions more generally: there is a self-conscious attempt to be slightly racy. In fact, the passage reads like a piece of dated anti-cant in the manner, ironically, of Carlyle.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Stephen confessing to a sneaking regard for what he calls, citing Carlyle as his example, the 'essential Puritan'. He seems to maintain that this is a category of personality, or even a racial type, quite independent of transient ideology: a type characterized by a high sense of duty and deep domestic affections (and incarnated, no doubt, in the Victorian patriarch), but embroiled, by historical misfortune, in 'language about "the scheme of Salvation"'.⁴⁷

The real bogeyman of Some Early Impressions, it turns out, is not the Carlyle-type convert at all, but his monstrous progeny, the prig.⁴⁸ And the prig, furthermore, is a gendered creature whose conventionalism is a bore and whose enthusiasm, more importantly, is unmanly. Thus, the sexual politics which, as we have seen, characterize his attitude

to Brown's 'remarkable biography' of Symonds, provide the keynote of Stephen's own reminiscences.

Despite his retrospective criticism of the Oxbridge system as he experienced it, the persona of the unflappable, rational Cambridge chap is the one Stephen allows to dominate his account of his career.⁴⁹ The question 'what did we talk about, and in what direction were the minds of contemporaries tending?'⁵⁰ is addressed, sometimes broadly, sometimes anecdotally, but with the proviso, always, that the graduates of the 'little world at Cambridge' were above the worst excesses of both heresy and reaction. In keeping with this, Stephen's description of his own secession from Anglicanism is exaggerately matter-of-fact. Dissociating himself from the tales of 'agony', 'shock' and 'exquisite pain' told by certain 'admirable' contemporaries, he proclaims

I have no such story to tell. In truth, I did not feel that the solid ground was giving way beneath my feet, but rather that I was being relieved of a cumbrous burden. I was not discovering that my creed was false, but that I had never really believed it... I will not inquire what is the inference as to my intellectual development. I fear that it would be rather humiliating or at least imply that the working of "what I pleased to call my mind" had been of a very easy-going and perfunctory character. But the ease of the change was probably due to another part of my intellectual "environment."⁵¹

The problem seems to be that Stephen, at such pains to remain aloof from the spiritual narratives of 'admirable people', and yet determined, in the context of the Tory National Review, to stick to the public arena and the most general influences, has very little left to say. While the construction of the work, with its four self-contained units chosen thematically rather than strictly chronologically, and its minor excursions into word-association and mental topography, seems full of possibilities, Some Early Impressions never fulfils the promise (in its form and title) of lighthearted discursiveness. In its ponderous generality and complacency, Some Early Impressions (rather than the Mausoleum Book) is truly obituary. Though Stephen maintains

his ambivalent position vis à vis the conventions of autobiography, his tone is now cynical rather than sceptical - as if even his pleasure in 'misrepresentation' were spoiled by doubts as to his readers' perspicacity. The tentative experiments of the Mausoleum Book are left behind, as Stephen corners himself into flippant self-congratulation, and blustering philistinism.

CHAPTER 2

THE SIX PAPER BAGS:
THOMAS CARLYLE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

1. THE PARADIGM: CONVERSION IN SARTOR RESARTUS

In the early months of 1832, Thomas Carlyle was in London. Because of the unrest and alarm occasioned by the hesitant progress of the Reform Bill through Parliament, the book trade was sluggish and cautious, rendering impossible Carlyle's most urgent task - to find a publisher for his new book, Sartor Resartus (completed in July 1831, and eventually published in parts in Fraser's Magazine from November 1833 to August 1834). Meanwhile he was engaged in various other projects, notably his essay 'Biography' (part of a review of Boswell's Johnson, published in Volume 5 of Fraser's Magazine, in April 1832). On January 22 of the same year, Carlyle's father James died, and by the 29th of that month, Thomas had written 'James Carlyle'. This was his first attempt at Reminiscence, a genre he was to work in extensively in the sixties. His collected Reminiscences were published posthumously in March 1881 under the controversial editorship of James Anthony Froude.¹

These three works, Sartor Resartus, 'Biography' and the Reminiscences share a preoccupation with the literary depiction of human lives. One, 'Biography', theorizes on Life-writing in general. Sartor Resartus and the Reminiscences are experiments in 'Self-Life-Writing': they both attempt indirect approaches to autobiography.

The great paradox of this multiple autobiography lies not in the fact that more than one autobiography of Carlyle exists, but in the manner in which these different works have been received: Sartor Resartus, patently a 'work of fiction', has generally been regarded as the definitive autobiography of its author, while the Reminiscences, though categorized as 'non-fiction', have regularly been accused of misrepresenting both Carlyle and his relationships with other people. Sartor Resartus, oddly the more fugitive, self-reflexive and difficult of the two, has been canonized and upheld as a model for later autobio-

graphers, while the Reminiscences have either been neglected, or derided as inaccurate, over-intimate, and self-indulgent. Sartor Resartus is autobiography as Art; the Reminiscences have been consistently relegated to a sub-genre of inferior status.

It seems to me that the reason Sartor Resartus has been privileged at the expense of other versions of Carlyle's life, is that in Sartor, Carlyle appropriated and successfully secularized a potent myth of self which appealed, not only to biographers and worshippers of Carlyle, but also to later autobiographers in need of a model. That myth is the myth of Self as Convert. I do not, for a moment, claim that Carlyle alone was responsible for secularizing the concept of redemption. For many of the moods he described, and the motifs he elaborated, he was indebted to the Romantics, both German and English. Teufelsdröckh's negative moods, - his morbid introspection, melancholy and dejection - all have their predecessors in Coleridge and Goethe, as have his more positive moments. Teufelsdröckh shares with the Ancient Mariner, with Werther and with Wilhelm Meister what Harold Bloom has called 'a desperate assertion of self and a craving for a heightened sense of identity'.² The importance I would claim for Sartor Resartus in the development of autobiography lies in its systematic approach to conversion: its rigorous and explicit schematizing of the Romantic quest for personal salvation.

Coming as it does (in book form) within a year of the start of Victoria's reign, Sartor becomes the paradigmatic text for a line of autobiographical novels of crisis and conversion while the most significant autobiographies of the time (Mill's, Ruskin's, and even Newman's) are written, as it were, in its margins.³

In my Introduction, I observed a relationship between the crisis/conversion sequence and the 'received' aesthetics of autobiography, suggesting that the 'significance' of autobiographies and their adherence to the structure of Sartor Resartus (or Augustine's Confessions, or Bunyan's Grace Abounding), are somehow interdependent

in literary history and historiography. In Chapter 1, I described the efforts of one late-Victorian would-be autobiographer, Leslie Stephen, to escape from the generous margins of Sartor Resartus. In this chapter, I will examine why and how Carlyle set about evolving this influential model, and will go on to argue, on the basis of the ambivalent views advanced in the essay on 'Biography', that this single version of the self should be re-integrated into the context of Carlyle's autobiographical work as a whole, and set alongside Carlyle's other, equally radical, and often more humane versions of his Life. I will attempt to assess whether the Reminiscences are simply more marginalia on Sartor, or essays in a new (or at least different) mode.

The literary influence of Sartor Resartus on its nineteenth century readers rested mainly on the story: on Carlyle's brilliant dramatization of one soul's efforts to reconstruct a new moral universe out of the debris of the old. Despite its focus on Diogenes Teufelsdröckh as protagonist, that drama was multi-layered, with discrete textual adventures taking place on the levels of plot, narrative form, and genre. On the first level, the hero's quest was for certainty - both for its own sake and as a basis for motivation: Teufelsdröckh's struggle was to replace aimless drifting with direction, propulsion, vigour. On the second, the concern of the (fictional) biographer was to initiate forward momentum in a dead-weight of biographic data:

How, from such inorganic masses... can even fragments of a living delineation be organised? (p. 142)

On the third, the task for Carlyle as (fictionalizing) autobiographer, encompassing both the former, was to infuse new life into a genre deadened by its dependence on Christian dogma for structural coherence. On three levels, then, Carlyle's enterprise was Promethean: its purpose was to bestow animation.

Like Frankenstein, however, he used second-hand material in the execution of his Promethean design. As we shall observe, after his initial discovery of a 'vital principle', the experience of re-animation was recast in the form of spiritual conversion. It is worth pondering, for a moment, why Carlyle, in a work so eccentric in manner and tone, so novel in design, and so outrageous in its disregard of the boundaries of fact and fiction, should have returned to a traditional motif - spiritual conversion - as his model for personal change and as the structural principle of his (auto-)bio-graphy. What property of the model recommended it to Carlyle as Life-Writer?

Whatever its psychological, political or spiritual direction, the conversion motif provides a metaphor for personal development which predicates the enlightenment of the converted. Hence it can be used to confer and establish authority. In the conversion narrative, this authority can assert itself in two ways. The first is self-reflexive. In other words, conversion validates itself in a cyclical way: the convert knows incontrovertibly that he or she has been converted. 'The witness in ourselves we have'.⁴ The convert can thus claim a monopoly on analysis of his or her life, and cannot be gainsaid. The vexed autobiographical question, have I achieved anything? can be answered in the affirmative every time. I am (in the) right (way.) I am saved.

The second possible mode of assertion is hierarchical: the enlightened may claim authority over the unenlightened. The convert, from the vantage-point of a 'redeemed' subjectivity, may proceed to extrapolate - may work outward from 'self' to 'other', forming and casting judgement on the external world. These judgements will be paternalist in form, and may even assume a prophetic weight as the products of a 'higher' consciousness. Belief in 'election' for instance gives rise to utter self-confidence, precluding as it does the

possibility of sin or error on the part of the elected soul: 'Thou can't not let me sin'.⁵

These two operations of authority, over one's own past and over the world outside the self, coincide neatly with the 'Life and Opinions' format of Sartor Resartus and of Victorian Autobiography in general. It could be that the use of the conversion model in an otherwise secular or non-Christian autobiography reflects the author's urgent need for authority over, and during, the serious, perilous business of remaking and representing the self.

Of course, another requirement of the Christian conversion narrative is the agent: Christ. Some manifestation of Christ, be it scriptural, visual or directly spiritual, must intervene in the story to bring about the enlightenment, and effect the transformation, of the subject. Believing as he did that such enlightenment as could be achieved came from within rather than from any external source, Carlyle's first problem was to provide some sort of philosophical basis for his bold substitution of Self for Christ as the deus ex machina of the conversion plot.

Whatever ethical or epistemological relativism obtains in the work as a whole, for the purposes of the Teufelsdröckh story, Carlyle's donné is moral: the dualism of Good and Evil. According to Carlyle, Good and Evil exist, palpably, within and without the Self. (This dualism is later elaborated to include other 'opposites' such as spirit and flesh, will and necessity [p. 177].) Furthermore, this opposition constitutes, not only a system of relations, but also a dynamic - the dynamic of conflict. As Teufelsdröckh puts it, 'but for Evil there were no Good, as victory is only possible by battle' (p. 125). The two clauses taken in isolation are indisputable, but they are evidently not parallel. The first clause proposes that 'Good' and 'Evil' only have meaning in relation to each other. The second proposition is not so straightforward. Battle is not the opposite of victory: it is a

process necessary for the production of victory. The implication is that Good and Evil also exist as the result of a process, rather than as fixed, timeless opposites.

Accepting this association between Good, Evil and Battle is the leap of faith we must take if we are to follow Teufelsdröckh's career with any sympathy. We must take for granted some kind of necessary and causal relation between struggle and morality.

This extra-logical progression from stasis to process is at the bottom of many of the assumptions and value-systems in Sartor Resartus, be they aesthetic, pragmatic or dogmatic: that 'Altercation' with Evil through Art is simply a preparation for the 'Fight' of real life, for instance; that 'idle Suffering' must be transmuted into 'actual Endeavouring'; and that the 'end of Man is an Action, not a Thought' (pp. 153, 182, 152).

Having affirmed that Good and Evil exist, and that conflict is necessary to produce Good, Carlyle need only take one step further to maintain that the harder the struggle, the higher (better) the victory, - as is implied in the following metaphor:

what is all this but a mad Fermentation; wherefrom, the fiercer it is, the clearer the product will one day evolve itself? (p.155)

Teufelsdröckh must thus

in the temper of ancient Cain, or of the modern Wandering Jew, - save only that he feels himself not guilty and but suffering the pains of guilt, - wend to and fro with aimless speed. (p.153)

Through this dynamic of frantic struggle, the psychological travail of Teufelsdröckh is made valid outside Christianity or any existing scheme of redemption. (There is a certain wistful significance, though, in the fact that the precursors Carlyle claims here are scriptural, and poignant because they are banished from Divine comfort and protection. Cain and the Wandering Jew are not aliens so

much as outcasts). The sin-repentance-forgiveness routine of Christianity is suspect, because it relies upon an economy of reward and punishment, devised by an external arbiter, and because it hinges on the individual's desire for conclusive peace of mind and the 'Happiness of an approving conscience' (p. 157). The whole field of practical morality has been further debased, Carlyle implies, by the Utilitarian definition of 'Good' as productive of pleasure - 'an earthly mechanism for the Godlike itself' (p. 157). As mechanical and economical, this philosophy alienates the mystic in Carlyle; as implicitly hedonistic, it dissatisfies the ascetic side of his nature. Notions of sin, Fall, and punishment, then, are bypassed in Carlyle's redemptive scheme, though the ideas of Good and Evil, of struggle and of possible victory are essential. Granted these concepts, he is able to re-write the drama of change in the self, and to construct a secularized conversion pattern which remains 'spiritual', and retains many of the terms and rhetorical patterns of Judaeo-Christian tradition, but is actually religious only by analogy.

To sum up: within this framework, beneficial change in the self will be seen primarily in terms of a violent transition from negative to positive poles, or of a sudden transference of allegiance from negative to positive forces (rather than, say, in terms of more organic models of development, for instance).

Such transitions are ever full of pain: thus the Eagle when he moults is sickly; and to attain his new beak, must harshly dash-off the old one upon the rocks. (p. 155)

Generalized psychological agony will supersede remorse as the index of preparedness for redemption. The state of righteousness, or grace, or wisdom ultimately attained will be gauged in proportion to the extent of the 'pain' undergone in the transition.

Once Carlyle has outlined this conceptual model (as he does in

Chapters IV - VI of Sartor Resartus), he is ready, in the crucial Chapters VII - IX, to draw on and modify the traditions of the Christian conversion sequence in order to create his own version of personal salvation. As we have noted, the 'sense of sin' so central to Christian conversion narratives is replaced in Carlyle's scheme by a more generalized anguish, bordering on despair. Instead of proceeding from a tormented conscience, this anguish (akin in many ways to the Dejection of Coleridge's Ode), may originate in any number of intellectual, emotional or social factors - in Teufelsdröckh's case a stifling education, unemployment, 'unreasonable' employment, and a thwarted love affair, - and culminates in the loss of faith, or 'irreligion' (p.156).

But loss of faith in what? It would appear that, for Carlyle, faith in a Deity is faith simply in 'another and higher' (p. 156); that is, active faith in the possibility of Victory for Good, as opposed to passive, reckless acquiescence to the existence of Evil. And the point of the formula is that it is applicable on the personal as well as on the universal level, and can operate against the self: 'Alas the fearful Unbelief is unbelief in yourself' (p.159).

Without the possibility of victory, as we have seen, the notion even of conflict dissolves, and without this dynamic, Good and Evil are rendered meaningless. For Teufelsdröckh, this sense of meaningless is moral death: "'To me, the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility'" (p. 160).

With everything outside the self bereft of meaning, the problem becomes existential rather than moral. The choice, and it remains a choice since 'Destiny itself could not doom me not to die' (p. 162), is whether or not to carry on living. (It is here that Teufelsdröckh's advantage over his Judaeo-Christian counterparts, Cain and the Wandering Jew, becomes apparent). In Teufelsdröckh's case, illness threatens to pre-empt even this decision - a heart-sickness which

threatens the vestiges of will with extinction, and which incarnates Teufelsdröckh's metaphysical distress:

"How beautiful to die of broken-heart, on Paper! quite another thing in practice; every window of your Feeling, even of your Intellect, as it were begrimed and mud-bespattered, so that no pure ray can enter; a whole Drugshop in your inwards; the fordone soul drowning slowly in quagmires of Disgust!" (p. 161)

But the autobiographical self cannot die of a broken heart, beautifully or otherwise.⁶ In the face of so stark a choice, the stubborn vitality of the self, (and here surely of the body, and paradoxically of the impulse to continue writing) takes over.

In the famous scene on the Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer, Teufelsdröckh, exercising this existential freedom of choice, chooses to defy Death and the spectre of meaninglessness. The 'recording of Protest' which takes place is more than a naming of the enemy, or a mere flat contradiction: it takes the form of a vow: "'I am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!"' (p. 163, Carlyle's emphasis). A promise or contract involves interaction, (indeed Teufelsdröckh calls this 'the most important transaction in Life' (p. 163), and hence can be seen as sufficient to generate movement. According to Carlyle's scheme, this 'Spiritual New-birth' is not final salvation; in fact it is experienced by Teufelsdröckh only as a change in 'the temper of my misery' (p. 163). It is initiation in the sense of 'setting in motion' rather than 'admittance.' And, what is most significant to later autobiographers, the impetus for this motion comes from within the self (or the ME in Carlyle's terms), not from any external or supernatural agency.

The fixing of poles of Good and Evil, and the instigation of a dynamic of conflict produces 'incipient method' out of 'madness' (p. 164). Three interlinked advantages have now been gained: a sense of purpose, a point of reference for observation speculation and

judgement, and an affirmed, validated subjectivity. Even at the Centre of Indifference, Teufelsdröckh can begin to make use of his new vantage point, and 'clutches round him outwardly on the NOT-ME for wholesomer food' (p. 165). While at this stage the biographer's 'chief quest' is to discern the state of Teufelsdröckh's 'inner man', already Teufelsdröckh himself is glancing avidly from one 'specialty' to another (p. 174) - from cities to books to great men to duels - watching, sometimes participating, withdrawing, and evaluating. The world may ignore his existence, but he is defiantly indifferent to that indifference. Obscurely, a positive value is being generated: "perhaps it is better so!" (p. 176).

Again, at this pivotal mid-point of Teufelsdröckh's spiritual development, the language used is a dense compound of Carlyle's new terms and traditional conversion imagery:

Too-heavy-laden Teufelsdröckh! Yet surely his bands are loosening; one day he will hurl the burden far from him, and bound forth free and with a second youth.

"This," says our Professor, "was the CENTRE OF INDIFFERENCE I had now reached; through which whose travels from the Negative Pole to the Positive must necessarily pass." (p. 176)⁷

The progress of Christian, Bunyan's Pilgrim, is evoked here, and the 'second youth' of Teufelsdröckh recalls the New Birth of the Christian convert. Once more, though, the impetus for change comes from within: the modern pilgrim's burden is not to be 'eased' at the foot of the cross; he will 'hurl' it from his own shoulders.

Once Carlyle's redemptive scheme has been plotted and mobilized, the outcome, the salvation of the subject, is inevitable. Since salvation in Carlyle's terms is renunciation of Self, it is appropriate that the autobiographical narrative, in so far as it coheres at all, begins to disperse at this point. The issue is no longer what will happen, but how long it will take, how hard the struggle will be. The chapter 'The Everlasting Yea' does little to advance the action - the

important thing is that action is happening. Instead, the chapter is used to recapitulate: to describe the conversion figure in a variety of different ways. Drawing on the redemptive typology of the Scriptures (Christ's temptation in the wilderness, with its analogies in the Old Testament, new birth and awakening, the restoration of Paul's sight by Ananias, and so on), and on different modes of discourse (such as algebra, ethics, philosophy, theology), Teufelsdröckh traces and retraces his spiritual path. The values may vary, but the equation is always the same:

"Our Life is compassed round with Necessity; yet is the meaning of Life itself no other than Freedom, than Voluntary Force: thus have we a warfare; in the beginning, especially, a hard-fought battle. For the God-given mandate, Work thou in Welldoing, lies mysteriously written, in Promethean Prophetic Characters, in our hearts; and leaves us no rest, night or day, till it be deciphered and obeyed; till it burn forth, in our conduct, a visible, acted Gospel of Freedom." (p. 177, Carlyle's emphasis)

The importance of Carlyle's achievement - the secularization of the conversion model - can hardly be over-estimated. In Sartor Resartus, he first created a persona capable of change. By finding a means of validating and sanctifying one decision, he created a self capable thereafter, not only of making decisions, but of making the right decisions. The present self was thus finally justified. Carlyle made available, not so much a specific creed, as a new set of possibilities for Life-writing: a new taxonomy for self-appraisal (and hence a new means of charting development); and a structure for autobiography which, though new-looking, was really a regvanized version of the old, 'spiritual testimony' structure. As a model for later autobiographers it was ideal: simple, self-validating and foolproof.

But at this point, like the editor in Chapter 10, we should pause. Sartor Resartus is not a simple book. In content as in style, it is aggressively self-conscious, so that the reader should be wary of taking anything at face value. The moment the transformation of

Teufelsdröckh has been accomplished, Carlyle proceeds to undermine the whole structure: by disarming the language of transformation:

"Blame not the word [conversion]," says he; "rejoice rather that such a word, signifying such a thing, has come to light in our modern Era, though hidden from the wisest Ancients...what to Plato was but a hallucination, and to Socrates a chimera, is now clear and certain to your Zinzendorfs, your Wesleys, and the poorest of their Pietists and Methodists." (p. 190)

by casting doubts on the possibility of literary 'truth':

What if many a so-called Fact were little better than a Fiction...! (p. 194)

and by admitting all the philosophical vested interests of the self writing, thus discrediting the authorial voice:

"The Man is the spirit he worked in; not what he did, but what he became..." (p. 194)

By re-admitting doubt into a framework based on faith in the self - by deliberately introducing incoherence into what had come to seem coherent, plausible and complete - Carlyle makes the reader think again about the autobiographical project as a whole. Back to square one.

2. 'BIOGRAPHY' AND SARTOR RESARTUS

Before attempting to reconsider Carlyle's autobiographical procedure in a less reductive, more circumspect way, it is worth examining briefly some of the explicit comments about Life-writing in 'Biography'. The essay is fascinating as a working-through or mulling-over of Carlyle's thoughts about biography both as product and as activity - and it should be remembered that a large proportion of Carlyle's literary output was biographical. (Indeed many of the arguments and quotations summoned in 'Biography' not only overlap with those in Sartor Resartus, but are also reiterated twenty-six years later in the Proem to Frederick the Great.⁸) And, as virtually contemporary with Sartor Resartus, it is pertinent to any discussion of the plurality of selves emergent in Carlyle's own autobiographical experiments.

Despite the sweeping generalizations with which they open, Carlyle's much-cited pronouncements in defence of Biography (a term which, for the purposes of the essay seems to include autobiography), are deeply ambivalent. A taste for biography, Carlyle argues, is an undeniable symptom of the 'sociality' of man. *Furthermore,*

"The proper study of mankind is man;" to which study, let us candidly admit, he by true or by false methods, applies himself, nothing loath. "Man is perennially interesting to man; nay, if we look strictly to it, there is nothing else interesting."⁹

On first reading, this seems nothing more than a string of trite aphorisms on 'man', culled, perhaps, from a Commonplace book. Its archaeology, however, is more interesting than its surface banality and moralism might suggest. The first allusion is, of course, from the second epistle of Pope's Essay on Man:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man¹⁰

and the second, (a tag also used in Sartor Resartus,) is a paraphrase

from the second book of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels, which Carlyle himself had translated in 1824.¹¹ Set back in context, the two quotations actually tend in rather different directions. Pope exhorts us to know ourselves to be fools. We are to recognize our limitations in the face of God's omniscience and mysterious wisdom. (It should be added that within the scheme of the poem as a whole, the argument is circular. If we know we are fools, then we are not: we are godlike.). In the persona of Wilhelm, Goethe is more direct. Citing the power of drama, Wilhelm advocates observation of humanity in order that human dignity and social conscience (unsers eignen Wertes and das Gefuhl der Gesellschaft) might be affirmed. Furthermore, in the most general terms, the focus of Pope's scrutiny is the self (know thyself), while Goethe's Wilhelm takes self-knowledge almost for granted, and advises us to study one another. (Later Wilhelm will admit that

"From youth, I have been accustomed to direct the eyes of my spirit inwards rather than outwards; and hence it is very natural that to a certain extent I should be acquainted with man, while of men I have not the smallest knowledge.")¹²

At the back of Wilhelm's theories hovers Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is a Man' - so that, in drawing on Goethe, Carlyle brings to bear Shakespearean as well as Romantic traditions. It is clear that Carlyle, far from offering one expanded aphorism, is toying with several different conceptions of knowledge of human nature.

The essay 'Biography' is part of Carlyle's longer review of Boswell's Life of Johnson, and it is fitting that in such a context, Both Augustan and Romantic voices should be invoked to debate the usefulness of Life-Writing. Differing world-views - in this case rational and romantic - exact differing accounts of human achievement, differing analyses of the significance of self:-

every Mortal has a Problem of Existence set before him, which, were it only, what for the most it is, the Problem of keeping soul and body together, must be to a certain extent original, unlike every other; and yet, at the same time, so like every other...¹³

Hereafter, both in tone and in the terms of the debate, Carlyle slides between extremes. Employing a device similar to that in Sartor Resartus he uses two voices: that of reviewer, and that of an invented 'authority', one Gottfried Sauerteig who, cited to support the reviewer's opinions, at points actually undermines them.¹⁴ Furthermore, the tone of the argument, even within the reviewer's narrative, slips readily between the romantic and the satiric, the ideal and the practical, the 'scientific' and the 'poetic'.

Apparently 'safe' formulations about man knowing his fellow creatures generate in the essay a series of (implicit) questions as to the kind of 'knowing' possible; where it leads; and what it implies about human limitations. Indeed, at times it is far from clear that nothing but man is interesting to man, or even that man is interesting at all. The vigorous exordium in praise of biography, exhorting us to a spirit of enquiry both strict and candid, is soon subverted by stylized satire, as Swift joins in the attack on human pretension:

The Vatican is great; yet poor to Chimborazo or the Peak of Teneriffe: its dome is but a foolish Big-endian or Little-endian chip of an egg-shell, compared with that star-fretted Dome where Arcturus and Orion glance forever; which latter, notwithstanding, who looks at, save perhaps some necessitous star-gazer bent to make Almanacs; some thick-quilted watchman, to see what weather it will prove? The Biographic interest is wanting: no Michael Angelo was He who built that 'Temple of Immensity;' therefore do we, pitiful Littlenesses as we are, turn rather to wonder and to worship in the little toybox of a Temple built by our like.¹⁵

A few pages later, in the fictional persona of Gottfried Sauerteig, precisely the opposite view of 'biographic interest' is expounded:

"for Man's Life, now, as of old, is the genuine work of God; wherever there is a Man, a God also is revealed, and all that is

Godlike: a whole epitome of the Infinite, with its meanings, lies enfolded in the Life of every Man." ¹⁶

So the simple claim that 'The proper study of mankind is man' can be seen to contain antithetical notions of human capability: a 'descendental' view of our insignificance in time, space and capacity for understanding; and a 'transcendental' belief in the infinity of human potential, and in an indwelling Godhead.

The two arguments, Sauerteig's and the narrator's, overlap at many points, but culminate in pleas for two very different kinds of 'knowing' - and hence two kinds of biography. Sauerteig advocates 'knowing' through belief - the faith in prophets, the faith of prophets - a characteristic Carlylean position.

"Only, alas, that the Seer to discern this same Godlike, and with fit utterance unfold it for us, is wanting, and may long be wanting!" ¹⁷

The narrator makes a more modest claim: that the beginning of all knowledge is 'To have an open loving heart, and what follows from the possession of such'.¹⁸ Thus endowed, one can view the 'whole man', who becomes a 'living mirror wherein the wonders of this ever-wonderful Universe are...represented, and reflected back on us'.¹⁹

In both cases, of course, the drift is towards the apprehension of Universals through the activity of biography or autobiography. The differences, though, are crucial: the universal is emanent in one case, reflected in the other; we are interesting because of our humanity, or in spite of it. Such competing views necessarily call into the question the scope and scale of Life-Writing, and open the way for a re-evaluation of, for example, the particular and the minute alongside the general and the great. In the succeeding essay 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', for instance, Carlyle pleads for a reconsideration of 'the Temple, the Workshop and Social Hearth' as shaping forces in history.²⁰

The essay 'Biography' is at once disappointingly inconclusive and challengingly inclusive. The reader comes away confused, perhaps, but assured that a human life admits of different and possibly conflicting readings. Nevertheless 'The proper study of mankind is man'; these readings are not wrong but simply reflect the complexity of the life. This conclusion may be a truism, but it is also axiomatic. It underlines an aspect of Carlyle's work which is often overlooked - which indeed is not always present: a tolerance on Carlyle's part of conflicting sides of his own temperament; a feeling for the mesh of inconsistencies which constitute the 'whole heart of his mystery'; and a certain relativism of outlook as a consequence.²¹ George Levine has noted such tolerance (characterized by 'narrative indirection' and 'the balance of fiction'), and has claimed to locate this 'unique flexibility' in a particular and unrepeated phase of Carlyle's intellectual development. It took place, he estimates, around 1830-33, resulted in Sartor Resartus, and was eventually and totally superceded by the insensitivity and intolerance evident in later works such as 'The Nigger Question'.²² I would argue that this phase was formative, not just of Sartor Resartus, but of Carlyle's attitude to autobiography in general, both then and later.

From what we have seen of Carlyle's ideas about biography, it would be unlikely that the (auto)biographical element of Sartor Resartus would manifest a simple or straightforward attitude to the self. From the start, the 'hero' Teufelsdröckh is a slippery creature:

Unhappily, indeed, he seems to be of quite obscure extraction; uncertain, we might almost say, whether of any: so that this Genesis of his can properly be nothing but an Exodus (or transit out of Invisibility into Visibility)... (p. 81)

The complex, layered narrative allows the subject, the Carlyle-Teufelsdröckh figure, to shift into and out of focus. The mediation of a non-omniscient narrator, the disconcerting lurches into the

subjunctive, the obfuscation of even such 'basic' facts as birth and parentage: all play to (and on) our contradictory demands of Life-writing - that it should set forth the unique and the representative, the remote and the lovable, the mysterious and the mundane. The tetchy relationship between 'editor' and 'autobiographer' dramatizes these conflicts. Sometimes the editor is eager to promote his subject's uniqueness or difference (as manifest in his philosophy), while the Philosopher himself insists on his own humanity, his lack of difference:

Then we have long details of the Weinlesen...; with a whole cycle of the Entepfuhl Children's-games, differing apparently by mere superficial shades from those of other countries. Concerning which, we shall here, for obvious reasons, say nothing. What cares the world for our as yet miniature Philosopher's achievements under that 'brave old Linden'? (p.91-92)

At other times, the relationship is reversed, and the editor feels bound to exhort his subject to 'Beware...of spiritual pride!' (p.99).

As if to reinforce this ambiguity, the bifocal vision is replicated within the autobiographical narrative itself, as it swings from the familiarity of the first person, to the conscious detachment and irony of the third. Teufelsdröckh speaks of his infancy thus: 'I have heard him noted as a still infant, that kept his mind much to himself' (p. 88).

The distinction at stake here are in fact a more formalized articulation of the contradictory impulses inherent in the autobiographical project in general. Is the individual, the self, to be seen as great, Godlike, immortal, special? Or as insignificant, commonplace, 'human?' Does the autobiographer opt for the ritualized self-abasement of the Confession? Or the ritualized self-aggrandizement of the Apologia? Should the autobiographer ignore the contradictions, and employ both? This seems to be Carlyle's answer.

Conveniently, of course, spiritual testimony, with its central

conversion motif - its before/after format - organizes separate space for both modes of self-appraisal within a single literary form.

But is it the only way to overcome the problem? This was the challenge Carlyle faced. Critical obsession with the details of Carlyle's life, with his spiritual development and its correspondence with Teufelsdröckh's experience, has distracted attention from Carlyle's more subtle experiments with autobiographical form. Much of his effort was focussed on discovering alternative ways of accommodating special and commonplace selves within a single work. Could the commonplace be re-evaluated, redeemed? Could notions of the Godlike, the prophetic, the heroic, be redomesticated?

On a superficial level, the kind of juxtaposition Carlyle had in mind was facilitated by the designedly clumsy device of the six paper-bags, purportedly containing the memorabilia of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh:

Whole fascicles there are, wherein the Professor, or, as he here, speaking in the third person, calls himself, 'the Wanderer,' is not once named. Then again, amidst what seems to be a Metaphysico-theological Disquisition, 'Detached Thoughts on the Steam-engine,' or, 'The continued Possibility of Prophecy,' we shall meet with some quite private, not unimportant Biographical fact. On certain sheets stand Dreams, authentic or not, while the circumjacent waking Actions are omitted. Anecdotes, oftenest without date of place or time, fly loosely on separate slips, like Sibylline leaves. Interspersed also are long purely Autobiographical delineations; yet without connexion, without recognisable coherence; so unimportant, so superfluously minute, they almost remind us of 'P.P.Clerk of this Parish.' (p. 75)

The six paper-bags are thus Carlyle's way of inscribing the comic anarchy and complexity of 'day-to-day' life, - as it is experienced, rather than as it is described. In the paper-bags, as in life, laundry-lists and love-letters, diaries and diagrams will compete for attention. In this crude state, no one kind of material can be privileged above any other: the private and the public, the minute and the portentous, the conscious and the unconscious are shuffled together

in kaleidoscopic configurations.

From the outset, the autobiographical section slips teasingly from the light-hearted to the serious. Typically, Teufelsdröckh will outline a seemingly uncontroversial project, such as an account of his education, only to cast doubt on its usefulness, or to subvert it by providing logically incompatible materials. Then the 'editor' will pre-empt our confusion by rehearsing it himself, thus appropriating our irritation, and disarming our resistance.

The depiction of Teufelsdröckh's childhood exemplifies this kind of procedure. Having given us a contrivedly 'mythical' account of his 'foundling' origins, Teufelsdröckh creates himself as the joyful, expansive, Wordsworthian child of nature - well-adjusted but personally unremarkable:

"Thus encircled by the mystery of Existence; under the deep heavenly Firmament; waited-on by the four golden Seasons, with their vicissitudes of contribution, for even grim Winter brought its skating-matches and shooting-matches, its snow storms and Christmas-carols, - did the Child sit and learn." (pp. 96-97)

The next moment we are presented with a critique of his 'upbringing' which highlights the elements of strictness, seclusion and confinement, and their consequences: passivity, introversion, 'worldly Discretion'. (This unresolved attitude to childhood as at once carefree and anxious anticipates many other autobiographies, in particular Ruskin's Praeterita, William Hale White's Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Edmund Gosse's Father and Son.) Yet even the qualities generated by confinement are of unstable significance: their obvious negative value being counterbalanced by their status as tokens of future seriousness, integrity and spirituality - key components of the conversion narrative:

yet in that very strictness and domestic solitude might there not lie the root of deeper earnestness, of the stem from which all noble fruit must grow? (p.98)

The image of the precociously earnest child places Sartor Resartus momentarily in the mainstream of spiritual autobiography, invoking Augustine's 'inque ipsis parvis parvarumque rerum cogitationibus veritate delectabar',²³ and Bunyan's sense of sin and fear of judgement 'in the midst of my many sports and childish vanities'.²⁴

The juxtaposition may 'mean' many things - that our socialization is a continuing transaction between 'nature' and 'culture' or that primal innocence is soon superceded by 'worldly' wisdom. The lack of a firm chronology here leaves the account open to either interpretation. We are left to discern for ourselves the composite significance (or lack of significance) of Teufelsdröckh's explicitly disjointed observations. The point is surely that, by withholding coherence, Teufelsdröckh (and hence Carlyle) places any notion of thematic unity in jeopardy. We interpret, select and emphasize on our own responsibility, and at risk of oversimplifying the 'mystery of Existence'.

3. REMINISCENCE AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The orthodox response to Carlyle's autobiographical oeuvre has been along these lines:

Sartor is the perfect autobiography of Carlyle, told as genius alone can tell it, "from within." A lower order altogether, journalistic rather than artistic, is the order of Rousseau. The Confessions have not the spiritual insight, the spiritual life, but they possess other qualities. They are exteriors, not interiors.²⁵

It is not my business in this thesis to argue the claims of Rousseau against those of Carlyle. My task is rather to question some of the assumptions made here about autobiography, particularly in so far as they implicate Carlyle. It will be seen that a hierarchy has been erected: 'perfect' autobiography, with its satellites genius, art, spirituality and interiority; and lesser autobiography, which is journalistic, exterior, and so on.

