

THE CHALLENGE OF THE IMAGE : READINGS IN THE
CRISIS OF AUTO(BIO)GRAPHICAL SELF-REPRESENTATION
: [WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ROUSSEAU, VALÉRY
AND BARTHES]

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The Challenge of the Image:
Readings in the Crisis of Auto(bio)graphical
Self-Representation.

PhD THESIS by Anna Myatt

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the 'challenge of the image' to self-perception and a central sense of selfhood. It suggests that, as a result of the trigger provided by this challenge, new intuitions of selfhood and new forms of representation have been developed in auto(bio)graphical writing. The dynamic reciprocity of challenge and response is studied in three strategically chosen authors, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Paul Valéry and Roland Barthes, whose works span over more than three centuries and who allow a complete cycle of ideas on the self and the possibilities of self-representation to be explored in the perspective of the generating mechanism identified.

The increasing reflexivity of Western consciousness as exemplified by each of these authors, is seen to engender by this means new and increasingly subtle forms of self-representation in order to convey adequately a progressively complexified view of the subject or self.

In following the emergence and development of auto(bio)graphy in this way, the thesis contributes to an ongoing diagnosis of the nature and origin of a contemporary crisis in auto(bio)graphy, a crisis in which the relation between selfhood and its representational forms and language has been placed under increasing scrutiny or suspicion.

It is argued here that there can be no simple expulsion of the subject from the domain of auto(bio)graphy. The challenge of the image suggests, on the contrary, that it is precisely the sense of a central 'I', however elusive and irreducible to theory this may be, which ultimately still provides the impetus for new and innovative auto(bio)graphical production.

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Introduction

1) What is the challenge of the image?

In *La Chambre Claire* (1980), Barthes writes:

Posant devant l'objectif (je veux dire: me sachant poser, même fugitivement), je n'en risque pas tant (du moins pour l'heure). Sans doute c'est métaphoriquement que je tiens mon existence du photographe. Mais cette dépendance à beau être imaginaire (et du plus pur Imaginaire), je la vis dans l'angoisse d'une filiation incertaine: une image - mon image - va naître: va-t-on m'accoucher d'un individu antipathique ou d'un type 'bien'? Si je pouvais 'sortir' sur le papier comme sur une toile classique, doué d'un air noble, pensif, intelligent etc[...]. Mais comme ce que je voudrais que l'on capte, c'est une texture morale fine, et non une mimique, et comme la photographie est peu subtile, sauf chez les très grands portraitistes, je ne sais comment agir de l'intérieur sur ma peau[...] je me prête au jeu social, je pose, je le sais, je veux que vous le sachiez, mais ce supplément de message ne doit altérer en rien (à vrai dire quadrature du cercle) l'essence précieuse de mon individu; ce que je suis, en dehors de toute effigie.¹

The anxiety Barthes expresses in this analysis of his feelings on being photographed will be familiar to many. Even before it exists, the photograph raises questions about the subject's relation to his/her image: 'What will I look like?', 'What judgements will be made about me on the basis of the photograph?' - 'Who or what will it turn me into?' are all questions which are likely to arise for any subject being photographed, as they do for Barthes. The problem is that, like many of us, Barthes

¹ Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes* vol. III ed., Éric Marty, (Paris: Seuil, 1995), pp.1115-6.

would ideally like the photograph to represent *him* - but what exactly is meant by this - who is this *him* and how can it be represented?

These questions concerning the nature of the self/subject and its relation to any representation of it will be at the heart of our discussion here. The image is always a challenge to the subject because it provokes the kinds of questions we have raised and to which there appear to be no clear or immediate answers.

Very often reactions to an image of oneself are of the type: 'Do I really look like that!' or 'That's not me!', involving an immediate distancing of the subject from its objective representation - either because we feel that the photograph does not do us justice, that it is not *like* us, or conversely, that we have been over-flattered by the image, that it presents us in a light in which we feel unfamiliar. In either case, the reaction provoked by the image takes the form of a negative identification. As well as the inevitable feeling of loss of control at having become a public object and being able to see ourselves as others see us, there is a keen sense of betrayal by the image. It is our purpose in this thesis to explore the relationship between the subject and its representation in images, and to seek an understanding of what it is that leads to these types of reaction to images.

2) The crisis of contemporary autobiography: the challenging image.

It will be our contention here that this 'challenge of the image' and the questions concerning the nature of the subject, the relation between the subject and its representation, and the possibilities for self-representation it provokes, are at the heart of the crisis which exists in the field of contemporary autobiography. The movement of increasing Western critical reflexivity² which has dominated not only discussions of autobiography but many other areas of the human sciences, has focused on precisely those questions which the challenge of the image raises, and has led to a situation in which the very foundations of the genre are being put under growing

² See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Taylor traces the movement of radical reflexivity which has informed Western perceptions of identity since Descartes.

scrutiny, leading some to view autobiography as an endangered species which will not survive the present onslaught.³

Symptomatic of the increasing suspicion of the relation between the subject and its representation in autobiography have been the types of discussions which have dominated autobiographical criticism over the past twenty years. Critics of autobiography have particularly focused their attention since the mid-1970s on the role of 'creativity' in autobiography.

An inevitable consequence of this highlighting of these 'creative' aspects of autobiography has been a change in the view of the relation between the self writing the autobiography and the written subject of the autobiographical work. If creativity is to be seen as an integral part of the writing process, no longer can the autobiography be seen as a simple or transparent translation of self into writing. The relation has obviously become more complex with the growing awareness of the variety of factors involved in writing autobiography. Autobiographical theory has been provided with a new focus - the elucidation of the now increasingly complex relation between the textual subject and the referent of autobiography.

There is no doubt that concern with this relation between textual subject and referent has always been at the forefront of the autobiographer's mind, a view expressed by Montaigne when he commented on the ability of the work to create him as much as he was able to create the work itself.⁴ This concern with the representative possibilities of autobiography became the overriding concern of autobiographical theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and focused largely upon the aspects of written autobiography which seemed to inevitably entail a distortion of the autobiographical self during the writing process.

Three aspects of autobiography dominated these discussions of autobiography: namely the instability of memory, the seemingly artificial imposition of narrative and selection of events in autobiography, and the recognition of autobiography as a public act with the consequent effects of such public self-presentation. Theorists of

³ See for example Michael Sprinkler, 'Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton University Press, 1980), James Olney ed., 341-342, and Richard White, 'Autobiography against Itself', *Philosophy Today* 35 (1991), 291-303.

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, 'Je n'ai plus fait mon livre que mon livre m'a fait' (II. xviii), quoted in C. Taylor, p.183.

autobiography attempted to examine the influence of these 'creative' aspects of written autobiographical representation which appeared to subvert the attainment of any kind of simple translation of self into writing.