We have seen how the tessellated narrative form and fluctuating tone of Sartor Resartus jeopardize any stable notion of self as genius or prophet that might be thrown up by the 'Life and Opinions' emphasis, or 'conversion' structure of the work. As the editor points out, only certain 'pools and plashes' of the erratic 'river' of Teufelsdröckh's history are traced with any thoroughness (pp. 150,151).

Furthermore, as A. L. Le Quesne has proposed, Sartor Resartus is, at least in part, an extended parody of the conventions of the review.²⁶ Carlyle's primary identification with Teufelsdröckh rather than with the editor has the bizarre effect of permitting the 'reviewed' author to fight back - by providing incongruous, and possibly even bogus biographical data, thus defying the reviewer to privilege any one 'self' over any other (for instance the artistic over the journalistic). Whenever the editor proposed to pursue the 'small thread of Moral relation' rather than, say, the 'broken, unsatisfactory thrums of Economical relation' (p. 114), he is presupposing the

sinister collusion between reviewer and audience which the reader is by now disposed to resist. The editor responds ingeniously to this by hedging his bets: by drawing attention to the very data he prefers to ignore. He quotes, for example, a high-flown elegiac account of Teufelsdröckh's own feelings about the death of his foster father Andreas' death, but omits, in the following terms, the accompanying reminiscence.

Close by which rather beautiful apostrophe, lies a laboured Character of the deceased Andreas Futteral; of his natural ability, his deserts in life (as Prussian Sergeant); with long historical inquiries into the genealogy of the Futteral Family, here traced back as far as Henry the Fowler: the whole of which we pass over, not without astonishment. (pp.106-07)

Rightly or wrongly, the editor chooses to highlight Teufelsdröckh's more dramatic reactions to the death and to the subsequent revelation of his foundling background:

A certain poetic elevation, yet also a corresponding civic depression, it naturally imparted: I was like no other. (p. 107)

The satire cuts both ways, directed as it is at both Teufelsdröckh's apparent lapse into the mundane, and the editor's snooty 'astonishment'. I would go so far as to suggest that the editor's multiple role as gull of his subject, puppet of the public and arbiter of taste is designed to expose the shortcomings of his effort (and by implication any effort) to mediate between 'life' and 'literature' and hence casts serious doubt of the notion of 'perfect' autobiography.

If this is so, then Carlyle's attitude to his own autobiographical oeuvre as a whole deserves scrutiny. In the first place, the idea that Sartor Resartus might be somehow 'definitive' and Reminiscences the inadvertent ramblings of an ageing and embittered mind must be thrown out. The dates themselves belie this. As I noted earlier, Sartor Resartus was written before, but published after the death of Carlyle's

father James (in Jan. 1832), and the writing of the memoir to him. Thus, when the public read about the editor's exasperated abandonment of Teufelsdröckh's 'laboured Character of the deceased', the 'James Carlyle' was already in manuscript. When, in 1866, Carlyle recalled having written his 'memorials' to his father, he denied their usefulness to an abstract 'Posterity', at the same time affirming their intimate relation to himself (Reminiscences p. 297). To refuse to acknowledge the Reminiscences is thus to take sides firmly with the 'editorial' voice in Sartor Resartus, and to dismiss out of hand Carlyle's evidently sophisticated conception of the many possibilities of life-writing.

The shape of a 'pure' autobiography is largely a matter of conscious choice. Between the axes of 'self writing' and 'self past' (or, to put it another way, of imagination and memory), the autobiographer should ideally be able to plot his or her co-ordinates at will. The shape of a biographical reminiscence, however, must to some extent be determined by the points of intersection of two separate but interconnected lives. These points will be more or less systematically 'read off' the axis of memory. That the author is reminiscing (rather than, say, compiling a history), will determine that his or her work is autobiographical, however indirectly. But in so far as the time-scale and action of a Reminiscence are, at least in part, a function of the relationship between self and another, they are involuntary.

Because of this dependence on external factors, reminiscence has always been devalued as art: the autobiographical self should be seen to play freely in the interstices of memory and imagination. Of course, such freedom is illusory. Social taboos, literary conventions, and especially, the dictates of chronology inevitably intervene. John Sturrock has argued in favour of the release of autobiography from its 'parasitic' relationship to biography - a

relationship which, according to Sturrock, is reducible to autobiography's slavery to chronology. He advocates a 'new model' for autobiography:

Once chronology has been given up, the autobiographer is lost, and must take his bearings by writing... The power of association, of bringing into light mnemonic instead of temporal contiguities, has infinitely more to tell us about our permanent psychic organization than the power of chronology.²⁷

The specific type of map of association Sturrock enjoys in the autobiographical works of modernist writers such as Michel Leiris is, of course, that of word-association. The author 'take[s] his bearings by writing'. I would argue that the act of reminiscence - of pursuing the figure of another as it weaves in and out of the (unwritten) history of the self - goes some way towards liberating autobiography from chronology, and hence perhaps from the tyranny of consciousness. Once the subject of a Reminiscence has been lighted upon, a whole set of temporal choices make themselves. Or rather, the writing self must negotiate its selections - its fictions - with a fixed Other, rather than with endlessly recursive manifestations of the self. In the last analysis, of course, the conceit of the external, independent Other is just as much a narrative fiction as the conceit of the converted self: both can be seen as cartographical conventions in the mapping out of a life. (Carlyle frequently uses the verb to 'mark' when describing his procedure in the Reminiscences: to 'mark it as it lies in me', suggesting to me the plotting of a map or graph [p. 3].) Nevertheless, in the sense that it relies if only in part on mnemonic mechanisms, Reminiscence fulfils Sturrock's prescription that the modern autobiographical text 'should be a compromise between intention and improvisation'.²⁸

That Carlyle sensed the possibilities of improvisation around a fixed point or theme is clear in his memoir to his wife Jane Carlyle.

Because their lives were so closely interlocked for so long, the problem of chronological selection was more pressing than it is in, say, the 'Lord Jeffrey'. It is therefore significant that in this, perhaps the most painful and personal of the Reminiscences, Carlyle chooses to duplicate the strategy of pre-selection, using as his starting point not merely memories of another, but another's memories of that other: Geraldine Jewsbury's recollections and anecdotes of Jane Carlyle. (The reason would seem to be that the lives of the couple were so closely intermeshed that for Thomas, any sense of Jane's 'otherness' is difficult to sustain. He has internalized his wife's personal mythology; it has become part of his own: 'I never saw a picture lovelier than had grown in me of her childhood' [p. 52]). Superficially at least, Carlyle's dialogue with Geraldine's 'Mythic Jottings' seems obsessed with chronological and factual accuracy. In practice, however, this double displacement allows him to abandon the effort of biographical reconstruction, and to elaborate on more fugitive impressions. Relationship, (rather than the epiphanic moment) is the prism through which memory passes to produce Reminiscence. In a lachrymose but telling formulation, Carlyle describes his procedure:

I look back on it as if through rainbows, the bit of sunshine hers, the tears my own. (p. 55)

Carlyle's enjoyment of the arbitrary intersections in time and space that form the structure of Reminiscence is evident in the opening sequence of the Reminiscence 'Lord Jeffrey'. The first visit of Carlyle, fourteen-year-old student, to the famous 'Outer House' of Edinburgh law in Parliament Square is a 'descent into the underworld' parodying Book IV of Virgil's Aeneid and Dante's Inferno. The 'innocent conceited' Tom Smail ('Palinurus Tom' [pp. 308, 309]) plays guide and helmsman as the pair enter the Outer House for Carlyle's initiation in one of the mysteries of Edinburgh life.

The great hall, with its dramatic shadows, its swarming population and cacophany of simultaneous pleadings, forms 'a scene which I have never forgotten' (p.309).

Higher up on the walls, stuck there like swallows in their nests, sat other humbler figures; these I found were the sources of certain wildly plangent lamentable kinds of sounds or echoes which from time to time pierced the universal noise of feet and voices, and rose unintelligibly above it, as if in the bitterness of incurable woe... (p. 309)

The scene, memorable on its own account, is the more piquant as it represents to Carlyle the probable convergence of paths which are to cross again and again. The parties concerned, however, are unconscious of each other at this juncture.

...Cranstoun, Cockburn, Jeffrey, Walter Scott, John Clerk; to me at that time they were not even names; but I have since occasionally thought of that night and place where probably they were living substances, some of them in a kind of relation to me afterwards. (p. 310)²⁹

Relived, it is a moment only of chaotic, indecipherable impressions. Observed with hindsight, it is pregnant with significance. Hence, its claim to a place in the chronology of the Reminiscences is partly real, partly fraudulent.

I recal it for Jeffrey's sake; though we see it is but potentially his; and I mean not to speak much of his Law Procedures in what follows. (p. 310)

Here, it seems to me, is the key to the structure of the Reminiscences. The wilful capriciousness of a memory proceeding by association reflects, here as elsewhere, the unfathomable though fortuitous force which brings lives together in time and space; drawing them into contact, into 'relation'. The process of reminiscence is thus more than nostalgia: it is a liberation and an adventure. And it is this process, surely, which calls forth the exclamation

Time with his tenses, what a miraculous Entity is he always. (p. 310, Carlyle's emphasis)

This is not just personification - the representation of an abstraction as a person. Derived primarily from Kant's notion of Time as a mode of perception, this is a necessary demystification and reconceptualization of Time as relative to (human) being. Chronological narrative can be seen as predicated on a notion of time as absolute, as irrelative - a notion which disguises its own anthropocentrism.³⁰ In Reminiscence, time is explicitly a function of memory and language, not vice versa. (In this way, reminiscence as a genre apparently anticipates John Sturrock's theory that autobiography should '[cede] the initiative to words'.³¹ The word 'tense,' originating from the latin 'tempus,' encapsulates the association between time and language. But one does not need to burrow into etymology to appreciate that tenses connote conjugation, relationship. They connote the 'conditional' as well as the 'perfect', potentialities and probabilities as well as certainties. If time is regarded as a system of tenses rather than as some kind of principle or imperative, what Margaret Oliphant was later to call the 'might have been' is as true as, and can coexist alongside, the factual and historically verifiable.³² Like the poet in 'Burnt Norton', the speaking subject can have free play amid the whole complex grammar of time:

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.³³

Allowing the flow of another life to dictate the patterning of one's own can have a curious effect. To call it homogenizing is perhaps an oversimplification, though it does bring about a strange 'levelling' of emphasis. Details - a meeting, a journey, a meal, a 'chance' remark - are brought into unaccustomed prominence and definition; while major events or achievements may become tangential, marginal, or even super-

fluous. This is nowhere more evident than in the treatment in the Reminiscences of Carlyle's conversion: so central and dominating in the structure of Sartor Resartus. In the 'Edward Irving' Carlyle's conversion is slotted between a tour of the Yorkshire Moors and an account of Irving's decline into prophecy. It is interesting, I think, to note the particular way Carlyle describes the process of revelation in the Reminiscences:

- my meditatings, musings and reflections were continual; thoughts went wondering (or travelling) through Eternity, through Time and Space, so far as poor I had scanned or known; - and were now, to my endless solacement, coming back with tidings to me! (p. 281, Carlyle's emphasis)

Three things are worth pointing out here. One is the tone: for Carlyle it is understated, muted. Another is the relativity built into the passage: 'Time and Space, so far as poor I had scanned or known...' A third is the choice of the word 'tidings,' which, like its synonym 'news,' and like the word 'tenses' discussed above, enacts a connection between time and language.

Carlyle goes on to stress the 'immense victory' he gained at this time, and the moral superiority and peace it conferred upon him; but the authoritarian voice is virtually drowned out by the insistent note of sadness and mourning over friends since lost:

I had, in effect, gained an immense victory; and, for a number of years, had, in spite of nerves and chagrins, a constant inward happiness that was quite royal and supreme; in which all temporal evil was transient and insignificant; and which essentially remains with me still, though far oftener eclipsed, and lying deeper down, than then. (p. 282, Carlyle's emphasis)

At once tighter than Autobiography, in that its 'events' are partly pre-selected; and looser, in its 'associative' patterns, the structure of Reminiscence allows scope for the portrayal of a different kind of self, with different preoccupations. It should be said that these differences can be partly accredited to the provisional nature of the Reminiscences: they are primarily personal, unedited sketches

liberally sprinkled with cryptic asides, passages of journal-type material, and note-like, ungrammatical comment. But there are more significant differences. The most obvious is that the texture of Carlyle's life as it appears here is a web of interdependencies. The subject and object of Reminiscence are known through each other:

But to understand the full chivalry of Irving, know first what my errand to Kirkaldy now was. (p. 185)

And again,

Well may I recollect, as blessed things in my existence, those Annan and other visits; and feel that, beyond all other men, [Irving] was helpful to me when I most needed help. (pp. 230-31)

The focus on relationship might even be said to afford to Carlyle the opportunity to see himself from the outside. 'Could I be easy to live with?' asks Carlyle (p.69). The painful answer is no. It is no doubt significant that it is his consideration of his wife's life and its impact on his own that elicits his most basic re-evaluation of Life-writing. Here, his own gendered assumptions about the composition of a Life come under scrutiny as he tries to come to grips with the intricate and puzzling phenomenon of his marriage. 'Feminine' metaphors - 'mingled yarn' (p. 87) and knitting (p. 55) are called upon in an attempt to suggest their life together as a closely interwoven fabric.

Other, less obvious kinds of interdependency are able to emerge from the loose, 'train of thought' structure of Reminiscence. Carlyle's obsessive relationship with his body and its illnesses, for instance, is evident in the Reminiscences where it is underplayed in Sartor Resartus. (That both the Carlyles suffered (enjoyed) chronic ill-health has been amply documented in Thea Holme's The Carlyles at Home.³⁴) The relative absence of this subject from Sartor is partly due to the effects of an autobiographical orthodoxy which limits the potential of physical suffering as a proper subject for discussion. As

Domna C. Stanton has pointed out, in traditional Autobiography the death of the speaking subject cannot be inscribed,³⁵ with the result that the tragic possibilities of illness are likewise difficult, if not impossible, to inscribe. Much the same could be said of poverty, or of failure. Given the chronological pressure on Autobiography, illness which evidently has not resulted in death thus represents both wasted (historical) time and wasted (autobiographical) space: it is merely morbid. Harriet Martineau, in her Autobiography, is vividly conscious of this:

Five years seem a long time to look forward; and five years of suffering, of mind and body, seem sadly like an eternity in passing through them: but they collapse almost into nothingness, as soon as they are left behind, and another condition is fairly entered on.³⁶

But though these lines were written in 1855, they were not published until 1877; so it is the prevailing image of Harriet Martineau as a (literally) spectacular invalid, - an image reinforced by her self-indulgent Life in the Sickroom - that is familiar to Carlyle, and which is for him a warning of how not to appear in public. In the 'Jane Welsh Carlyle' he speaks deprecatingly of Martineau's 'painful ostentation' (p. 119). Illness as tragedy, then, does not work as an autobiographical trope; and the portrayal of self as long-suffering saint is definitely to be eschewed.

The remaining possibility is illness as a catalyst or crucible for regeneration: as something to master, to transform. In the 'Lord Jeffrey' Carlyle makes every effort to cram the subject of illness into the conversion mould.

I look back upon it with a kind of angry protest, and would have my successors saved from it. But perhaps one needs suffering, more than at first seems... (p. 315)

The half-hearted attempt to reclaim illness as part of a unified auto-

biographical progression fails before it starts. For Carlyle at least, physical distress does not fit easily into a redemptive framework. Illness seems to shrug off meaning. Pain (or the memory of pain) spills over in 'angry protest' - a gesture only partly neutralized by the customary genuflection to conversion which follows. As it is, the history of Carlyle's body, and in particular, jokes and rants about his long 'curriculum of dyspepsia' (p.206), provide a nervy counterpoint to the story of his relationships. At times it even constitutes a relationship, - as when Carlyle and Frank Dixon find common ground by comparing notes on their ailments (p. 210). The physical Carlyle remains stubbornly unreconstructed and unredeemed: a source of some discomfort to the reader as to the autobiographer himself.

If there is a biblical analogue to the Reminiscences in this respect, it is the story of Job, with his many afflictions and reverses - not least among which are boils and boiling bowels. And this is arguably the story, not so much of redemption, but of a difficult and complex relationship: a struggle between two wills. In the context of this battle of wills, the point of Job's suffering is its pointlessness. It will be recalled that the Job of the Old Testament is not always as patient as his proverbial counterpart. He curses the day he was born at some length and with considerable vehemence. Job, like the Carlyle of the Reminiscences, permits himself an 'angry protest', astonishing in a simple redemptive type, but only too human.

There seems to me to be a kind of fitness in this: illness is demoralizing, irritating, embarrassing, painful. It is evident, however, that this track of association as pursued by Carlyle has lent itself to a peculiar kind of metonymic criticism. Carlyle exposes his physical debilities, therefore he is (to quote one critic) 'tummy-obsessed' and therefore, by implication, the Reminiscences themselves are unwholesome, bilious, baneful. When, comparing himself with his friend Edward Irving, Carlyle calls himself 'biliary and intense' (p.

184), he does so with good humour and conscious irony. This irony was lost on contemporary reviewers, who were aghast, but not speechless, over such ignoble admissions of weakness in Carlyle, and who took the opportunity to describe his work, his personality, even his religion, as 'dyspeptic'. It is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that the post-Carlylean generation saw everything that was indigestible about him in terms of his indigestion.³⁷ Whatever one's opinion of Carlyle as a thinker, this must seem a rather facile form of dismissal. In the Reminiscences Carlyle engages with difficult, personal subjects in an uncompromising way; and it is precisely the Reminiscence format, with its associative patterns, which enables - almost forces - him to court embarrassment thus.

The most embarrassing, because the most revealing, of the Reminiscences is surely the 'Jane Welsh Carlyle'. One of the phrases Carlyle uses to describe this piece is 'a kind of religious worship (course of devotional exercises)' (pp. 110-111, Carlyle's emphasis). Much has been written about the distortion which results from the intensely reverent perspective Carlyle adopts in his depiction of his wife, and in particular about the way this canonization actually creates a diminutive, twee, 'wifey' figure:

The worst [Reminiscence] in my opinion, is the memoir of Mrs Carlyle. Here Carlyle's personal feelings were too deeply involved; they led him astray. Here Jane Carlyle appears as something between an angel just wanting wings and a baa-lamb with a blue ribbon round its neck. I do not think that Mrs Carlyle resembled either.³⁸

This is clearly a question of the negotiation and representation of gender, and does not immediately concern me here. More relevant is the second phrase, in parenthesis - 'course of devotional exercises'. The epithet is illuminating as it brings together the two constitutive factors of Reminiscence as I have described it. On the one hand, it suggests system, discipline, renunciation of will. On the other, it

connotes (though with irony) the kind of unselfconscious release of emotion George Eliot ascribes to Maggie Tulliver in her Thomas-à-Kempis phase. The former facilitates the latter.

The phrase also enacts, and goes some way to explaining the vitality and immediacy of these Reminiscences: qualities which, I feel, are only partly attributable to the text was not (directly) written for publication, and hence is 'provisional' in character. Reminiscence is an exercise, a flexing of memory. Consciousness of process is usually near to the surface: exhilaration when the execution of a passage is going well; frustration and dismay when the writing founders. Thus in Carlyle's Reminiscences, it is often the incidental passages - asides, jottings, memoranda, which are the most densely detailed, the most dynamic. Witness a passage from the 'Jane Welsh Carlyle' in which Carlyle is navigating the difficult transition between Scottish memories of Jane's kin and reminiscences of their London Life together.

Another of these dinner days, I was in the throes of a Review Article (Characteristics, was it?), and could not attend the sports; but sauntered about, much on the strain, to small purpose; dinner all the time that I could afford. Smoking outside at the dining-room window, - "Is not every Day the conflux of Two Eternities," thought I, "for every man?" Lines of influence from all the Past, and stretching onwards into all the future, do intersect there. That little thoughtkin stands in some of my Books: I recollect being thankful (scraggily thankful) for the day of small things.

[Oh my Darling, how dark and sad am I, and seem to have been defrauding Thee all this while, and speaking only about others! I will stop; and go out.]

[22nd June ...] The London bits of memorabilia do not disengage themselves from the general mass, as the earlier Craigenputtock ones did; the years here, I still struggling in them, lie as a confused heap, unbeautiful in comparison. Let me pick out (and be speedier) what comes to hand. (p.114 Carlyle's emphasis)

Here, the train of association has cornered Carlyle into dealing with the unlikely subject of 'entertaining Jane's Uncle John' - a scenario in which his own part is limited, almost incidental. Mixed in

with the 'fondness' of the account there are, of course, liberal dollops of self-pity, false modesty and rather Tennysonian self-dramatization. Nevertheless, it remains true that many of the usual values apportioned by the autobiographical impulse have been oddly reversed. The autobiographical self, whose accustomed idiom is that of importance, authority and progress, is knocked off-centre, and relegated, quite literally, to the shadows. His purpose is 'small', his emotion is 'scraggy' (a Scottish word meaning gnarled, meagre or stumpy), and, as self-writing, his project itself is insignificant: 'bits of memorabilia'. Even his remembered intuition (significantly a metaphysical view of time as convergence or coincidence and leading to a re-evaluation, reminiscent of St. Augustine, of 'this day of small things'), has become, in this context, a mere 'thoughtkin'. Meanwhile, activities often taken for granted - dining, smoking, and just hanging around - gain sudden prominence.

Implicitly and explicitly, then, Carlyle apprehends this scene, and himself in it, as a kind of temporal accident; and the whole passage is informed with a sense a displacement and incongruity. Quite different from the glaring light of self-scrutiny, reminiscent memory is twilit, not in the sense of originating in one's twilight years, but in the sense of imparting altered perspectives, throwing detail into relief, and affording unwonted definition to apparently casual encounters. It is a seductive but precarious medium, and, as we see here, obscurity and disorientation can only be warded off by a spontaneity verging on unreflective haste: 'Let me...be speedier...'

The conceit of the self-determining plot is again evident here. Unlike Teufelsdröckh's infuriating six paper-bags, the Craigenputtock memorabilia emerge from their original confusion and 'disengage themselves' of their own accord. Even the blurred and bitty London recollections, we note, while requiring some sifting, will obligingly

'come to hand' when a mood of emergency is induced.

'Emergency' is perhaps the keynote of these reminiscences. The task of recalling and preserving so fugitive a thing as a relationship seems to enforce a feeling of urgency. Embarking on the reminiscence of his father, Carlyle announces that his aim is to discover

what my present calamity means; what I have lost, and what lesson my loss was to teach me. (p. 2, Carlyle's emphasis)

A paragraph later, he expands on this:

I purpose now, while the impression is more pure and clear within me, to mark down the main things I can recollect of my Father: to myself, if I live to after years, it may be instructive and interesting, as the Past grows ever holier the farther we leave it... I proceed without order, or almost any forethought; anxious only to save what I have left, and mark it as it lies in me. (p. 3)

Yet again the vital importance of relationship is underlined, and deliberation is consciously dispensed with. Spontaneity seems almost to guarantee that the process will be instructive.

That Carlyle regarded reminiscence as an autodidactic exercise should give us pause. As in Sartor Resartus so in Carlyle's work as a whole, the voice of authority is more readily heard than the voice of doubt or of ambivalence. What the format of reminiscence allows him to do is to dismantle the ideology of greatness sustained and reinforced by the conversion narrative, and to review himself and his life in other terms. Out with greatness and authority go the need to be single-minded, consistent and everlastingly right. For Carlyle, engaged and ensnared for so much of the time in the role and language of prophet, this must on some level have been a relief. In one of the most disturbing scenes in the 'Jane Welsh Carlyle', he describes the time he spent trying to understand the Battle of Mollwitz, Frederick the Great's victory over the Austrians:

After tugging and wriggling through what inextricable labyrinth

and Sloughs-of-despond, I still well remember, it appears I had at last conquered Mollwitz, saw it all clear ahead and round me, and took to telling her about it, in my poor bit of joy, night after night. I recollect she answered little, though kindly always. Privately, she at that time felt convinced she was dying:- dark winter, and such the weight of misery, and utter decay of strength;- and, night after night, my theme to her, Mollwitz! This she owned to me, within the last year or two; - which how could I listen to without shame and abasement? Never in my pretended-superior kind of life, have I done, for love of any creature, so supreme a kind of thing.' (p. 134, Carlyle's emphasis)

The battle of Mollwitz comes to stand for two entirely separate battles of will. Carlyle's grammar strains to accommodate side by side two conflicting impressions of the same scene: his own and Jane's ('I still well remember, it appears I had...'). The result is extraordinary. By a startling reversal of perspective, the familiar imagery of conversion (here Christian's escape from the Slough of Despond) and the imagery of classical heroism (in this case Theseus' unravelling of the labyrinth to conquer the minotaur) are rendered squalid and petty: a matter of mere tugging and wriggling. Carlyle's enlightenment - his hard-won intellectual vantage-point - looks dim and gloomy when re-examined from Jane's point of view. ('Night after night... dark winter... night after night...') Carlyle is thus able to decode his personal symbolism, and to disclose his own history as just a number of 'things' making up a certain 'kind of life'. And a pretty shoddy one at that.

As I hope I have shown, the internal structure of Reminiscence, associative rather than chronological, involves the taking of risks: exposing as it can obsessions, dependencies and regrets. The Mollwitz episode seems to suggest that Carlyle was at least in part aware of the risks he was running. At other times he was not. This is particularly evident in his re-evaluation of the domestic and 'trivial'. Forced to confront his wife's physical and mental sufferings, her ministrations and her ceaseless efforts to pick out of a dreary existence 'bright fragments for herself and me', Carlyle is occasionally shaken into

genuine humility. More often though, his conscious attempt to reassess Jane's contribution to his welfare is undercut by his unconscious habit of affirming his humanity and validating his own discourse at the expense of hers.

It was strange how she contrived to sift out of such a troublous day as hers, in such case, was, all the available little items; as she was sure to do, - and to have them ready for me in the evening when my work was done; in the prettiest little narrative anybody could have given of such things. (pp. 125-126)

Sometimes, as here, he is betrayed into postures of exaggerated and offensive awkwardness (what is a great chap like me doing fumbling with such dainty matters?), while at other times, he loses his nerve altogether, dismissing his discoveries as small beer 'with the gas gone out of it!' (p. 198, Carlyle's emphasis).

In Sartor Resartus, Carlyle reworked the motif of Christian conversion - deriving the possibility of virtue and victory from the dynamic of struggle - in order to establish for himself a vantage point of moral authority whence to write of himself, his life, and his world. The myth of self-hood he expounded in the person of Teufelsdröckh resonated with Romantic heroism and prophetic power. Simultaneously, however, he undermined this secure platform by reminding us of the 'fictionality' of his narrative constructions, and by hinting at the 'duplicity' of his authorial voices. In the Reminiscences, he abandons altogether the platform of self as convert, and the narrative authority it confers, experimenting with a form which is provisional and open-ended.

In spiritual testimony, the fictional confrontation is between two incarnations of the self: before and after the conversion experience. In the Reminiscences, where the nexus is between the writer and a valued but ultimately mysterious Other, any such stable, final notion of self as redeemed is called into question. Perforce cast in the role

of survivor, the writing self is caught up in a trial which can never come to judgement. The only remaining source of self-validation is not moral authority, but authorship: the physical act of writing itself. As such it is bound up, not with absolutes, but with material and social realities: the body, the family, the economic need for work. Writing of his wife's last illness, Carlyle explores his 'authorial' role as part of an on-going process of self-interrogation:

To this hour it is inconceivable to me how I could continue "working;" as I nevertheless certainly for much the most part did! About three times or so, on a morning it struck me, with a shudder as of cold conviction, that here did lie death; that my world must go to shivers, down to the abyss; and that "victory" never so complete, up in my garret, would not save her, nor indeed be possible without her. (p. 145, Carlyle's emphasis)

The model of autobiographer as saint is being recast to incorporate fallibility, uncertainty, even betrayal. Indeed, the passage can be seen as a re-reading of an incident from the Crucifixion story:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.³⁹

The point of the biblical echo is obvious. The moral ascendancy, if there is any, must belong to the martyr rather than to the survivor, whose idealism is exposed as rhetorical posturing. Carlyle's own rhetoric of heroism - the artist struggling in his garret, the seer gripped by forebodings - is itself thrown out as irrelevant. For it is not with Christ that Carlyle identifies himself here, but with Peter: unconverted and committed to a test he cannot pass.⁴⁰

The philosophy developed in Sartor Resartus rested on the premiss that;

but for Evil there were no Good, as victory is only possible by battle.

For the Carlyle of the Reminiscences, the only possible victory is not over Evil, but over silence. And without Jane, without relationship, even that victory is not possible.

CHAPTER 3

WILLIAM HALE WHITE'S THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD
AND MARK RUTHERFORD'S DELIVERANCE:
A COMMONPLACE LIFE?

Perhaps I shall not have a better opportunity to say that, with all these drawbacks, my religious education did confer upon me some positive advantages. The first was a rigid regard for truthfulness. My parents never would endure a lie or the least equivocation. (The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, 1881.)¹

Consequently I know perfectly well that those little volumes are crammed with all sorts of literary and other blunders. The only thing I can say for them is that they are true - but then what is my truth - and were not manufactured for money. (Letter from William Hale White to William Dean Howells, February 25, 1886.)²

I have been asked at 78 years old to set down what I remember of my early life. A good deal of it has been told before under a semi-transparent disguise, with much added which is entirely fictitious. What I now set down is fact. (The Early Life of Mark Rutherford, 1913.)³

My inclusion in this study of William Hale White's Autobiography of Mark Rutherford (1881) and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance (1885) demands that I engage, however cursorily, with the vexed question of their generic affiliation. Are the books 'pure' autobiography under an assumed name, as the letter to Howells suggests? If so, how far, and why, are they 'fictitious?' Are they novels in the guise of autobiography, or Hale White's genuine autobiography masquerading as fictional autobiography? Rutherford may repudiate lying, but the 'semi-transparency' of the disguise, and the obvious disparities between both early and later versions of the story and the documented careers of Mark Rutherford and William Hale White, force us to acknowledge a formal equivocation which renders the volumes' status as autobiography deeply problematic.

Generally, Hale White scholars have inclined to the view that, whatever its surface appearance, Hale White's Rutherford story has autobiographical underpinnings and is only secondarily fictional. They have focussed upon the biographical elements of the works, and have emphasized the exactness of the alignment between the Autobiography and Deliverance, and various other sources of biographical data. Discrepancies between the Rutherford story and available versions of similar incidents have been largely attributed to discretion,

reticence, or false modesty, or to some localized cause, such as the seizing of an opportunity for satire. Inevitably, the main outcome of this attention to 'factuality' is the diversion of interest away from the texts and towards the psychological and religious make-up of their author. E. S. Merton's view is typical of many:

Even more interesting than the "works" is the man White himself. As an unusually sensitive mind he illustrates in how many ways, subtly and unexpectedly, the personality of the artist can enter his art.⁴

According to this theory, the real pleasure of reading the Rutherford story is the satisfaction of cracking a specific biographical code - of penetrating the 'semi-transparent disguise'. Wilfred Stone compares the story to a family album:

But though the photography is sometimes blurred and formalistic - as is usual in such Victorian memorials - the commentary, once we learn to read it, is extremely lucid and revealing.⁵

But is the mask of fiction there only to be seen through? Disguises, it should be remembered, are used not only to protect one 'truth', but to project another; they have a positive as well as a negative function. It is the positive aspect, in this case, which has been neglected. According to John Sturrock

It would do autobiography ... a power of good to recognise how close it stands to fiction, for on the whole autobiographers have made a sadly insufficient use of their specific freedom.⁶

In John Lucas' view, Hale White's interposing of the Mark Rutherford persona between himself and his tales is symptomatic of the late-Victorian crisis for bourgeois liberalism. It grants Hale White a mouthpiece for his worthy liberal conscience and his humanist consciousness, whilst preserving a narrative space in which to explore (and worry about) their limitations.⁷ According to this theory, the often glaring shortcomings of the 'Mark Rutherford' texts (that is to

say, the autobiographical writings as well as the pseudonymous novels) are commensurable with the personal limitations of a fictionalized narrator, and are not necessarily to be attributed wholesale to Hale White the author. Hence, Rutherford might endorse many of the values of High Victorianism: he might extol the virtues of family life; he might support reform movements and act on meliorist principles; he might insist on moral purity in the face of the collapse of religious dogma - but the contradictions and disquieting gaps in his discourse tell a different story.

Early in the Autobiography, Mark Rutherford asserts that, from his suffocatingly rigid dissenting background two (and only two) benefits have accrued. One, as we have seen, is a deeply-ingrained respect for veracity. The other is the 'purity of life' enforced on young men by the forfeits and threats of nonconformist belief (p. 8). In characteristically pensive mood, Rutherford ruminates over the recent decline in moral standards:

The reason for my virtue may have been the wrong reason, but anyhow I was saved, and being saved, much more was saved than health and peace of mind. To this day, I do not know where to find a weapon strong enough to subdue the tendency to impurity in young men; and although I cannot tell them what I do not believe, I hanker sometimes after the old prohibitions and penalties. Physiological penalties are too remote, and the subtler penalties - the degradation, the growth of callousness to finer pleasures, the loss of sensitiveness to all that is most nobly attractive in woman - are too feeble to withstand temptation when it lies in ambush like a garrotter, and has the reason stunned in a moment. (pp.8-9)

Diligently, Rutherford casts aside his inveterate mood of mournful self-deprecation and braces himself ('but anyhow') to launch into improving remarks in the conventional rhetoric of moral purity. The repetition of the word 'saved', with its modulations of meaning from Christian redemption to self-preservation (and implicitly, accumulation of capital in the personal and national sexual economy), sets the passage snugly in the tradition of secularized spiritual testimony.

Once salvation has been established, in however local a way, the narrator can, and does, assume the right to cast judgement. (Young men are dangerous and endangered; I am beyond these snares). As in Sartor Resartus, Life and Opinions rest on the same premiss. These observations, however, as well as being shot through with negatives, lack, loss, inability, failure, and ignorance (Rutherford's most positive activity in the passage is hankering), are riddled with ambiguity and silence. What is the 'much more' that is saved by virtue of Rutherford's compulsory chastity, and which underlies his claim to authority here? Can virtue be compulsory and remain virtuous? Was it really social and spiritual retribution that the young Mark feared, or sexuality itself - as the hyperbole 'temptation... like a garrotter' might suggest? The phrase is hardly expressive of 'peace of mind'. The carefully constructed platform of authority upon which Mark Rutherford stands is intermittently exposed by Hale White as frail and unsteady.

In effect, William Hale White created, in his Mark Rutherford persona, a being who only exists by virtue of autobiography rather than vice versa. Granting his first person an existence independent of 'real life,' he was able to free himself from all but the chronological restraints of biography, and, more importantly, was enabled to dramatize the business of composing an autobiography. Thus the distance between Hale White and Rutherford was not just a means of varying 'so that it could not be recognized, the form of what, at bottom, was essentially the same matter' (p. 146). (This is just the kind of grinding exercise in concealment so demoralizing to Rutherford the journalist in Deliverance). It was a creative emancipation. The Autobiography and Deliverance ultimately refuse the categories of fact and fiction, autobiography and novel. In doing so they pose enormous methodological problems for the critic, for they lack an

epistemological centre of gravity. One never knows whether to suspend belief or disbelief.

The most accurate definition of the Rutherford story is probably 'fictionalized autobiography disguised as autobiographical fiction', but this is unwieldy as a critical tool. As a working definition, I shall say that Hale White wrote a two volume novel incorporating all the rhetorical patterns proper to autobiography. If in doing so he used materials from his own history, and consequently created an identity for his hero similar in some respects to his own, this is largely incidental to my argument here. In this study, I shall speak of Hale White only when discussing the general strategies behind the work. When I am speaking of the discourse of the novel, I will attribute it either to Rutherford, the story's 'first person', or to his fictional friend and editor, Reuben Shapcott.

My main aim in this examination of the Rutherford story is to determine how far, if at all, Hale White was committed to the conversion motif as the appropriate structure for autobiography. '[The Bible] was a magazine of texts, and those portions of it which contributed nothing in the shape of texts, or formed no part of the scheme, were neglected' (p.14). This bitter criticism by Rutherford of 'systematic' theology as taught at Dissenting College, shows his suspicion of 'schemes' arbitrarily imposed on works of literature from the outside, and should act as a warning against any too systematic interpretation of the Autobiography and Deliverance themselves. It is all too easy to read the Rutherford story as a straightforward case of 'orthodox unorthodoxy', to invoke a Bunyan/Mill/Carlyle pedigree, to inflict upon the plot a few simple pseudo-typological formulae, and to come up with an 'alternative' scheme of redemption beginning with the mediation of Wordsworth, manifesting itself in the 'good works' of Drury Lane, and culminating in the 'beatitude' of the chalk downs.