The 'copy' or 'representative' view of memory, inherited from Plato and Aristotle and which persisted in a variety of forms up until the middle of this century,⁵ has, over the past three decades, come under sustained attack from a number of academic disciplines, but most noticeably due to the research carried out in philosophy and psychology.⁶

What has come to replace the 'wax imprint' or representative view is one which recognises more fully the plastic nature of memory, the influence of present consciousness on recall of the past, and the proximity of memory to that other important mental faculty, the imagination. Thus in many present-day theories of memory, a 'reconstructive' view is put forward, in which recollections are seen as being reconstructed both from traces of the past and aspects of present consciousness.

Of course, for the autobiographer this has always been the case, for s/he has always had to negotiate an uncomfortable position between the acknowledgement of the fallibility of memory and the fundamental belief that memories are essentially correct,⁷ as Yeats fully recognised when he wrote: 'I have changed nothing to my

⁵ The 'representative' or 'copy' theory of memory has a long tradition in Western philosophy. Versions of it are to be found in Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and, in this century, Russell and James. The discussions arising from this view of memory have tended to centre around the capacity to distinguish memories from other mental phenomena such as perceptions and imaginings, a distinction which has usually been construed in terms of varying degrees of 'vivacity' (Hume) or 'warmth' (James). Much attention has also focused on the epistemological questions such a theory inevitably raises.

⁶ For a summary of the development of Western philosophical views of memory see Mary Warnock *Memory* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987). The essays in the collection edited by David Rubin, *Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) are indicative of the important advances which have been made in psychology and sociology, along with Rubin's recent work, *Remembering Our Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Ulric Neisser and Eugene Winograd's *Remembering Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) also includes much recent research material on memory in the field of psychology. In particular, experiments by E. Loftus and G. Loftus have strengthened the view that recall in memory is strongly influenced by the present state of consciousness and the reasons for recall; for discussion of these see Donald Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 91.

⁷ Ulric Neisser, 'Nested Structure in Autobiographical Memory', in D. Rubin, ed., pp. 71-81, proposes a view of memory in which details of events in the past are 'nested' within one another so that memories recovered can be more or less detailed as required, in much the same way as a zoom lens homes in on the portion of the view desired. This view supports the claim that personal memories are fundamentally accurate, a particularly important point to hold onto in the wake of the recent scepticism concerning autobiographical memories which has arisen due to claims of 'false memory syndrome'.

knowledge and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge'.⁸ However, it is only in recent years that the 'creative' aspects of memory have been fully exposed and critically discussed in the field of autobiography.

Those arguing for the recognition of creativity in autobiography also gained support from a perhaps surprising source. Recent philosophers of history, in particular Hayden White and Louis Mink,⁹ have argued extensively that the construction of both historical and autobiographical narratives inevitably involves the artificial imposition of a narrative framework which can only serve to distort the 'truth' of the past potentially available to memory. Mink writes: 'Life has no beginnings, middles and ends[...]. Narrative qualities are transferred from art to life'.¹⁰

Although this theory has been contested in recent years by those who see narrative arrangement of events as very much part of the way in which we experience events in the external world, and have argued that 'stories are lived before they are told - except in fiction',¹¹ the dominant view remains that narrative construction, inevitably, to a certain extent, falsifies actual experience, thus serving to undermine the view that either history or autobiography can perform a faithful representation of past events.

Narratives, it is argued, are not aspects of the events themselves, but are constructions retrospectively employed in order to place events in coherent succession, and, thereby alter the configuration of a past event and confer new meanings upon it. A staunch defender of this view has been John Sturrock who has argued that in the written narrative, events are placed in sequence which did not occur in this order, and, that in the reading of the narrative, the reader is led to form connections between events so that 'temporal sequences are effortlessly raised into

⁸ W.B. Yeats, Preface to *The Autobiography of W.B. Yeats*, quoted in Francis, R. Hart, 'Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography', *New Literary History* 1 (1970), 485-511, (p. 488).

⁹ See Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 5-27 and 'Historical Text as Artifact', in R.H. Canary and H. Kozicki eds., *The Writing of History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), also Louis Mink, 'History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension' *New Literary History* 1 (1970), 541-558 and 'Narrative as a Form of Cognitive Instrument', in R.H. Canary and H. Kozicki eds.

¹⁰ Mink, 'History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension', pp. 557-8.

¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 212.

causal ones',¹² thus creating meanings within the text which bear no relation to lived experience.

The chronological narrative, the most frequently encountered form of narrative in autobiographical texts, the 'most familiar received model of autobiographical representation',¹³ as one critic refers to it, which has turned the autobiographer into the 'petit bonhomme de calendrier',¹⁴ has, in particular, been subjected to constant criticism for its distorting effects on the way a life is lived and remembered.¹⁵

Creativity has also been recognised in autobiography in a third way due to the highlighting, in the second half of the twentieth century, of the public nature of the autobiographical act.¹⁶ Thus, there has been a tendency to privilege a view of the writing of autobiography as the giving of a public statement, rather than as the result of private introspection. This new recognition owes much to the ideas put forward by Erving Goffman in his highly influential work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1955), a work which discussed and illustrated the extent to which one's public persona could be managed so as to produce the desired effect upon an audience.

The rise of interest in the public nature of autobiography has led to increased cynicism amongst some critics who argue that the possibility of autobiographical truth must be thrown into question if the autobiography can be considered the careful construction of a desired self-image which is intended to wilfully mislead the public audience. Other, perhaps less cynical commentators, have concluded, as Mandel does, that no autobiographical presentation can cover all the aspects of the person, so that the autobiographer is forced to choose 'one aspect of his total personality to stand for the complex whole'.¹⁷ What both these ideas draws into focus, however, is the 'role-

¹² John Sturrock, 'The New Model Autobiographer', *New Literary History* 9, (1977), 51-63, (p.54).

¹³ P.J Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 32.

¹⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.197.

¹⁵ For critical discussion of the chronological narrative in autobiography see Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, pp.197-203, and John Sturrock, *ibid.*, p.54

¹⁶ The notion of autobiographical writing being an *act* is, in itself, a divergence from the 'traditional' view of the autobiography as expression of the inner and private self, which gained credence during the eighteenth century in particular and the view of autobiography as the re-uniting of a lost or fragmented self which can be found, for example, in Augustine's *Confessions* or Wordsworth's *The Prelude*.

¹⁷ Barrett J. Mandel 'The Autobiographer's Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 27 (1968), 215-226, (p.223).

playing' aspect of autobiography, thus further damaging any claims to 'truth' the genre had made.

The increased attention in this area has, in particular, brought into relief the ways in which the author is able to manipulate his/her image in the autobiography, for example by openly addressing the reader, but also in less obvious ways through the selection of events to be included, the tone of the work, the vocabulary and the narrative structure, which all contribute greatly to the final representation given of the autobiographer.¹⁸

It is unsurprising that, as a result of the recognition of the three areas of creativity in autobiography we have outlined, much recent research work by critics of autobiography has turned towards the search for some stable delineation of the position held by autobiography, particularly in regard to those disciplines seen as 'closest' to it, fiction and history.¹⁹ Whilst it is acknowledged that history benefits from a much more 'objective' outlook than autobiography, much of the emphasis in autobiography has still been with giving a 'true' account, albeit in some obvious respects, a subjective one, of the past of the individual autobiographer concerned.

Yet as an inevitable consequence of the increasing awareness of the creative input of the autobiographer, it is in the attempt to formulate a distinction between autobiography and fictional writing that debate has been particularly fierce. There has been a noticeable shift in recent 'definitions' of autobiography away from the constraints of truth and historical veracity and towards the embracing of autobiography as a highly subjective, and often creative act. Even in Lejeune's early definition of autobiography in the ground-breaking *Le Pacte Autobiographique*

¹⁸ Again, the manipulation of image in autobiography is not a new idea. Rousseau's complaint against Montaigne's *Essais* was that the author had only portrayed himself in a favourable light to his readers.

¹⁹ Leigh Gilmore, 'The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre', in Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, Gerald Peters, eds., *Autobiography and Post-Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), writes: 'autobiography has often been seen as insufficiently objective because the eye witnesses may be simultaneously the most sought after and the most suspect interpreter of events. At the same time autobiography has been spurned as insufficiently subjective (or imaginative) because it relies too much on the constraints of the real to be taken as art[...]. Autobiography has fallen outside both fiction and history', p.6. Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) comments that: 'the work of some of the most influential North American autobiographical critics in the second half of the twentieth century[...] is dominated by the project of "rescuing" autobiography from incorporation into history and history-writing, and establishing it as an essentially "literary" act', p.181.

(1975), emphasis was placed on sincerity of intent rather than on autobiography as a truth-conveyor. The adherence of autobiography to the form set by biography and the unwillingness to give credence to the role of creative imagination in autobiography has been lamented by some recent critics such as Sturrock who writes:

The peculiarity of the genre of autobiography is that the untruths it tells may be as rich, or richer, in significance than the truths[...]. It would do autobiography, I believe, 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.²⁰

For many critics, following Lejeune's early work, the existence of the 'pact' made, either implicitly or explicitly, guarantees that the work be read as autobiography rather than fiction and forms the essential distinction between the two. As Paul John Eakin states: 'One could conflate autobiography with other forms of fiction only by wilfully ignoring the autobiographer's explicit posture *as autobiographer* in the text'.²¹ Mandel, also in defence of the explicit 'pact' mode of recognising autobiography, vents his frustration by taking issue with critics who, by stressing the fictional nature of autobiography, 'have been missing in their zeal to deal with the "knotty philosophic and literary questions"', the fact that fiction and autobiography are distinct, which Mandel refers to as 'this simple fact *every reader knows*'!²²

Yet, however convenient this may seem, such a way of distinguishing fiction and autobiography is rendered void by those who have 'played' with the pact, provocatively conflating the criteria upon which the distinction rests. Hemingway, for example, writes: 'If the reader prefers this book may be regarded as fiction',²³ and Serge Doubrovsky call his work *Le Livre Brisé* (1989), an 'autofiction'. These authors

²⁰ Sturrock, p.52. The use of narrative techniques and research devices pertaining to history and biography has been also been criticised by others, see, for example, Christine Downing, 'Re-visioning Autobiography: The Bequest of Jung and Freud', *Soundings* 60, (1977), 210-228.

²¹ P.J.Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, p.4.

²² Barrett J. Mandel, 'Full of Life Now', in J. Olney ed., *Autobiography*, pp. 53-4, also quoted in Candice Lang, 'Autobiography in the Aftermath of Romanticism', *Diacritics* 12 (1982), 2-16, (p. 8).

²³ Ernest Hemingway, in his Preface to *A Movable Feast* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964).

raise questions concerning the validity of such a pact and how any reader is to know if the pact itself is genuine and not a fictional invention of the author.

The questioning of the relation between the subject and its representation in autobiography which has led to a recognition of the complexity of this relation and has given rise to the types of discussions of the role of creativity in autobiography we have outlined, has also paved the way for more extreme forms of critical reflection in the field. Thus the questioning of the relation between representation and referent which burgeoned into attention to the role of creativity in autobiography, and to the increasing acknowledgement that the subject within the autobiographical work was, to a large extent, a fictional figure, also led to increasing critical scepticism over the validity and status of the notion of a subject/self of autobiography which any autobiography could be said to refer or represent.

Thus alongside the view that the subject within autobiography should be seen as a fictional construct of the autobiographical process, there emerged a far more radical view of the disjunction between the self of autobiography and its textual embodiment. This view, pioneered largely in the writings of Paul de Man and following on from the structuralist movement of the late 1960s, claimed not only that the subject of autobiography was a fictional construct but that there was no referent beyond the autobiographical work itself. De Man, in his influential article 'Autobiography as De-facement' wrote:

We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life[...] Does the referent determine the figure or is it the other way round: is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a referent at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity?²⁴

²⁴ Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979), 919-930, (p. 920-1). For a more recent expression of this view see Jonathan Loesberg, 'Autobiography as Genre, Act of Consciousness, Text', *Prose Studies* 4 (1981), 169-85.

This new line of questioning has struck at the very roots of autobiography and threatened its existence as a recognisable and valid writing genre. For if autobiography has traditionally been seen as the representation of the self/subject, what does autobiography become once the notion of the self is exploded and rejected as being a fictional construct, an illusion which is simply the product of our own autobiographical discourse and representations? Autobiography must now be seen, according to this view, as a play of images but one in which there is no longer any source or origin of these reflections. As Sidonie Smith writes, the self is dissolved into a 'pile of rubble' from which it seems unable to be resurrected:

Site of fractures, splittings, maskings, dislocations, vulnerabilities, absences, and subjections of all kinds, the architecture of selfhood seems to have collapsed into a pile of twentieth-century rubble[...]. With the metaphysical self problematized, the very grounds of representation soften, break apart, and disperse.²⁵

Contemporary study of autobiography, as we have presented it, can therefore be seen to be dominated by questions arising from the complex relation between the sense of self which is to be represented autobiographically and the representation in writing which in fact results from autobiographical production. Suspicion of the epistemological assumptions upon which any simple relation between these two seemed to be based, has led to a crisis in contemporary theory of autobiography which has placed in jeopardy the entire autobiographical enterprise and has gnawed away at the foundations upon which the genre of autobiography has rested.

It is this concern with the representation of the self in autobiography, of both its potential and limitations, which provides the context for our thesis. The present era of suspicion surrounding autobiographical representation is one which can be seen in terms of a challenge of the image and of attempting to understand and explore the relation between the self and its written representation.

²⁵ Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 57.

3) Rousseau, Valéry and Barthes - Three witnesses and actors in the unfolding crisis of autobiography.