Indeed the passage dealing with Rutherford's discovery of the Lyrical Ballads does seem to invite just this sort of schematic interpretation.

But one day in my third year, a day I remember as well as Paul must have remembered afterwards the day on which he went to Damascus, I happened to find amongst a parcel of books a volume of poems in paper boards. It was called "Lyrical Ballads," and I read first one and then the whole book. It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition. (p. 18)

In a sense, the language could hardly be less ambiguous. Are we not to read this as a conversion narrative, the antithesis of the stage-managed episode of childhood, and the necessary rectification of the false start of Dissenting College? Is this not actually a revitalized version of Paul's experience; the scales which fell from his eyes beneath the hands of Ananias having been replaced in the motif by the systems based upon the apostle's teaching?

But it excited a movement and a growth which went on till, by degrees, all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away into nothing. (pp. 18-19)

Wordsworth offers, in his 'God of the hills', an object of worship, the framework for which has been prepared by Rutherford's up-bringing and training. After the disjunction of childhood - between the natural joy and vigour of 'holidays' and the spiritual dullness of Sundays - nature, emotions, worship, literature all slot into place, into meaningful relation.

Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me, I had now one which I thought to be real, one in which literally I could live and move and have my being, an actual fact present before my eyes. God was brought from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. (p. 19)

All in all, a classic conversion sequence, drawing in obvious ways on J. S. Mill's autobiographical encounter with Wordsworth, and linking,

via Mill, with both Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and Protestant tradition.⁸ The young Rutherford passes through an 'enthusiastic stage' during which life is 'exquisite' and seems 'infinite' (pp. 19, 20). But seems is the operative word: Rutherford's reconciliation with life depends upon this illusion of infinity. Unlike Paul's Divine apparition, Rutherford's Wordsworthian deity, while making sense, for the moment at least, of this life, offers no promises for the next. Likewise, in stimulating Mark's sensitivity to pleasure and beauty, the new God awakens a susceptibility to pain. Mark's problems do not end with this 'conversion,' they begin with it.

One should be wary, then, of calling the Wordsworthian 'visitation' a conversion at all. Although it seems to have the experiential structure and metaphoric texture of the motif we associate with the road to Damascus, there are qualifications built into the account. Take the 'movement and growth' passage quoted above. The metaphor of transformation is not, as my earlier reading implies, that of miraculously regaining sight (as in the Saul/Paul story) but that of sloughing - of shedding an outworn, outgrown skin. It implies a natural, gradual, organic process. Both the rhythm and language of the sentence emphasize that this is a slow rather than a sudden movement, putting the brakes on the Damascene reading. Leslie Stephen, as we have seen, was to use the same metaphor of 'shedding' or 'shrugging off' to ally himself with Gibbon's pragmatism and to distance himself laconically from the discourse of conversion.⁹

Even at the height of his retrospective rapture, Rutherford himself is careful to avoid the term, reserving it for the abortive incident of adolescence, or for the idiom of the revolting Snale (p. 32). This is entirely in character, denoting the ex-preacher's healthy suspicion of a word prone, like the rest of his ministerial magazine, to misuse and devaluation. If it has no other effect, the period spent at Dissenting College produces in the hero a deep distrust of the

mechanical use of spiritual jargon. (Inverted commas consistently signal Rutherford's distaste for such phrases as 'engaging in prayer', 'causes' and 'supply preaching' (pp. 12, 15, 17, 26), and alert the reader to his horror of the categorical: of stereotypical behaviour and predictable response.) Perhaps his avoidance of the term 'conversion' is also attributable to his wariness (as autobiographer) of this model of change. Can the drastic change in outlook and conduct promised by the word 'conversion' ever be permanent? His own subsequent adventures cast doubt on this. By Chapter 4, the disillusionment is nearer the surface:

I did not know then how little one man can change another, and what immense efforts are necessary - efforts which seldom succeed except in childhood - to accomplish anything but the most superficial alteration of character. Stories are told of sudden conversions, and of course if a poor simple creature can be brought to believe that hell-fire awaits him as the certain penalty of his misdeeds, he will cease to do them; but this is no real conversion, for essentially he remains pretty much the same kind of being that he was before. (p. 47)

In direct contrast with the highly-charged narrative of Miss Arbour, or the history of the butterfly-collector, Hale White seems at pains to underplay the drama of the Wordsworth episode, denying the possibility of 'Vesuvian fires slumbering below' the calm surface of events (p.70). In Rutherford's story, philosophical dilemmas find outlet, not in striking changes of heart, but in accesses of petulance, hypochondria and self-pity. While, as I have said, it is not within my scope to insist on the relative 'factuality' of any single version or phase of Hale White's autobiographical oeuvre, it is perhaps appropriate to remember at this point the divergence between the two published accounts of this incident, in the Autobiography and the later, less novelistic memoir The Early Life of Mark Rutherford Written by Himself.¹⁰ Judging from the version offered in The Early Life, the reading of Wordsworth had a permanent, definite and immediate effect

upon Hale White's career, causing his expulsion, amid some furore, from Dissenting College; whereas in the Autobiography, the impact is limited to Rutherford's 'preaching and daily conversation', and the long term effects are less spectacular and more sinister (pp. 20-21). The gap between Hale White and the Rutherford persona has thus been deliberately widened at this point. On the other hand, though the effects of the Wordsworth incident are more dramatic in the Early Life, the style of the transformation itself is remarkably similar:

The most important changes in life are not those of one belief for another, but of growth, in which nothing preceding is directly contradicted, but something unexpected nevertheless makes its appearance.¹¹

In this delightfully understated version, the narrator experiences a profound yet undramatic broadening of opinion, but has his theological hand forced by the narrow-minded authorities of Dissenting College. Meanwhile, though little is made of this coincidence, at about the same time William's father is undergoing his own Carlylean transformation, abandoning a life-time of orthodox Dissent:

It was the Heroes and Hero Worship and Sartor Resartus which drew him away from the meeting-house... He was not converted to any other religion.¹²

In The Early Life, it is the father who speaks out boldly in defense of the narrator's religious misgivings.

In the Wordsworth episode Hale White assembles, and plays off against each other, a number of models of autobiographical change. This tournament itself can be read as a kind of autobiographical exercise, since it involves a heavily encoded intergenerational battle between the paternal/Carlylean model and the preferred 'expansion' model. What seems to interest Hale White in the Rutherford story is the possibility of inscribing personal change in a way which registers, but also problematizes, the dominant literary model: the possibility,

in other words, of producing something more than 'echoes of the book last read' (p. x).¹³

The Wordsworth episode, then, is and is not a conventional conversation sequence. It is pivotal, bringing into direct collision the past and present selves of the autobiographer: a collision compounded by the simultaneous inception of other conflicts. The episode in the Autobiography brings about a differentiation and clash between the public persona of the Minister, and the private consciousness of the lover of nature and poetry. It also represents Rutherford's first real engagement with the written word: later he will refer to this as the significant aspect of the 'epoch' 'when I first began to read and think'(p. 246). The incident is the site of four main confrontations: literary, social, chronological, and generational. On the other hand, it is just 'something unexpected making its appearance',

Rutherford details two separate changes instigated by his Wordsworthian confrontation, though they are really two parts of a single process: the rejection of old 'received' values, and the looking inward for new ones. Since the main effect of the encounter, the shift from 'life...entirely external' (p.18) to introspection is thus psychological rather than moral or theological, the result is a gradual discovery, not of any lasting certainty, but of endlessly alternating layers of affirmation and negation. While the immediate change strikes him as one of expansion and sloughing, metaphors of denudation and evacuation are before long employed to signify the next phase of the same movement.

I was alarmed to find, on making my reckoning, that the older I got, the less I appeared to believe. Nakeder and nakeder had I become with the passage of every year, and I trembled to anticipate the complete emptiness to which before long I should be reduced. (p.84)

It is the same movement - the difference is in its interpretation. A

few pages later, during a debate with Mardon, the process is already reversing again:

"I am certain that there is something truer and deeper to be said about the existence of God than anything I have said, and what is more, I am certain of the presence of this something in me, but I cannot lift it to the light." (p. 89)

The reader must learn to suspect either phase as the definitive Rutherford, for

...he who by painful processes has found yes and no alternate for so long that he is not sure which is final, is the last man in the world, if he for the present is resting in yes, to crucify another who can get no further than no. The bigot is he to whom no such painful processes have ever been permitted. (p. 16)

The Autobiography is above all an exploration of this state of flux within a personality. The 'Lyrical Ballads episode' represents the opening of the hero's eyes, but offers no conclusive 'vision'.

In that it precipitates self-consciousness, the Wordsworth incident is responsible for the autobiographical voice, and, implicitly, for the Autobiography itself. Salvation here consists of the (re)birth of the self and the creation of the potential autobiographer. Self is salvaged from oblivion rather than saved from sin. Thus it would be wrong, I think, to interpret the chapter as an emotional crisis and conversion of the same order as Mill's. There is no phase of Coleridgean 'dejection' before the event: no sense of inadequacy or need for fulfilment, merely a pre-lapsarian unselfconsciousness. In short, though both works focus upon Wordsworth as a revelatory influence, Hale White's Damascene strategy is literary where Mill's is 'literal'. Where Mill plots his progress through 'conviction of sin' to understanding and salvation, Hale White's Rutherford both creates and confronts himself, moving from two to three dimensions, from unconsciousness to self-consciousness.

In all this there is, I think, an implicit critique of the

conversion model of autobiography. The paradox or contradiction at the centre of the model is easily overlooked. Christian conversion involves the sacrifice of self and so, essentially, does Carlyle's secularized rewriting of it. For Teufelsdröckh, this is Renunciation, the reduction of Life's 'denominator'.¹⁴ Both Christian and Carlylean conversion, then, supposedly result in a state of un- or anti-self-consciousness which is at variance with the autobiographical act: which is in fact anti-autobiographical. Carlyle's own recognition of this is to some extent responsible for the wild distortions of form and sybilline dispersal of the first person in Sartor Resartus. (Many of these distortions and dislocations are replicated, in milder form, in Hale White's experiment). Most Victorian autobiographers simply ignore or dismiss this discrepancy between autobiographical theory and practise. John Stuart Mill, for instance, writes blithely of modifying his felicific outlook according to the 'anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle',¹⁵ adding

This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life. And I still hold to it as the best theory for all those who have but a moderate degree of sensibility and of capacity for enjoyment, that is, for the great majority of mankind.¹⁶

By de-centering the episode; by refusing to allow Wordsworth to solve, or even bring to a head, Rutherford's difficulties, Hale White exposes, not so much the theory of anti-self-consciousness itself, as the ideology of a genre which typically constructs selfhood on a platform of selflessness.

So the encounter does not automatically bring about any permanent moral, behavioural or spiritual redemption. In a sense, it signals the opposite: a fall from the Edenic innocence of unselfconsciousness. Within a couple of pages of the revelation offered by the Lyrical Ballads, a dangerous drift towards self-obsession is evident:

Of more importance, too, than the decay of systems was the birth

of a habit of inner reference and a dislike to occupy myself with anything which did not in some way or other touch the soul, or was not the illustration or embodiment of some spiritual law. (p. 19)

It became gradually impossible for me to talk about subjects which had not some genuine connection with me, or to desire to hear others talk about them. The artificial, the merely miraculous, the event which had no inner meaning, no matter how large externally it might be, I did not care for. A little Greek mythological story was of more importance to me than a war which filled the newspapers. (p. 21)

The change is potentially ruinous - it makes some kind of subsequent conversion desirable if not essential. Shapcott's verdict, at the end of the Autobiography, that Rutherford was morbid but not selfish, would find few supporters, and one is intrigued to hear that Shapcott might be able to 'represent him autobiographically' in a better light (p. 139). Yet the reader searches the pages of Rutherford's narrative in vain for another, decisive upheaval - a final conviction of error or commitment to good. Many incidental lessons are learnt and relearnt in the course of the Autobiography, and much sound advice is given, received, and ultimately ignored. Witness, for instance, Mark's reaction to the testimony of the butterfly-catcher, who has lost ten years to a malaise identical to Rutherford's own:

A good deal of all this was to me incomprehensible. It seemed mere solemn trifling compared with the investigation of those great questions with which I had been occupied. (p. 108)

The first part of Rutherford's narrative ends, characteristically, on a note of doubt. No conclusions are drawn, no pronouncements are made. The Deliverance, on the other hand, has a mood of aftermath: showing some evidence of a change having happened, and of some progress having been made, but of the source of the change there is no sign. Consequently, the exact nature of Rutherford's 'deliverance' has perplexed critics. Where is it located?

Deliverance from what? He was already emancipated from Bedford and its creed before the end of the Autobiography, and the second part is not warmed by any sense of final liberation from the ills

that dogged him to the end: loneliness, self-distrust, nervous obsessions, speculative doubts, unsatisfied love.¹⁷

True, there is still gloom, but there is now also a calm, philosophical acceptance of gloom as the common lot of humanity. There is less resentment, less sense of exclusion from a hypothetical paradise of perfect love and noble work. There is an acknowledgement, partly reluctant, but partly relieved, of Rutherford's own limitations:

I was now, however, the better of what was half disease and half something healthy and good. In the first place, I had discovered that my appetite was far larger than my powers... (p. 146)

Furthermore, this gradual relaxation is perceptible, not only in the Rutherford written, but in the Rutherford writing. The construction of Deliverance is looser, the style less intense, less urgent, the train of thought less exclusively self-obsessed. The fictive authorial 'moment of writing' has been shifted several years, as Reuben Shapcott hints in his epilogue to the Autobiography.¹⁸ While we are undoubtedly dealing with the same personality, it is that personality viewed from a new standpoint. The difference can be attributed to the 'weakness of a sequel',¹⁹ - the dispersal of the creative energy which prompted the author to put pen to paper originally. Autobiographical 'continuations' are more often than not rather feeble, prosy attempts to cash in on a successful first memoir.²⁰ If the Autobiography and Deliverance are to be read 'simply' as novels or autobiographies then the criticism is valid: Deliverance is badly 'plotted' compared with the Autobiography. But one must beware of such statements when dealing with a work, largely fictional, which is consciously 'acting out' autobiography, using the reader's expectations to its own ends. In fact, Deliverance is a necessary sequel, required by the editorial format of the Autobiography:

Thus far goes the manuscript which I have in my possession. I know that there is more of it, but all my search for it has been in vain. Possibly some day I may be able to recover it. My

friend discontinued his notes for some years, and consequently the concluding portion of them was entirely separate from the earlier portion, and this is the reason, I suppose, why it is missing. (p. 137)

Shapcott casually points out that Rutherford 'discontinued' rather than completed his autobiography at some point after Mardon's funeral, thus preparing us for the second volume. This deliberate discontinuity, not only in the narrative, but also in the act of autobiography itself, seems to me to be the key to the Rutherford story as a whole.

In order to appreciate the significance of this disjunction, it is worth trying to pin-point its cause in the story. We have seen that the Wordsworthian 'visitation', while supplying the psychological mechanism of introspection necessary for autobiography, also has more sinister effects upon Rutherford's personality. The bliss of self-hood, of uninhibited emotion and of liberal speculation soon turns sour as the 'shadow of on-coming death' poses 'preciser problems' (p. 19). As love of life transmutes into fear of death, introspection turns to self-doubt, and hence to morbid self-disgust.

As the story develops, this paralysing suspense about the future of the self finds an objective focus in the character Mardon, who embodies those principles which threaten to undermine Rutherford's security - and sanity: independence of God and indifference to the grave. This almost allegorical role for Mardon makes it necessary that he should eventually be sacrificed in order that Rutherford face death, his greatest horror. Three times in the course of the book, Mardon approaches annihilation on Rutherford's behalf. As I hope to show, the Autobiography is structured around this recurring scenario. The first time (later proven to be a false alarm), finds Rutherford already in the grip of contradictory notions about mortality, morosely contemplating the possibility of eternal extinction:

Why this ceaseless struggle, if in a few short years I was to sleep forever? (p. 76)

His self-absorption is such that it leaves no room for any but a cold, scientific curiosity about his friend's predicament:

I watched eagerly Mardon's behaviour when the end had to be faced. (p. 77)

There is an unmistakable callousness in Mark's attitude at this point. Despite their friendly debates, Mardon and Rutherford's relationship is reducible here to a battle of wills. Either Mardon must repent, at the last moment, of his heresy, or Rutherford must cease to exist solely on the assumption of guaranteed immortality. But the issue is not to be resolved yet - the distance between the two remains immense. Meanwhile, in the background, Mary calmly nurses her father through his illness - a feat of self-command astounding to Rutherford:

If he did not get well she would be penniless, and I could not help thinking that with the like chance before me, to say nothing of my love for him and anxiety lest he should die, I should be distracted, and lose my head... (p. 77)

Unexpectedly, Edward Mardon recovers, and Rutherford is cheated of his vicarious encounter with death. The two resume their arguments, and only Mary is able to bring them a little closer through her singing. But even this rapprochement is temporary: Rutherford and Mardon are soon parted geographically, as their respective careers founder.

Their paths converge again at another point in their fortunes, when both are living in London. Rutherford is employed in heretical hack-work for Wollaston, while Mardon is unable to work at all, since his health (parallel with Rutherford's creed), is 'wasting away from atrophy' (p. 133). A second time, Rutherford is called to the atheist's death-bed.

The tension now lies, not in whether Mardon will die, but in how Rutherford will react. Practically, the staring match between the two is over, and Mardon calls a truce. The passage recounting Mardon's

death is one of extraordinary beauty and almost supernatural serenity; it is the least gloomy scene since the 'enthusiastic stage' discussed earlier. Viewed thus close-up, death turns out to be very different from the horrifying abstraction which has tormented the narrator for so long.

When I went into his bedroom, he smiled, and without any preface or introduction he said: "Learn not to be over-anxious about meeting troubles and solving difficulties which time will meet and solve for you." Excepting to ask for water, I don't think he spoke again. All that night Mary and I watched in that topmost garret looking out over the ocean. It was a night entirely unclouded, and the moon was at the full. Towards daybreak her father moaned a little, then became quite quiet, and just as the dawn was changing to sunrise, he passed away. What a sunrise it was! For about half-an-hour before the sun actually appeared, the perfectly smooth water was one mass of gently heaving opaline lustre. Not a sound was to be heard, and over in the south-east hung the planet Venus. Death was in the chamber, but the surpassing splendour of the pageant outside arrested us, and we sat awed and silent. Not till the first burning point of the great orb itself emerged above the horizon, not till the day awoke with its brightness and brought with it the sounds of the day and its cares, did we give way to our grief. (p. 134-35)

In this passage we witness the re-emergence of some of the currents of thought set in motion by the Wordsworthian episode. As in the latter scene, there is a distinctly biblical texture, calling to mind, in this case, the Passion of Christ in St. John's Gospel:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.²¹

Furthermore, there is a prophetic 'rightness' about Mardon's answer to Rutherford's unspoken question, as if the two minds understand each other at last. Spoken 'without any preface or introduction', the imperative takes on the special quality of text or maxim: in a way this is another literary encounter, with the same immediacy and force as that crucial first reading of the Lyrical Ballads. There is a moment of illumination, symbolized in this sequence by the sunrise, and, briefly, Rutherford's normally restrained discourse slips into a

higher gear. The language becomes suddenly elevated and ornate: the bedroom or garret becomes the 'chamber', the sun a 'great orb', and the sunrise, a 'pageant'. Broad daylight brings with it a release of pent-up emotion, and the return, striking by contrast, of Rutherford's characteristic monosyllables.

Thus, there emerges, beyond the pathos, a strong sense of calm acquiescence, quite unlike the restless tone of previous chapters. Scarcely even an unwanted intruder, Death fades naturally into the background. Simultaneously, Rutherford's now dangerously malignant self-consciousness is arrested:

So I went back to London. Before I had got twenty miles on my journey the glory of a few hours before had turned into autumn storm...I thought of all the ships which were on the sea in the night, sailing under the serene stars which I had seen rise and set; I thought of Mardon lying dead, and I thought of Mary. (p. 135)

What Rutherford has finally actualized here for the first time is that forgetfulness of self taught by the butterfly-catcher, exemplified by Mary Mardon throughout, but never hitherto achieved by the hero himself. The suspension of self-awareness necessarily entails the suspension of the autobiographical act, and we must rely upon the hints left by Shapcott, the fictitious editor, to fill in the picture. After nursing Mary through her last illness, Mark himself suffers a breakdown, but, as the editor relates,

I thought that Miss Mardon's death would permanently increase my friend's intellectual despondency, but it did not. On the contrary, he gradually grew out of it. A crisis seemed to take a turn just then, and he became less involved in his old speculations, and more devoted to other pursuits. I fancy that something happened; there was some word revealed to him, or there was some recoil, some healthy horror of eclipse in this self-created gloom which drove him out of it...I find it very difficult to describe exactly what the change was, because it was into nothing positive... (p. 138)

Who is Reuben Shapcott? E. S. Merton has expressed the commonly-held view that Reuben Shapcott is nothing but a perpetuation of Hale

White's 'little game of deception' - just a defense mechanism, a manifestation of the author's incurable reticence about his published works.²² Wilfred Stone, on the other hand, has argued that Shapcott functions as Rutherford's (and White's) 'dream friend': that he is a 'projection of Hale White's bitter frustration' in personal relationships.²³ Shapcott's strikingly detached, almost flippant tone, and his superficial, generalized and sometimes unsympathetic insights into Rutherford's personality, render such a suggestion implausible. But if Hale White believed, as I suspect he did, that true conversion, involving as it must a temporary death to selfhood, cannot but be extra-autobiographical, Shapcott takes on a different role. He is present, not as pseudonym, or as advocate, but as *observer*, *unknowingly* passing on to the reader the vital information that autobiography cannot absorb. In the passage quoted above, Shapcott liberally deals out a handful of the key terms we associate with personal upheaval in the Victorian Life: crisis, turn, recoil, eclipse. These are crucial terms in the vocabulary of the 'secular' convert. What is remarkable, is not that these terms should be used, but that they should be deposited with Shapcott. The effect is the marginalisation of the very phase of experience we would expect, according to the conventions of Victorian autobiography, to be the most momentous and dramatic in the book. Thus, the old, self-obsessed Rutherford is discreetly dismissed, and Shapcott presents to the reader the third party - the creature created by, but also beyond, conversion and confession; the creature liberated for action.

It is this creature, of course, who composes, in a quite different mode, the second volume. The Rutherford of Deliverance is above all determined to avoid the 'dogmatism of death' (p.230). Death punctuates the second narrative, but it is no longer a question-mark over every action and idea. The last illness of Mrs M'Kay sees her transformed

from a careworn wife, ignored by her husband, into a 'blossom of the chalk downs' (p. 165). The key-note of Deliverance is perhaps the introductory quotation from an 'Unknown Greek Author', reflecting the calmer mood of the second volume: 'Having death for my friend, I tremble not at shadows'. It is a new Rutherford we are to meet, one created between the volumes.

Such an interpretation seems strained until one discovers another expression of the same theme from an unexpected source, outside the main narrative. I refer to the curious poem at the beginning. I mentioned earlier that the death of Mardon is worked over three times in the course of the book. The third version can only be recognized as such once the Autobiography has been read through. I quote the poem in full:

This is the night when I must die,
And great Orion walketh high
In silent glory overhead:
He'll set just after I am dead.

A week this night, I'm in my grave:
Orion walketh o'er the wave:
Down in the dark damp earth I lie,
While he doth march in majesty.

A few weeks hence and spring will come;
The earth will bright array put on
Of daisy and of primrose bright,
And everything which loves the light.

And some one to my child will say,
You'll soon forget that you could play
Beethoven; let us hear a strain
From that slow movement once again.

And so she'll play that melody,
While I among the worms do lie;
Dead to them all, for ever dead;
The churchyard clay dense overhead.

I once did think there might be mine
One friendship perfect and divine;
Alas! that dream dissolved in tears
Before I'd counted twenty years.

For I was ever commonplace;
Of genius never had a trace;
My thoughts the world have never fed,
Mere echoes of the book last read.

Those whom I knew I cannot blame;
If they are cold, I am the same:
How could they ever show to me
More than a common courtesy?

There is no deed which I have done;
There is no love which I have won,
To make them for a moment grieve
That I this night their earth must leave.

Thus, moaning at the break of day,
A man upon his deathbed lay;
A moment more and all was still;
The Morning Star came o'er the hill.

But when the dawn lay on his face,
It kindled and immortal grace;
As if in death that Life were shown
Which lives not in the great alone.

Orion sank down in the west
Just as he sank into his rest;
I closed in solitude his eyes,
And watched him till the sun's uprise. (pp. ix-x)

With good reason, this poem is usually dismissed as 'introductory verses' - doggerel composed mainly of conventional 'transiency' motifs, but useful if only for the convenient tags it offers about Rutherford's personality, obsessions, and preferred imagery of stars and graves. Obviously, it is synoptic, summing up the main themes of the Rutherford story, and relates closely to the summary passage on pages one and two of the Autobiography. But this passage, we recall, was written 'Now that I have completed my autobiography up to the present year' (p. 1). This fact alone should persuade us to connect the poem with the conclusion of the Autobiography.

Who is supposed to have written the poem? Significantly, it is placed between the writings credited to Shapcott and Rutherford, without being directly attributed to either. The tone is undeniably Rutherfordesque, in all but the last three stanzas, but the details of the scene - the stars, the season, the waves, the daughter, even the final moan - come almost directly from Mardon's death in the garret room. The outlook on death, the inability to conceive of anything beyond the grave, is Mardon's, while the regret, the sense of loss and

waste, is definitely Rutherford's. But is the child playing Beethoven Mary or Theresa?

As in Eliot's *Little Gidding*, we are presented with a 'familiar compound ghost', at once subject and object, a fusion of autobiographical material. Furthermore, out of this experience of death, this dissolution of self-hood, emerges orthogonally another figure, calm, wise, restrained and anonymous. The poem is thus a clue, not to the authority of the work, but to its strategy. The cycle of confession and oblivion culminates in the release of a 'virtual' third self, enlightened by, but also detached from, the experience:

I closed in solitude his eyes,
And watched him till the sun's uprise.

Hence the shift of perspective and mood perceptible in Deliverance:

This was work which would have been disagreeable enough, if I had not now ceased in a great measure to demand what was agreeable. (p. 146)

Ceasing to demand the agreeable is not merely a matter of suppressing certain tastes and inclinations, it is an index of something more - of an autobiographical climb-down. The choice of the word 'agreeable' is significant: the whole of the Autobiography can be read as a persistent clamour for sympathy, for correspondence of interests, for accord between conflicting selves, for 'agreement' in various forms. This is the source of the friction, and therefore the energy in the first volume. The Deliverance is undeniably limp in comparison. But to demand agreement is unreasonable. Rutherford frequently uses 'agreeable' ironically to signify superficial standards of acceptability and superiority. Clem Butts, for example is regarded as more 'agreeable' than Chalmers, his rival, because the latter has dirty fingernails and collars (p. 188). It is worth noting, also, that Mrs

Cardew, in the later novel Catherine Furze (1896), who plays a role similar to that of Mrs M'Kay - the long-suffering, misunderstood, inarticulate wife - is nevertheless 'sane' and 'sensible', her features, though not beautiful, betokening a certain 'inward agreement'.²⁴ This is the kind of harmony that Mark Rutherford strives grimly to achieve in Deliverance; it is inward, but it is also unexpressive - 'muzzled' to use Mark's metaphor:

Had I followed my own natural bent, I should have become expressive about what I had to endure, but I found that expression reacts on him who expresses and intensifies what is expressed. (p. 257)

The change of emphasis in the second volume is thus not directly due to any specific amelioration in Rutherford's social or psychological condition. Rather, it is the result of a deep distrust of his former confessional mode of discourse. Gradually, the day-to-day struggles of his own existence, the minutiae of his own sufferings, so absorbing to the younger Rutherford, come to seem less important, as other issues, such as the trials of others and the joys of leisure gain ascendancy in the narrative.

The path away from confessional discourse (which is the journey towards self-forgetfulness and innocence) involves Rutherford in a reevaluation of personal values in the light of needs other than his own. As we have seen, he comes to question the fundamentals of his 'autobiographical' consciousness, and these include his 'early training on the "Lyrical Ballads"' (p. 149). The natural divinity of the Autobiography undergoes a reconsideration in the light of the sufferings of Rutherford's fellow-Londoners. To put it bluntly, how can a 'God of the hills' be effectual where no hills are visible?

I cannot help saying, with all my love for the literature of my own day, that it has an evil side to it which none know except the millions of sensitive persons who are condemned to exist in great towns. (p. 149)²⁵

This mundane, pragmatic approach to Wordsworth strikes the reader as philistine after the raptures of the Autobiography, but it is in line with the development of Rutherford's outlook: from self-pity to a wider empathy, from introspection to awareness of others. Nature must be re-earned if it is to be re-claimed. Meanwhile, it can no longer be regarded as a universal panacea.

As circumstances, social conditions, people claim a share of the hero's attention, the absolutes of the Autobiography - the stars, the grave, the Wordsworthian 'abstraction Nature' - are gradually supplemented, if not replaced, by relatives: by the city and the chalk downs. In the context of Drury Lane, any appeal to spiritual polarities is silenced by the clamour of more immediate, life-threatening concerns. Rutherford goes so far as to deny the relevance of Christian and Pauline models amid the squalor of the Victorian slums:

Here was nothing but sullen subjugation, the most grovelling slavery, mitigated only by a tendency to mutiny. Here was a strength of circumstance to quell and dominate which neither Jesus nor Paul could have overcome... (p. 171)

In the light of Rutherford's early experience, this represents a radical change of outlook: it is at once a recognition of new moral priorities, and a sense of the inappropriateness of familiar exempla:

The preaching of Jesus would have been powerless here; in fact, no known stimulus, nothing ever held up before men to stir the soul to activity, can do anything in the back streets of great cities so long as they are the cesspools which they are now. (p. 171)

Furthermore, as Rutherford comes to see, an inappropriate model is pernicious rather than simply redundant, because of the facility with which a congregation will adopt as their own an entirely alien experience when it is suggested to them by a religious leader and clothed in religious phraseology:

Just as we entered we heard him say, "My friends, I appeal to those of you who are parents. You know that if you say to a child 'go,' he goeth, and if you say 'come,' he cometh. So the Lord" - But at this point M'Kay, who had children, nudged me to come out; and out we went. (p. 156)

All these issues crystallize around the notion of preaching, as exemplified by M'Kay's first attempt to communicate to the inhabitants of Drury Lane. Forgoing the formality of quotation marks, M'Kay virtually appropriates the narrative at this point, sweeping the reader along with the current of his ideas. Persuasive as he sounds, however, it is vital to remember that M'Kay is not necessarily Rutherford's spokesman. With all the subtlety of a bulldozer, he goes straight to the point, and the point is Christ. M'Kay's is professedly a moral message, but one transmitted through the medium of Christ, the 'central, shaping force' of the enterprise (p. 173).

We are in a state of anarchy, each of us with a different aim and shaping himself according to a different type; while the uneducated classes are entirely given over to the "natural man." He was firmly persuaded that we need religion, poor and rich alike. We need some controlling influence to bind together our scattered energies. We do not know what we are doing. (p. 172)

However moderate and practical M'Kay believes himself to be, we are left in no doubt that he is nonetheless a would-be prophet, 'possessed by a vision of a new Christianity', and dealing in 'forces' and 'influences' beyond the merely human. Moreover, revolutionary though his new, liberal form of Christianity may sound, it is in some respects as conventional as orthodox Dissent, reliant upon a form of conversion for its success. His object is to 'attract Drury Lane to come and be saved' (p. 168). Not surprisingly, M'Kay's ideal is St. Paul:

Jesus was in him; he had put on Jesus; that is to say, Jesus lived in him like a second soul... (p. 172)

We are reminded of the painful lessons learnt in the first volume: that the impulse to proclaim a message is scarcely more than a

'gregarious instinct' to pass rather than reserve judgement (p. 16); and that it is better to "'Leave the whole business and prefer the meanest handicraft"' than to take a stand on shaky authority (p. 87). Rutherford makes no explicit judgement either favourable to or critical of M'Kay's address. His feelings, however, are implicit in the narration of events immediately subsequent to the meeting. After reporting the substance of his friend's argument, Rutherford remarks

He strove as much as he could to make his meaning plain to everybody. Just before he finished, three or four out of the half-a-dozen outsiders who were present whistled with all their might and ran down the stairs shouting to one another. As we went out they had collected about the door, and amused themselves by pushing one another against us, and kicking an old kettle behind us... (p.174)

Each detail is significant. In contrast to M'Kay's earnest eloquence, his struggle to communicate, this response is inarticulate, formless, anarchic. It is not a response to M'Kay's actual message, which they do not allow him to conclude; it is spontaneous mutiny. Nor is it hostile in any logical, directed, and therefore answerable way; it is amoral, irrational, brutal. M'Kay has made no impact whatsoever. These are indeed 'outsiders'. M'Kay's efforts are not merely futile, they are also hypocritical, as we deduce from the chapter's final incident:

Mrs M'Kay went with us, and when we reached home, she tried to say something about what she had heard. The cloud came over her husband's face at once; he remained silent for a minute, and getting up and going to the window, observed that it ought to be cleaned, and that he could hardly see the opposite house. (p. 174)

The sullen incomprehension of the 'outsiders' is hardly less frustrating than M'Kay's deliberate withdrawal behind a self-made screen of indifference. (The juxtaposition of the cloud and the dirty window here re-inforces our impression of M'Kay's self-deception, of the difference between his preaching and practice). At the end of the chapter, the 'new Christianity' is as remote as ever.

This tacit judgement of M'Kay's gospel is borne out by long and painful experience:

We had learned that we could not make the slightest impression on Drury Lane proper. (p. 208)

That the inhabitants of Drury Lane should refuse point blank to mould themselves to M'Kay's model, and that no spirit of revival descend to assist the well-meaning reformers are harsh but salutary lessons:

To stand face to face with the insoluble is not pleasant. A man will do anything rather than confess it is beyond him. He will create pleasant fictions, and fancy a possible escape here and there, but this problem of Drury Lane was round and hard like a ball of adamant. (p. 209)

Their refusal to conform forces a new flexibility of attitude, along with a radical modification of expectations; the change is reflected in the language of reform. Reformation turns out to be a kind of ad hoc social work. M'Kay 'did not convert Drury Lane, but he saved two or three' (p. 210).

This recognition of the need for a kind of deliverance apart from divine intervention or sudden inspiration - a salvation less spectacular but more enduring perhaps than conversion - is the underlying theme of the second volume, and its implications extend to the form of the work itself, with its rejection of ready models, and its decentralization of the inner agonies of the 'first person'. The vital link between ideology and form is articulated most clearly in Rutherford's analysis of M'Kay's evangelical method:

He recurred to the apostles and Bunyan, and was convinced that it was possible even now to touch depraved men and women with an idea which should recast their lives. So it is that the main obstacle to our success is a success which has preceded us. We instinctively follow the antecedent form, and consequently we either pass by, or deny altogether, the life of our time, because its expression has changed. We never do practically believe that the Messiah is not incarnated twice in the same flesh. (p. 168)

M'Kay's adherence to the apostles and Bunyan as his ideal 'inspired'

converts and ministers, his way of viewing history as a series of sudden leaps forward brought about by religious fervour, his view of salvation as passive rather than active - all stem from his inability to recognize or acknowledge the possibility of personal change outside the conversion-figuration, or 'antecedent form'. M'Kay's vision excludes other, more painstaking methods of improvement.

Rutherford, meanwhile, with the same basic aims, struggles towards a more pragmatic means of education. His imaginary adventure in St. Paul's Cathedral is symptomatic of his new view of his own role, and it is appropriate that Rutherford should choose this venue for his stepping-down as 'minister':

I discovered that my sermon would be very nearly as follows:
"Dear friends, I know no more than you know; we had better go home." (p. 167)

Ultimately, then, Rutherford is compelled to acknowledge the existence of difficulties, less intellectual perhaps than his own, but equally, if not more, urgent and soul-destroying. The Drury Lane regulars

all wanted something distinctly. They had great gaping needs which they longed to satisfy, intensely practical and special. Some of these necessities no words could in any way meet. (p. 226)

These are problems with religion in its available forms is unable to meet:

Preachers are like unskilled doctors with the same pill and draught for every complaint. (p. 226)

The resultant policy is essentially one of compromise; of painstaking manoeuvre, of adaptation of lifestyle to personality, or, at worst, of personality to lifestyle: what Rutherford calls the religion of Reconciliation. This reconciliation with providence brings about a final reconciliation with self. 'For my own part, I was happy when I

had struck that path.' (p. 228) As they did after the first encounter with Wordsworth, things slot into place - though it is a gradual subsiding rather than a revelation. This time, however, there is none of that fretful division of self against self encapsulated by the first edition title Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, Dissenting Minister.