Our project here is to explore the origin and nature of the contemporary crisis of autobiography as being one of the challenge of the image and of the relation between the self and textual subject of autobiography. The three authors we focus on have been chosen because they each mark a new point in the unfolding crisis and are both witnesses to this crisis and actors in it. Through the work of these three writers the increasingly reflexive nature of autobiographical practice, in line with the reflexivity which has come to dominate Western consciousness and criticism, will be foregrounded.

The thesis therefore traces the increasing epistemological scepticism surrounding the image as representation of the self, demonstrating the way in which each of our three authors contributes to this growing suspicion of the relation between self and image and takes it up within his own work. Whilst Rousseau, at the end of the eighteenth century, posits a simple, direct and transparent correspondence between a sense of self and autobiographical writing, his own attempts at self-representation highlight the naiveties of his approach to this project. These naiveties are brought to the fore by Paul Valéry, over a century later, in whose writings, the disjunction between self and representation is explored and dramatised. The unfolding autobiographical crisis surrounding the image and the suspicions raised by Valéry, however, culminate in the approach to autobiography and self-representation taken by Roland Barthes, in which the notion of any autobiographical referent appears to be rejected in favour of a view in which there are only images or representations with no origin.

These three authors exemplify in their own work the reciprocity which exists between a sense of one's own identity or intuitions concerning the self which are triggered by the challenge of the image, and the literary creativity which arises as a result of the attempt to present in writing these intuitions. The writings themselves, we

shall show, arise from particular challenges of the image in the lives of each of these writers, but the works they produce under the impetus of these challenges are not to be seen as theoretical hypotheses or statements on the notion of the self. Rather it is through their own creative attempts to mirror the self that new and more fruitful attitudes to the self emerge which form the basis of further works in each case.

This reciprocity of ideas and intuitions concerning the self and their exploration in creative writing projects governs the structure of this thesis. The thesis is divided into three sections, each of which focuses on one of our three chosen authors. However, these sections themselves are further divided into two chapters. In the first chapter the historical and biographical situation of the author is given, along with the particular challenge of the image faced by each writer and the way in which this challenge is interpreted in terms of ideas on the self.

Thus, in this first chapter of each section we highlight the impetus for self-writing in each author, the approach taken to the problematics of self and self-writing and the types of auto(bio)graphy each author engages in, as well as indicating the way in which these 'auto(bio)graphical acts' influence further interpretations of the self and yield, in turn, further and increasingly complex auto(bio)graphical attempts. In the second chapter, we concentrate attention upon the form and content of these works themselves and demonstrate the way in which the features of these auto(bio)graphies reflect certain attitudes to, and understanding of, the self and the possibilities of self-representation, which reflect back and enhance any theoretical notions or intuitions which were present at their origin.

The authors we have chosen are explorers of the self, of the 'autosphere' as Valéry calls it, and of the relation which exists between the self and the process of self-representation in writing. However, in doing so, their writings go beyond the realms of what we could term 'traditional' autobiography. Thus we shall discuss works of auto-drama, auto-dialogue, auto-poetry, auto-science, and auto-fiction as well as more straightforwardly autobiographical works, embracing the blurring of boundaries which the increasing critical reflexivity of Western autobiographical theory has encouraged. The term auto(bio)graphy reflects this same extension of purview.

The evolution of self-writing we follow from Rousseau to Barthes, as well as tracing the nature of the crisis which now characterises contemporary discussion of autobiography, also serves to re-instate some of the views which had come to be eliminated as a result of the increasing suspicion of the image. Thus we shall show that the auto(bio)graphies of these three authors, although they clearly highlight the epistemological suspicions surrounding the challenge of the image and the relations between self and textual subject which have come to the fore in recent discussions of autobiography, also point to a re-instatement of the self, no longer viewed as an accessible and knowable Cartesian subject, but one which returns in full awareness of all its complexity and ambiguity in a new form.

In contemporary speech, the term 'image' retains its primary use as a visual representation or icon, but can also signify a figure of language, a feature of mental life or, in its modern, or even postmodern sense, an empty symbol. Images can also function in many different ways. They may be used as a basis for knowledge of the external world, just as they may be employed so as to extend the scope and complexity of literary language. This thesis will follow custom in using the term 'image' to cover a variety of divergent uses: the term will be used in familiar ways to refer to pictorial images such as portraits, to the realm of what has been commonly referred to as 'mental imagery', and to images created through language. However, it must be noted that the instability which surrounds the term image is, in part, that which proves to be such an impetus for self-writing in the three writers we are considering. It is by attending to the deficiencies of representation and the ongoing need to represent, that these writers discover most about the otherwise elusive 'self'.²⁶

²⁶ For further discussion of the term image and its usage see, Edward Craig, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), Ned Block, ed., *Imagery* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), Richard Kearney, 'The Crisis of the Postmodern Image', in *Contemporary French Philosophy* ed., A. Phillips Griffiths, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lecture Series 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), and Ray Frazer, 'The Origin of the Term Image', *English Literary History* 27, (1960), 149-161.

SECTION ONE: Jean-Jacques Rousseau

CHAPTER ONE

The challenge of the portraits and the stance of auto(bio)graphical self-assurance.

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau is considered by many the 'father' of autobiography,¹ responsible for 'inaugurating the genre in its modern form',² it is fitting that we should begin our exploration of self-representation in autobiography with the work of Rousseau himself. Rousseau is the first to turn to auto(bio)graphical writing in the face of what we have termed the 'challenge of the image' and, in doing so, he adopts attitudes towards the self and self-representation which have had an enormous impact upon the course of modern autobiography.

Our aim, in this chapter, is to show the circumstances in which Jean-Jacques Rousseau became involved in autobiographical writing and the possibilities of representing the self in this form. It is, we shall argue, the challenge posed to Rousseau by the existence and proliferation of certain images representing the author, which provides the impetus for his auto(bio)graphical writing. It will be our contention that, in the face of what Rousseau saw as defamatory visual images representing him, he was forced into a position of self-defence and this self-defence took place in the arena of autobiography.

The images in question, which presented such a challenge to Rousseau, take the form of portraits and reproductions of these portraits in engravings and lithographs, particularly during the period 1762-69. However, we shall argue that it

¹ It is important, however, to note that the term 'autobiography' was not a current one during Rousseau's lifetime and has only recently been seen as a literary genre in its own right. The term was first used in 1797 in a review of Isaac d'Israeli's *Miscellanies* in the *Monthly Review*, 2nd Series, 29 (1797).

² Michael Sprinkler, 'Fictions of the Self: the End of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed., J. Olney, p.326. Other authors who make similar claims concerning the origins of modern autobiography with Rousseau are: Georges May, *L'Autobiographie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), pp.18-19, and Francis R. Hart, 'Notes for an Anatomy of Autobiography', p.486. See also Susan K. Jackson, *Rousseau's Occasional Autobiographies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), pp.1-2.

was not the physical characteristics represented in these images which most disturbed Rousseau, but the moral character he saw as being portrayed and promoted. The portraits and, in particular, the engravings of these portraits, Rousseau believed presented a morally dissolute character quite opposed to his own. Rousseau was outraged that artists and engravers who were unfamiliar with his character could portray him as they wished and that these representations could serve to undermine his moral reputation.

In the face of what he perceived as attacks being launched in this way upon his moral character and work, Rousseau was forced to respond in order to preserve his public reputation and his own self-respect. Rousseau's response comes in the form of two auto(bio)graphical works, the *Confessions* and *Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*: it is these two works, the circumstances which provided the motivation for their undertaking, and the highly influential model of auto(bio)graphical self-representation they provided, which forms the centre of our attention in this chapter.

It will be part of our task here to show that Rousseau's belief in and confidence concerning the correctness of his own self-image as opposed to the, in his eyes, false portrayal being produced by others, was supported by theoretical beliefs he had already put forward in several earlier writings. The support he gained from this theoretically-outlined belief in the ability of the individual to have unrivalled knowledge concerning his/her own true identity gave Rousseau the confidence to assert the veracity of his own self-image, thus countering the images being presented by others: it is this confidence which led him to take up the challenge presented to his identity by the portraits and engravings, by attempting to communicate what he believed to be his 'true' image to others in his own auto(bio)graphical writing.

Thus, by drawing on Rousseau's earlier writings, in particular the *Lettres Morales* (1757-8) and the *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard* (1762), we shall illustrate the theoretical foundation of his views concerning the subject as an autonomous site of epistemological certainty. It is these views which Rousseau would rely on when he undertook his own autobiographical self-exploration. We shall argue that Rousseau was influenced in both these earlier texts, to a large extent, by elements of Descartes's *Discours de la Méthode*, but we will also demonstrate that Rousseau's

own beliefs and aims diverged significantly from Descartes's theoretical system in many important ways.

1) The nature of the challenge: the portraits and reproductions of Rousseau.

In 1766, Rousseau had been encouraged to come to England by, amongst others, David Hume. Shortly after his arrival in England, Rousseau consented to sit for a portrait by the artist Allan Ramsay at the London home of Richard Davenport. Whether Hume commissioned the portrait as Rousseau claimed, or whether the portrait was undertaken at the instigation of the artist himself as Hume stated in his account of the Hume-Rousseau quarrel,³ remains a matter for debate. The portrait was later given as a present by the artist to Hume along with a portrait of Hume himself completed in the same year.⁴ Two further copies of the portrait were produced for Richard Davenport's home.⁵

An engraving of the painting was undertaken by Ramsay's pupil David Martin in 1766 and it may be that the engraving itself, or sketches made by the artist, were the source for the later copies made once the portrait had been given to Hume. Further engravings of the portrait were then made by Corbutt (1766) and Nochez (1769). These engravings were widely circulated and many copies were sold.⁶

It is in the *Dialogues* that Rousseau vents fully his fury, not only at the Ramsay portrait but at the other portraits and engravings subsequently produced, many of which were based on the original portrait.⁷ He describes these pictures,

³ *A Concise and Genuine Account of the Dispute between M. Hume and M. Rousseau*, (London, 1766).

⁴ Both these paintings are in Edinburgh. The portrait of Rousseau hangs in the National Gallery of Scotland, whilst the Hume portrait is in the Portrait Gallery.

⁵ Details of the iconography of Rousseau can be found in B. Gagnebin, *Album Rousseau* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléaide, 1976), F.de Girardin, *L'Iconographie de J.J. Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Centrale d'Art et d'Architecture, 1910), H. Buffenoir, *Les Portraits de J.J. Rousseau* (Paris, 1913) and Alistair Smart, *Allan Ramsay* (Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1992).

⁶ See Buffenoir, p.59.

⁷ It is likely that the comments Rousseau makes in the Second *Dialogue* refer not to the original portrait itself, but rather to the Martin engraving and replicas which were produced subsequently. In fact, Rousseau's first response to the Ramsay portrait had not been an unfavourable one, see *Correspondance Complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* ed., R.A. Leigh, (Geneva and Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1972), hereafter abbreviated to C.C. followed by letter number and date, 5134/29 March 1766. The Martin engraving is far inferior to the Ramsay portrait and does indeed portray Rousseau as tense and slightly sinister.

including 'ce terrible portrait' (779),⁸ as having made him look increasingly sinister and ridiculous, accusing the artists and engravers of having transformed him not only into 'un Cyclope affreux' (780), but a 'monstre que vous m'avez peint' (778).

Rousseau continues:

De l'homme terrible et vigoureux qu'on avoit d'abord peint on fit peu à peu un petit fourbe, un petit menteur, un petit escroc, un coureur de tavernes et de mauvais lieux (782).

Rousseau's reaction to the portrait and engravings is an interesting, if unsurprising, one given the circumstances in which he found himself at this particular time, as we shall detail later. However, what is most immediately noticeable about Rousseau's comments on the painting, and more particularly on the engravings, is that he objects most fervently not to the physical characteristics he is given in these images, but to the moral traits such characteristics suggest to any observer.

Rousseau by no means saw himself as a handsome man: in the *Dialogues* themselves, he describes himself, in the third person, in the following unflattering terms:

Il est petit, et s'apetisse encore en baissant la tête. Il a la vue courte, de petits yeux enfoncés, des dents horribles (777).

It seems, therefore, that what Rousseau is really objecting to is to having been given physical characteristics which associate him with the morally corrupt, with his far from aesthetic features having been presented in such a way as to make him appear a liar, a cheat and generally unsavoury character. Rousseau's reaction to the moral aspects of the characteristics represented by these images is understandable in the light of two important factors: the nature and expectations of portrait painting as a genre,

⁸ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Les Confessions, Autres Textes Autobiographiques Oeuvres Complètes*, vol I, eds., Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1959), p.779 (hereafter O.C.). Page numbers are given in parentheses in the text after each quotation from this edition. In order to suggest its embeddedness in its time, we have retained the eighteenth-century spelling, including the accents, of this edition.

and the personal situation in which Rousseau found himself after 1762. Rousseau's reaction must therefore be placed in its proper historical and personal context to be fully appreciated.