As in the first volume, Rutherford's narrative in Deliverance ends with a rapturous vision of the natural world, this time in the slightly more prosaic form of a family day trip to the chalk downs:

It was late in the autumn before Ellen had thoroughly recovered, but at last we said that she was as strong as she was before, and we determined to celebrate our deliverance by one more holiday before the cold weather came. It was again Sunday - a perfectly still, warm autumnal day, with a high barometer and the gentlest of airs from the west...We were beyond the smoke, which rested like a low black cloud over the city in the north-east, reaching a third of the way up to the zenith. The beech had changed colour, and glowed with reddish-brown fire. We sat down on a floor made of the leaves of last year. At midday the stillness was profound, broken only by the softest of whispers descending from the great trees which spread over us their protecting arms. Every now and then it died down almost to nothing, and then slowly swelled and died again, as if the gods of the place were engaged in divine and harmonious talk. By moving a little towards the external edge of our canopy we beheld the plain all spread out before us, bounded by the heights of Sussex and Hampshire. It was veiled with the most tender blue, and above it was spread a sky which was white on the horizon and deepened by degrees to azure over our heads. The exhilaration of the air satisfied Marie...We were all completely happy. We strained our eyes to see the furthest point before us. The season of the year, which is usually supposed to make men pensive, had no such effect upon us. Everything in the future, even the winter in London, was painted by Hope, and the death of the summer brought no sadness. Rather did summer dying in such fashion fill our hearts with repose, and even more than repose - with actual joy.(pp. 271-2)

The spectacular view of sea and sky from Mardon's garret is replaced by the less grandiose landscape of the chalk downs; the mood is cheerful rather than passionate, exhilarating rather than ecstatic. It is a moment of 'actual joy', reminiscent of the 'present joy' of the poet in the opening of Wordsworth's Prelude of 1850.²⁶ Indeed, the linguistic correspondences between this passage and the 'glad preamble' of the

Prelude are too many and too striking to be coincidental. In both, the autumnal setting is not an ominous precursor of winter, but full of

vernal promises, the hope
Of active days urged on by flying hours. (41-42)

The woodland repose, the perfect stillness of the afternoon, the 'cheerfulness serene', the great vistas of time and space, and even the

backward glance upon the curling cloud
Of city smoke (88-89)

all suggest a reappraisal of the hero's hitherto volatile relationship with Wordsworth and the Romantic self.

No longer the alienating, disturbing influence renounced by Rutherford after the shock of Drury Lane, nature is here a benevolent presence. The surrounding hills of Sussex and Hampshire define their outlook, the trees offer a canopy, the clouds a veil, and maps and barometers act as mundane but comforting mediators between the holiday-makers and their unwonted environment. The contentment generated by nature is thus not the mystical joy of direct intercourse with the God of the hills - the mingling of the 'congenial powers' of self and heaven - but the satisfaction of peaceful co-existence: the gods of the place engaged in their own affairs, the humans 'all completely happy'. It is a social, rather than a spiritual encounter with Wordsworth.

This is undoubtedly a rather tame, Home Counties version of Wordsworth. Nevertheless, the passage does capture something of the sense of healing and rest described by the poet at the start of his journey:

Content and not unwilling now to give
A respite to this passion, I paced on
With brisk and eager steps; and came, at length,
To a green shady place, where down I sate
Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice,
And settling into gentler happiness.(59-64).

Wordsworth is here re-read and reclaimed; the conflicts instigated by the momentous first meeting having finally been resolved, and the fretful self-consciousness of the hero having found rest. The most significant element of Rutherford's final utterance is the complete disappearance of the first person singular. Another phase of autobiography is complete.

CHAPTER 4

THOMAS COOPER: THE FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

The Life of Thomas Cooper Written by Himself (1872) is the autobiography of a Convert to Christianity.¹ For the most part, however, it is occupied with a career of immense variety and historical interest: the classic life-trajectory of the Victorian demagogue. Born into a working-class family, Cooper trained as a shoemaker, but went on to be, at different times, teacher, preacher, journalist, Chartist agitator, prison poet of some celebrity (like many nineteenth-century autobiographers, he boasted Thomas Carlyle among his friends), novelist, and lecturer on every subject from Pitt to Pythagoras. His intellectual history was likewise diverse, falling as he did under the sway of works as different as Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and George Eliot's translation of Strauss' Leben Jesu - one of the most influential sceptical works of the period. By the time he came to write his own Life, he had achieved his final incarnation as itinerant preacher and freelance lecturer on Christian Evidences.

Cooper, then, writes as convert: from the perspective of 'one who has changed'. As such, he is embroiled in the paradox in which all autobiographers are implicated - that of the foregone conclusion. An accurate reconstruction of the past self is at once demanded by the conversion model of autobiography and rendered impossible by it. Cooper's autobiographical procedure is complicated by his recognition of this: of the relative futility of attempting to reconstruct the past. 'We see the past, as it were, through a false glass; and cannot represent it to ourselves otherwise than as something like the present' (p. 3). Thus, if the two-year-old Thomas behaves uncannily like the sixty-six-year-old, it is the result of the dual irony of type-casting: the redeemed self acts out the role of the child, but only insofar as the child is recognizable as the redeemed self.

Almost every stage of the account is characterized by an air of self-satisfaction, and a reluctance to admit failure. Indeed one of the difficulties one encounters when examining Cooper's Life is a

suspicion that Cooper as recent convert has no right to be so pleased with his past life. He remains unapologetic and unperturbed, on the whole, by the apparent contradictions and violent vicissitudes of his development. He will describe his 'impregnation' with the spirit of Radicalism in one paragraph, and the early sowing in his mind of the seeds of spiritual good in the next, commenting blandly that there are 'strange mixtures ... in the experience of some of us' (pp.35,36). Such pervasive complacency in the face of multiple, drastic changes of belief, at odds with the severely dichotomous structure of the conventional conversion narrative, raises questions which cannot be answered simply in terms of Cooper's personality. Does a sense of having been enlightened inform the whole work? Or is there a compromise between past and present selves? What narrative manoeuvres enable Cooper to contravene the imperatives of his own chosen genre, and in what circumstances would he elect to do so?

This species of self-congratulation is perhaps best illustrated by Cooper's earliest memory:

I fell into the Leate, a small tributary of the Exe, over which there was a little wooden bridge that led to my father's dye-house, on the day that I was two years old - and, as my mother always said, at the very hour that I was born, two years before. After being borne down the stream a considerable way, I was taken out, and supposed to be dead; but was restored by medical skill. It may seem strange to some who read this - but I remember, most distinctly and clearly, being led by the hand of my father, over St. Thomas's bridge, on the afternoon of that day. He bought me ginger-bread from one of the stalls on the bridge; and some of the neighbours, who knew me, came and chucked me under the chin, and said, "How did you like it? - How did you fall in? - Where have you been to?" The circumstances are as vivid to my mind as if they only occurred yesterday. (pp. 4-5)

This short sequence represents a very characteristic piece of personal mythology. On the surface, it appears to function simply as 'evidence' of the length of Cooper's memory, and hence as a legitimization of the beginning of the retrospective (rather than genealogical) narrative. Almost coincidentally, it is a conventional account of the timely

intervention of Providence; an intriguing, but equally coincidental re-enactment of his birth on his birthday, and a direct prefiguration of Cooper's final, decisive immersion and entry into the General Baptist Connection on Whit Sunday fifty-two years - and nearly four hundred pages - later. To make an obvious but important distinction, the scene is treated by Cooper as emblematic rather than formative.²

The episode is, however, more broadly typical, exemplifying Cooper's proneness to New Birth, to Conversion in life, and to certain habits (conscious or unconscious) of selection and presentation in writing. Read this way, the episode becomes almost preposterously metaphorical. The child Thomas, close by his father's 'dye-house', falls into the stream. (The repetition born/borne already alerts the reader to the scene's potential significance.) His emergence from the waters of the (aptly-named) Leate coincides with his precocious awakening to consciousness, for he remembers what follow 'most distinctly and clearly': being led by the hand of his father across the bridge of Saint Thomas - whose name, as well as being a handy canonization of himself, also prefigures his notorious transition from 'doubting' to faith.³ And finally, the mysterious and inconsequential-seeming questions, left unanswered here, are the very questions to be addressed time and again in the course of the following chapters, as Cooper recounts his plunges into and out of conviction.

Interestingly, it is the 'circumstances' rather than the experience Cooper recollects most vividly. What he remembers is being the centre of attention - being called upon to validate the gossip that has sprung up around him. The gingerbread treat and the presence of witnesses, rather than the narrow escape, make the incident memorable to Cooper. His imagery is not that of the Wilderness or the lonely garden of Gethsemane, but that of the public rite of baptism or the furore of Pentecost. Here as elsewhere, there is a tension between two

contradictory conceptions of self: one of (rather self-conscious) ordinariness and one of specialness; Everyman versus the demagogue. (Witness the opening lines, in which Cooper reports that :

Hundreds of people have told me that I ought to write a record of my own life. But, very likely, thousands will wonder that I have had the assurance to write it...(p. 1)

Aware that his own self-presentation may be construed as presumptuous, undemocratic and spiritually arrogant, Cooper good-humouredly and ostentatiously cooks the books in his own favour).

The more one studies this little story, the more over-determined it seems. Ultimately, one realizes that Cooper does not just dramatize himself: he presents himself as self-dramatizing. Evidence of naivety in Cooper's portrayal of himself must be interrogated in the light of this apparent self-consciousness. For instance, one can only take this incident seriously as typological if one is prepared to accept a piece of gingerbread and a chuck under the chin as tokens of heaven. Otherwise, one must read it as - at least partly - a muted self-parody.

Well-rehearsed scenes such as this lead me to suspect that the fact that Cooper emerges gloriously unrepentant about so much of his early life and activity is attributable to his undaunted engagement with and occasional subversion of the conventions of an intransigent autobiographical tradition. Aware, as we have seen, of the pitfalls of autobiography, he will use them to his advantage: either by making an event out of his tumble, as here, or by navigating around them by drawing on alternative models of Life-writing. In both cases the effect is to defuse the before/after dichotomy of spiritual testimony and to rehabilitate Cooper's pre-conversion experiences as the legitimate and often happy reminiscences of a convert. All this is to the greater credit of the writing self - and here the 'foregone conclusion' reasserts itself. The autobiographical conceit always plays, in the end, to the conceit of the autobiographer.

Another problem in tackling the book is that, although Cooper is highly literate by anyone's standards, he is not, according to commonly accepted post-Romantic values, 'literary'. His style can be musical in a way which echoes the alliterative sounds and rhythms of early English prose, and his accounts of intellectual achievement often reflect a desire to organize and control his world linguistically,

From George Wimble, whose father was a fisherman and herb-gatherer, I learned the names of agrimony, and wood-betony, and wood-sage, and mountain-flax, and centaury, and other herbs which were to be found in the neighbourhood, and were used as medicines, by the poor. But I often longed to know the names of flowers, which none could tell; for I gathered, fondly, every wild-flower in its season - a delicious pleasure, which, thank God! is fresh with me still, now age is reached, and I am familiar with the forms and know the names of every English flower. (pp. 18-19)

But in general, his attitude to language - to naming, to dialect and to ancient and modern literature - seems antiquarian: nostalgic and acquisitive rather than dynamic. Similarly, the 'textuality' of the Life remains problematic. On one level, it is a book about books: his version of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (a work Cooper much affects in the opening pages of the Life). Cooper traces his spiritual and intellectual progress upon a map of books, some of which are rejected, some pursued. A borrowed copy of Salmon's Geography, containing the Lord's Prayer in thirty languages, calls forth the exclamation 'Here was a world of new reading and new information!' (p. 33). Bunyan provides his 'book of books' (p. 27) and Byron thrills him.⁴ But the books are not always as thoroughly 'digested' into the text, as, say, Wordsworth is in Mill's Autobiography or in Mark Rutherford's Autobiography and Deliverance; or even fully integrated into the narrative, as the biographies of George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and John Addington Symonds are in Margaret Oliphant's Autobiography and Letters.⁵

Often the books feature in dreary lists of titles or authors, aimed at establishing Cooper's claims to erudition. He was an adherent

(some would say a victim) of the cult of self-education, expounded, in Cooper's case, not by Smiles' works (which came later), but by G. L. Craik's Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties (1830) and by more ephemeral articles culled from periodicals such as Drew's Imperial Magazine. The account of Cooper's self-education is a history of addiction, beginning with the 'dabbling of boyhood, moving on from 'social' reading with friends and in more formal Mutual Improvement Societies, to gluttony and serious indulgence in 'forbidden fruits' (books borrowed secretly from a genteel Book Society), and culminating in his stealing time from himself in and around his working day, to the point of physical and mental collapse. Books, just the names of books, acquire hypnotic properties, and hence seem to signal a fending-off, rather than an evaluation, of real problems. Just as, when troubled by religious doubt, Cooper the youth repeats by heart the arguments of Paley's Evidences, so, Cooper the narrator will often recite lists of authors, or titles, or 'subjects covered,' rather than identify what he has actually learned (p. 70, p. 65, etc.).

Otherwise, the impact books have is directly causal; in other words they are invoked in seemingly glib justification of a particular incident or phase in Cooper's life. Hence, books can become virtually protagonists in their own right: the trading in of one set for another can transform Cooper from astrologer to rationalist within a paragraph (p. 49).

The most important 'literary' input, however, is also the most unspecific and fugitive: the way in which Cooper's promiscuous reading affects, more or less intangibly, his attitude to what an autobiography should contain, and how it should be structured. Some attempt will be made in this chapter to reconstruct this relationship.

Not surprisingly, Cooper is strongly influenced, both in his life and (what concerns us here) in his manner of autobiography, by a series of more or less conventional models, particularly the Lives, whether in

the third or first person, of missionaries and non-conformist ministers. Such works, largely unreadable today, enjoyed enormous currency (many were published cheaply by the Religious Tract Society) - to the extent that Cooper feels he need give only the briefest hint to signal to his reader the book he has in mind.

Significantly, the conversion narratives which fire Cooper's imagination most are very often those at the extreme end of the spectrum of belief: the Lives of men (usually) who have been almost fanatical by temperament, or who have alienated many of their contemporaries by their refusal to compromise with existing mores or prevailing opinion: men 'instant in season, out of season'.

About two months before I was compelled to take to bed, my friend Hough put into my hand the Life of Henry Martyn, the missionary. Its effect, as might be expected, was very powerful upon my mind. The picture of one so perfect as a scholar and a man of refinement, and so fully convinced of the truth of religion - the brilliant short life of intense and devoted missionary labour, crowned with a death that was, almost literally, a martyrdom - took very strong hold of me. (pp. 70-71)

John Sargent's standard biography of Henry Martyn, chaplain to the East India Company, does indeed represent Martyn as refined, scholarly, and devoted - as well as zealous, disciplined and passionate. It requires little reading between the lines, however, to discover that Martyn was also inflexible and tactless, prone to alternating bouts of rapture and gloom, and continually fighting to hold in check an ambitious intellect and a short temper in order to pursue his mission.⁶

In some respects we are dealing with influence of a crude, pre-literary kind. Because of the intellectual isolation of the autodidact, and the physical isolation of the shoe-maker at his last (working from home because he is without formal apprenticeship), the autobiographies consumed by Cooper in his quest for knowledge are devoured in a raw, immediate, way:

Very soon, some one put into my hand Sigston's "Life of William

Bramwell." It proved to be a spark that, for a time, lit my whole soul into flame. I had heard members of the Society talk of holiness of heart, and of "the blessing of sanctification," and of "a clean heart," and of "perfect love," or "the second blessing," as some called it. I read again such of Wesley's own sermons as touched on the nature of holiness. I found that Wesley taught "sanctification," but could never learn that Wesley himself professed to be sanctified. Fletcher's experience was fully described and professed and taught as what all might experience. The experience of Hester Ann Rogers - hers is a well-known book to Wesleyans - also seemed very full and clear...

I read Bramwell on my knees by three in the morning. I was swallowed up with the one thought of reaching "perfect love," - of living without sin - of feeling I was always and fully in God's favour. (pp. 82, 83)

Throughout this early 'Methodist section', 'Life', 'experience' and proper names are used almost interchangeably in this way to denote personal history - whether biography or autobiography. In other words, each account seems to have been swallowed whole as true: as an exact, unmediated representation of experience. The fact that they are artificial, literary constructs is lost sight of, and thus they achieve their aim, appealing directly to Cooper's sympathies, and penetrating his solitude. He wants to believe the printed word; he wants to believe in the honesty of the author. However unselfconscious, this urgent relationship with biography is entirely in keeping with the Methodist emphasis (increasing throughout the nineteenth century) on individual experience as confirmation (and later as source) of doctrine. It is also in keeping with the tendency in Methodism, and perhaps in autobiographies generally, to cloud the distinction between autobiographical signifier and signified, between life and Life. Thus, for instance, 'experience' in the phrase 'Experience meeting' would refer to the telling of accessions of grace, as well as to those accessions themselves. Hence the 'experience' of Hester Rogers is 'full and clear' as evidence of divine intercession, and 'full and clear' as text.

Despite their enormous popularity, these are documents of a very formulaic, unsophisticated kind, little more than religious hack-work.

The lasting hold they maintain over Cooper's imagination is, however, perfectly plausible given the paucity of reading matter readily available to working people (and hence the disproportionate mystique of the printed word in any context), and of course his desire for a final, lasting solution to the problems of self-definition and self-alignment. This desire connects the Cooper in the narrative with Cooper the narrator: he needs role models both in life and in Life-writing.

The biography discussed above, James Sigston's Memoir of William Bramwell is a typical example of the non-conformist hagiography of the period, describing Bramwell's conversion, and relating his subsequent successes as a minister in the Methodist Connexion. Nevertheless, even within the bounds of such a consistently flattering work, it emerges that Bramwell was not entirely at one with his sect. (In fact Bramwell's disciple, the author of the biography, James Sigston seceded from the Connexion in 1827 to co-found the Protestant Methodists). He was an old-style, eighteenth century Methodist at odds with the more sophisticated Buntingite organization of the early nineteenth century. His character and history were just the sort to appeal to Cooper. In his youth he studied by the light of the dying embers when his candles were confiscated. He was outspoken, almost courting persecution, and ascetic to the point of physical self-mortification:

At midnight he stole into the kitchen, while the family were asleep; then sprinkling a corner of the floor with the roughest sand, and uncovering his knees, would spend hours in fervent prayer for the pardon of his sins.⁷

(For Cooper himself to speak of 'reading Bramwell on [his] knees by three in the morning' is surely a sign of his claiming kin: of his asserting his place in this tradition of latter-day saints.). Furthermore, Bramwell was a fervent advocate of revivalism at a time when it was extremely unfashionable, not least because it entailed assembling

and stirring up a potentially ungovernable mob.

The facet of Bramwell's belief which interests Cooper here is his espousal of a dogma which set him apart from many of his fellow Methodists - his insistence on the doctrine of 'entire sanctification'. This doctrine defines a state beyond that of justification (the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins experienced upon conversion): a state of 'perfect love' in which the Christian simply does not sin. It is based largely upon 1 John iii, 9:

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

The 'well-known' Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers, mentioned by Cooper above in conjunction with Sigston's Bramwell, demonstrates the finer logic of entire sanctification:

And my nervous system, weakened by that dangerous fever at Cork, has also greatly suffered by these things; which, like wave upon wave, have followed each other! To this I ascribe it chiefly that a cloud of heaviness has, at some seasons, hung upon my mind; and that Satan has taken occasion to suggest, in those times of animal depression, various accusations of short-comings in zeal, activity, and spiritual joy.⁸

Any sense of sin experienced after perfect love has been attained is attributed to ill-health. Sin has not actually been committed, but through the agency of the devil, it is felt to have been committed - 'Satan has accused when my God did not condemn'.⁹

This is clearly a doctrine easier to preach than to apply or exemplify. As Cooper astutely points out, while Wesley taught that the state of 'entire sanctification' was possible in this life, he never claimed to have attained it himself, and indeed was suspicious of many who did.¹⁰ As Sigston presents him, Bramwell not only adhered unflinchingly to this doctrine in his teaching, he actually experienced this 'perfect' state from day to day. Of entire sanctification, Bramwell asserts in a letter of 1813:

It preserves the soul in rest, in the midst of all the storms of life ... The world is gone, we live above, yea, we 'dwell in God and God in us... We can speak when we will, and be silent at our pleasure... We are nothing, and feel it; and we can do nothing without God.¹¹

Evidently, this is conversion par excellence. No further choices are to be made, or struggles undergone, as the will has been purified beyond the need for decisions. Everything slips utterly and irrevocably into place. Every action, every remark, becomes ineluctably an authoritative text on right living.

Nowhere in Cooper's Life is the mystique of the printed word more powerfully felt than in this encounter with what might seem to us the mediocre biography of a relatively obscure itinerant preacher. The Methodist friends who have been besieging Cooper with talk of perfect love and second blessings are a mere irritant, but a book is a far more potent sign. It must be true.

We sang over and over again, on our knees, "Wrestling I will not let Thee go!" - till at last I sprang upon my feet, crying, "will believe! I do believe!" and the very saying of the words, with all the strength of resolve, seemed to lift me above the earth. And I kept on believing, according to the lesson I had learned in the Life of Bramwell. No thought of consequences that might happen - no fear of the possibility of failure - could prevent me from confessing and professing, with impressive fervour, that God had sanctified my soul. (p. 84)

The subsequent disillusionment - the failure of the 'lesson learned' is built into the passage in the tense of the verbs (or rather the absence of the present continuous), and in the predominance of speech acts (singing, crying, saying, confessing and professing) over acts of faith. Also built in, however, is a faint reluctance to admit its failure, in the form of an implicit appeal to witnesses: his fervour is 'impressive'. The need to reclaim these early experiences as part of his total spiritual achievement is characteristic of Cooper's ambivalence towards his previous selves. He cannot quite shed, even after his final conversion, the impression that he might once have

enjoyed a state of innocence never regained.

How long I maintained the profession of it, I cannot say with exactness. It was for but part of a year, perhaps not more than half a year. But I remember well that I was in a religious state that I have never reached since. For some months I never struck a boy in my school. I felt that I could not strike; and told the children that I should strike no more...

If, throughout eternity in heaven, I be as happy as I often was for whole days during that short period of my religious life, it will be heaven indeed. (p. 85)

This ambivalence is evident again in his tragi-comic account of the downfall, which the narrative has anticipated, and which is ritually but painfully acted out in public, before Cooper's inevitable jury of innocents:

This was exhausting to the body, as well as to the soul. The perpetual tension of the string of the will seemed, at last, to be more than I could sustain. One day, when I was faint and weak in frame, I lost my temper under great provocation from a disobedient boy in the school, and suddenly seized the cane and struck him. The whole school seemed horror-stricken. The poor children gazed, as if on a fallen angel, with such looks of commiseration on my poor self, as I cannot describe. I wished I was in a corner to weep, for I was choking with tears, and felt heart-broken. (pp. 85-86)

The bubble (which is the dream of emulating Bramwell), has burst. The release of tension described is reflected in the bathos of what follows, for Cooper immediately lapses into a mundane account of the unreliability of revivalism in general, dodging behind yet another autobiographical document - Wesley's Journal - to screen himself, and the reader, from the 'unresolvedness' of the episode (p.87).

The whole sequence is marked by a curious combination of affectionate nostalgia and almost ironic detachment. To speak bluntly, what we are witnessing here is the uneasiness experienced by the convert-autobiographer in the face of evident inconsistency. In a localized way, conversion provides a useful language of change - of struggle, failure and triumph - applicable to all spheres of personal development. (In this case, for instance, it is clearly embodying his

feelings, not only about this early spiritual experiment, but also about his failure as a teacher). But conversion resonates beyond the local. It cannot be invoked in autobiography without shifting the balance of the whole narrative. Returning for a moment to the scriptures,

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.¹²

The life-pattern of self-as-convert can be visualized as a figure of eight: one loop tracing the course of self from birth 'of water' to the moment of conversion - the death of the will or death to the self; the other loop moving from spiritual re-birth, to physical death. (In autobiography, of course, the latter death must be prefigured by silence - the death of the writing self). Such a configuration makes explicit the fact that the two 'halves' of the life of a convert have ideally nothing in common. They do not converge: they intersect at 'nought'. The convert, in the strict sense of the term, having cut all ties with his or her former self, cannot logically reclaim it.

It is partly the almost geometrical simplicity of the 'spiritual testimony' model that makes it so attractive to autobiographers. Given Cooper's evident credentials as convert, his divergences from this model might be regarded as somewhat surprising. But for Cooper the formula poses major problems. The obvious, but not the main difficulty it presents is that by far the greater part of Cooper's pre-autobiographical life took place before his conversion, and encompassed most of his intellectual, literary and political achievements and a number of subordinate or 'false' conversions - to Methodism, to militant Chartism, and to Straussianism, for instance. This problem should not be exaggerated, however. The equal distribution of text to

time (what Shumaker calls 'the approximation of narrative tempo to the even flow of the years'), is not a condition of autobiography.¹³

The real problem is not so much one of quantity as of quality. A central principle of conversion is renunciation: of will, of self, of the old life. However, unless an exclusively didactic approach is adopted (as in pure spiritual testimony), autobiography must be a process of compromise with the past. Cooper has no intention of condemning all or even most of his pre-conversion life. His aim is to enjoy both the process and the product of autobiography, and he has told us at the outset,

I have written the book chiefly to please myself. And that, I suspect, is the chief reason why anybody writes an autobiography. (p. 2)

This recognition that autobiography is a selfish activity is not a conventional pre-emptive stratagem. For Ruskin, who starts from the same premiss in his Praeterita, it has radical consequences for autobiographical form. For Cooper, the accommodation of secular (political, literary) 'gratification' within a Christian conversion framework requires the acceptance of contradiction and the deployment of some complex and often dubious tactics involving both his material and his audience. The hypothetical 'good Christian man' (p. 395) into whose ear Cooper would prefer to whisper of his successes in life, turns out to be the bête noire of this autobiography. Only at his expense (as at the expense of the incredulous 'thousands' of the opening lines) can the project proceed.

So it would seem that, if Cooper is to achieve his primary aim of self-gratification, he must negotiate, not only with his abandoned, 'unredeemed' self, but with the organizing principle of the conversion narrative. His Life, erratic and unreasonable as it often seems, evolves out of this negotiation.

We have seen how, in his treatment of a childhood escape from death, and of his failure as a 'sanctified' schoolmaster, narrative devices ranging from irony to self-parody have served to underline the dissociation between past and present selves, whilst retaining the dramatic force of the scenes. A consistent element in the crucial episodes of the Life is a kind of detachment. Recounting moments of inner crisis, Cooper will sketch in an audience, and will see himself, and encourage his readers to see him, from the outside. John Bunyan's Relation of his imprisonment, first published in 1765, but thereafter usually printed as part of his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, had put the trial scene firmly on the autobiographical agenda, and it is partly on this tradition that Cooper draws. Bernard Sharratt notes the centrality of the trial scene and the 'awareness of being observed' in an earlier working-class autobiography - Samuel Bamford's Passages in the Life of a Radical (1844).¹⁴ Sharratt classes these as 'passive' features, and relates them to the limited political horizons and passive resistance tactics of the early nineteenth century labour movement. In comparison with Bamford's style of enforced passivity, Cooper's is one of scripted activity: his is the passivity of the dramatic performance rather than the prison. He means, not merely to be excused, but to extort applause from his audience. In Sharratt's terms, I suppose, post-1848 political cynicism might be imputed from this. In terms of Cooper's individual relationship to his story and to his audience, the picture is more complex, and a number of factors in Cooper's history can be seen to converge to cause (or facilitate) this phenomenon. As working man, militant and convert, Bunyan provides Cooper with his most powerful autobiographical precedent. But many of the more contemporary models to which Cooper refers in the course of the narrative are not autobiographies at all, but biographies incorporating a mixture of correspondence and journal entries. This is partly due to the randomness of the books available, and partly also

to the prevalence of inauthentic over authentic accounts of working class experience. However, aside from his primary identification as convert-witness, Cooper has certain advantages to gain from a 'biographic' approach to autobiography. It should be noted, in passing, that Cooper chose a title which, though unarguably commonplace, dramatizes the disjunction - whilst affirming the connection - between self as writer and self as constructed in the text. The Life of Thomas Cooper written by Himself signals something of Cooper's vested interest in the biographic mode, as at once claiming control over, and disclaiming responsibility for, the contents of a Life.

Two strains of biography inform the Life of Thomas Cooper: the Protestant hagiography and the biography of the autodidact. The former is represented in the text by the Lives, among others, of Hester Ann Rogers, William Bramwell, and Henry Martyn; the latter by the account, in Drew's Imperial Magazine, of the life of Samuel Lee, and (implicitly) by Southey's biographical preface to the Remains of Henry Kirke White (p. 53). These two strands overlap, in that, in the cases of both Lee and Kirke White, the Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulty is justified by a vocation to the Anglican ministry. Thus an overarching spiritual framework, constructed by the biographer, sustains and contains both types of Life.

Within this framework, the Protestant hagiography and the Life of the autodidact work in rather different ways. In the case of hagiography, autobiographical documents such as letters and journals are used extensively to convey the 'personality' of the subject. As we have seen, failures, doubts, mistakes, ambitions and personal idiosyncrasies emerge from these documents, while the biographer imposes, and takes the strain of, the conversion structure. As in the case of the biography of Henry Martyn (or for that matter, of Hester Ann Rogers), worldly impulses and confusions are expressed by the

subject, whilst the biographer, from a safe distance, is free to point out inevitable patterns, interventions by providence, and happy, - which is to say, saintly - endings. Much of the fascination of this kind of biography springs from the tension between these two discourses.

The 'Pursuit of Knowledge' biography (in this, its early manifestation) works slightly differently, for in this genre the biographer tends to assume the posture, and adopt the tone, not of disciple and exegete, but of patron. The anonymous 'Interesting account of the Rev. Samuel Lee' provides Cooper with what might at first seem an unlikely narrative model. Lee, initially a self-educated carpenter, eventually gains the attention of the Established Church, and, with eighteen languages under his belt, finally enters the University of Cambridge and becomes a well-published scholar, Professor of Arabic and sought-after Anglican minister. Unlike Cooper, Lee obtains the highest material and social, as well as intellectual rewards for his efforts. But the mainspring of change in the account is not worldly ambition so much as resistance to institutionalized ignorance. Lee is said to have been 'mortified' by the (to him) opaque classical quotations peppering his general reading, and 'mortified' but not 'intimidated' by the peremptory refusal of a priest to assist or advise him in his intellectual endeavours.¹⁵

In the end, though, the moral of the tale is hardly revolutionary: despite his success, Lee remains humble, eschews enthusiasms, and at every opportunity manifests his gratitude to his patrons. The systematic thwarting of Lee's early attempts at self-improvement is interpreted, finally, as the occasion for an exemplary lesson by Divine Providence. Without irony, the biographer descends firmly on the side of the establishment, and it is with the voices of the powerful patrons that the account ends.

Robert Southey's account of the life of Henry Kirke White is

rather more complex. The Remains of Henry Kirke White with an account of his life by Robert Southey posthumously popularized this obscure and enigmatic young poet, who, while formally educated to a far greater degree than either Cooper or Lee, was nevertheless extensively self-taught.¹⁶ Southey's position as biographer is an uncomfortable one: his relationship with White is inescapably one of patronage, (one of his tasks in the biography is to exonerate all those who might be accused of having given White bad advice and insufficient encouragement), yet he has an investment in the figure of the poet-in-struggle. Southey explicitly distances himself from White's religious orthodoxy, at the same time citing the hopes of an anonymous Lady of Cambridge that

"Mr. Southey will do as much justice to Mr. Henry White's limited wishes, to his unassuming pretensions, and to his rational and fervent piety, as to his various acquirements, his polished taste, his poetical fancy, his undeviating principles, and the excellence of his moral character..."¹⁷

Southey's solution to this dilemma is to work round the issue of class altogether, by attributing the qualities of humility, fervency and industry to poetic genius - thus side-stepping political considerations. This stratagem enables him to act as spokesperson for both the idealist poet and the realist patron:

To the young poets who come after him, Henry will be what Chatterton was to him; and they will find in him an example of hopes, with regard to worldly fortune, as humble; and as exalted in all better things, as are enjoined equally by wisdom and religion, by the experience of man, and the word of God.¹⁸

By the time of writing The Life of Thomas Cooper, Cooper was familiar, not only with such biographical tactics applied to others, but also with biographies of himself. He recounts with some amusement that, in 1868, he was reported in the Midland Newspapers to have been dead and buried, and that he became, as a consequence, the subject of

columns of 'somewhat spurious biography' (p.391). Furthermore, his preaching tour of 1861 was accompanied by a pamphlet by the secularist George Jacob Holyoake, in which (to quote its title) Cooper was scathingly 'delineated as Convert and Controversialist', and in which Holyoake, eager to discredit the work of the newly reconverted Christian, had yet to affirm the value of Cooper's pre-conversion Straussian publications and teachings.¹⁹

Many of the resources of the biographer in the structuring, evaluating and distancing of the subject, and all the ironies to which these resources give rise, are freely exploited by Cooper in his autobiography. Speaking of his youthful zest for learning, Cooper comments

And how resolute I was on becoming solitary, and also on becoming a scholar! What though I could not get to Cambridge, like Kirke White, could I not study as hard as he studied, and learn as fast? (p. 53)

In ornate, exclamatory style, Cooper writes himself as industrious, unworldly scholar and hermit, and, in the silences between the rhetorical flourishes (how resolute? could I not?) debunks his past self as naïve and over-ambitious. The satirical intervention is more than just syntactic: as authorized biographer of himself, Cooper is patronizing, publicizing and (by extension) glamourizing his independent-minded, reclusive and humble subject. The allusion to Henry Kirke White here multiplies the ironies. White became notable, had his *Life* written by a famous poet, was published, was read and idolized as a model for resolute young scholars precisely because, in his pursuit of learning, he worked himself to an early death. Only by failing as Romantic subject can Cooper become his own biographer. Yet the infectious jollity of Cooper's recreation of himself precludes a straightforward prioritizing of one interpretation over the other; Cooper the idealist need not be abandoned in favour of Cooper the cynic.

Cooper's friend Charles Kingsley may have provided another influential model in his novel of 1850, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography. Kingsley teasingly pre-empts any efforts to locate 'originals' for his dramatis personae by making many of the relevant connections himself. When an irascible Scots character quotes Carlyle at every breath, to suggest that he is 'like Carlyle' comes to seem absurd. Yet Sandy Mackaye is palpably Carlylean, just as O'Flynn, the fictional radical hack and demagogue is modelled on O'Connor (who also appears in the story), and Windrush, the Emersonian, takes traits from Emerson.²⁰ So with Alton Locke himself. The most superficial reading of the novel alongside Cooper's Life reveals similarities of incident between the two. However, as if to forestall future enquiry, Kingsley has his narrator liken his own career explicitly to that of Thomas Cooper:

If you do tether your cleverest artisans on tailors' shop-boards and cobblers' benches, and they - as sedentary folk will - fall a-thinking, and come to strange conclusions thereby, they really ought to be much more thankful to you than you are to them. If Thomas Cooper had passed his first five-and-twenty years at the plough tail instead of the shoemaker's awl, many words would have been left unsaid which, once spoken, working-men are not likely to forget. ²¹

In the face of this quite open appropriation of the historical by the fictional, it takes a certain doggedness to insist upon the likeness. In his Kingsley et Thomas Cooper: Etude Sur Une Source D'Alton Locke (1903), Louis Cazamian took the trouble to establish the biographical connection beyond reasonable doubt.²²

In short, for Kingsley's fictional and didactic purposes, Cooper was a Chartist of the right sort. Highly (self-)educated, articulate, literary, earnest, and intimately connected with the development of Chartism in the 1840's, mistrustful of violence, and committed to the education of working people, Cooper provided, in many respects, an ideal model for Kingsley's projected hero. Furthermore, by the time

the two became acquainted (at Kingsley's instigation) Cooper had already achieved notoriety as the author of the prison rhyme The Purgatory of Suicides (1845). Just such a poet of the people Kingsley had envisaged as his next fictional protagonist in July 1848.²³

Hence, the Summer of 1848 saw the start of a longlasting friendship and an extraordinary correspondence - extraordinary because characterized by an intense mutual admiration and by a great liberality in the exchange of views between two men of quite different backgrounds and creeds. In June 1849, Cooper was passing Kingsley's Sermons amongst his Chartist friends (despite the fact that he himself was deep in his Straussian phase). Similarly, Cooper, in 1850, had no hesitation in forwarding his new free-thinking periodical Cooper's Journal for the perusal of the more orthodox Kingsley.²⁴

In the light of this evidently cordial relationship, it is fair to assume that reminiscences were exchanged, and that Kingsley was in a position to make use of Cooper's experiences and impressions in his novel. Once this premiss is accepted, it is possible, as Louis Cazamian has demonstrated, to trace parallels, both general and specific, between the lives of Cooper and Kingsley's fictional hero Locke - as artisan, autodidact and poet, tempted by insidious forms of patronage; as enthusiast cornered into scepticism; as critic of the harsher types of non-conformist Christianity; and of course as Chartist swept along by revolutionary zeal, and ultimately brought to a more moderate position by several dampening months in gaol.