The capacity, or at least the attempt, of portrait artists to capture some essential features, not only of the physical characteristics, but more importantly of the moral and psychological characteristics of their subjects, has been an underlying presupposition of Western portrait painting. That the painted portrait should attempt to embody the moral personality of the sitter has, in fact, for a long time been considered one of the aims of portraiture. The portrait artist is seen as having to capture of at least some of the essential characteristics of the sitter.⁹

The portrait artist uses his/her skill to combine the presentation of an easily recognisable likeness with some main aspects of the character of the sitter, and the production of a work of art.¹⁰ The task the portrait artist undertakes is thus no simple one and the portrait produced may often have important repercussions for the individual portrayed, in particular on the way in which his/her character is viewed by the public. A considerable burden of responsibility is therefore placed on the artist:

The extraordinary attempts made by portrait artists over the centuries to fix the image of persons by visualizing their appearance and/or character and, at the same time, to produce an acceptable and accessible object of art reveals the enormity of the task.¹¹

The portrait thus combines the public appearance of the figure, often in formal poses and attire, according to the social conventions of the period, with the display of fundamental characteristics or some personal 'core' of the sitter. To many, the genius

⁹ Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays in Physiognomy, Designed to Promote the Knowledge and Love of Mankind* (London: J Murray, H. Hunter and T. Holloway, 1789-98), vol I, writes: 'each perfect portrait is an important painting, since it displays the human mind with the peculiarities of personal character', pp.171-2, quoted in Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), p.78.

¹⁰ There is much debate over what constitutes an adequate 'likeness' in a portrait. As abstract portrait artists have attempted to show, the portrait need not necessarily resemble the sitter to qualify as a portrait of that individual, see Brilliant, p.15, on this point.

¹¹ Brilliant, p.14.

of the portrait artist is the ability, within a short space of time, to gain insight into the character of the subject in question and to convey these characteristics to the observer through his/her art.

The artist's presentation of these characteristics is aided by socio-artistic conventions governing the portrayal of character traits in general terms. These conventions have undergone many changes over the centuries, but Western portrait painting has been, and still is, dominated, to a great extent, by the science of 'Physiognomics' or face-reading, deriving from Aristotelian tradition. Physiognomics has existed since the fifth century B.C., and is 'the science of judging human character based on outward physical appearance, especially in the face'.¹² It is due to the existence of this tradition that the observer of a portrait would be able to interpret and understand the characteristics the artist had wished to convey.

It is of significance that around the time of Rousseau's objection to the defamation of his moral character he considered to be taking place in Ramsay's portrait and the reproductions which ensued, physiognomics was undergoing something of a revival, due to the work of J.C. Lavater. In fact, at the end of the eighteenth century, Lavater attempted to transform it into a full-blown scientific theory,¹³ so it appears that Duncan's pronouncement in *Macbeth* that: 'There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face',¹⁴ was particularly inapplicable during this period.

Nowadays, it might be considered that belief in the 'science' of physiognomics is highly untenable and that, in fact, we now know that there is very little relation between a person's facial features and their character.¹⁵ However, the pervasiveness of physiognomics must not be underestimated. The fascination, for example, Oscar

¹² Berland, K.J.H., 'Reading Character in the Face: Lavater, Socrates, and Physiognomy', *Word and Image* 9 (1993), 252-269, (p.252). For further reading on physiognomy, see E.H. Gombrich, 'The Mask and the Face: the Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and Art', in M. Mandelbaum ed., *Art, Perception and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp.1-46.

¹³ Berland, p.255.

¹⁴ Shakespeare, *Macbeth* I. iv, 12-13, quoted in Berland, p.252.

¹⁵ In general, portrait artists have rarely called into question the relation between the external features and personality of the sitter. Dürer presented himself as an exception amongst portrait artists when he recognised that 'the appearance of an individual may bear only a casual, even coincidental relation to his nature, his interior personal life, and that, therefore, his features do not necessarily portray that inner quality which identifies the individual in his essence', Brilliant, p.74.

Wilde's character Dorian Gray holds, owes much to this idea, and we have only to look to the public condemnation of many criminals on the sole basis of their photographs appearing in newspapers and magazines, for evidence that the idea of a relation between physical and moral features is one which is still has great hold over the public imagination.¹⁶

2) Rousseau's reaction to the portraits and reproductions.

The portrait artist has historically played a large role in the communication of moral characteristics of the sitter.¹⁷ As we have seen, the artist is inevitably involved in making moral judgements upon the sitter, and the way in which the model is portrayed, in terms of expression, lighting, clothing, pose and context, will all contribute greatly to the moral message conveyed to any observer. The artist must thus be seen not only as the interpreter of moral characteristics, but as the manipulator of these within the social space. Rousseau's reaction, which suggests that he interprets the portraits and engravings as being an attack on his moral character, can therefore be appreciated in the light of the history of portraiture for, as we have outlined, this is typically one of the artist's foremost aims.

In the *Dialogues*, Rousseau suggests that he had been placed in an awkward pose by the artist so as deliberately to distort his physical features, resulting in the possible portrayal of the negative moral traits the artist, in collusion with others plotting against Rousseau, wanted to attribute to him.¹⁸ In the following passage from the Second *Dialogue*, Rousseau describes the physical manipulation of the sitter by

¹⁶ The famous photograph of Myra Hindley, which many have come to associate with evil, provides a clear example of the persistence of physiognomics within our present culture.

¹⁷ Berland traces the dispute over portraits of Socrates, which arose precisely due to the fact that the representations of Socrates's face did not seem to reflect his moral character. Berland writes 'because of the contradiction between his outward appearance and inward character, Socrates became a test case for the physiognomists', p.256.

¹⁸ The idea of a plot being formed against Rousseau was one which developed particularly after his escape from Paris in 1762, and grew to the point where Rousseau found it increasingly difficult to have faith in anyone proclaiming to be his friend or ally. The 'plot' was considered by Rousseau to be the work of Grimm, Diderot and later Hume, amongst others, and appears to have been due to a combination of some malicious actions, particular circumstances and Rousseau's own medical decline. Some critics have attributed the idea of the 'plot' solely to Rousseau's mental illness, but the matter is certainly more complex than this for there were individuals who found the both the author and his views highly objectionable.

the artist which helped to give rise to the impression of the desired moral image, as follows:

On lui fait mettre un bonnet bien noir, un vetement bien brun, on le place dans un lieu bien sombre, et là, pour le peindre assis on le fait tenir debout, courbé, appuyé d'une de ses mains sur une table bien basse, dans une attitude où ses muscles fortement tendus altèrent les traits de son visage(779).

Yet, there were also more personal reasons for Rousseau's interpretation of the visual images as attacks on his moral character. Rousseau's public moral reputation was, in fact, to undergo a series of dramatic changes during his lifetime. Prior to the publication of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in 1761, Rousseau had been considered brilliant by some, and by others a charlatan who, in his writings, took up polemical positions in order to provoke public debate and outrage.¹⁹ Yet, immediately following the publication of this work, Rousseau suddenly became for many a leading moral light and 'a prophet of a moral regeneration and of a return of virtue'.²⁰ S.S.B.Taylor writes:

From 1761 until 1766, Rousseau's publications and his Socratic acceptance of his persecutions endowed him with a reputation for moral integrity of a unique order. His authority, the respect he aroused and the stature he assumed became almost legendary in these few years. He became a moral counsellor and a moral example to his admirers.²¹

¹⁹ S.S.B. Taylor, 'Rousseau's Contemporary Reputation in France', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 27 (1963), 1545-74, writes 'the effect of this apparent predilection for paradoxes was to persuade critics that Rousseau was not basically sincere and that he sought merely to attract attention by the most effective means at his disposal. If this had been the opinion of one or two biased critics only, then it could have been regarded as a mere debating point, but the charges recur from critic to critic, and in every tone from gentle probing to angry contempt', p.1548. This view of Rousseau soon gave rise to the 'ironical situation', 'in which a Rousseau who was striving increasingly for self-commitment to and recognition of his ideal of austerity and virtue found the public more and more sceptical of his intentions and more and more inclined to ridicule him', p.1551.