Admitting always the additional influence on Kingsley of lesser-known Chartist figures such as Walter Cooper the tailor-poet, Cazamian has, I think, shown conclusively that large portions of Alton Locke can be read as an imaginative reconstruction - in the first person - of Thomas Cooper's life up to about 1849 or 1850. The success of Cazamian's efforts can be gauged by the fact that most scholars of Kingsley now take for granted that Alton Locke is based at least in

part on Cooper, and by the fact that Philip Collins' literary study of Thomas Cooper can be read, as its author suggests, as 'an extended footnote to Alton Locke.²⁵

In order to arrive at this conclusion, Cazamian had to weave his way round a complex problem of chronology: his hypothesis had to take into account the fact the main source of 'historical' data, Cooper's Life, post-dated by twenty-two years Kingsley's fictionalized version of the same events. Cazamian's investigation had therefore to include many secondary sources of evidence - letters, biography and so on. No such difficulty presents itself if we reverse the procedure, positing Alton Locke as a 'source' for Cooper's Life, since Cooper openly admits the impact of Kingsley's novel on the course of his own literary career:

After the appearance and popular reception of Charles Kingsley's "Alton Locke," I had a conversation with Mr. Edward Chapman, of the firm Chapman and Hall, when he said to me,-

"Why, I should think you could write a Chartist novel, and a successful one. You see Kingsley has succeeded; and you ought to know a deal more about Chartism than he can possibly know." (p. 334)

What I propose, then, is to turn around Collins' and Cazamian's formulae, and to examine Alton Locke as (metaphorically) a footnote to the Life of Thomas Cooper. If Alton Locke's first attempts at writing are the 'anomalous offspring'²⁶ of Childe Harold and the old missionary records, then Thomas Cooper's Life can be read as the progeny of that anomalous offspring and Alton Locke. The relative 'factuality' of different kinds of life-writing, or of different versions of the same life, is not the subject of this thesis. However, the possible impact of the publication of Alton Locke on both Cooper's life and Cooper's Life poses a question which does fall within the scope of my study. In fact, the question turns out to be an extreme formulation of the question I have been asking all along. How far is the autobiographer

conscious of, reassured or even inhibited by working within the prescribed limitations of an established genre or tradition? And more specifically, what is the relationship between the autobiographer and the dominant literary model of conversion? In this case, crucially, the dominant literary model can be said to incorporate the autobiographer's own conversions.

As regards Cooper's 'conversions' to and from revolutionary (physical force) Chartism, the paradox is intriguing but quite simple: he was in a position to read about it before he wrote about it. The same is true of his conversion to religious scepticism. However, his final conversion to orthodox Christianity is problematic on a further level. Not only did he read it before he wrote it, he also read it before he lived it.

We have been warned from the beginning that 'conscious conversion' in his mother's strict, calvinist sense of the word, will never happen to Alton Locke,²⁷ and have been led to expect that, whatever salvation our narrator may have achieved, will be a variation on the orthodox unorthodoxy theme. Locke's last conversion begins with his fever, and the dramatic delirium-sequence which is at once a climax of physical and mental anguish, and a time of privileged insight for the dreamer. It is a bizarre Divine Comedy, with Eleanor cast as Beatrice; a dream-vizion couched first in terms of pre-Darwinian theories of evolution, and secondly in the more conventional allegorical mode of Langland and Bunyan, using the typology of the Old Testament - the typology of Jonah and of Job - to illustrate the idea that the moral suffering and triumph of a chosen individual is the necessary precursor of national salvation.

"And for you," she said, looking on me, "your penance is accomplished. You have learned what it is to be a man. You have lost your life and saved it...Awake." ²⁸

The extreme weirdness of the hallucination sequence prepares the reader to accept as satisfactorily unorthodox a set of doctrines which are actually far less daring than they are meant to sound. The fever conveniently leaves Locke's mind a clean slate - Kingsley uses the imagery of the deluge and of the field ploughed by affliction - ready for whatever Eleanor chooses to inscribe. What follows is virtually a sermon on the life of Christ as demagogue and genius:

She spoke of Him as the great Reformer; and yet as the true conservative; the inspirer of all new truths, revealing in His Bible to every age abysses of new wisdom, as the times require; and yet the vindicator of all which is ancient and eternal - the justifier of His own dealings with man from the beginning. She spoke of Him as the true demagogue - the champion of the poor; and yet as the true King, above and below all earthly rank; on whose will alone all real superiority of man to man, all the time-justified and time-honoured usages of the family, the society, the nation, stand and shall stand forever...

She told me how He had borne the sorrows of genius; how the slightest pang that I had ever felt was but a dim faint pattern of His;²⁹

and so on for several pages.

Eleanor's teaching involves a careful but thorough redistribution of Locke's priorities, so that Christianity can oust Chartism whilst retaining a generalized commitment to social change. The campaign for the Charter has been reduced to the trivialized petition and the aborted revolution of the disastrous 10th April. As Eleanor explains it, this is God's vengeance upon the Chartists for trying to override His will; for letting their short-term aims, however well-intentioned, take moral precedence over the divine plan. Furthermore, this plan, as outlined in the Scriptures, is egalitarian in that it recognizes moral, rather than social distinctions. Kingsley must make these rather obvious doctrines seem startling and new, for they constitute the revelation which is to be the basis of Locke's final, dramatic change of heart, and hence the basis of his regenerated mission as poet of the people, and of his narrative authority as 'honest' autobiographer.³⁰

Again, the regenerated Eleanor is Kingsley's prophetic mouthpiece:

"Behold, the days come, when I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and no one shall teach his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know Him, from the least even unto the greatest. Ay, even on the slaves and on the handmaidens in those days will I pour out of my spirit, saith the Lord!"

"And that is really in the Bible?" asked Crossthwaite.

"Ay" - she went on, her figure dilating, and her eyes flashing, like an inspired prophetess - "that is in the Bible!" ³¹

The effect of Eleanor's teaching on Alton is that his immediate goal of political change is replaced by the ambition to attain, and to use his talents to produce in others, a state of moral and spiritual preparedness, for the time when this divine deliverance should come. Thus Kingsley ties up, firmly and neatly, what he perceives to be the loose ends of his hero's personality: his misdirected sense of mission, his squandered 'genius', his unfocussed capacity for reverence, his yearning to belong. (Of course, the sexual conflict, which is central to the story of the novel, is also resolved in this sequence. I omit this from my analysis as inapplicable to the comparison with Cooper.) Locke is now ready to set sail for the New World; ready to write his story; ready to die.

As we have seen, Kingsley resorts to melodrama - to dilating figures and flashing eyes - to disguise the ungainly didacticism of this conversion-sequence, and to mitigate the neatness of the foregone conclusion:

She ceased, and there was silence for a few moments, as if angels were waiting, hushed, to carry our repentance to the throne of Him we had forgotten.

Crossthwaite had kept his face buried in his hands; now he looked up with brimming eyes -

"I see it - I see it all now. Oh, my God! my God! What infidels we have been!" ³²

The word 'infidel' strikes a false note. To apply so loaded an

epithet to oneself is to align oneself, in a moment, with a new code of values, to acquire a new language, and to adjust one's history in accordance. The point of conversion is thus the moment at which the autobiographical illusion is shattered. The past, along with the past self, is beyond the pale, is 'written off', and the reader feels somehow defrauded.

It seems to me that what Thomas Cooper faces, reading Alton Locke before his conversion, and (re-)writing his own Life after it, is this problem of the foregone conclusion in a most aggravated form. His past self has been 'written off' before he even begins to write. Something like resentment of this, I would suggest, underlies his treatment of his return to Christianity in the closing pages of the Life. Cooper plots his progress back to Christianity in detail, avoiding high drama, confessing himself sceptical about sudden conversions (p. 370), and underplaying as far as possible the contrast between his past and present beliefs:

I am often, I must confess, extremely mortified by some descriptions of myself given by religious friends. They tell the people, in words spoken, or in print, that I am the "Converted Infidel Lecturer;" that, "after having once done all in my power to oppose and overthrow the faith of Christ, I am now," etc. etc. Now I have no taste for being exhibited as a recovered reprobate. (p. 356, Cooper's emphasis)

(Cooper is conscious, then, that his life story might lend itself to melodrama, and even to parody. As we have seen, he had already been the victim of G. J. Holyoake's satirical pamphlet of 1861, Thomas Cooper delineated as Convert and Controversialist, in which the secularist quotes from a hand-bill 'printed apparently with Mr. Cooper's sanction', and describing the latter as "Shoemaker - for seven years a Wesleyan local preacher - afterwards a Chartist - a sceptic - almost an utter Infidel - a convicted sedition-monger... - a preacher again, and a sceptic no longer -that is, a Wesleyan again."³³

This is just the kind of caricature feels, in his Life, to be damaging and offensive).

The rest of this chapter is taken up by a series of lengthy quotations from the lectures he gave during his 'free-thinking' period; partly to define and hence extenuate his agnosticism, but also, doubtless, to reclaim some of his work from that time, in spite of the labels pinned on it by his new friends. He concludes, however,

Thus I thought and spoke and wrote; but not all the thinking and speaking and writing could destroy the latent wish that rapt communion with God were again mine. (p. 367)

- so that, while his free-thinking is being 'cleaned up' for display in the present, his newly acquired Christianity is being projected back into the past in the form of a 'latent' spirituality. This reciprocal exchange, blurring the contrast between the two phases, tones down the drama of the conversion narrative.

Two motives are evident here: the desire to be taken seriously despite apparently fluid convictions, (Holyoake had satirized Cooper's latest conversion as 'undignified': 'He might be said to have leapt off the freethought platform, splash into the Baptist dipping-pool'),³⁴ and also the need to demonstrate the continuity (and by extension the integrity) of his personality. The refusal, in the last analysis, of the conversion mode is in a sense a political act: it represents a refusal, albeit at the risk of the moral authority of the narrative as a whole, to let the past lapse. Cooper's gradual change of heart from scepticism through theism and thence to Christianity is described in a measured, painstaking way over three chapters (XXXI-XXXIII), and is represented, not as a sudden Damascene revelation, but as a slow recognition of intellectual error. The first intimations of his doubt about doubt are offered in an uncharacteristic tone of wistfulness,

I felt as if all my old work were done, and yet I knew not how to begin a new work. (p. 352)

and the first outward manifestation of this uneasiness is described in a manner which, anticipating William Hale White, is understated to the brink of irony. In 1856, he is lecturing at the Hall of Science, City Road:

I delivered the first lecture on the 6th of January, "Russia and the Russians;" but on the 13th, when I should have descanted, according to the printed programme, on "Sweden and the Swedes," I could not utter one word. The people told me afterwards that I looked as pale as a ghost, and they wondered what was the matter with me. I could hardly tell myself; but, at length, the heart got vent by words, and I told them I could not lecture on Sweden, but must relieve conscience - for I could suppress conviction no longer. (p. 353)

Once again, Cooper's change of heart is acted out before a critical audience - this time of his peers. His own battle against scepticism is translated into a battle against the sceptics, and the emotional and spiritual content of the battle becomes secondary to the thrill of intellectual combat:

Amidst the dense crowd and the almost frantic excitement of some, I maintained my ground. (p. 354)

The chief characteristics of the account are circumspection on the part of the narrator - especially when the episode is compared with the fervid 'William Bramwell' incident - and a kind of good-humoured tolerance towards the past:

I confess I am very incredulous respecting sudden conversion from the habitual scepticism of years. I had been twelve years a sceptic; and it was not until fully two years had been devoted to hard reading and thinking that I could conscientiously and truly say, "I am again a Christian" - even nominally. (p. 370)

This final step into positive belief does not involve a sudden revelation. There is no single turning point, no blinding light, just a pragmatic, even calculating search for peace of mind, in which mundane affairs have their allotted place:

So I had an enforced silence of six months before me, unless I

chose to travel, as I had been wont to do, in the finer part of the year.

But I could not travel. I felt it was the silence that I wanted. Yet how to get bread was the question. (p. 355)

This silence, which covers both emotional turbulence and incipient peace (in the story and in the telling of the story), is perhaps the most striking aspect of the sequence. Silence throughout the autobiography has been an index of powerlessness: Cooper has been accustomed to winning breathless silence from his audiences. Now, for the first time, he is speechless (unable to speechify, or write). Only in the last few pages of the Life, in the relation of his call to ministerial work, and of its extent and success, does Cooper lapse into the expansive complacency of the justified.³⁵

My work is, indeed, a happy work...I feel that to preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ" is the most exalted and ennobling work in which a human creature can be engaged. And believing that I am performing the work of duty, that I am right, my employment of lecturing on the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, from week to week, fills me with the consoling reflection that my life is not being spent in vain, much less spent in evil. (p. 398 Cooper's emphasis)

In the light of his reactions to the constraints of the conversion-narrative, it remains for us to examine Cooper's handling of his Chartist phase and the overtly political part of the autobiography. Students of Cooper have not scrupled to speak of his 'third conversion: that of ultra-Radical'.³⁶ Is this an adequate reading of this section of the Life? We have seen how suspicious Cooper was of evaluative labels (such as 'Converted Infidel Lecturer') imposed upon him by others. Nevertheless, a glance at Cooper's chapter headings, which almost invariably contain the word 'life' alongside a noun used adjectivally (Shoe-maker Life, Student Life, Local Preacher Life, Chartist Life, etc., and finally, of course, The Right Life), reveals, not only a convenient, if stark, set of divisions, but also, it seems to me, an anxiety about unity and continuity. Underlying his need to

divide up his memories into discrete and manageable blocks, is a sense that certain strands of his being, particularly the spiritual and the secular, somehow taint or devalue each other by association. In Chapter VII, he articulates this anxiety in terms of 'congruity':

My great burthen of heart and spirit has yet to be approached. I have purposely kept it out of my story for some time, not feeling it congruous to mingle secular and spiritual cares, or the relation of them, familiarly. (p. 70)

Yet despite, or because of, his persistent desire to preserve the account of his spiritual life untainted by secular concerns, the two continually converge. Occasionally, the overlap is disregarded. His work as a preacher, for instance, reinforces and is enhanced by his impulse towards self-improvement - any incompatibility being conveniently overlooked.

Nor could I continue to take a part in such work without endeavouring to make it serve my own intellectual culture. The writing out of sermons was a noble induction to the art of expressing one's thought. I strove to make my sermons worth listening to. (p. 91)

On the whole, though, Cooper is painfully conscious of the possibility of 'incongruity'. Several devices and manoeuvres are available to him in his attempt to secure the integrity of his Life as a spiritual narrative. In this important transitional passage, he uses many of them:

I am not yet come to the later period of my life when I fell into an awful alienation of the mind from the faith of Christ; but I cannot help tracing that alienation to its root in these harsh dealings from ministers and professors of religion. I have felt compelled to state the truth, in order that all who read these pages to the end may have some key to unlock what they might otherwise deem very mysterious changes of character in me. And having said so much, I purpose to leave the entire subject, for the present, in this Memoir. When the step of separating myself from Methodism was taken, the die was cast anew for my Future - whatever it was to be - and I sought occupation for thought that should not awake tormenting remembrances, and soon found it. (p. 102)

On the most superficial level, he is lightly relinquishing one subject (faith) in favour of another (worldly occupation). However, in order to justify the dismissal of so central a theme, he first points out the hypocrisy of these 'minister and professors' of religion, diverting our attention from faith to sectarianism - or more accurately to the members of this particular sect, the Methodists. Religion is depreciated in order to legitimize its replacement in the narrative. But by anticipating at this point his temporary 'clean break' with Christianity ('awful alienation'), and by rehearsing this break as a narrator (I purpose now to leave the entire subject'), he is striving to create the impression that his subsequent secular activities have been an unfortunate aberration, the account of which is merely an interesting side-track. And despite the fact that he has already allocated blame (to the 'harsh dealings' of the Methodists), and insists in the end that his new choice of occupation was a reaction to 'tormenting remembrances', he cannot resist situating the whole business in the context of arbitrary fate, or hazard ('the die was cast anew'). The importance of the element of 'destiny' in his professional, or more accurately his political, recollections, will emerge later in this study.

As I said before, several literary strategies are open to Cooper in his role as religious confessant. He has not that religious imagination which habitually interprets the world in terms of the soul. Moreover, the obvious, the simplest alternative - that of consciously leaving out what does not pertain to his religious development - does not suit his purposes. But if the option of omission does not attract, neither is he comfortable with the relationship between faith and the world. The fact that he uses the other half measures all at once, whether or not they are logically compatible, protesting, in effect, too much, only serves to reinforce the reader's sense of the significance of what is to follow. Thus, an apparently straightfor-

ward, chronological narrative masks a tense transaction between spiritual and social selves, and hence between religious confession and secular apologia.

The problem of the relationship between these selves is compounded by the lack of a distinct language of change for secular development, especially as, by the time of writing his autobiography, Cooper had made it his personal mission to expose, among others, the errors of 'Darwinism, and [its] dream about "Evolution"' (p. 379). Thus, one of the motifs evident in the Chartist chapters is the return to the birthplace, and the discovery of a new way of living:

Leicester was a new world indeed to me, although I had been born in it, nearly thirty-six years before. (p. 143)

(As in the Divine Comedy, the age of thirty-five is the crucial midpoint in the allotted 'three-score years and ten'). The metaphors of the new start seem to be the only available formulae for the expression of shock, realization and enlightenment. This holds true for the reader too, who expects conversion, not only from the internal mechanisms of autobiography, but also from the logic of Cooper's written personality. It would be easy to 'explain away' Cooper's political career as simply another of his alternating changes of heart: part of his 'descent' into secularism, and ultimately superseded in importance by the final conversion to Baptist Christianity. No-one would deny that Cooper was prone to violent and emotional swings of opinion. He says himself that he was 'made of mettle that must take a side' (p. 145, Cooper's emphasis). But this tracing of motifs, satisfying as it is, oversimplifies Cooper's attitude to, and depiction of, his past. Discernible alongside the imagery of the new start is a struggle - often cliché-ridden and fumbling, to define the self in other terms: as a social being rather than as an isolated soul. Here, for instance, he is speaking of his first eye-opening contact with

other cultured artisans at the Mechanics' Institute in Lincoln:

I soon found myself in a new world at Lincoln; and now, first, may be said to have mingled with the real world, and to have begun to understand that I really belonged to it. (p. 103)

The rather awkward mixture of active and passive verbs, the implicit appeal to witnesses ('may be said...'), the repeated insistence on the 'reality' of the experience, all seem to signal an attempt to define a self which is not purely subjective; which is not independent of material considerations; in short, a 'self' which is not identical with 'soul'.

In Alton Locke, Kingsley had preserved a safe distance between his narrator and politics by stressing the passivity of Locke's involvement with Chartism, as well as the farcical elements of his career as an agitator. Alton's Chartist phase is just one botched enterprise after another. The ultimate effect of this is to make Chartism seem relatively unimportant in the scheme of the novel as a whole. In addition, as Cazamian has pointed out, the fictional 'self at the time of writing' rigidly controls the moral perspective of the work, so that

we are offered a reformed Chartist retracing the story of Chartism for us. His whole narrative is dominated by the suggestion of a higher truth which appears obscurely in the early chapters and is clarified at the end. And so it is perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the book to disregard the chronological order of events, and to analyse them all together in the light of intentions which reflect equally upon them all.³⁷

While this is true of Alton Locke, whose 'first person' is, after all, an artificial intelligence programmed by Kingsley for didactic ends, it would be a mistake to regard all autobiographical consciousnesses as fixed and unequivocal about the past, and to assume that all autobiographical time is collapsible and therefore irrelevant. I would argue that such assumptions are often false. Certainly they are misleading in the case of Cooper, who manifests an intense and illuminating ambi-

valence towards his past. Furthermore, to see such ambivalence as a fault in the work would be to take for granted the 'correctness' of that form of self-analysis enshrined in the conventions of Victorian autobiography: the self-analysis of the redeemed.

To return to an earlier point, the problem with the figure-of-eight construction as applied to a life such as Cooper's is that all his important work, indeed all his exciting activity, took place before his conversion. As a consequence, there are occasional signs of a fear that the drama of the Chartist 'sub-plot' might get out of hand - that it might spill over into the 'main plot', distorting, or even destroying the internal logic of the spiritual narrative:

I hope what I saw will never be seen again. And I heard words of misery and discontent from the poor that, I hope, are not heard now. I should not like to hear them again, for I know not what they might again impel me to say or do. (p. 142)

This anxiety is passed on to the reader by means of a barrage of facts. Chapter XIII is headed 'Leicester: Wretchedness of Stockingers: 1840-41' and, significantly, breaks with the sequence of 'Life' chapters, indicating Cooper's willingness to accept a subordinate role in what follows. His role, in fact, is passive; he becomes a medium through which information can emerge.

"And what may be the average earning of a stocking weaver?" I asked, - "I mean when a man is fully employed."

"About four and sixpence," was the reply...

"Four and sixpence," I said; "well, six fours are twenty-four, and six sixpences are three shillings: that's seven-and-twenty shillings a week. The wages are not so bad when you are in work."

"What are you talking about?" said they. "You mean four and sixpence a day; but we mean four and sixpence a week." (pp. 138-39)

However laboriously, facts carry the burden of emotion throughout the sequence, which is one of the most moving in the book. Such facts are

not 'improving', they cannot be transmuted (and neutralized) into 'useful knowledge'. They are not at Cooper's command; rather, he is at their's: they impel him in word and deed.

As more and more 'sorrowful truth' emerges, Cooper's forthcoming career as a Chartist leader comes to seem inevitable, almost involuntary.

"What is the acquirement of languages - what is the obtaining of all knowledge," I said to myself, "compared to the real honour, whatever seeming disgrace it may bring, of struggling to win the social and political rights of millions?" (pp. 14647)

Cooper's call to political service is thus set in an alternative philosophical mode. Several times he speaks of his 'destiny' or of the 'message of Destiny' (pp. 131, 134, 185, etc). Replying to objections to this 'superstition', he finds that

there are mysteries in our existence that I cannot fathom; and I am compelled to leave them unfathomed, and go on with the duties of active and useful life. (p. 131, Cooper's emphasis)

His whole political career, from his reportage on the Chartists for the Leicestershire Mercury to his avowedly accidental instigation of the Hanley riot and subsequent imprisonment, is couched in these terms, with the suggestion throughout that he is passive to material forces:

But I was soon sent on the errand which led to the fulfilment of my "destiny." (p. 134)

Only after the main actions of Cooper's Chartist phase have been accomplished does destiny give way once more to the 'Special Providence' of the Christian believer. Thus on the way from Hanley to Manchester, and after his most incendiary speeches have been uttered, Cooper is saved from further scrapes by a series of remarkable 'coincidences':

I must now call the reader's close attention to a few facts which very closely concern myself, and show that, amidst the fulfilment

of the "destiny," an Everpresent and All-beneficent Hand was guiding events, and preventing a fatal conclusion to my error. (p. 198, Cooper's emphasis)

The concept of destiny, therefore, has a three-fold function. By offering a non-theological framework for this part of the story, it enables Cooper to redeem these early events and actions as part of his total achievement, despite the fact that they are not 'in line' with his role as spiritual witness. By providing a new protagonist (fate) and hence a new momentum for the story, it allows Cooper to explore, in a less exclusively subjective way, his own relationship with the 'real world'; to see himself, not as an individual, but as a phenomenon and part of a larger phenomenon. It also permits Cooper to set Chartist history in a tragic rather than a comic discourse. According to the logic of Kingsley's version, Chartism must undergo its own personal conversion if it is not to be squalidly petty. In a classic articulation of Victorian humanism, Eleanor opines

"The Charter, like its supporters, must die to itself before it lives to God."³⁸

Cooper's is a grimmer version: for him, Chartism resembled 'the fly on the wheel' (p. 178).

Not that this stratagem is unproblematic. For Cooper as working-class autobiographer, the past/present dichotomies facing the self-as-convert are replaced by a new set of difficulties. In Cooper's case these cluster around the concept of 'specialness'. The models available to working-class autobiographers, those of autodidact-genius, demi-martyr and saint, are incompatible with a view of self as 'representative'. The idea of the demagogue, fusing both sets of models, is the nearest Cooper gets to a comfortable role:

For the demagogue, or popular "leader," is rather the people's instrument than their director. He keeps the lead, and is the people's mouthpiece, hand and arm, either for good or evil, because his quick sympathies are with the people; while his

temperament, nature, and energetic will fit him for the very post which the people's voice assigns him. (p. 180)

Cooper's Life calls into question whether the expression of the development of class-consciousness and class affiliation is compatible with the traditional autobiographical form - that of the progress of the self towards personal salvation.

CHAPTER 5

MARGARET OLIPHANT: THE IMPOSSIBLE LIFE.

Margaret Oliphant's career as a professional writer spanned nearly fifty years of the Victorian period. During that time, her vast literary output included biographies, translations, travel books, works of fiction and criticism, as well as periodical articles on every subject that came her way. This astonishing productivity was virtually uninterrupted by the many catastrophes of her personal life. After the death of her son Cyril, she wrote in her autobiographical note-book:

As for my life and that work for daily bread which runs through everything with me, I dare not say how uninterrupted [?] that has been. I have carried it on all this time steadily, about a chapter a day, I suppose about twenty pages of an octavo book. Sir Walter at the time when he was labouring to pay off his debts speaks of writing a volume in twelve days I think. I have done it steadily in sixteen. He says no man can keep it up for long, but I have kept it up in spite of everything now for months and months. The product is very different indeed, and the object so small beside his grand big magnificent struggle. Mine is for little more than daily bread.¹

That her hero and compatriot Walter Scott, toiling to keep afloat financially and to support his dependents, could continue to work steadily in spite of the loss of his wife, and through mental stress and physical illness, was to Oliphant some sort of self-justification. However, since she lacked any sustained or sustaining sense of her own life as heroic, as a 'grand big magnificent struggle', her ability to 'carry on regardless' was at once a source of pride and of anxiety. If her work was not the product of great struggle, could it be great art? And if, as she suspected, she was not a great artist, what possible validation could there be, other than financial gain, for her decision to combine motherhood with professional life? These questions became more urgent as, over the years, her husband and beloved children predeceased her. She had tried for everything, and was left with nothing: nothing, it seemed, but the past and the obsessive need to write.

In these troubled self-images may lie a clue, not only to Margaret Oliphant's personality, but also to the problems raised by her

autobiographical writing. Why should Oliphant, who had slipped so effortlessly into the mainstream of middle-class, middle-brow literary life, have found her own experience so difficult to recount? Why should a woman who was adept at the conventions of a wide variety of prose forms, have found it necessary to break many of the (albeit unwritten) rules of Victorian autobiography?

Critics of Oliphant have had difficulty accounting for the peculiarities of her Autobiography. Linda Peterson for instance, attributes the quirky structure of the work to Oliphant's conception of her audience, and to the rhetorical strategies she adopts in justifying herself and her artistic compromises to that audience. Peterson discerns what she calls a 'del Sarto' model at work: 'early achievement and promise - family crisis - artistic compromise'.

This pattern provides the structural framework for the work as a whole and for each of its four sections. Each begins on a note of hope but ends with personal tragedy and often artistic failure.²

This is a persuasive argument but it is not borne out by the structure of the autobiography as Oliphant left it - the version to which we must appeal if we are to invoke 'consciousness of audience' as a determining factor.

Laurie Langbauer, in her intriguing Foreword to the most recent reprint of the Autobiography, remarks that, while it has never been elevated to the status of 'classic' alongside Newman's Apologia or Mill's Autobiography, Oliphant's book has received some attention because 'the poignant self-division that characterizes it points beyond the author's particular experience to the contradictions within constructions of identity and meaning'.³ Of the many possible deconstructions of the Autobiography, the one Langbauer pursues is Oliphant's 'cheap' distribution of herself: her record of the 'sheer disposability, the planned obsolescence, of the self in the indifferent

throw-away economy within which it circulates.⁴ Witness a typical evaluation by Oliphant of the work in hand:

I feel all this to be so vulgar, so common, so unnecessary, as if I were making pennyworths of myself.⁵

Because she so insistently forces on the reader the idea of the 'debased, humdrum, and commonplace', Oliphant, Langbauer claims, 'makes us unable to accept [this idea] without question as simply the determining category of her life's story'.⁶ By discerning deeper strategies and by exposing the complex pattern of force and resistance that the text encodes, Langbauer neatly turns inside out the exasperating special pleading that the surface of the writing sometimes offers.

Langbauer's is a seductive reading, but it has little to say about the problematic structure of Oliphant's Autobiography, nor about its refusal of the conventional crisis/conversion pattern which might have accorded it the 'classic status' granted to Mill's Autobiography or Newman's Apologia. In this chapter I shall examine some of the ways in which Oliphant evaded the restraints of autobiographical convention, looking in particular at her rejection of the rigid organization of time enforced by the conversion model.

When Margaret Oliphant died in June 1897, she left, among her literary remains, an autobiographical document composed over a period of more than thirty years. On Mrs Anne Coghill, a distant cousin, devolved the problem of producing a publishable volume from a fragmented narrative interspersed with odd memoranda: a note of instructions to her editor, a dream jotted down on a piece of card, a cutting from the Athenaeum of A. C. Swinburne's 'Threnody'. Ruthlessly deleting Oliphant's caustic remarks about contemporaries such as Leslie Stephen and George Lewes, expressions of disappointment over her sons, remarks about domestic strife and other personal matters, Anne Coghill

undertook the intricate 'fitting together' needed to produce a roughly chronological account of Oliphant's life. Even after this surgical operation, the story still seemed incomplete and insubstantial, and, since Oliphant had prohibited the writing of a biography, it was deemed necessary to supplement the edited autobiography with twice as many pages again of correspondence. The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant was published in 1899. Despite the heavy-handed editing, Margaret Oliphant's limpid, shrewdly allusive prose reveals an attractive, vital personality struggling to come to terms with tragedy.

One of the difficulties for any structural analysis of the work is the lack of a formal beginning. With intervals of days or even years between attempts, Oliphant commenced and recommenced her task several times: usually, but not always, picking up the threads of an existing, chronological narrative. But the evolution of the work was not as simple as this might suggest. In 1899, Anne Coghill had to piece together the story from the 'scraps' of autobiography Oliphant had left in her trust. She commented in her Preface to the first edition,

The first entry in her book was written in 1860, and mentions, rather than records, the struggles of her early widowhood. The second, in 1864, is the outpouring of her grief for the loss of her one daughter, her little Maggie, suddenly snatched from her in Rome. After this is the long gap of twenty-one years... (p. ix)

It seems from this that what resulted in the Autobiography began, as the word 'entry' suggests, in the form of a spasmodic journal. This is borne out by the manuscript version of the Autobiography, which is contained in two hardbound exercise books in the National Library of Scotland.

As Coghill hints, the writing got under way in 1864, though only a small portion of this early material was considered suitable for publication (pp. 92-4). The 1864 'outpouring', divided, as it is in the manuscript, into small, self-contained and individually dated units, bears no internal signs of being part of a larger, chronological

project. Indeed, the predominance of the present tense, the impassioned apostrophes and the intimate, clearly self-addressed musing of this section are all characteristics of the journal rather than the more public autobiography.

Thus, an examination of the Autobiography in manuscript reinforces one's impression of the importance of the journal form in the development of the work. A significant element of the book as Oliphant wrote it, which is rendered inconsequential in the edited version, is this repeated return to the present and the present tense. Much of the 'present tense' material is the tearful and often frenzied effusion of grief for recent loss. The obsessive reiteration of essentially private thoughts makes painful reading - hence, one assumes, the extensive editing. (From Anne Coghill's Preface it emerges that the avoidance of the 'intimate' was one of her priorities in editing Oliphant's correspondence [p.x]. The same was probably true of her handling of the Autobiography itself). The loss of her daughter Maggie in 1864, and of her sons Cyril ('Tiddy') and Francis ('Cecco') in 1890 and 1894, are all recorded as they happen in the immediacy of the present tense, and only the first is in any way assimilated into the autobiographical narrative as such. Each death is shattering, in its effects on both Margaret Oliphant's serenity and on her story: on her life and on her Life. The sacrifice of her daughter is 'hard and terrible, a rending asunder of my life'⁷ and the deaths of Tiddy and Cecco are described thus:

2nd October 1894 - Four years have not quite passed since the terrible event which rent, as I have said, my life in two. What can I say now - it is gone altogether, like a bladder that has burst. I have no life any longer, for Cecco has followed Tiddy.⁸

The story is interrupted by these deaths, and ultimately resolves itself into a race against annihilation: not the death of the self in an absolute, moral sense - Carlylean 'selbst-tödtung'- but of the

self within the familial structure. Finally, of course, the race is lost. The last of her children dies, and with him the autobiographer's sense of purpose and identity. The closing words of the Autobiography are ambiguous: is it the story itself or her capacity to write it that runs out?

I can hear myself saying "Cecco and I." It was the constant phrase. But all through he was getting weaker; and I knew it, and tried not to know.

And now here I am all alone.

I cannot write any more. (p. 150)

The loss of her children, we come to realize, is an event which cannot be slotted neatly into place within a controlled and orderly retrospective. It prevents the necessary detachment. Because of this, present and past refuse to maintain fixed, peaceful relations. The present forcibly invades the past, and the past the present. As I hope to demonstrate, this problematic relationship permeates both the form and the characteristic imagery of Margaret Oliphant's autobiographical experiment.

I say experiment. Whether or not Oliphant herself considered the two handwritten volumes of mixed recollections and 'outpourings' to constitute a cohesive whole is unclear. From a letter to William Blackwood of 16 June 1897, it is evident that she regarded these autobiographical notes as in some way part of her literary estate.⁹ The work was intended for posthumous publication, the trustees having full discretionary powers to suppress the whole or any part.¹⁰ The sole indication of Oliphant's feeling on the form such a publication might take is to be found on an undated scrap of paper inserted between the leaves of the first manuscript volume, and refers to the 1860-64 sections.

Whether anything should be taken from the preliminary pages Denny,

with the help of perhaps Cousin Annie, or some other friend [illegible] whom she can trust, must decide.¹¹

She adds,

My musings at this dreadful moment when my firstborn was taken from me might perhaps give a sense of fellowship to other mourners - I know not.

This is a recommendation of sorts. The implication that feelings and experiences have no interest independent of their basis in the common lot of humanity is a commonplace in autobiography, part of an established rhetoric of apology in which the private and personal are justified in terms of the public and universal. As self-deprecation it need not be taken too seriously.

On the other hand, the (presumably well-meant) suggestion of a friend (again in 1864) that her sufferings are sent by God to qualify her in sympathy and wisdom to teach others through her writing, elicits a bitter reaction in the privacy of the journal-mode:

As for teaching anybody, God knows I have nothing to teach. I may put the long musings of my agony into words, but Tennyson has done it already far better than I can - and how can I who sit in darkness show any light to my neighbours?¹²

Doubting the usefulness of what she writes, she continues, compulsively, to write.

In the event, only a tiny proportion of the substantial quantity of journal material was published in the Autobiography and Letters, and the passages selected were taken out of their written sequence and rearranged to fit in with the chronology of the story. Some indeed are completely 'buried': for instance the discussion of Charlotte Brontë published as part of the passage dated 1894 (p.67), was actually written in Albano in 1864, after Maggie's death. Such details are not insignificant if one is to account for the evolution of the work. Many phases of the writing, for example, can be seen as a direct, immediate

response to reading of the Lives of authors who took themselves very seriously as artists: in this case probably Elizabeth Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë (1863), and elsewhere J.W. Cross's George Eliot's Life (1885). As we have already seen, Margaret Oliphant was one of the autobiographers who responded with bewilderment to H. F. Brown's highly serious Life of J. A. Symonds.¹³

The terms of that response are worth repeating:

January 22.

I have been reading the life of Mr Symonds, and it makes me almost laugh (though little laughing is in my heart) to think of the strange difference between this prosaic little narrative, all about the facts of a life so simple as mine, and his elaborate self-discussions. I suppose that to many people the other will be the more interesting way, just as the movements of the mind are more interesting than those of the body, or rather of the external life. I might well give myself up to introspection at this sad postscript of my life, when all is over for me but the one event to come, which will, I hope and believe, do away with all the suffering past and carry me back, a happy woman, to my family, to a home; though whether it will be like the home on earth who can tell? ... I don't know whether it is more hard for me to be here with all these associations, or to be in some other place which might not be so overwhelming in its connection with what is past. But it is not a question I need discuss here. Indeed I must not discuss here any question of the kind at all, for any attempt at discussing myself like Mr Symonds, if I were likely to make it, only would end in outlines of trouble... (p. 80)

I noted in Chapter 1 the particular 'gender inflection' of this passage: Oliphant's affirmation, at the risk of appearing unfeminine, of the 'external life'. It should be added that the idea of the 'external life' leads back to the 'home', with its ambivalent position between the 'internal' and 'external' lives. Deeper ambivalence is evident in her relationship with Symonds' bowdlerized conversion narrative. She must avoid the introspective mode because, far from entailing the happy ending of the redemptive scheme, her story would end in 'outlines of trouble'. Yet even as she muses on her 'prosaic little narrative', she is drawn back, despite herself, into dangerous introspection. But because these thoughts are contained in a 'journal'

entry, the chronological narrative can remain prosaic: untainted by depressing self-scrutiny.

The fact that the two modes of writing - journal and autobiography - were allowed to coexist and evolve side by side within the same document over a period of so many years, implies that Mrs Oliphant saw them as compatible, even complementary. Certainly, this juxtaposition and interplay of forms, which the first editors regarded as scrappiness, and to which they responded with disappointment, could be seen as one of the work's distinguishing characteristics. Most obviously, it maintains a tension between private and public articulation, between the private and public life. This 'threshold' between two worlds has been claimed by recent theorists as the possible site of gender difference in women's writing.¹⁴ On the level of narrative form, feminist critics have argued that structural discontinuity is a significant aspect of many women's autobiographies. Estelle C. Jelinek has claimed that

The multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies as well, and so by established critical standards, their life studies are excluded from the genre and cast into the "non-artistic" categories of memoir, reminiscence, and other disjunctive forms.¹⁵

Citing examples from the fifteenth century Book of Margery Kempe to Kate Millett's Flying, she claims that women's Lives have been marginalized by critical emphasis on 'orderliness' in defining autobiography. Within this tradition, or anti-tradition, of women's writing, the journal has a special value in its expression of women's experiences, as Suzanne Juhasz has pointed out:

In their form, women's lives...show less a pattern of linear development towards some clear goal than one of repetitive, cumulative, cyclical structure. One thinks of housework or childcare, of domestic life in general. Even if a woman is a professional and conducts her work life largely according to male patterns...it is generally not easy or usual, because she is a woman, for her to separate out neatly the powerful strands in her

life. Dailiness matters to most women; and dailiness is by definition never a conclusion, always a process.¹⁶

Whether or not dailiness necessarily 'translates' into disjunctive prose forms, it is clear that Oliphant is at pains, in her 'little narrative', to avoid the pattern of linear development towards present success, or, as would be more usual, the pattern of crisis and conversion leading to present salvation. Dailiness does matter to Mrs Oliphant, often in the bleak sense of the daily renewal of anxiety. The introduction of present time in the narrative of the past highlights the sometimes tragically cyclical pattern of life. In 1885, in a deleted passage, she implicitly compares the dismal failure of her alcoholic brother Willie's career with that of her own son:

The dreary spectacle of that content is before me, with almost as keen a sense of the misery as if it had been yesterday. Alas - it is not yesterday. Life is full of dreadful repetitions.¹⁷

Furthermore, the interplay of forms dramatizes the dislocation between life as it is lived, and as it is managed, shaped, proportioned, and in effect distanced, in the act of autobiographical composition. For Margaret Oliphant, as we shall see, the ability to live beyond crisis is not necessarily an unalloyed good. But the brittle constitution which can find release in breaking down is not hers. After Maggie's death, she reports that

It is not yet six weeks that she has been gone from me, and already new habits, new arrangements are rising over the vacant place.¹⁸

Only in the journal passages is the vacant place preserved. Blows which may have been softened by time are felt there in all their violence. The emotional chaos precipitated by bereavement retains its place alongside the organized, retrospective narrative.

Unfortunately, Mrs Coghill's careful editing papers over many of these cracks in autobiographical convention. The contrast between the

two modes of self-writing is lost, and what appears in the original as the rigorous, and sometimes grim effort of conscious displacement reappears in the published Autobiography as a rather desultory meandering through time.

As Coghill hinted, the 'germ' of the Autobiography is the first entry in the notebook, dated 1864. This provokes the ruminations on the passage of time and the casuistry of 'self-explanation' which in turn lead to the more sustained consecutive narrative of 1885. This first entry is worth examining in some detail as it contains many of the themes of the Autobiography in embryo.

It constitutes the first 'murmur of pain' - the first expression of the anguish of bereavement - which is to be refrain or 'over-word' of the work as a whole:

Here is the end of all. I am alone. I am a woman. I have nobody to stand between me and the roughest edge of grief. All the terrible details have to come to me. I have to bear the loss, the pang unshared... O Lord, Thou wouldest not have done it but for good reason! Stand by the forlorn creature who faintest under Thy hand, but whom Thou sufferest not to die. (p. 94)

A vein of lamentation runs through the 1864 section, as through later episodes. Bitterness of heart causes Oliphant to re-examine her hitherto comfortable, unquestioning relationship with Christianity. This gives rise to thoughts which, in different guises, are to recur many times: the possibility of divine injustice; the inconsistencies of the so-called God of Love; and the difficulty of believing in a state of bliss for the dead quite divorced from, and indifferent to, the sorrows and concerns of the living.

...but if heaven were ignorant of the bonds of nature, it surely would be no heaven for the spirits of men.¹⁹

Grief is sharpened, but also modulated and in some way controlled by these religious considerations: the personal and the impersonal

dovetail. The immediate loneliness of a widow, bereft of her first-born child, and cut off from friends and support in a foreign place, becomes a paradigm of the de^leparate anxieties of the human condition: *uncertainty, isolation, and estrangement from God's will.*

I feared from the first moment her illness began, and yet I had a kind of underlying conviction that God would not take my ewe-lamb, my woman-child from me. (p. 92)

(The biblical reference is bitterly ironic: the rich man's theft of the poor man's ewe-lamb is used by Nathan in II Samuel xii as a metaphor for David's terrible injustice towards Uriah the Hittite.) The apparently *cruel and gratuitous* act - the termination of the life of a promising and beloved child, undermines Oliphant's faith in an ordered and meaningful universe.

According to the custom of the time, Oliphant is encouraged, after the death of Maggie, to turn to In Memoriam for consolation. John Tulloch, nicknamed the 'Principal', also in Rome with his family, has brought Tennyson's elegies to the notice of his friend in her sorrow. As it was to Scott's Journals, Oliphant's response is equivocal. Though she acknowledges the consolatory value of In Memoriam (published in 1850) as the supreme expression of grief and loss, she seems to feel inhibited, even eclipsed, by Tennyson's virtuosity. A late essay on Tennyson for Blackwood's suggests she resented his monopolization of mourning for a mere friend.

Had [the subject of In Memoriam] been a wife, a child, even a woman beloved, it would have been more natural, more germane to the matter. ²⁰

Oliphant is at once admiring of, and overwhelmed by Tennyson's masterpiece. His memorial to Arthur Hallam follows the familiar pattern of individual grief leading to a crisis of faith and the voicing of a widely-shared malaise:

The Principal calls "In Memoriam" an embodiment of the spirit of this age, which he says does not know what to think, yet thinks and wonders and stops itself, and thinks again; which believes and does not believe, and perhaps, I think, carries the human yearning and longing farther than it was ever carried before. Perhaps my own thoughts are much of the same kind. (p. 93)

It seems, however, that Oliphant's feeling of affinity with Tennyson at this point originates in her sense of a shared mood, rather than in any particular belief expressed in the poem. The remark directly preceding the reference to In Memoriam is one of the most despairing in the book:

Now I am thankful for the night and the darkness, and shudder to see the light and the day returning. (p. 93)

Oliphant's reluctance to face the day, and the loss of her customary sense of rejuvenation each morning, are clearly reminiscent of the close of stanza VII, one of the bleakest of Tennyson's elegies

The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly through the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.²¹

As often in In Memoriam, meditation on the present promotes a sense of dislocation: of times being 'out of joint.' Reality, actuality seem unreal and deadened (life has become 'ghastly', the day 'blank'), whereas the past, the region of memory, is full of expectancy and urgency:

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasped no more... (VII)

There are two parallels to be drawn between these passages of In Memoriam and Oliphant's Autobiography. Firstly, the sense of oddness and incongruity pervading Tennyson's lines is associated with the present rather than with the recalled past. The remembered hand is real and vivid, its absence is incomprehensible. Seven stanzas later,

in the imagined quay scene, the memory of Hallam's wanted greeting breaks out of its suspended animation, and follows its own momentum:

And if along with these should come
The man I held as half-divine,
Should strike a sudden hand in mine,
And ask a thousand things of home...

The narrator, swept along by memory and imagination, cannot but feel that if Arthur Hallam were suddenly to reappear 'I should not feel it to be strange.' (XIV) This, as I hope to show, is Oliphant's characteristic response to what, in a letter of 1864, she calls (rightly, the reader begins to feel) her 'impossible life'.²²

The second similarity, related to the first, is the search for a point of contact and communication between the living and the dead. In 1864, Oliphant's feelings about the dead are confused and contradictory:

The more I think of it, the less I am able to feel that those who have left us can start up at once into a heartless beatitude without caring for our sorrow ... Where, then, are they, those who have gone before us? Some people say around us, knowing all that occupies us; but that is an idea I cannot entertain either. It would not be happiness but pain to be beside those we love yet unable to communicate with them, unable to make ourselves known. (p. 93)

The habitual anxieties and responses of parenthood persist though their object has gone, so that her view of the afterlife, firmly grounded as it is in practical, and even administrative considerations, often seems strangely mundane. Heaven might almost be an expensive finishing school:

Can I trust her with Him? Can I trust Him that he has her safe, that there has been no mistake, no error, but only his purpose in all - and that he is keeping her now in the position most happy for her - that even my own human judgment when enlightened would approve as the best²³

Likewise her consciousness of defeat and frustration over Tiddy's

dissipated life and squandered talents spills over into her conception of his posthumous bliss, to bathetic effect:

I do not wish to think that he lingers about us. that would be unnatural. I hope he has something better to do - some real work, something that occupies all his faculties.²⁴

In her unguarded moments - and the journal formula admits of such - it is evident that her sense of the bonds which connect her to her family will not admit of a final sundering:

Sometimes such a longing comes upon me to go and seek somebody, as I used to go to Frank to the studio in the old times.(p. 94)

The lines exude an air of defeat, as if Oliphant feels that her yearning is a kind of surrender. Unlike Tennyson's tireless pursuit of certainty, her longing is the 'mere' need for companionship and affection. Hence, at this stage the longing for the company of the dead seems like a weakness to be fought and overcome.

But as the work progresses, it becomes apparent that for Oliphant, the worldly and the divine are indissolubly fused in a way which ultimately sanctifies her longing. This mingling of the mystical and the secular in her visualization of heaven is characteristic of her religious outlook more generally. In most respects she seems to regard her faith as too conventional, or perhaps too consistent to require much comment. She expresses few doubts, and mentions no crucial point of conversion around which to structure her spiritual development. That is not to say that she places little value on religion, but that her spiritual position tends to be defined in terms of her relationship with her family: her mystical experiences reaffirm rather than loosen human bonds. In a passage written shortly after Cyril's death (but excluded from the Autobiography due to Annie Coghill's policy of editing out all the many references to Oliphant's disapproval of, and disappointment in her sons), she relates an incident which took place

shortly after Cyril's return from Ceylon, where he was to have been private secretary to the Governor. She had taken a house in St Andrews, in the hope that the change of air might 'brace' her apathetic sons for action:

And they had both gone out to the Club at night, and I went out wandering across the links in the late twilight, almost dark, towards the sea. How clearly I can see the scene now. I went up round the Club, to see if I could get a glimpse of them through the lighted windows, but could not, and then I sat down on the seat by the path before you come to the burn. There was a dull sky hanging low ... I was very miserable, crying to God for them both, feeling more miserable almost than I had ever done before - when suddenly there came upon me a great quiet and calm, and I seemed stilled, and a kind of heavenly peace came over me. I thought after it must have been the peace that passeth all understanding. It felt like that, and came to me in a moment, stilling my thoughts. Sometimes now I ask for it, but it occurred to me the other day that it came that blessed moment when I was not asking for it, not thinking of any consolation for myself, only help and deliverance for them.²⁵

The use of the word 'deliverance' encourages the reader to locate the passage in relation to the conventional autobiographical conversion figure. Merryn William comments:

This was probably the closest she ever got to a spiritual experience, and it impressed her deeply.

She adds, however,

Yet, when she went back to the house, she realised that nothing had changed. It looked as if her sons would be dependent on her for the rest of her life.²⁶

Oliphant seems to be mobilizing a Carlylean notion of 'un-self-consciousness' as the basis for her fleeting transcendental experience. But the recognition ('it occurred to me the other day') is passive and distanced in time from the active writing self: 'Sometimes now I ask for it'. Unselfconsciousness remains syntactically inaccessible to the autobiographical self, and cannot be appealed to as the moral premiss of the autobiographical act.

It is a strikingly Tennysonian passage: the confession of her own

deliberate self-torture in lingering in the half-light to gaze at the inaccessible brilliance of the Clubhouse. But the agony which is for Tennyson exquisite is for Oliphant intolerable.²⁷ It gives way to a moment of transcendent peace, which, whilst it calms her rebellious will and assuages her suffering, yet reinforces the earthly bonds which caused her pain in the first place: her own deliverance is involved with the fate of her sons.

Such passages are more than a mere re-writing of Tennyson: they constitute the confession of a faith more positive, more hopeful than any expressed in In Memoriam. What she gleaned from her reading of In Memoriam was not primarily a sense of waste, *futility or isolation*, but a confirmation of the redeeming powers of living hope and loving memory. Her obituary tribute to Tennyson, published almost thirty years after that despairing encounter with the poem in Rome, assesses In Memoriam in terms of its hope rather than its sorrow:

It is the voice of every man from whom has been taken that which he held most dear: it is at the same time a voice of life and that nobler sorrow which throughout all absence and ending feels but the stronger the ring of an endless continuity, the sense of an existence unassailable, which holds to our bosoms more closely than in any loose hold of careless living, the thought that recurs with every moment, that every new thing renews, and every old thing makes more dear - the fellowship of the undying dead.²⁸

Like Tennyson, Oliphant frequently uses the image of the 'doorway' as a symbol of dispossession and sadness. Unlike Tennyson, however, she uses the motif to anticipate 'continuity' beyond crisis, and 'fellowship' beyond solitude. In In Memoriam VII, the doorway of the Hallam home in Wimpole Street represented the impenetrable barrier between this and the afterlife. (As Williams notes in another connection, Oliphant was also familiar with, and appreciative of, Holman Hunt's immensely influential painting The Light of the World which depicts Christ patiently knocking at the closed, neglected door of the soul.²⁹) But for Oliphant, the motif of the doorway, as it

emerges in the evolution of the Autobiography, instead of being associated with exclusion and alienation, gradually takes on the more positive connotations of homecoming and reunion. This progression is the more astonishing when we realize that the Autobiography was generally composed in the wake of one of Oliphant's many and keenly-felt bereavements.

Given that her home doubled as domestic and professional workplace, it is appropriate that the symbolism she uses to describe the workings of her memory and imagination should be that of the home: doors, windows, 'this picture...hung up upon the walls of my mind' (p.69), and so on. However, without wishing to overlook the significance either of the positive aspects of 'women's space' or the negative connotations of the claustrophobic Victorian interior, her imagery of doorways is more adventurous than this domestic scenario might suggest.

A door is, of course, both a means of escape and a way into an enclosure. These meanings are allowed to overlap and interact throughout Oliphant's Autobiography, as they do in many of her other works. In her poem 'The Innermost Room' (1867), for instance, the inner room is the secret chamber of a lonely heart, whose door is always ajar, but is seldom penetrated save by the memory of deceased friends:

'When such guests come to me
Heaven opens with the opening door'.³⁰

The main function of the doorway metaphor, however, is as a mechanism to signal a 'passage' forwards or backwards through time within the circuitous structure of the autobiography. As such it bears a close relationship to the 'Gothic' trappings used in those eerie stories of the 'Unseen' at which Oliphant specialized. The castle in 'The Secret Chamber' (1876),³¹ for instance, features mysterious

disappearing doors, which lead to the laboratory-like lair of an evil ancestor who lies in wait to appropriate the souls of succeeding generations. But Oliphant's preoccupation with doors is best illustrated by her short story of 1882, 'The Open Door' (1882), a light-weight ghost narrative whose chief dramatic interest lies, not so much in the person of the tormented soul (Willie's history is revealed and summarily dismissed in a few lines at the close of the narrative), as in the mysterious forces surrounding the apparently empty doorway of a ruined house. As Willie's spirit ritually re-enacts, night after night, his attempted - and thwarted - reconciliation with his mother, the vacant doorway, at first an 'emblem of vanity', of futility and redundancy, 'leading to nothing', becomes the focus of a series of partial and confused encounters between the living and the dead.³² The doorway, seemingly stripped of meaning by the passing of time and the disappearance of any enclosure, is yet permeated by the violent emotions it has witnessed:

To me it seemed as if...a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature.³³

The 'open door' of the title is thus not merely the vacant doorway of the deliberately conventional 'picturesque' ruin, but the point of contact between two phases of being, equally real, and artificially separated by the fact of mortality. As the narrator of the story, Colonel Mortimer, comes to realize, the appropriate response to such hauntings is neither horror nor skepticism, but recognition and sympathy.

On this strange premiss - that the seen and the unseen exist in a continuum misleadingly screened off into past, present and future - is based Oliphant's autobiographical procedure. The image of the doorway signifies her imaginative penetration of these screens. Her account

(written in 1891) of her second house in London opens with this characteristic motif:

After this we removed to Ulster Place, a larger house, which is the house in London upon which my mind dwells. I pass it sometimes going to King's Cross, when we have gone to Scotland, and a strange fantastic thought crossed my mind the first time I did so in these latter years, as if I might go up to the door and go in and find the old life going on, and see my husband coming down the road, and my little children returning from their walk. (pp. 41-2)

The verb 'dwells', static and passive, is deceptive. The activity of recollection turns out to be both complicated and vigorous. Thereafter, the prose leaps into action; the next sentence is full of motion, of coming and going. This is not, it should be noticed, a mere retrieval of the past: it is a memory of a memory; the recreated scene being located somewhere between the original, 'real' scene and its final, written reconstruction. The impression is of a process, not of salvaging, but of rapprochement: between past and present, the living and the dead. A simple door stands between then and now, but a door can be, is made to be, opened. Thus, Oliphant's memory is boldly, even defiantly, imaginative, to the extent of involuntarily rejecting change (particularly unwelcome change) as more or less an illusion, and of positing the continuity of the family on another plane of existence, in despite of death. Her impressionistic, anecdotal method, her offhand delivery of cameo or tableau, barely conceal a consciousness of power - a sense that only her volition is needed to reactivate the complex of emotions of which the past is composed. Oliphant's protestations that her autobiographical efforts are inconsequential ('only a scene detached and conspicuous, here and there...') and vague ('I cannot recollect whether it was then or after...'[pp.38, 21]) must therefore be set beside this conscious power of evocation, this ability to regenerate feeling.

Three years later, the image has become less 'fantastic', more habitual. Forgetting, it would appear, that the scenario has already

been mythologized at the appropriate point in the chronological sequence, Oliphant reverts, in a short passage omitted from the published Autobiography, to this 'halcyon time' (p. 44) between her mother's death and the fatal first trip to Rome, a period during which her nuclear household was relatively intact, relatively free from conflict. As she ponders over the 'things one might have done' had she settled at Nemi after Maggie's death, Ulster Place again comes to mind in a formula by now automatically associated with her sense of place:

I had half a mind, I remember, to take an appartamento in that house, and throw myself into the rut of artist life, though my instincts were not of that kind, - a life not exactly disorderly, but a little wild and wandering and gregarious. I have curious superstitions about localities. I used to have a dizzy feeling sometimes in later years when I passed our old house in Ulster Place, that if I had the courage to knock at the door and go in, asking no questions, I might find, who could tell, that all the rest was a dream, and that the babies were safe in their nursery, and Frank in [the] studio, wondering what had kept me so long.³⁴

In Oliphant's imagination, the doorway on Ulster Place has acquired distinctly magical properties. As before, to knock and enter would be to break a spell: to disperse the prolonged nightmare of 'real life'. On the other hand, to enter and question would also be to break a spell: the return to the past must be an act of blind faith. (There is an obvious echo from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew vii, 7: 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you'). At the same time, however, the mental recourse to the old house seems less bizarre than formerly; it is merely a 'curious superstition', manageable, even reassuring. It has become, if anything, a shorthand sign for a complex of emotions contingent upon domesticity, security and family unity - emotions enjoyed by Oliphant only in those three or four years before Frank's death.

Her fond memories of Eton, also written in 1894 after the death of Cecco, her last surviving child, provoke the following digression:

I wonder sometimes if what has been ever dies! Should not I find them all round the old whist-table, and my Cecco, with his bright face and the great blue vein that showed on his temple, proud to be helping to amuse the old people, if I were but bold enough to push into the deserted house and look for them now? I have so often felt, with a bewildered dizziness, as if that might be.(p.117)

The sequence presupposes that Margaret Oliphant the narrator could resume the old life, could fit into the old picture, without incongruity or anachronism. (Could this imply in turn that her 'self' has not essentially changed, to her own consciousness at least?) The sensation of slipping through time (physically and, as it were, linguistically), is vertiginous, but not unwelcome or unpleasant. Furthermore, a motif which was first presented as the description of an involuntary and momentary mental reflex is here elevated to the status of intuitive response. Again, the scene, offered quite openly as the product of memory and imagination combined, is presented as more vividly realized, more gripping, than the actual.

The final, and most elaborate use of the motif occurs almost at the end of the manuscript, when the pain of recollection is fast becoming unbearable.

Ah me, alas! pain ever, for ever, God alone knows what was the anguish of these years ... Lately in my many sad musings it has been brought very clearly before my mind how often all the horrible tension, the dread, the anxiety which there are no words strong enough to describe, - which devoured me, but which I had to conceal often behind a smiling face, - would yield in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of a voice, at the first look, into an ineffable ease and the overwhelming happiness of relief from pain, which is, I think, our highest human sensation, higher and more exquisite than any positive enjoyment in this world. It used to sweep over me like a wave, sometimes when I opened a door, sometimes in a letter, - in all simple ways. I cannot explain, but if this should ever come to the eye of any woman in the passion and agony of motherhood, she will more or less understand. I was thinking lately, or rather, as sometimes happens, there was suddenly presented to my mind, like a suggestion from some one else, the recollection of these ineffable happinesses, and it seemed to me that it meant that which would be when one pushed through that last door and was met - oh, by what, by whom? - by instant relief. The wave of sudden ease and warmth and peace and joy. I felt, to tell the truth, that it was one of them who brought that to my mind, and I said to myself, "I will not want any explanation, I will not ask any question, - the first

touch, the first look, will be enough, as of old, yet better than of old." (p. 146-47)

The most remarkable aspect of this passage is the shift in mood: within a single paragraph seemingly unremitting pain is transmuted into 'ease and warmth and peace and joy' without either extreme appearing implausible or facile. The strained grandiloquence gives way almost mid-sentence to an engaging, conversational tone, as if her interlocutor (herself) has suddenly come closer. Despite herself, despite everything, her prose communicates, if not joie de vivre, still a fund of resilience, and a readiness to be comforted, to relax, even to rejoice. It is not the mask of cheerfulness which 'yields' at the slightest touch, but the strain itself. As we have seen, the door of Oliphant's imagination/memory also yields to her touch. In this case, the 'last door' is a barrier, not between divided selves (past and present, public and private), but between a world of harsh and false appearances, and another, more perfect reality. Hence, the image which for Tennyson signifies exclusion and disappointment, is here the symbolic means of union and fulfilment. The craving for someone with whom to share her emotion, which in 1864 seemed to her like a kind of capitulation, is finally equated with her longing for 'ineffable' bliss, her desire for heaven.

Stylistically the 'opening door' passages seem, with their delicacy of detail, multiplication of clauses, and dream-like accumulation of impressions, to anticipate Virginia Woolf. Any comparison between the work of Oliphant, self-confessed pot-boiler (p. 131) and the highly charged writing of Woolf may at first appear incongruous. Critics of Oliphant and historians of feminism have been eager to highlight Woolf's opinion, in Three Guineas (1938), that 'Mrs Oliphant sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual ability', failing to give any prominence to the fact that Woolf nevertheless considered the

Autobiography to be 'an illuminating document ... a most genuine and indeed moving piece of work ... which is full of facts',³⁵ There are, furthermore, significant points of contact between the autobiographical techniques of the two women. The importance to Woolf of the diary form is well known. For the purposes of this thesis, however, her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past', with its famous distinction between moments of being and non-being, is of greater interest.³⁶ Like Oliphant's Autobiography, the work is fragmentary, and diffuse in organization - a 'possible form' emerging only gradually, as the work progresses.³⁷ Again, the present is given a prominent place alongside recollection. Indeed the past is to act as a 'platform' for the present. Oliphant's quiet celebration of 'those family details...the human story in all its chapters' (p. 122) has its equivalent in Virginia Woolf's defence of 'the personal, the trivial' as compatible with the claims of art.³⁸ In both works there is a shunning of abstract analysis and continuous narrative in favour of scenes, complete and coherent within themselves. We have already noted Oliphant's mental gallery, where pictures get themselves 'hung up upon the walls of my mind'. This is comparable to Woolf's method: '...I find that scene making is my natural way of marking the past',³⁹ Both have faith in the integrity of these scenes, in all their complexity and apparent redundancy of detail.

Moreover, many of the insights which have emerged obliquely from the examination of Oliphant's imagery of doorways in the Autobiography are expressed directly in 'A Sketch of the past'. Central to Woolf's conception of autobiography is a sense that the distant past 'can still be more real than the present moment',⁴⁰ and that, furthermore, intense experiences 'are in fact still in existence'.⁴¹ This startling theory is elaborated thus:

I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to

it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start.⁴²

What for Oliphant seemed at first an eccentric superstition, and was eventually granted acceptability as a prefiguration of heaven, is, in Woolf's memoir, given the value of an intuitive 'philosophy': rationally indefensible, but verifiable on the level of experience. Woolf even posits a direct relationship between her pictorial method and this sense of the past as recoverable:

Always a scene has arranged itself: representative; enduring. this confirms me in my instinctive notion: (it will not bear arguing about; it is irrational) the sensation that we are sealed vessels afloat on what it is convenient to call reality; that is these scenes - for why do they survive undamaged year after year unless they are made of something comparatively permanent? Is this liability to scenes the origin of my writing impulse?⁴³

As I hope I have shown, the connections made thus boldly in A Sketch of the Past are also made, albeit indirectly and tentatively, in Oliphant's Autobiography. I do not argue, though it is tempting to do so, that Woolf was influenced in her autobiographical writings by her familiarity with and admiration for Oliphant's published Autobiography. What Oliphant and Woolf do share, however, is an investment in writing as a place for coming into being, and a strong sense of the cyclical (rather than conclusive) nature of that process.⁴⁴

The image of the opening door, as it evolves in the course of the writing from reflex to revelation, encompasses a series of overlapping meanings for Oliphant as autobiographer: her confidence in the reconstitution of her family on another, better plane of existence; the power of her memory to reopen, to recreate the past; and thus by implication her literary skill in evoking the quality of that past. Though the story is written in sorrow, and often of sorrow, yet the metaphors most characteristic of her autobiographical method seem to reveal a sense of vitality, optimism and continuity rather than crisis or breakdown.

Lest one be inclined to regard the doorway motif as a kind of sentimental or superstitious escapism, a symptom of maladjustment to reality, it should be set against another set of images connected with Oliphant's professional life as a writer - a life, as she admits herself, continually dominated by practical considerations and financial pressures. Explaining the difficulties of maintaining her large family of dependents while the boys are at Eton, she emphasizes her reluctance to economize by means of a metaphor which recalls Dante's spiralling ascent of Mount Purgatory:

I could not do that, or at least did not, but I could work. And I did work, joyfully, with pleasure in it and in my life, sometimes with awful moments when I did not know how I should ever pass some dreadful corner, where the way seemed to end and the rocks to close in: but the corner was always rounded, the road opened up again. (p. 126)

The Gothic 'frisson' of risk-taking, of facing the 'awful', 'dreadful' unknown, is enjoyed for its own sake, but the successful outcome (exit/result) is only momentarily obscured. A few lines later, this general observation is illustrated by a specific instance. The metaphor shifts from road to stream and back to road, but it is clearly the same motif:

...it so happened that I came to a pause and found that every channel was closed and no place for any important work. I had always a lightly flowing stream of magazine articles, &c., and refused no work that was offered to me; but the course of life could not have been carried on on these, and a large sum was wanted at brief intervals to clear the way...It was like nothing but what I have already said, - a mountainous road making a sharp turn round a corner, when it seemed to disappear altogether, as if it ended there in the closing in of the cliffs. I was miserably anxious...

Next morning came my visitor. He came from the 'Graphic': he wanted a story, I think the first they had had...The road did run round that corner after all. Our Father in heaven had settled it all the time for the children; there had never been any doubt. I was absolutely without hope or help. I did not know where to turn, and here, in a moment, all was clear again - the road free in the sunshine, the cloud in a moment rolled away. (p. 126-28)

The logic of the motif is not identical with that of the doorway, which

operated both ways through time. Nevertheless, there are obvious similarities: clouds, corners, and cliffs give way before her; 'dead ends' are optical illusions and yield, at the last minute, a way forward. Continuity is ensured.

Linking these characteristic metaphors, the doorway and the path forward, then, is a notion of continuity. In one of the truisms which only Oliphant could get away with, she points out that

Life, though it is short is very long, and contains so much. And one does not, to one's consciousness, change as one's outward appearance and capabilities do. (p. 3)

It is to be noted that Oliphant refrained from revising or cancelling self-analyses which, written up to twenty-one years earlier, she might have deemed inappropriate or outlived. (The editorial powers she entrusts to Cecco's discretion (p. 65), and later to Annie and Denny, are clearly over matters of privacy and domestic sanctity rather than over her method of self-presentation). In other words, while the sections may differ - and intentionally - in tone, they do not substantially differ in terms of Oliphant's self-image. Her idea of the patterns of her life remains constant over decades, despite the vicissitudes of her personal and professional life. Circumstances change, and along with them the writer's lot of blessedness or pain, 'The world is changed, and my life is darkened' (p. 93); but in her own view she remains fundamentally the same. Any discrepancy between her sensations as a child and as a woman is attributed, perhaps unconsciously, to the pressure of personal tragedy rather than to any alteration in her outlook, as the pronoun 'it' implies in the 1864 section:

...I, too, rise up to bear my burden. How different it used to be! When I was a girl I remember the feeling I had when the fresh morning light came round. (p. 93)

In fact, her delineation of her life as unfractured, as continuous

in spite of apparent obstacles, reflects Oliphant's sense of her self as, willy-nilly, a survivor. She rejects the closure of the conversion structure, with its transformed, finalized depiction of self, and its appeal to the present as conclusive. The closest she comes to a conventional typology is in her motif of exile and return (in Oliphant's case, exile from and return to the past). But the exile is always returning, and language is the true 'home from home'. The word she uses most frequently to describe her constitution perfectly expresses her ability to 'bounce back', in terms of her capacity both for emotional struggle, and for huge amounts of work: her lightheartedness in adversity might, she speculates, be 'want of feeling or mere temperament and elasticity' (p.4). She is not crushed by care because of 'unbroken health, and a spirit almost criminally elastic' (p. 129); and after Maggie's death

my own life burst forth again with an obstinate elasticity which I could not keep down. (p. 119)

It is significant that her attribute of elasticity is invariably yoked with some negative quality, be it want of feeling, obstinacy, even criminality. As early as 1864 she comments 'they will give me credit for courage (which I almost think is not courage but insensibility)' (p. 67). Perhaps this ambivalence is due to the discrepancy between the conventional images of the Victorian lady (sensitive, delicate, prone to ill-health) and her own experience of the psychological and physical burdens of maternity, and working motherhood. As the emotional hardships of her life increase with the successive deaths of her children, she must endure, not only her feeling of failure and uselessness, but the guilt attached to what could be construed as 'insensibility'. In the journal section written after Cecco's death she cries out that

my body is well, well, the horrible thing, I could...work, write a love story, or clean a grate or walk a mile, anything, anything...⁴⁵

Her very survival, becomes, at last, a liability:

I would pray that He would take me with my boy, but I am as strong as an elephant. All this misery does not give me even a headache. I neither eat nor sleep for days together, and I am as well at the end of them as at the beginning. What is to become of me, shall I never die? ⁴⁶

The problem of her dislocated self-image is aggravated by the Romantic idea of what an artist should be like. In her Autobiography she reveals a tendency to brood over the depressing, if not degrading connection between her literary efforts and the need for cash. Oliphant found herself caught in the dilemma encapsulated in the single word 'industry'. The virtues of diligence, perseverance and self-discipline, upon which she prided herself, had, in the field of literature, acquired the stigma of hack-work, the ignominy of the treadmill. Whilst habitually referring to her work with pride as 'my trade', and in terms of 'labour' and 'production' (pp. 4, 6), she saw through the 'contemptuous compliments' as to her 'industry' (pp. 5, 131). She could not accept the notion of culture and industry as somehow antithetical.⁴⁷ Just as Scott noted, on July 19 1828, 'I am become a sort of writing automaton',⁴⁸ so, Oliphant could record, a little ruefully,

And I am sixty two, older than Sir Walter was when he died - I am a wonder to myself, a sort of machine, so little out of order, able to endure all things, always fit for work whatever has happened to me.⁴⁹

In this image of herself as a 'wonderful machine', is embodied the tragi-comedy of her Autobiography. On the one hand it expresses her bitterness and frustration over the sacrifice of her literary reputation to ends which were themselves defeated, and on the other hand, it is a powerful affirmation of the qualities of endurance and vitality which enabled her to keep the pot boiling, so cheerfully, for so long.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE SELF AT STAKE?

We have seen how Margaret Oliphant ignored the autobiographical model of self as convert in favour of an elastic, expansive, unbroken selfhood capable of sustaining what 'might have been' alongside what was. In doing so, she incurred fractures in the autobiographical narrative itself, allowing fantasy, dream and speculation as well as present-tense comment to vie with, and even take precedence over factuality, authority and chronology. Formally, Oliphant's Autobiography represents a dramatic and challenging departure from the norms of the genre. However, this 'positive' reading should perhaps be modified in the light of Oliphant's obvious ambivalence about the result. Oliphant's autobiographical self expands and stretches to accommodate multiple, and often conflicting roles, desires and possibilities until, as she points out, it becomes elephantine. This gradual evolution is, as she perceives it, at the expense of dainty, passive, vulnerable femininity, and leaves her - finally - suspended rhetorically in a problematic immortality: 'Shall I never die?'

That the journal mode has been historically significant for women's writing, with demonstrable effects on some women's autobiographical choices, has been amply documented.¹ It cannot be said, however, that all Victorian women autobiographers made such drastic infringements on traditional autobiographical form. Indeed, as became clear in the Introduction to this thesis, some, such as Harriet Martineau and Annie Besant, invested heavily in the conventional conversion model for their authority as autobiographers and as the guiding principle of their chronology. Conversely, some male autobiographers (Thomas Carlyle in his Reminiscences for instance) experimented with autobiographical form, with 'authority' and with the 'conditional'. This raises the question as to whether autobiography, or the figure of the convert as the dominant autobiographical model, can be said to be gendered.