²⁰ S.S.B. Taylor, p.1557.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.1566.

Rousseau's moral reputation, however, underwent a gradual decline, the seeds of which may have been planted as early as 1758 when some of Rousseau's closest friends turned against him due to his treatment of others within their social circle.²² The turning of the tide against Rousseau was also accelerated by the response of the Parisian *parlement* and the Genevan authorities to the publication of *Emile* and the scandal the author had created through this work. It was not until 1766, however, that Rousseau's public moral reputation was dealt serious blows due to both his relationship with Hume, towards whom Rousseau was seen as acting ungratefully, and to the rumours which had begun to circulate of the way in which Rousseau had treated his five children,²³ rumours which were eventually to be confirmed in Rousseau's own account of events in the *Confessions*.²⁴

We can now fully appreciate Rousseau's reaction to the Ramsay portrait and subsequent engravings which appeared to present him in a negative moral light, for such attacks on his moral character had already begun to emerge. Rousseau came to see the portraits and their circulation as a direct and immediate means of publicly presenting and perpetuating a negative image of him. The portraits and, in particular, the engravings produced from 1766 onwards, were considered by Rousseau to be part of the 'plot' being trammelled against him. The passage cited above from the *Second Dialogue* clearly accuses the artist, Allan Ramsay, of having colluded in the general defamation of Rousseau's character, masterminded by Diderot, Grimm, and aided at this time by Hume, who had, according to Rousseau, desired this portrait by Ramsay 'aussi ardemment qu'un amant bien épris désire celui de sa maitresse' (779).

There appears to be no room in Rousseau's mind for the possibility of a portrait which would bear no relation to his moral character, for terms such as *criminel* and *hideux* refer explicitly to the nature of his moral personality rather than to his external appearance. The portrait, in his eyes, is unlike him in that it portrays him

²² S.S.B. Taylor dates the beginning of the decline of Rousseau's moral reputation in 1758, when several of his friends and acquaintances including Grimm, Saint-Lambert, Diderot and Voltaire turned against Rousseau and cites as acting as a trigger to this decline 'Rousseau's apparently unprincipled and ungrateful behaviour towards his patroness mme Épinay', p.1567. Yet, these grievances were unknown to the public until Hume's publication.

²³ In his *Sentiments des Citoyens*, published anonymously on 27 December 1764, Voltaire had made personal attacks on Rousseau.

²⁴ See Rousseau, O.C., pp.344-5.

falsely, with the assumption being that had it been a good portrait, if he had been presented as he truly looked, the positive aspects of his character would have been clearly revealed to all.

Not only does Rousseau accuse Ramsay of presenting a false image, but the accusation is extended to all portrait artists who, in Rousseau's view, are unable to portray anything but their own characteristics and thus to get beyond their own subjectivity. Rousseau argues that the portrait is essentially nothing but a self-portrait of the artist. The following ditty inserted in the Second *Dialogue* sums up this view:

Hommes savans dans l'art de feindre
 Qui me prêtez des traits si doux,
 Vous aurez beau vouloir me peindre,
 Vous ne peindrez jamais que vous(778).

It would therefore seem that Rousseau had little confidence in the ability of the portrait painter to represent anything but him/her self. Yet, this had not always been Rousseau's opinion of the portrait artist; in fact, of the artist Maurice Quentin de La Tour, who had painted Rousseau in pastel for the 1753 Salon,²⁵ Rousseau had written:

M. La Tour est le seul qui m'a peint ressemblant[...] Je préférerais toujours la moindre esquisse de sa main aux plus parfaits chefs-d'oeuvre d'un autre, parce que je fais encore plus de cas de sa probité que de son talent.²⁶

Thus there appears to have been a fairly radical change of opinion between Rousseau's comments on La Tour and his more general criticism of the portrait artist in the Second *Dialogue*.

In fact such had been Rousseau's trust in this artist's ability to produce a portrait of the author which would be able to faithfully represent both his physical

²⁵ The portrait, in pastel, was exhibited to high acclaim at the 1753 Salon along with other famous, although not necessarily rich, contemporary figures. For comments on the portrait in the exhibition see Buffenoir, pp.24-30.

²⁶ C.C., 2362/ 2 Dec 1762.

appearance and his character, that in 1762 he had written both to his bank-manager, Lenieps, and soon afterwards to Mme de Luxembourg, requesting that they get in touch with de La Tour, in order to give the artist the go-ahead to produce an engraving of the 1753 portrait.²⁷ The passage taken from the letter to Lenieps reads:

Voulez-vous bien que je vous charge d'une petite commission qui n'est nullement pressée, et que vous pourrez faire tout à loisir, quand vous passerez dans le quartier du Louvre: Vous connoissez, je crois, M. de la Tour Peintre du Roy. Il m'avoit fait proposer l'année dernière de consentir qu'il fit graver le portrait qu'il a fait de moi: Consentement que je ne donnai point. Mais comme les choses ont fort changé depuis mon arrivée ici, j'ai prié quelqu'un de lui dire que je consentois maintenant qu'il fit graver ce portrait, à condition seulement qu'on n'y mit point mon nom, mais seulement ma devise, qui ne me nomme que trop. Je voudrois savoir si cette commission a été faite; car je n'en ai reçu aucune réponse d'aucun côté.²⁸

In this letter, Rousseau stresses that he wants the portrait to be engraved because 'les choses ont fort changé depuis mon arrivée ici'. 1762 had in fact been, and would continue to be, a particularly difficult year in Rousseau's life. Following the outcry unleashed by the publication of his treatise on education, *Emile*, Rousseau had been exiled from Paris and had sought refuge in Môtiers-Travers.²⁹ Numerous articles and manuscripts were circulating in Paris, being falsely attributed to him, and his

²⁷As was customary, de La Tour had offered to have an engraving of the portrait produced soon after he had completed the portrait, but Rousseau had declined the offer at the time.

²⁸C.C., 2362/2 Dec 1762. In a letter to Mme de Luxembourg on, Rousseau also wrote 'quand M. de la Tour a voulu faire graver mon portrait, je m'y suis opposé; j'y consens maintenant, si vous le jugez à propos; pourvû qu'au lieu d'y mettre mon nom, l'on n'y mette que ma devise; ce sera desormais assés me nommer', C.C., 2017/ 21 July 1762. Rousseau's motto 'Vitam impendere vero' (To submit one's life to truth) had been adopted in 1761 from the title page of his *Ecrits de La Montagne* and its use by Rousseau had by now become customary.