One of the pressing concerns of many recent critics of

autobiography has been this issue of gender.² Is there, as Estelle C. Jelinek argues, a separate tradition of women's autobiography?³ If so, in what ways is women's autobiography different from men's? What might be the formal characteristics of (to borrow Domna C. Stanton's coinage) autogynography? Jelinek's description of women's autobiography as less unified, less chronological, more subjective and more concerned with personal relationships than men's merely replicates the sets of binary oppositions that marginalised women's autobiographical writing (and men's reminiscences, for that matter) in the first place.⁴ Stanton, on the other hand, formulates the issue thus:

Because of woman's different status in the symbolic order, autogynography, I concluded, dramatized the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself discursively and strives towards an always impossible self-possession.⁵

As Paul de Man has demonstrated,⁶ autobiographical 'self-possession' or 'coming into being' is always fictional, always impossible, regardless of gender. If there is gender difference in autobiography, then, it must be sited in the 'alterity and non-presence' of the feminine subject. But how can 'non-presence' be dramatized? And if women as subjects have no place in the symbolic order, how can they be the site of autobiographical discourse at all? Linda Anderson, as we have seen, uses the metaphor of the 'threshold' to describe, in psychoanalytic terms and with special reference to the diary mode, women's relationship to themselves and their written Lives.⁷ This formulation is particularly useful when applied to Oliphant's autobiography, which employs both the metaphor itself and the journal mode. But what of the (apparently) more conventional autobiographies by women?⁸

In addressing these questions, it is useful to bear in mind

certain wider generic issues. As critics Elizabeth Bruss and Philippe Lejeune have pointed out, autobiography as a genre relies at the very least on the assumption (on the part of the reader) of a relationship of identity between the owner of the proper name on the title page, and the 'I' of the text.⁹ In pre-modernist works, autobiography rests on the further assumption that the author, as signified by both the proper name and the textual I, is telling the truth. This apparent 'truthfulness' to 'self' is necessarily a precarious balancing act, since truthfulness and selfhood are problematic in directly interrelated ways. The autobiographer must be - convincingly - objective and subjective, scientific and poetic, impersonal and personal. A Victorian autobiographer 'succeeds' in proportion to the Victorian reader's belief in his or her veracity.

Of the available 'signifiers' or conventions of truth-to-self - fictions of intimacy, confession and vocation, for instance - the fiction of the 'spiritual testimony of the convert' is the most prevalent in Victorian autobiography, having, as I have argued elsewhere, the most ethical and epistemological clout. In the most general terms, the 'mainstream' nineteenth century autobiographer claims, admits to, or at the very least hints at, some definitive spiritual experience, if only to offset the material egotism of the autobiographical project. This spiritual experience may consist of a straightforward 'Damascene' conversion, the acquisition of a moral or poetic sensibility, a call to action or a call to prophecy. Thus, the invocation of spiritual experience immediately engages the autobiographer in a range of gratifying literary heroisms: the romantic, the chivalric, the prophetic. Above all, conversion is self-validating: the convert is ipse facto an authority.

However speechless the autobiographer claims to be in the face of the ineffable, the transcendental, or the private nature of the soul's travails and discoveries, in order to become autobiographical matter,

spiritual experience must subject itself to the same kinds of systematization and classification as other, less rarefied, more mundane affairs. In other words, in so far as spiritual experience can be said to have value and meaning, that value and meaning will be socially constructed, socially construed. Furthermore, in so far as society is gendered, so too is religious experience. In autobiography as in other practises, the manifestations of spirituality - modes of behaviour, attitudes of devotion, styles of authority and linguistic categories - tend to be distributed and interpreted in gender-conscious ways. This is not a matter of fixed quantities (so many parts gender to so many parts religion), but of continually negotiated valuations. Much of Annie Besant's Autobiography, to which I now turn, is taken up with the author's battle to claim for herself, or locate herself in, a positive spiritual terminology. Her mother, she recalls, reconciles herself to her adored husband's free-thought on the grounds that 'women ought to be religious'.¹⁰ But the thread of antagonism between mother and daughter over religion is attributed to a different asymmetry: to age and historically shifting femininities:

To me, who took my religion in strenuous fashion, this dainty and well-bred piety seemed perilously like Laodicean lukewarmness, while my headlong vigour of conviction and practise often jarred on her as alien from the delicate balance and absence of extremes that should characterise the gentlewoman. (p. 24)

We have seen elsewhere how Leslie Stephen, from an atheist perspective, can admire the virile muscularity of Carlylean puritanism, whilst despising effeminate 'priggishness'.¹¹ For Annie Besant, 'piety' is prim and over-feminine, whilst vigorous religion is problematically unfeminine ('unbalanced and unbecoming' [p. 70]) In her mother's eyes, women ought to be religious, but her daughter Annie "has always been too religious" (p. 24). From the outset, we might expect the nineteenth century woman autobiographer to experience difficulty taking aim

at ever-shifting ideological goalposts. Not surprisingly, therefore, Besant's account of her youthful Christianity traces her ungainly decline from 'young and sensitive' girl to 'little prig' (p. 51).

Two versions of Besant's Autobiography exist: the Autobiographical Sketches of 1885 published by the Freethought Publishing Company, and An Autobiography of 1893 published by T. Fisher Unwin for the Theosophical Publishing Company. For the most part, these volumes cover the same ground, often in the same words: Besant's childhood and education; her early, unfortunate marriage to a clergyman; her mental and physical breakdown and subsequent rejection of Christianity in favour of Atheism; her separation from her husband and struggles to earn a living; her career as a freethought lecturer and journalist and her involvement, on many fronts, with radical politics. Autobiographical Sketches ends with an extensive apologia for Besant's public support of the 'Knowlton Pamphlet' on birth control - an allegiance which threatened her reputation and cost her the right to custody of her children. An Autobiography curtails the Knowlton Pamphlet incident, going on to chart her later participation in Fabian Socialism, her championing of the Match Girls' Strike, and her ultimate 'evolution' into Theosophist (p. 140).

The main difference between the two texts is one of light and shade. Though theosophy is presented as a logical extension rather than a contradiction of Atheism, the platform of Freethought and the 'lofty' spirituality of Theosophy cast different patterns of metaphorical shadow over the past (p. 140). The storm clouds of misery, doubt and despair, the darkness of error, the glimmers of recognition, the light of understanding and the 'radiance of Peace' (p.364) all shift slightly between the two volumes. So, for example, in Autobiographical Sketches, Besant's early explorations of Freethought are spoken of as 'the brighter side of my life'¹² while the corresponding passage in An Autobiography refers more circumspectly

to her 'slowly, cautiously feeling my way onward' (p. 131). References to Besant's Atheism added to the later version tend to refer to this phase as 'going out into the darkness' - an adventure, a necessary quest, but not yet a homecoming (p. 24).

Structurally, as their respective titles suggest, the Autobiographical Sketches are more anecdotal, more concerned with relationships, than An Autobiography, which accords far more with the conventions of the genre: it is more 'unified', more introspective, and its themes are more fully developed.¹³

Among the revisions, modulations and expansions Besant felt were necessary to produce the later 'rounded', more conventional autobiography, was an elaboration of the 'sketch' of her early religious impressions and spiritual enthusiasms. Given Besant's intermediate move from 'rational' Freethought to mystical Theosophy; given, moreover, the equation of self with soul in autobiographical orthodoxy, this additional emphasis on youthful religious experience is predictable. Less predictable, perhaps, is the form taken by these impressions in Besant's account: the form of a persistent flirtation with the idea of early death.

At issue from the beginning is Besant's engagement with, and ultimate rejection of, what she deems the 'religious materialism' of her day (p. 40).

I went out into the darkness alone, not because religion was too good for me, but because it was not good enough; it was too meagre, too commonplace, too little exacting, too bound up with earthly interests, too calculating in its accommodations to social conventionalities. The Roman Catholic Church, had it captured me, as it nearly did, would have sent me on some mission of danger and sacrifice and utilised me as a martyr; the Church established by law transformed me into an unbeliever and an antagonist.(p. 24)

To some extent this is simply a (by now) conventional substitution of terms: instead of undergoing a positive religious transformation, she is 'converted' into an unbeliever and antagonist. The excursion into

darkness, ignorance, solitude and alienation ('out into the darkness alone') is, in its turn, the precursor and prerequisite of the final espousal of theosophy. The possession of an autobiographical voice is here predicated on the eventual arrival and enlightenment of the subject who 'went out into the darkness'. But the eruption into the text of the 'might have been' - which in Margaret Oliphant's Autobiography competes as a vital narrative force - momentarily destabilizes the narrator's authority and alerts us to potential ambivalences. The theme is taken up again later:

I read tales of the early Christian martyrs, and passionately regretted I was born so late when no suffering for religion was practicable; I would spend many an hour in day-dreams, in which I stood before Roman judges, before Dominican Inquisitors, was flung to lions, tortured on the rack, burned at the stake;... But always, with a shock, I was brought back to earth, where there were no heroic deeds to do, no lions to face, no judges to defy, but only some dull duty to be performed. And I used to fret that I was born so late... (p. 43)

Set this passage alongside Besant's condemnation of the contemporary Established Church, and there emerges an overwhelming sense of self as anomalous: a sense of having been born too late, and into an ethical space that is both too wide (accommodating) and too narrow (meagre, calculating).

Besant returns again and again to these youthful 'daydreams', connecting them, not only with social, historical and spiritual incongruence, but also, as explicitly as is possible in a Victorian publication, with an awakening (autoerotic) sexuality. It is in part the emotional frigidity of established religion which repels her, and she 'broods' over the days when 'girl-martyrs were blessed with visions of the King of Martyrs, when sweet St. Agnes saw her celestial Bridegroom', losing herself in these 'fancies, never happier than when alone' (p. 52). In her chapter on marriage, she quotes eight times from 'so-called devotional exercises' (p.66) to show how, with their

imagery of masochistic desire and consummation, they might absorb and direct the erotic life of a sexually ignorant adolescent girl. (The 1885 version of this sequence explains this need for an outlet in terms of the artificial cultivation of Victorian (hetero)sexuality:

the perfectly harmless and natural sexual feeling is either dwarfed or forced, and so we have "prudishness" and "fastness".)¹⁴

Thus, as the Autobiography progresses, the motif of frustrated self-sacrifice becomes conflated with the thwarting of other ideals: sexual and intellectual - all converging, significantly, around one particular Eastertime. Besant narrates how, in 1866, at the age of eighteen, she set out to compose a 'Harmony' of the Gospel accounts of Christ's last days and death, in order to 'facilitate the realization of' (or rehearse) Christ's suffering and martyrdom (p. 59). The exercise fails, because

discrepancies leaped at me from my four columns; the uneasiness grew as the contradictions increased, until I saw with a shock of horror that my "harmony" was a discord, and a doubt of the veracity of the story sprang up like a serpent hissing in my face. (p. 61)

The convergence of religious disillusionment, dissatisfaction with gender roles and sexual disappointment is articulated in a number of ways. Besant's spiritual alienation takes place in consecutive chapters entitled 'Girlhood' and 'Marriage' - a juxtaposition which speaks for itself. Initially, Besant affects a naïve surprise at the coincidence of events, as if, in writing, she had only just noticed it:

strange that at the same time I should meet the man I was to marry, and the doubts which were to break the marriage tie.(p. 59)

Later she indulges in a piece of novelistic social satire in the Austen vein, demonstrating how excessive religious susceptibility in a young girl can too easily lead to the 'unlucky' idealization of the clergyman as potential husband: a phenomenon in which 'the particular clergyman

affected plays a very subordinate part' (p. 68). (Her husband, whom she consistently calls by his full professional name, the Rev. Frank Besant, is allowed a very subordinate part in the drama of her marriage.) But the ludicrously banal step of marrying a clergyman for the 'glamour' of self-sacrifice to a higher cause - only to find that cause riddled with discrepancies and contradictions - has its sinister side. The word 'shock', used by Besant to describe both the disruption into her day-dreams of mundane reality, and her first sensation of religious doubt, is also used of the transition from childhood to wedlock ('so stunning a shock' [p.56]), of the young bride's first experience of marital sex (a 'terrible shock' [p.71]) and also of the discovery that, as a wife, she cannot own property because she is property. Furthermore, the lapsarian imagery associated with Besant's spiritual dilemma ('a serpent hissing in my face') is echoed in her account of early marriage: the forcible wrenching of the young woman from carefully cultivated innocence and ignorance is likened to expulsion from the 'paradise' of a mother's love (p. 71).

Though these overlapping discourses have in common the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge (the attainment of adulthood, the demythologizing of the Scriptures, the acquiring of sexual experience), and thus might be said to constitute an enlightening 'conversion', the effect is rather different. The typology of redemption is brought into play, but instead of new terms being superimposed on the old formula, that formula itself is curiously reversed. Just as, in the Scriptures, the story of the Fall prepares the way for that of the Crucifixion and Ascension, so, in the typology of autobiography, conviction of sin (or error) leads to personal salvation. In Besant's version, as we have seen, contemplation of the Crucifixion leads to Eve's expulsion from Eden. The gendered nature of the conversion model begins to emerge. The constellation of properties - enlightenment, knowledge, authority -

which the convert-autobiographer claims, and which legitimate authorship, have different connotations when applied to masculinity and femininity. The price of knowledge to Eve is catastrophe. Ideal femininity leaves the girl Annie 'defenceless to face a rude awakening' (p. 71).

Entwined with these narratives of religious, social and sexual frustration is the story of frustrated authorship. The pivotal episode between Girlhood and Marriage, in which 'realization' of Christ's martyrdom becomes 'realization' of doubt, exile and fall, is, as we have seen, an attempt at writing: the composition of a Harmony. This failure is followed by another: Besant's Lives of the 'Black Letter' Saints of the church calendar does not find a publisher and drops into oblivion. After the minor success of a few short stories in the Family Herald, Besant's fortunes as author are temporarily frozen. Publishers regard her new novel as too political, and will only accept from her writing of 'purely domestic interest' (p. 85). As a wife, her earnings from writing are, to her horror, not her own to dispose of. As a mother, her time becomes absorbed by childcare. With such material and ideological forces amassed against her, her literary career is 'checked' (p. 86).

To the fact that this check, however serious, is only temporary, the existence of the text bears witness. But the central paradox of the narrative is that the autobiographical discourse itself is bought at the price of a highly valued model of self: the romance of self as martyr.

This personal myth, with its heroic plot of torture, suffering and premature death, its floridly masochistic eroticism, and its complex social and ideological ramifications, becomes blurred, is rendered petty and feeble by the prevailing, legitimated mythology. In individual instances, the child's fictions are quickly subsumed by the more powerful, authorized fiction:

I felt that my dreamy longings were very poor things compared with the vigorous "sense of sin" spoken of by the preachers, and used dolefully to wonder if I were "saved." (p. 43)

At one point the attraction of martyrdom is interpreted psychologically: Besant is disposed by nature to be 'too religious', having inherited what she calls an 'Irish' susceptibility to psychic impressions' (p. 27). It may be argued that Annie Besant's martyr fantasy is simply a manifestation of her 'Irish sentimentality', - or rather that her insistence upon her childish identification with martyrdom is part of her construction of herself as Irish. But Besant does not miss her métier as martyr, and survive as autobiographer because her Romanism gives way before a more powerful Anglican Protestantism: both are presented, in the last analysis, as pious frauds. The mythology of martyrdom must collapse because, according to its own semiotics, it cannot, in the end, take effect as an autobiographical discourse.

On Besant's transformation from Christian to Atheist (which covers more than two chapters and over three years of autobiographical time), an array of cataclysmic imagery is brought to bear: storm, shipwreck, darkness, eclipse, earthquake, bondage and rebellion. In its language, in its organization of time ('My religious past became the worst enemy of the suffering present' [p. 90]), and in its pivotal place in the story, this is a classic conversion sequence, faithful to autobiographical tradition. The sequence contains a number of crises, as Besant passes through alternating phases of physical distress and mental anguish. Amongst these climactic moments, it is impossible to isolate one as the decisive turning point. Nevertheless, Besant's contemplated (and rejected) suicide might be said (in An Autobiography at least), to form the crux between religious despair and existential freedom. The scene, with its garden outlook, its moment of supreme struggle, and its 'cup of poison' recalls Gethsemane, whilst the inter-

vention of a mysterious voice evokes the Damascus Road, and Augustine's 'tolle, lege'. Besant's prose, which in any case inclines to the melodramatic, is at this point self-consciously portentous and 'literary':

I uncorked the bottle, and was raising it to my lips, when, as though the words were spoken softly and clearly, I heard: "O coward, coward, who used to dream of martyrdom, and cannot bear a few short years of pain!" (pp. 93-94)

Along with the bottle of chloroform, thoughts of suicide are defiantly cast aside, and with them the 'dream of martyrdom' which has haunted the text. Besant falls 'fainting on the floor' - a gesture which expresses simultaneously 'surrender' to the conversion process, and the last gasp of 'hysterical' Victorian femininity. The next sentence identifies Besant definitively as 'a strong soul' (p. 94), and the next supernatural voice she hears will be the 'voice of Truth ringing over the battlefield' (p. 188). Whatever her physical and mental sufferings, hereafter she will identify herself almost exclusively in the language of the miles christi (though armed, not with the Sword of the Spirit but with the full weaponry of scholarship), or as a classical warrior riding into battle under the "nom de guerre" of Ajax (pp. 180-81). The emphasis throughout will be on the bold exercising of free will: 'Persecution... never can make an honest convert' (p. 173).

What, then, are the ideological and textual implications of this 'fantastic' (p. 42) but foregone romance of self as martyr? It is a romance familiar to readers of George Eliot: both the 'Prelude' and the 'Finale' of her novel Middlemarch (1871-72) construct an analogy between the incoherent fate of latter-day would-be Saint Therasas and the 'epic life' of the original. The lack of epic grandeur in 'middle' society, and in particular the lack of epic opportunities for women, are among Eliot's main preoccupations. But the analogy is not drawn

just to make a rather obvious sociological statement. The nub of the comparison is a point, not of contrast, but of similarity between the saint and Eliot's fictional heroine Dorothea. The opening pages of Book One delineate Dorothea as one 'likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it'.¹⁵ The description anticipates Dorothea's fate as Mrs Casaubon, but also refers back to the Theresan analogy in the 'Prelude': specifically to the legend associated with the saint's childhood. Who, Eliot asks, has not smiled at

the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors? Out they toddled from rugged Avila... until domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles, and turned them back from their great resolve.¹⁶

Unlike Theresa the great reformer, Dorothea cannot achieve heroic sainthood for historical reasons. Like Theresa the autobiographer, Dorothea strives and fails to achieve martyrdom. The historical whys and wherefores are irrelevant: what is important is the way the metaphor operates.¹⁷

To be martyred, as conceived of both inside and outside Roman Catholic theology, is to die for a cause. The meaning of martyrdom lies, not so much in the content of the 'cause' itself, as in the fact that it has been regarded as worthy of premature death. The convert may be bound to bear witness to a cause or belief through saying or deed. By virtue of being dead, the martyr is witness. (The root meaning of martyr is 'witness' in the Christian sense).

Martyrdom, as Marina Warner has pointed out in relation to Joan of Arc, 'is the only triumph in an ideological climate where change means deterioration'.¹⁸ As we have seen, in the context of nineteenth century autobiography, change means anything but deterioration: it is the premiss upon which authority is established. In the context of the representation of femininity, however, Warner's claim is relevant. In

the closing pages of Margaret Oliphant's *Life of Jeanne D'Arc*, tribute is paid to the 'Maid, alone in her lofty humility and valour, and in everlasting fragrance of modesty and youth'.¹⁹ Joan of Arc transposed thus into the Victorian context demonstrates the durability of the martyrdom ethic, not just for its defiance of compromise, but for its overvaluation of chastity, youth and innocence at the expense of experience, maturity and knowledge. In obvious ways, this intermeshes with the Victorian cult of feminine moral and physical beauty. A link can also be drawn between the cult of martyrdom and the cultural construction of female sexuality. Warner indicates the erotic content of the cult, and goes on to claim that

If the central presence of sexual pleasure-in-pain in the Christian concept of martyrdom is recognized, martyrdom can at least be understood in its psychological place, without being trivialised. A link with the structure of erotic sensation is not cheapening in itself, but its existence at the heart of the cult of innocence as sainthood should cast light on that cult.²⁰

An earlier biographer of Joan, Thomas De Quincey, goes a considerable way down this path in an essay of 1847.²¹ Martyrdom, as he sees it, is the one realm of artistic achievement at which women can excel. They cannot 'produce' a Milton or a Mozart or a Michael Angelo, but they can 'die grandly'.²² De Quincey imagines distant 'telescopic worlds' for whom an execution would be the ultimate spectacle the earth had to offer. To these extraterrestrial voyeurs, the scene would be the more enticing if the victim were a martyr, - and, better still, a woman:

some, perhaps, would suffer a sort of martyrdom themselves, because they could not testify their wrath, could not bear witness to the strength of love and to the fury of hatred that burned within them at such scenes...²³

In De Quincey's account, the execution itself occurs (discreetly) out of focus, so as not to injure an event so 'unspeakably grand'. His

discretion does not prevent him, however, from lingering in the interim over the debate as to 'Joanna's personal appearance'.²⁴ While I would not wish to labour too solemnly over a piece of rather outrageous historical camp, the connection De Quincey articulates between the unspeakably glorious and the (literally) obscene in the depiction of women cannot be ignored.

To sum up, while the figure of the convert might seem to be non-gendered, most of its narrative manifestations are decidedly masculine: the pilgrim, the miles christi, the apostle. Like childhood, ideal Victorian femininity, whose virtues (silence, chastity, restraint, innocence, youth) are for the most part virtues of omission rather than commission, scarcely lends itself to drama:

How much more exciting to struggle with a winged and clawed dragon that you knew meant mischief, than to look after your temper, that you never remembered you ought to keep until you had lost it.
(p.42)

The only spiritual model or sainthood upon which Victorian ideal femininity seems to have any real purchase is that of martyr. Its heroism brings with it connotations of passivity, youthfulness, purity, innocence and masochism. It is, moreover logically incompatible with the autobiographical act: one can speak as convert; one cannot speak as martyr.

Let us return, for a moment, to the question of autogynography. The autobiographical dilemma for woman can be posed in a number of ways. Stanton formulates it as a linguistic predicament: for a woman, entry into a symbolic order which designates her as object immediately falsifies her subjectivity. Applicable, arguably, to anyone attempting any kind of writing, this formula might nevertheless have particular relevance when applied to a genre which rests, however unsteadily, on the fiction of Truth to Self. But where might gender come in? If a key component of the 'symbolic order' of autobiography is the

identification of autobiographer with convert, and convert with authority, then a gender which is defined in opposition to authority will be excluded from that order. For the Victorian woman, the problem is articulable in ideological terms: the construction of the autobiographer as authoritative, mature, assertive and public is at variance with the construction of femininity as self-effacing, youthful, passive and private.

If, in the symbolic order, women, like martyrs, have meaning ascribed to, or inscribed on them, then to represent the self as feminine subject is as impossible as to represent oneself as having died young. The most that can be done is to represent the self as having failed to die young: having failed to be silenced, extinguished, passive, defined:

And, in truth, I ought never to have married, for under the soft, loving, pliable girl there lay hidden, as much unknown to herself as to her surroundings, a woman of strong dominant will, strength that panted for expression and rebelled against restraint, fiery and passionate emotions that were seething under compression - a most undesirable partner to sit in the lady's arm-chair on the domestic rug before the fire. (p. 82)

One facet of Besant's quest for self-possession is her deployment and disposal of her self as martyr. In simultaneously evoking and forsaking this martyr self, she exchanges being for acting; she sacrifices her self as self-sacrificing, passive, and heroically 'feminine'; she becomes autobiographer. One never remembers one's temper until it is lost. In ritually entering the symbolic order, which we take here to be the order in which the equation autobiographer = convert = authority obtains, she renounces autogynography.

In highlighting the interest shown by Annie Besant in the romance of martyrdom and early death, it is not my intention to draw crass parallels between femininity and martyrdom, to suggest that femininity is martyrdom, or is even experienced as martyrdom. What intrigues me are the possibilities for representation that they offer one another.

One thing is clear: the romance of martyrdom as Besant deploys it is far from tragic, or even lugubrious. Rather, it is melodramatic. Its double-negative structure (failure to die) generates a positive black humour which subverts the seriousness which is the occupational hazard of the convert-autobiographer. ('Que le diable faisait-elle dans cette galère...?' [p. 82]) On one level, it saves the autobiographer from her (writing) self; redeems her from the formulae of redemption.

The uncanny recurrence of variations on the theme of martyrdom and early death in women's autobiographical writing of the nineteenth century and later might be read as a sign, not of morbid self-accusation or of masochistic passivity, but of release from such excess ideological baggage. The presence of the sign reminds the reader that, for a woman, the claiming of autobiographical authority involves a shedding (rejection/loss) of feminine identity. M.A.S. Barber's 'third-person' autobiography Bread-Winning; or the Ledger and the Lute. An Autobiography²⁵ which, as its title suggests, charts the author's abandonment of a Romantic (poetic) self-image and ambition in the face of the exigencies of lower middle class life, has its child heroine sitting 'hour after hour reading and dreaming of death and heaven'.²⁶ The world-weary nine-year-old, trapped in a Victorian moral fable, asks

"Why do I live?" A child of nine thus unconsciously echoing the experience of the learned, the witty, and the wise, who are without God in the world!²⁷

The author ends the chapter with a poem in which the refrain is a child's voice pleading "'Now, now, oh! let me die!'" while the narrator, made of sterner stuff, comments

Thus spake the spirit, strong in will -
Amidst its conflicts struggling still;
A deathless soul, - a mortal birth, -
Unmeet for heaven, - unfit for earth, -
Wearying the load of life to bear,

And pining for that region fair
Where earth's lost treasures back are given, -
A heathen's death, - a heathen's heaven!

'Yet' Barber adds, rather unnecessarily, 'death came not.'²⁸ As 'Meta', the author's autobiographical persona, grows up, the theme recurs: 'She had never, as a child, wished to encounter life, its troubles or enjoyments, but desired early death...'²⁹ Only when the heroine abandons her fantasy and develops a healthy fear of death, can she emerge as the convert-autobiographer. As soon as she does, she is mysteriously killed off by the narrative. The story ends abruptly (and prematurely) with the lines

Meta died in the month in the year "Lord remember her, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!"³⁰

Harriet Martineau, in the long section of her autobiography devoted to her final rejection of Christianity in favour of positivism, reverts suddenly to her childhood to remark

My youthful vanity took the direction which might be expected in the case of a pious child. I was patient in illness and pain because I was proud of the distinction, and of being taken into such special pupilage by God; and I hoped for, and expected early death till it was too late to die early.³¹

And later, the young Edwardian diarist Ruth Slate confesses with relief her sense of alienation from available models of expression, commenting

I told Eva how troubled I used to be because I had never felt any great change, like the people in the books are supposed to feel. I had never cried for days and called myself a terrible sinner and then suddenly felt I was 'Saved' ...We told each other of the strange ideas we used to have of things we ought to do, such as trying to 'Convert' those around us and telling others we were 'Saved'... We laughed together as we went.³²

She suspects that the high definition enjoyed by figures in literature (note the emphatic articles 'the people in the books') is related to their conformity to certain patterns of behaviour and expression, and that, perhaps, the prominence afforded by an Upper Case existence might

impose its own uncomfortable verbal duties. In a later entry she recounts

Nodded all the while in the train, and crawled along after like an old woman, my mind busy all the time with ridiculous notions of writing a touching story founded on the events of my own life. The story was to move the hearts of the people... Myself in the book was to fade quietly away - an unrecognized genius ... By lunchtime I was more myself and entertained friend Nim with a humorous account of it all.³³

Her own Life would be 'touching' and 'moving' only if she killed her textual self off in the course of the narrative. Her own literary heroism would hinge, paradoxically, on her being 'unrecognized'. Again the romance of martyrdom is deployed and shot down in favour of the comedy which is 'more myself'.³⁴

I do not argue that the metaphor of the failed martyr successfully usurps the primacy of the metaphor of self as convert in all, or indeed any of these autobiographical works. The relationship between the two is more complex. In his survey of autobiographical criticism, Avrom Fleishman concluded that the most promising way forward would be a fusion of 'expressionist' and 'Derridean' theories of language. He suggests that

autobiographical metaphor may be seen as a supplement that fills the space left by the self, which, in the act of writing, absents itself. The other self written in autobiography may also serve as a supplement to fill a lack felt in a variety of ways in life - such motivation is legion.³⁵

If one tries to apply this formula to women's autobiography, it can be seen why two complementary autobiographical metaphors might be necessary. For if the self which absents itself in conventional autobiographical writing (to assert itself in the text) is the self as authority, then the metaphor of the convert takes effect. But if the self which absents itself in any writing is by definition the construction of the self as feminine, then the metaphor of convert

alone will not represent it, and the forgone fantasy of martyrdom comes into play. It fills, and is, the 'lack felt': the presence that encircles absence at the threshold of the self.

AFTERWORD

In her challenging article 'Ulysses to Penelope: Victorian Experiments in Autobiography', Elizabeth K. Helsinger interprets the pessimistic outlook of Tennyson's In Memoriam ('My prospect and horizon gone'¹) as a critique of Wordsworthian optimism and egotism: a rejection or rewriting of the Romantic mode of perceiving life, both past and future, as a linear, unidirectional progression. The visionary elevation such a prospect assumes is perhaps most clearly established in the first Book of the Prelude:

The earth is all before me. With a heart
Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,
I look about; and should the chosen guide
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way. ²

The passage is a recollection of the wistful closing lines of Milton's Paradise Lost,

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide:
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way. ³

and hence has its typological roots in the story of Adam and Eve, and in the bitter-sweet motif of wandering and exile, with its nostalgia for the past and its promise of home-coming. The Wordsworthian prospect is also the metaphorical vantage point for an autobiographical project, both in anticipation,

... if this genial mood
Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down
Through later years the story of my life.
The road lies plain before me... ⁴

and in retrospect:

Anon I rose
As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched
Vast prospect of the world which I had been and was...⁵

According to Helsinger, this position is alien to the Victorians:

The injunction to forget oneself to find oneself is, of course, a commonplace of Christian and romantic tradition, but the Victorians took it further. Christians must remember God, and God, according to Augustine, will "recollect" the Christian, giving him a sense of himself he will only discover in the experience of conversion. The romantic poet seeks self-forgetfulness in imaginative experience, which will, in turn, offer the poet an identity. For many Victorians, such pursuits remained too self-involved, especially when they became subjects for literature. The way out was a deliberate shift of focus from the self to mutuality: friendship and marriage, or to community: the writer's concern for his audience and the reformer's vision of society. At the very least, the escape from self-involvement led the writer to complain of isolation, to criticize his romantic predecessors, and to subvert the forms of introspective literature, even when he continued to practice them.⁶

Helsinger traces the ways in which the great Victorian poets such as Tennyson, Browning and Arnold rejected as ethically wrong and aesthetically unsatisfying the questing after identity of the Christian (spiritual) and Romantic (imaginative) autobiographical tradition. However, she maintains that, with the exception of Ruskin's Praeterita, 'prose autobiographies of the high Victorian period ... show few radical departures from the tradition which reaches back from Wordsworth to St. Augustine'.⁷ It is, in her view, the 'poetic alternatives to spiritual or crisis autobiography' which prepare the way for the modernism of Proust, Joyce and Pound.⁸ Critics of autobiography have been convinced for so long, and so unanimously, that

if one is searching for the secret of the structure of autobiography, the category of the calling or profession is usually decisive.⁹

that all other features of the genre have tended to fade into the background. (No such tunnel vision is brought to bear on other forms of 'first person' literature.) This approach has narrowed down the Victorian autobiographical canon to one or two central texts, with a handful of others (often culled from poetry or fiction) admitted by

concession. This is a deplorable state of affairs, given the richness of the genre throughout the period. It has been my suggestion in this thesis that, while the 'high Victorians' may have been conservative in their autobiographical practice, a glance beyond the canon of 'classics' reveals prose autobiography containing, in varying degrees, all the features Helsinger claims for poetry: an emphasis on mutuality and community; an attempt to escape from 'pure' introspection and self-involvement; and a powerful critique of Romantic and spiritual autobiographical conventions - including the elevated 'prospect' and Pisgah vision.

I would also argue that this critique was anticipated by the 'highest' Victorian of all, Thomas Carlyle, in Sartor Resartus. The meditation on a Romantic panorama, with its unfolding landscape of possibilities, its purposeful rivers and its pilgrim's ways arrests Teufelsdröckh's narrative, both before and after his 'conversion', so frequently as to appear a stylistic mannerism. The stylization is part of the point: for whenever the vista seems about to resolve itself into a meaningful pattern, the scene is disrupted.

Fact unparalleled in Biography: The River of his History, which we have traced from its tiniest fountains, and hoped to see flow onward, with increasing current, into the ocean, here dashes itself over that terrific Lover's Leap; and, as a mad-foaming cataract, flies wholly into tumultuous clouds of spray! ¹⁰

Even at his most affirmative and serene, as he sits in his 'skyey Tent, musing and meditating; on the high table-land, in front of the Mountains...' Teufelsdröckh is an unreliable visionary, - for, as the narrator reminds us, 'the tone, in some parts, has more of riancy, even of levity, than we could have expected!' ¹¹ Romantic elevation, or post-Romantic levity?

Later in the century, the re-visions of Pisgah become more complex and diverse. In his fictionalization of Thomas Cooper's life-

story, Charles Kingsley gives his hero Alton Locke a visionary moment derived from both Wordsworth and Milton:

So on I went, down the broad, bright road, which seemed to beckon me forward into the unknown expanses of human life.

The world was all before me, where to choose,

and I saw it both with my eyes and my imagination, in the temper of a boy broke loose from school. My heart kept holiday. ¹²

Thomas Cooper's equivalent moments, however, are not mediated by 'literature' but by reading; he always has his head half in a book:

I commenced Caesar, and sped on well, so that by the time I had reached the third book, "De Bello Gallico," I found myself able to read page after page, with scarcely more than a glance, now and then, at the dictionary. I remember well my first triumphant feeling of this kind. I sat on Pringle Hill; it was about five in the morning, the sun shone brightly; and as I lifted up my eyes from the classic page of the great conqueror of the Gauls ... I said to myself, "I have made the greater conquest, without the aid of a living teacher, than the proudest warrior ever made - for I have conquered and entered into the possession of a new mind. ¹³

We have seen how William Hale White rewrites the 'Wordsworthian vision' to offer to his hero Mark Rutherford a landscape which is domesticated and social. Ellen and Mark strain their eyes to see the furthest point before them, but only in order to 'find it on the map'.¹⁴ Margaret Oliphant's 'prospects' are always obstructed by trompe l'oeil barriers which can only be dispensed with by writing.¹⁵ Leslie Stephen gives the curtest of nods to the convention - 'How well I remember sitting on a little grassy platform under the Riffel-Horn with Anny, Minny and Miss Huth! I began to know that my fate was fixed.' But he cannot resist the temptation to add

Yet, rather perversely, I chose to keep an engagement which I had made with Bryce (already known by his Roman Empire) and went with him to Vienna (where I met George Meredith) and Transylvania. ¹⁶

But the most radical revision is left to Annie Besant, writing in her Freethought phase:

The "world was all before us where to choose", but circumstances narrowed the choice down to Hobson's. 17

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Michael Paffard, The Unattended Moment: Excerpts from Autobiographies with Hints and Guesses (London: S. C. M. Press, 1976), p. 8.
- 2 ibid., p. 10, Paffard's emphasis.
- 3 A. O. J. Cockshut, The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), p. 181.
- 4 See for instance, Paul Delany, British Autobiographies in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); Karl J. Weintraub, 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness', Critical Inquiry, I (1975) 821-848; George Landow's Introduction to Approaches to Victorian Autobiography (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), pp. xvi-xxiv; Avrom Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England (Los Angeles and London: Univ. California Press, 1983), pp. 43-108.
- 5 Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936), p. 31.
- 6 Roger Sharrock's Introduction to his edition of John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. xxvii.
- 7 ibid., p. xxix.
- 8 J. G. Lockhart (attrib.), 'Autobiography', Quarterly Review, XXXV (December 1826), 149.
- 9 Wayne Shumaker, English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1954), p. 27.
- 10 William Hurrell Mallock, Is Life Worth Living? (London: Chatto and Windus, 1880), p. 145.
- 11 Gavin de Beer, ed., Charles Darwin and T. H. Huxley, Autobiographies (Oxford and New York: O. U. P., 1983), p. 50. The urgent need to reconcile science with God inspired many such unwonted flights of imagination, particularly from the so-called 'Scriptural Geologists'. Edmund Gosse in his Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), describes the public reception of his father's 'Omphalos theory' thus:

The theory, coarsely enough, and to my father's great indignation, was defined by a hasty press as being this - that God hid the fossils in the rocks in order to tempt geologists into infidelity. (p. 76)
- 12 John Addington Symonds, Memoirs, ed. and introd. Phyllis Grosskurth (London, etc.: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 247.
- 13 Annie Besant, An Autobiography (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), pp. 5-6.

- 14 Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography, pp. 58-59.
- 15 Alexander B. Grosart, Representative Nonconformists (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1879), p. 32.
- 16 ibid., pp. 31-33.
- 17 John Kershaw, from The Autobiography of an Eminent Lancashire Preacher, quoted in John Briggs and Ian Sellers, eds., Victorian Nonconformity (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 16-17.
- 18 John Henry Newman, Apologia pro Vita Sua, ed. Maisie Ward (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), p. 2.
- 19 loc. cit.
- 20 ibid., p. 3.
- 21 ibid., pp. 77, 62.
- 22 ibid., p. 62.
- 23 loc. cit.
- 24 loc. cit.
- 25 ibid., p. 99.
- 26 ibid., p. 160.
- 27 Harriet Martineau, Autobiography (London: Virago, 1983), Vol. I, p. 41.
- 28 ibid., Vol. I, p. 116.
- 29 ibid., Vol. II, pp. 148-49.
- 30 ibid., Vol. II, p. 173.
- 31 ibid., Vol. II, p. 182.
- 32 ibid., Vol. II, p. 194.
- 33 ibid., Vol. II, p. 173.
- 34 ibid., Vol. II, p. 186.
- 35 ibid., Vol. II, p. 206.
- 36 Symonds, Memoirs, pp. 102-4.
- 37 Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography, p. 276.
- 38 John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, Pref. John Jacob Coss (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 30.
- 39 ibid., p. 76.
- 40 ibid., pp. 93, 133.
- 41 ibid., p. 94.

- 42 loc. cit.
- 43 ibid., pp. 94, 95.
- 44 ibid., p. 99.
- 45 ibid., p. 104.
- 46 Alexander Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man, Introd. John Carswell (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), pp. 183-91; G. W. and L. A. Johnson, eds., Josephine Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir (London, etc.: Arrowsmith, 1928), pp. 65-70; Besant, An Autobiography, pp. 65-129.
- 47 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (London, etc.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904), p.230.
- 48 ibid., pp. 197, 196.
- 49 ibid., p. 234.
- 50 ibid., pp. 166-67.
- 51 ibid., p. 170.
- 52 ibid., p. 176.
- 53 ibid., p. 189.
- 54 ibid., pp. 273-74.
- 55 ibid., p. 357.
- 56 ibid., p. 7, my emphasis.
- 57 ibid., p. 296.
- 58 ibid., pp. 171-72.
- 59 John N. Morris, Versions of the Self (New York and London: Basic Books, 1966), p. 5.
- 60 ibid., p. 6.
- 61 ibid., p. 86.
- 62 ibid., p. 8.
- 63 ibid., p. 33.
- 64 Cockshut, The Art of Autobiography, p. 217.
- 65 ibid., p. 31.
- 66 ibid., p. 4.
- 67 ibid., p. 13.
- 68 ibid., p. 181.

- 69 See for instance Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (London, etc.: Hutchinson, 1987), p.73 (Davidoff and Hall's emphasis):

By the end of the eighteenth century this association of gentility with an income and style of life requiring neither mental nor manual labour was no longer acceptable to many of the middling ranks. A new claim was asserted that salvation was the mark of gentility, that an artisan's son from a rural backwater who managed to educate himself and become a minister, had as much right to that epithet as an aristocrat.

- 70 Fleishman, in his Figures of Autobiography, pp. 7-39, has categorized the various schools of autobiographical criticism as those based on ideas of truth (Hart), meaning (Pascal), convention (Lejeune, Bruss), style (Starobinski) and structure (Mehlman). I would add the feminist school, based on the idea of the inscription of gender difference in autobiography, to this list. Hereafter I will engage with these various theories and theorists only in so far as they elucidate my central concerns.

- 71 Landow, Introduction to Approaches to Victorian Autobiography, pp. xlii-xliii. Cf. John Foster, 'On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself' (1805), Letter VII of Essays in a Series of Letters, 13th ed. (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1838), p. 57:

Thus you see that in the course of a long life a man may be several moral persons, so dissimilar, that if you could find a real individual that should nearly exemplify the character in one of these stages, and another that should exemplify it in the next, and so on to the last, and then bring these several persons together into one company, which would thus be a representation of the successive states of one man, they would feel themselves a most heterogeneous party, would oppose and probably despise one another, and soon separate, not caring if they were never to meet again.

- 72 Weintraub, 'Autobiography and Historical Consciousness', p. 824.

73 Ibid., p. 825.

- 74 Jean Starobinski, 'The Style of Autobiography', in Seymour Chatman, ed., Literary Style: a Symposium (London and New York: O. U. P., 1971), p. 285.

75 ibid., p. 287.

76 ibid., p. 289.

77 ibid., p. 290.

- 78 William Dean Howells (attrib.), 'The Editor's Easy Chair', Harper's Monthly Magazine, CVIII, No. 645 (1904), 482.

79 Romans x, 8-10.

80 Psalms li, 14-17.

- 81 Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography, p. 112-13.

- 82 Howard Helsinger, 'Credence and Credibility: the Concern for Honesty in Victorian Autobiography', in Landow, ed., Approaches to Victorian Autobiography, pp. 48, 49.
- 83 John Ruskin, 'Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds', (1851) in Essays and Belles Lettres: Time and Tide and Other Writings (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1936), p. 172.
- 84 ibid., p. 175.
- 85 George Landow, William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 149.
- 86 ibid., p. 129.
- 87 Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography, p. 58.
- 88 ibid., p. 116.
- 89 Linda Peterson, Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), p. 101.
- 90 ibid., p. 94.
- 91 ibid., p. 189.
- 92 ibid., p. 193.
- 93 ibid., p. 3.
- 94 See, for example, ibid., p. 158.
- 95 ibid., p. 37.
- 96 ibid., p. 130.
- 97 ibid., p. 136.
- 98 See, for example, Janet Bathgate, Aunt Janet's Legacy to her Nieces, 3rd. ed. (Selkirk: George Lewis, 1895); Mary A. S. Barber, Bread-Winning; or the Ledger and the Lute: An Autobiography (London: William Macintosh, 1865).
- 99 Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography, p. 108.
- 100 Shumaker, English Autobiography, p. 52.

CHAPTER 1. TO THE DARK HOUSE: LESLIE STEPHEN AND THE MAUSOLEUM BOOK

- 1 Leslie Stephen, 'Autobiography', in Vol. III of his Hours in a Library, 2nd. ed. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1892), p. 241. The essay 'Autobiography' did not appear in the first edition of the collection.
- 2 ibid., p. 237.

- 3 Leslie Stephen, The Mausoleum Book, introd. Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 3-4. Hereafter page references to The Mausoleum Book will appear in the text.
- 4 ibid., p. 4, n.:
- The only living person who could say anything to the purpose at present would be F. W. Maitland. He as I always feel understands me, and I have explained my views upon this subject to him. But even he could only write a short article or 'appreciation' or a notice in a biographical dictionary. No 'life' in the ordinary sense is possible.
- 5 Letter to C. E. Norton, 13 April 1887, quoted in F. W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen (London: Duckworth and Co., 1906), p. 392.
- 6 Maitland, op. cit., p. 370.
- 7 Horatio Forbes Brown, John Addington Symonds: A Biography compiled from his Papers and Correspondence (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1903). First published in 2 Vols. (London: J.C. Nimmo, 1895).
- 8 This conflation of biography and autobiography is commonplace in nineteenth-century criticism. See, for instance, Thomas Carlyle's essay 'Biography', in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.), IV, 51-66.
- 9 James Stephen, Memoirs Written by Himself for the Use of his Children (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p.36. For a similar didactic approach see Janet Bathgate, Aunt Janet's Legacy to her Nieces, 3rd. ed. (Selkirk: George Lewis, 1895).
- 10 Virginia Woolf's portrait of Mr. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse (1927) (London, etc.: Granada, 1977), suggests that at least one of his intended audience read The Mausoleum Book as an extended plea for pity.
- 11 Noel Gilroy Annan, Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Career (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1951), Ch V. The more recent version, Leslie Stephen, The Godless Victorian (London: Wiedenfield and Nicolson, 1984), takes a broader view of the subject, emphasizing Stephen's complex relation to his family, society, and historical moment.
- 12 John Addington Symonds, Memoirs, ed. and introd. Phyllis Grosskurth (London, etc.: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 183.
- 13 Quoted by Phyllis Grosskurth in her John Addington Symonds: A Biography (London: Longman, 1964), p. 277.
- 14 For the circumstances of this suppression, see Phyllis Grosskurth's Foreword to Symonds's Memoirs, pp. 9-12
- 15 Symonds, Memoirs, p. 173.
- 16 Brown, John Addington Symonds, p. 254.
- 17 Symonds, Memoirs, p. 173.

- 18 Brown, John Addington Symonds, p. 254.
- 19 See for instance Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (London, etc.: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 108-13.
- 20 Brown, John Addington Symonds, p. 256.
- 21 Symonds, Memoirs, p. 193.
- 22 W. G. Lockett, Robert Louis Stevenson at Davos (London: Hurst and Blackett 1934), pp. 251-52.
- 23 Leon Edel, Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895-1901 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 119.
- 24 Letter quoted by Phyllis Grosskurth in her John Addington Symonds: A Biography, p. 322.
- 25 The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill, introd. Q. D. Leavis (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1974), p. 80.
- 26 ibid., p. 81.
- 27 Leslie Stephen, Some Early Impressions, Part 4, p. 565. Though published in book form in 1924, the work was first published serially from September to December in National Review, 42 (1903), 130-46, 208-24, 420-36 and 563-81. It is to this version I refer.
- 28 Stephen, 'Autobiography', pp. 238, 251.
- 29 ibid., p. 239.
- 30 ibid., p. 268.
- 31 ibid., p. 269.
- 32 ibid., pp. 237-38.
- 33 ibid., pp. 241-42.
- 34 Introduction to Leslie Stephen's The Mausoleum Book, p. xvii, and p. xxxi, n. 13.
- 35 James Olney, Metaphors of Self (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 35.
- 36 Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', MLN, 94 (1979), 919-30.
- 37 ibid., p. 927.
- 38 ibid., p. 930.
- 39 Stephen, The Mausoleum Book, p. 4.
- 40 See note 27 above.
- 41 Stephen, Some Early Impressions, Part 1, p.130.

- 42 loc. cit.
- 43 ibid., Part 1, p. 131.
- 44 loc. cit.
- 45 loc. cit.
- 46 ibid., Part 1, p. 140.
- 47 ibid., Part 1, p. 133.
- 48 See, for example, Part 1, p. 140.
- 49 Writings about the contrast between the intellectual atmospheres of Oxford and Cambridge (as exemplified by the Kingsley/Newman controversy), often seems to veil heavily-encoded debates about the nature Victorian middle-class masculinity.
- 50 Stephen, Some Early Impressions, Part 1, p. 146.
- 51 ibid., Part 3, pp. 214-5.

CHAPTER 2. THE SIX PAPER BAGS: THOMAS CARLYLE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- 1 I refer throughout to the following editions: Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.); 'Biography', Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.) IV, 51-66; Reminiscences, ed. C. E. Norton, introd. Ian Campell (London: J. M. Dent, 1972). Hereafter simple page references to Sartor Resartus and Reminiscences will appear in the body of the text.
- 2 Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company. A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 202.
- 3 Avrom Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England (Los Angeles and London: Univ. California Press, 1983), p. 135.
- 4 John Wesley, A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1821), Hymn 96, p. 96.
- 5 ibid., Hymn 282, p.271.
- 6 But see note 35 below.
- 7 To gauge Carlyle's closeness to the lineaments of traditional Protestant Dogma, compare his formulation with an account of (twentieth-century) Lutheran theology. In his New Birth: A Study in the Evangelical Doctrine of Conversion in the Protestant Fathers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1951) p. 100-01, Bernhard Citron quotes Theodor Ellwein:

In penitence the horizontal of human self-reliance and preservation ... is crossed, hurt and abolished by the vertical of the divine No.

- 8 Thomas Carlyle, History of Friedrich II. of Prussia, called Frederick the Great, (1854-65), Vol. I, pp. 1-17, in Thomas Carlyle's Works, Vol. XI (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.).
- 9 Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 51.
- 10 Alexander Pope, An Essay on Man, ed. Maynard Mack (London: Methuen; New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), Epistle II, p. 53, ll. 1-2.
- 11 Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels, trans. Thomas Carlyle (London: Chapman and Hall, 1824), II, 85.
- 12 ibid., Vol. II, p. 227.
- 13 Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 51, Carlyle's emphasis.
- 14 'Friend' Sauerteig re-appears in a very similar role in the Proem to Frederick the Great, pp. 15-17. See note 8 above.
- 15 Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 53.
- 16 ibid., p. 58.
- 17 loc. cit., Carlyle's emphasis.
- 18 ibid., p. 62, Carlyle's emphasis.
- 19 ibid., p. 63.
- 20 Thomas Carlyle, 'Boswell's Life of Johnson', Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.), IV, 67-131.
- 21 Carlyle, 'Biography', p. 51.
- 22 George Levine, 'Sartor Resartus and the Balance of Fiction', Victorian Studies, 8 (1964), 131-60.
- 23 '...even in these little things and in reflecting on little things, was I delighted with the truth...' St. Augustine's Confessions, trans., William Watts (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press; London: William Heinemann, 1968), pp. 58, 59.
- 24 John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 6.
- 25 R. S. Craig, The Making of Carlyle: an Experiment in Biographical Explication (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1908) p.424.
- 26 A. L. Le Quesne, Carlyle (Oxford, etc.: O.U.P., 1982), p.20.
- 27 John Sturrock, 'The New Model Autobiographer', New Literary History, 9 No. 1 (Autumn 1977), 59.
- 28 ibid., p. 61.

- 29 Compare Virgil's Aeneid, Book VI ll.292-4:

...and did not his wise companion warn him that these were but faint, bodiless lives, flitting under a hollow semblance of form, he had rushed upon them and vainly cleft shadows with the steel.

Virgil, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press; London: William Heinemann, 1932), Vol. I, p. 527.

- 30 For a closer inspection of Carlyle's interpretation of Kant in this respect see C. F. Harrold, Carlyle and German Thought 1819-1834 (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963), pp. 87-95.
- 31 Sturrock, op. cit., p. 60.
- 32 The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill, introd. Q. D. Leavis (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1974), p. 7.
- 33 The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.171, ll. 9-10.
- 34 Thea Holme, The Carlyles at Home (London and New York: O.U.P., 1965), pp. 41-57.
- 35 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', in Donna C. Stanton, ed., The Female Autograph (New York: Jeanine Parisier Plottel, 1984), p.10. The death of the speaking subject may be inscribed metonymically as the 'end of speaking' (as in Oliphant's Autobiography p. 150) or through some fiction d'outré tombe (as in The Autobiography and Deliverance of Mark Rutherford, introd. Basil Willey, [New York: Humanities Press; Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1969], pp.272-73). See Chapters 3 and 5 of this thesis.
- 36 Harriet Martineau, Autobiography (London: Virago, 1983), Vol. II, p.147. First published 1877.
- 37 See for instance Richard Holt Hutton's essay of 1881 for Good Words; and Andrew Lang's review of the same year for Fraser's Magazine entitled 'Mr Carlyle's Reminiscences', both quoted in Jules Paul Seigel, ed., Thomas Carlyle: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 493-512. Lang is particularly fond of dyspeptic allusions:

Let younger people, who have these Reminiscences to explain things take heart. Cakes and ale have not ceased to exist because Mr. Carlyle was dyspeptic. The sun is not abolished, nor has life at all left off being worth living, because Mr. Carlyle was put on a regimen of oatmeal porridge, and wrote books when perhaps he would have been better employed in playing golf. (pp. 508-09)

The furore bubbled on into the twentieth century. See, for instance, J. Chartres Molony, 'The Fall of an Idol: The Effects on Carlyle's Fame of His Reminiscences and Froude's Biography', Blackwood's Magazine, CCLVII (June 1945), 411-420. In other contexts, of course, Carlyle's alleged impotence has fulfilled the same bizarre metonymic function.

- 38 J. C. Molony, op. cit., p.419. However apt I might feel Molony's comments are on the characterization of Jane Welsh Carlyle, I would take issue with some of his implicit assumptions. Aside from his conviction that personal feelings can be 'too deeply involved' in a work avowedly personal, I would question the usefulness of replacing one subjectivity (Carlyle's) with another (his own). Underlying Molony's remark is an anxiety about the subjectivity of Reminiscence generally. The hidden prescription runs thus: Autobiographies are subjective because they are professedly and solely about the self. Biographical Reminiscence is about others, or other things: it should be objective. Subjectivity, in other words, should not be allowed to 'stray.' Evidently, it does. The textual power-play and trading-off between Thomas and Jane, which culminated in Carlyle's Reminiscences and the Froude biography, has been outlined by Phyllis Rose in Parallel Lives (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 239-55.
- 39 Luke xxii, 31-34.
- 40 For an account of the Carlyle's relationship with crowing cocks, see Phyllis Rose, op. cit., pp. 240-44.

CHAPTER 3. WILLIAM HALE WHITE'S 'THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD' AND 'MARK RUTHERFORD'S DELIVERANCE': A COMMONPLACE LIFE?

- 1 Mark Rutherford, Autobiography and Deliverance, introd. Basil Willey (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press; New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 8. References to this edition will be given in the text hereafter.
- 2 Quoted by Wilfred Stone in The Religion and Art of William Hale White, ("Mark Rutherford") (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, O.U.P., 1954), p. 124.
- 3 William Hale White, The Early Life of Mark Rutherford, Written by Himself (London: Humphrey Milford, O.U.P., 1913), p. 5.
- 4 E. S. Merton, 'The Personality of Mark Rutherford', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 6 (1951-52), 1.
- 5 Stone, op. cit., p. 142.
- 6 John Sturrock, 'The New Model Autobiographer', New Literary History, 9 No. 1 (Autumn 1977), 52.
- 7 John Lucas, The Literature of Change (Brighton: Harvester Press; New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1980), p.118.
- 8 See pp. 6 - 18 above.
- 9 See pp. 56 - 58 above.
- 10 William Hale White, The Early Life, pp. 61-68.
- 11 ibid., p. 61.
- 12 ibid., p. 38.

- 13 Compare Mark Rutherford's reservations in the Autobiography with Hale White's sense, in The Early Life, that orthodox accounts of spiritual history are often 'innacurately picturesque' and 'framed after the model of the journey to Damascus' (p. 57).
- 14 Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.), p. 184. Carlyle's essay 'Characteristics' (first published in the Edinburgh Review in 1831), contains his fullest account of the principle, derived from anatomy but applicable to psychology, religion and society, that 'self-contemplation ... is infallibly a symptom of disease'. See his Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.), p. 7.
- 15 John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, Preface John Jacob Coss (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 100.
- 16 loc. cit.
- 17 Basil Willey's Introduction to the Victorian Library Edition (see note 1 above), p. 15.
- 18 It should be noted that, according to the 'Editor's Note' in the first edition of Deliverance (1885), the gap in the Rutherford papers covers 'many months' rather than several years. See Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, Being the Second Part of His Autobiography (London: Humphrey Milford; O.U.P., 1936), p. v. Nevertheless, the crucial change in perspective is emphasized: Shapcott notes a loss of the 'terrible urgency' which characterized Rutherford's earlier speculations.
- 19 E. S. Merton, 'The Autobiographical Novels of Mark Rutherford', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 5 (1950-51), 207.
- 20 See for example Thomas Carter, Continuation of the Memoirs of a Working Man (London: Charles Knight, 1850); Samuel Bamford, Early Days (1849) (London: Frank Cass, 1969).
- 21 John xix, 28.
- 22 Merton, 'Autobiographical Novels', p. 206.
- 23 Stone, Religion and Art, p.8.
- 24 Catherine Furze (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 58.
- 25 Compare Charles Kingsley Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography, ed. Elizabeth A. Cripps (Oxford and New York: O.U.P., 1983), p. 31.
- 26 I shall quote from the Norton Critical Edition of The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. J. Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979). Line numbers from the 1950 version will be given in the text.

CHAPTER 4. THOMAS COOPER: THE FOREGONE CONCLUSION

- 1 The Life of Thomas Cooper, introd. John Saville (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press; New York: Humanities Press, 1971). References to this edition will be given in the text hereafter.
- 2 I borrow these terms from A. O. J. Cockshut, Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century (London: Collins, 1974), p. 20.
- 3 Compare Mark Rutherford's 'St. Paul's' fantasy discussed above (p. 141).
- 4 In his Nottingham Byron Lecture of 1969, Thomas Cooper, The Chartist: Byron and the 'Poets of the Poor' (Nottingham: Univ. Nottingham, 1970), Philip Collins traced the influence of Byron on Cooper's poetic development.
- 5 See pp. 190-192 above.
- 6 Witness, for instance, the uneasy combination of squeamishness and real concern in Martyn's attitude to the women in his pastoral care - and the implicit insult to his correspondent:

Certainly there is infinitely better discipline in the Romish Church than in ours, and if ever I be the pastor of Native Christians, I should endeavour to govern with equal strictness. My female hearers do not give me half such encouragement as yours, probably because I do not take such pains with them; yet there is no trouble I would spare, if I knew how to reach their minds. (Letter to Rev. D. Corrie, July 11, 1808).
- Quoted in John Sargent, Jun. Memoirs of Rev. Henry Martyn (Paisley: Paisley Free Library and Museum, 1819), p. 302. My impression of Martyn's personality is confirmed by John William Kaye, in his Christianity in India: An Historical Narrative (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859) pp. 187-88.
- 7 James Sigston, Memoir of the Venerable William Bramwell, lately a Wesleyan Methodist Itinerant Preacher (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co.; Leeds: J. Y. Knight, n.d.), pp. 11-12.
- 8 The Experience and Spiritual Letters of Mrs Hester Ann Rogers, with a Sermon preached on the Occasion of her Death by the Rev. Thomas Coke (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1857), p.69.
- 9 ibid., p. 71.
- 10 Cooper's claim is backed up by R. E. Davies in his Methodism (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 104-5.
- 11 Sigston, Bramwell, p. 215.
- 12 John iii, 4-5.
- 13 Wayne Shumaker, English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1954), p. 46.

- 14 Bernard Sharratt, Reading Relations: Structures of Literary Production (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 252.
- 15 'Interesting Account of the Rev. Samuel Lee', in Drew's Imperial Magazine; or Compendium of Religious, Moral, and Philosophical Knowledge, I (1819), 178-90.
- 16 The Remains of Henry Kirke White, with and Account of his Life by Robert Southey, 2 Vols. (London: Vernor, Hood and Sharpe etc., 1811).
- 17 ibid., Vol. I, p. 58.
- 18 ibid., Vol. I, pp. 56-57.
- 19 G. J. Holyoake, Thomas Cooper Delineated as Convert and Controversialist: A Companion to his Missionary Wanderings (London: Holyoake and Co., 1861).
- 20 See, for instance, Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography, ed. E. A. Cripps (Oxford and New York: O. U. P., 1983), p. 324.
- 21 ibid., p. 22. See also pp. 94, 288, etc. Close inspection reveals Kingsley's rather cavalier attitude to chronology in these biographical references. In fact Cooper admitted in his Life that his period as a shoemaker was short: 1820-27. The opening of Chapter XXVII of Alton Locke (p. 288) has Locke revelling in his new-found literary notoriety, and in comparisons between himself and the 'author of the Purgatory of Suicides - months before the poem was actually published (in August 1845).
- 22 Louis Cazamian, Kingsley et Thomas Cooper: Étude sur une Source d'"Alton Locke" (Paris: Société Nouvelle de Librairie et D'Édition, 1903).
- 23 Letter to J. M. Ludlow, quoted in Cazamian, Kingsley et Thomas Cooper, p. 9.
- 24 ibid., pp. 17-21.
- 25 Collins, Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, p. 4. See also Elspeth Huxley ed., The Kingsleys: A Biographical Anthology (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1973), p. 39; Robert Bernard Martin, The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 113.
- 26 Kingsley, Alton Locke, p. 84.
- 27 ibid., p. 7.
- 28 ibid., p. 350.
- 29 ibid., pp. 356-57.
- 30 ibid., p. 387.
- 31 ibid., p. 362.
- 32 ibid., p. 365.

- 33 Holyoake, Thomas Cooper delineated as Convert, pp. 3-4.
- 34 ibid., p. 8.
- 35 Cooper was to make up for this deficiency in the grouchily moralizing and opinionated Thoughts at Fourscore and Earlier: A Medley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885).
- 36 The phrase comes from John Saville's Introduction to the Victorian Library Edition (see note 1 above), p. 15.
- 37 Louis Cazamian, The Social Novel in England 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley (1903), trans. Martin Fido (London, etc.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 268-69.
- 38 Kingsley, Alton Locke, p. 378.

CHAPTER 5. MARGARET OLIPHANT: THE IMPOSSIBLE LIFE

- 1 MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 123. The manuscript of Margaret Oliphant's Autobiography is held in the National Library of Scotland, Acq. 5793.9. Vol. II is unpaginated.
- 2 Linda Peterson, 'Audience and the Autobiographer's Art: An Approach to the Autobiography of Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant', in George Landow, ed. Approaches to Victorian Autobiography (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), p. 169. The model is named after Browning's Andrea del Sarto, with whom Oliphant compares herself.
- 3 Laurie Langbauer, Foreword to The Autobiography of Mrs Oliphant (Chicago and London: Univ. Chicago Press, 1988), p. vi.
- 4 ibid., p. xi.
- 5 The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill, introd. Q. D. Leavis (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1974), p. 75, my emphasis. References to this edition will be given in the text hereafter wherever appropriate.
- 6 Langbauer, op. cit., p. xii.
- 7 Oliphant, MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 23.
- 8 ibid., Vol. I, p. 191.
- 9 Quoted in Merryn Williams, Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 183.
- 10 See, for instance, Oliphant, Autobiography and Letters, pp. 64-5.
- 11 Annie was Mrs Harry Coghurst, the editor of the Autobiography and Letters. Denny, or Janet Mary Oliphant, was Margaret Oliphant's niece and adopted daughter. In a phrase omitted from p. 75 of the published work, Margaret Oliphant referred to her Autobiography thus:
 Well! but if it does make poor Denny more comfortable and independent, what does it matter? (MS Autobiography Vol. II)
- 12 MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 22.

- 13 See pp. 52 - 54 above.
- 14 See for instance, Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', in Moira Monteith, ed., Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), p. 60.
- 15 See Estelle C. Jelinek's Introduction to Jelinek, ed., Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (London, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), p. 17.
- 16 Suzanne Juhasz, 'Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millett's Flying and Sita; Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior', in Jelinek ed., op. cit., pp. 223-24.
- 17 MS Autobiography, I, p. 73; see also Autobiography and Letters, p. 27.
- 18 MS Autobiography, I, p. 14.
- 19 ibid., I, p. 11.
- 20 Margaret Oliphant (attrib.), 'Tennyson', in Blackwood's Magazine, CLII, No. DCCCCXXV (1892), 754.
- 21 I follow the text of In Memoriam as given in Alfred Tennyson, The Poems, Christopher Ricks, ed. (London and Harlow: Longmans Green and Co., 1969). Elegy numbers will be given in the text.
- 22 Letter to Miss Blackwood, May 15, 1864. See Oliphant, Autobiography and Letters, p. 193.
- 23 MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 12.
- 24 ibid., Vol. I, p. 188.
- 25 ibid., Vol. I, pp. 118-19.
- 26 Williams, Margaret Oliphant, p. 125.
- 27 Cf. A. O. J. Cockshut's account, in The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), of Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1821):
- it may be said that for De Quincey, a true and extreme romantic, the idea of unattainability was itself attractive, and anything he could reach by definition disappointing. (p. 156).
- 28 Oliphant, 'Tennyson', p. 755.
- 29 Williams, op. cit., p. 131.
- 30 Margaret Oliphant (attrib.), 'The Innermost Room', in Blackwood's Magazine, CI, No. DCXVII (1867) 338-40.
- 31 Margaret Oliphant (attrib.), 'The Secret Chamber', in Blackwood's Magazine, CXX. No. DCCXXXIV (1876), 709-29.

- 32 Margaret Oliphant, 'The Open Door', p. 314. First published in Blackwood's Magazine (1882). Republished in Ghosts and Marvels: A Selection of Uncanny Tales from Daniel Defoe to Algernon Blackwood, ed. V. H. Collins, introd. M. R. James (London, etc.: Humphrey Milford, O. U. P., 1924), pp. 267-328.
- 33 ibid., p. 326.
- 34 MS Autobiography, Vol. II. Cf. Autobiography and Letters, pp. 96-97.
- 35 Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982) pp. 106, 105.
- 36 Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past', in Jeanne Schulkind, ed., Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings (Sussex: The Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 64-137.
- 37 ibid., p. 75.
- 38 ibid., p. 85.
- 39 ibid., p. 122.
- 40 ibid., p. 67.
- 41 loc. cit.
- 42 loc. cit.
- 43 ibid., p. 122.
- 44 For a useful elaboration of this theory of women's writing, see Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self', pp. 59-60.

It is necessary to take into account the fact that the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged by the nature of the activity itself in re-writing the stories that already exist about her since by seeking to publicize herself she is violating an important cultural construction of her femininity as passive or hidden. She is resisting or changing what is known about her. Her place within culture, the place from which she writes, is produced by difference and produces difference. The myth of the self which recent theorists have questioned may not be present for her in the same way; it is more difficult for her to believe in a self that can exist before writing, a self that is unified and continuous. Autobiography may selfconsciously exist for her as an alternative place of identification. This means that there may be a greater formal awareness in her writing, an emphasis on the self-reflexiveness of writing, the idea of the self as written. In writing the self a woman is also reaching into writing and her story will be more obviously informed by a dynamics of self-becoming. But there is no point of arrival; she can neither transcend herself nor attain to some authentic fullness of being. It is a dynamic which is shadowed by loss, which exists between loss, absence and what might be. As we have seen in psychoanalytic terms the woman's presence encircles an absence and her writing, too, exists at a threshold referring back in a constant process of coming into being.

- 45 MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 203.
- 46 ibid., p. 193.
- 47 See Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana, Croom Helm, 1976), p. 137:
- Industry as a human quality rather than as an institution, while continuing to be used, was on the whole subordinate after this period [the 1840s] and survives mainly in different kinds of patronizing reference.
- 48 The Journal of Sir Walter Scott, from the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890), Vol. II, p. 203.
- 49 MS Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 124.

CHAPTER 6. WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE SELF AT STAKE?

- 1 See, for example, Linda Anderson, 'At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography', in Moira Monteith, ed., Women's Writing: A Challenge to Theory (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 54-71; Suzanne Juhasz, 'Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millett's Flying and Sita; Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior', in Estelle C. Jelinek, ed. Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (London, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 221-37.
- 2 See, for example, Domna C. Stanton 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', in Stanton, ed., The Female Autograph (New York: Jeanine Parisier Plottel, 1984), pp. 5-22; Germaine Brée, 'Autogynography', Southern Review, 22, No. 2 (1986), 223-30; Estelle C. Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: from Antiquity to the Present (Boston: Twayne, 1986); Barbara Johnson, 'My Monster/ Myself', in her A World of Difference (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 144-54.
- 3 Jelinek, Tradition of Women's Autobiography, passim.
- 4 ibid., pp. 52-53.
- 5 Stanton, 'Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?', p. 16.
- 6 See pp. 64 -66 above.
- 7 See p. 192 above and note.
- 8 Barbara Johnson's answer to this question in 'My Monster/Myself' lies in what she sees as a profound interrelation between the three issues of autobiography, the woman-writer and mothering. She argues that the repressed contradictions of feminine creativity and self-hood are expressed autobiographically in the trope of mother-murder. It is interesting to note that three of the women's autobiographies discussed in this thesis are deeply concerned with the death of the mother. Margaret Oliphant's mother is sacrificed to the success of her marriage, Annie Besant's to religious freedom, and Mary Barber's to the beginning of the narrative itself. See The Autobiography and Letters of

- Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill, introd. Q. D. Leavis (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 31-35; Annie Besant, An Autobiography (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), pp. 117-29; Mary A. S. Barber, Bread-Winning; or the Ledger and the Lute: An Autobiography (London: William Macintosh, 1865), pp. 1-6.
- 9 Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: the Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 10; Philippe Lejeune, Le Pacte Autobiographique (Paris: Seuil, 1975), passim.
- 10 Besant, An Autobiography, p. 22. References to An Autobiography will be given in the text hereafter.
- 11 See pp. 69 - 70 above.
- 12 Annie Besant, Autobiographical Sketches (London: Freethought Publishing Co., 1885), p. 85.
- 13 In this respect it is worth noting in passing that, in the texts under consideration hitherto, the order of composition is reversed along gender lines. Carlyle, Stephen, Rutherford and Cooper become more anecdotal and reminiscent in their later autobiographical writings, whereas Annie Besant, and in a different way Margaret Oliphant, work through the episodic mode and strive towards the standard format in later efforts.
- 14 Besant, Autobiographical Sketches, p. 36.
- 15 George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. W. J. Harvey (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 30.
- 16 ibid., p. 25.
- 17 The autobiographical origins of this legend are even more striking in their relationship to the romance of martyrdom as we encounter it in Besant. Theresa herself, in her own Life, explains
- We used to read the lives of Saints together; and, when I read of the martyrdoms suffered by saintly women for God's sake, I used to think they had purchased the fruition of God very cheaply; and I had a keen desire to die as they had done...
- In Theresa's version, the planned expedition to be beheaded by the Moors remains a tantalizing daydream rather than a cute cameo of childish enterprise. See Vol. I of Peers E. Allison, ed. and trans., The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), p. 11.
- 18 Marina Warner, Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 263.
- 19 Margaret Oliphant, Jeanne D'Arc: Her Life and Death (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), p. 406.
- 20 Warner, op. cit., p. 266.

- 21 Thomas De Quincey, 'Joan of Arc', in Vol. 5 of David Masson, ed., Collected Writings (London: A. and C. Black, 1897), pp. 384 - 416.
- 22 ibid., p. 407.
- 23 ibid., pp. 407-8.
- 24 ibid., p. 408.
- 25 See note 8 above.
- 26 Barber, Breadwinning, p. 30.
- 27 ibid., p. 31.
- 28 ibid., p. 37.
- 29 ibid., p. 66.
- 30 ibid., p. 125.
- 31 Harriet Martineau, Autobiography (London: Virago, 1983), Vol. II, pp. 148-49.
- 32 Tierl Thompson, ed., Dear Girl: The Diaries and Letters of Two Working Women 1897-1917 (London: Women's Press, 1987), p.47.
- 33 ibid., p. 136.
- 34 Later examples might include Rosemary Manning's autobiography of a failed suicide A Time and a Time: an Autobiography (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1986); or Marguerite Duras' fictionalized autobiography The Lover, in which the narrator states from the outset that 'Very early in my life it was too late.' Trans. Barbara Bray (London: Fontana, 1987), p. 7.
- 35 Avrom Fleishman, Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England (Los Angeles and London: Univ. California Press, 1983), p. 34.

AFTERWORD

- 1 In Memoriam XXXVIII in Alfred Tennyson, The Poems, Christopher Ricks, ed. (London and Harlow: Longmans Green and Co., 1969).
- 2 I quote from the 1850 version in The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850, ed. J. Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979), Bk. I, ll. 15-19.
- 3 John Milton, Paradise Lost, Alastair Fowler ed. (London: Longman, 1970), Bk. XII, ll. 646-49.
- 4 Wordsworth, op. cit., Bk. I, ll. 636-39.
- 5 ibid., Bk. XIV, ll. 381-384.

- 6 Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Ulysses to Penelope: Victorian Experiments in Autobiography', in George Landow, ed. Approaches to Victorian Autobiography (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), p. 7.
- 7 ibid., p. 4.
- 8 loc. cit.
- 9 Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p.112.
- 10 Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh (London: Chapman and Hall, n. d.), p. 151.
- 11 ibid., p. 180.
- 12 Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography, ed. E. A. Cripps (Oxford and New York: O. U. P., 1983), p. 116.
- 13 The Life of Thomas Cooper, introd. John Saville (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press; New York: Humanities Press, 1971) pp. 59-60. See also, pp. 61, 63, etc.
- 14 Mark Rutherford, Autobiography and Deliverance, introd. Basil Willey (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press; New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 272.
- 15 The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, ed. Mrs. Harry Coghill, introd. Q. D. Leavis (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 126-28, etc.
- 16 Leslie Stephen, The Mausoleum Book, introd. Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 11.
- 17 Annie Besant, Autobiographical Sketches (London: Freethought Publishing Co., 1885), p. 75.

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