²⁹The publication of *Emile* by Rey in Amsterdam and its subsequent availability in Paris had led to a huge public outcry. The text had been confiscated by the police on 3 June 1762 and had been denounced a few days later at the Sorbonne. This was followed closely by further denunciation by the *parlement* and copies of the work had been burnt in Paris on 11 June. Rousseau had been forced to flee Paris in the afternoon of 9 June and had thereafter been in search of a safe haven. To add to all this, the author of *Emile* had been further subjected to scorn and condemnation from friends and associates.

public reputation was beginning to be questioned. Rousseau felt that he was being attacked from all sides, and perhaps had a foreboding of the dramatic change in his moral reputation which took place in 1766. He thus no doubt felt that he badly needed some means of maintaining public confidence in his moral integrity.

It is perhaps with this aim in mind that Rousseau wrote to Lenieps and Mme De Luxembourg offering his consent for the production of an engraving of the portrait that he had liked so much, to be undertaken under the supervision of the artist he held in such high estimation.³⁰ To have a favourable image of him circulating would undoubtedly help to temper, to a certain extent at least, the highly negative interpretations of his ideas which were becoming widely accepted, particularly since the scandal provoked by *Emile*, even amongst those who were completely unfamiliar with his writings.³¹ As Matthey writes: 'S'il était bien fait, ce portrait ne serait-il pas une défense en soi?'.³²

The portrait image, circulated in the form of an engraving, providing a direct and immediate portrayal of positive moral features in opposition to those features which were beginning to be associated with Rousseau's name and person, would be the perfect temporary remedy for a situation which could easily spiral out of control and which was causing Rousseau increasing medical, emotional and financial difficulties, rendering his life almost unbearable.

At this point, in 1762, Rousseau expressed no qualms concerning either the ability of an artist to capture his essential moral features or the acceptance of these by a public audience. The public, he no doubt believed, would thereby be convinced by his own favourable view of himself and his ideas. The portrait and engraving are thus seen as being able to reproduce faithfully the characteristics Rousseau wished to communicate to the public. It must also be noted that there does not appear, at this point, to be any discrepancy, in Rousseau's eyes, between the way in which Rousseau

³⁰ C.C., 2362/ 2 Dec 1762, Rousseau describes La Tour to Lenieps as 'cet honnête homme auquel je serai toute ma vie attaché par estime et par reconnaissance'.

³¹ It is likely that Rousseau wanted to have the engraving distributed separately from the writings, because he felt that the writings should be allowed to speak for themselves. A portrait could reach an audience far more directly than the written word, particularly bearing in mind the extent of illiteracy at this time.

³² François Matthey, 'L'Entreprise des Portraits', *Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau (AJJR)*, 36, 1963-65, 87-104 (p.91).

sees himself and the way in which La Tour had portrayed him.³³ Nor does Rousseau betray any sense of doubt that any audience will interpret the characteristics presented to them in the same way as he.

Rousseau's desire, however, for an engraving of the portrait which would meet his needs at this time and stem the tide of any negative public opinion, was to remain unfulfilled. The engraving produced by La Tour's engraver, Littret, proved a disappointment both to the editors Guy and Duchesne in Paris who had commissioned the engraving, and to Rousseau himself.³⁴ A second engraving was produced,³⁵ which was equally disliked by the author, who refused to have any engraving appear with anything but his motto, and emphasised that any engraving should be printed and distributed separately from his writings.³⁶

The situation was to worsen still further, however. By giving permission for the engraving of the La Tour portrait, Rousseau had opened the floodgates for both (unsatisfactory) authorised and unauthorised images to be released into the public realm. As Matthey writes 'le mouvement est donné; rien ne l'arrêtera plus'.³⁷ Thus subsequent portraits, engravings and busts were completed by Coindet, Fiquet,³⁸

³³ As mentioned earlier, Rousseau had previously refused a request for an engraving of his portrait to be made. Buffenoir writes: 'Rousseau d'abord et pendant longtemps, se montra rebelle à la gravure de son portrait. Ce ne fut qu'après la condamnation de *L'Emile* en 1762, qu'il changea d'avis et donna son consentement', p.58. It may also have been the case that Rousseau wanted to stress his alliance at this time with Geneva, for this portrait shows Rousseau in Genevan costume.

³⁴ C.C., 2837/23 July 1763, Rousseau wrote to Lenieps: 'Duchesne m'a envoyé une épreuve de mon portrait, qui me paroît très médiocrement gravé'.

³⁵ C.C 2858/6 August 1763. The second engraving was done by Cathelin. Buffenoir, p.59, states that Littret's engraving sold 10,000 copies at a price of 25 sous each. Even Rey was unable to obtain a copy. Rousseau's correspondence, particularly between May and August 1763, indicates that he took a keen interest both in the way in which he would be presented in these images and in the progress of the engravings being undertaken.

³⁶ See C.C., 2430/9 Jan 1763 and 2443/20 Jan 1763. In both these letters Rousseau complains at the way in which the engravings are being produced and distributed by his Parisian publishers. Rousseau's desire to have his portrait appear separately from his work may be indicative of his belief that the works should be allowed to speak for themselves and that whosoever read the works would gain an accurate portrait of the author from the writing. This belief is one which Rousseau maintains right up to the writing of the *Dialogues*. See Chapter Two of this thesis for further discussion of the importance of this belief in Rousseau.

³⁷ Matthey, p.95.

³⁸ Coindet had obtained a copy of the La Tour portrait from La Tour himself, it seems, by using much flattery. Rousseau, in the Second *Dialogue* refers to Fiquet's engraving from Coindet's pastel as portraying him as 'un petit crispin grimacier', p.777!

Carrée, Gardelle, Vecharigi, Gaucher, Valaperta, Lemoyne, Miger and Liotard, to name but a few who contributed to Rousseau's iconography.³⁹

Rousseau was therefore aware of a phenomenon with which we are now very familiar - namely the influence of a certain image upon public opinion.⁴⁰ Rousseau had attempted, through presentation of a favourable image, to sway public opinion back towards him and to reclaim some moral and intellectual respect, but the project had, to a large extent, backfired. By allowing, and in fact requesting, that his image be publicly circulated, Rousseau exposed himself to further negative interpretation. The sudden abundance of images in the form of engravings, portraits, busts and medallions, which to Rousseau appeared to be portraying him largely falsely, served to reinforce Rousseau's suspicion that the only true portrait of Rousseau had to come from Rousseau himself, and that any third-person view, however good-willed, was open to false interpretation, either through wilful manipulation by the artist or engraver, or simply due to the inevitably distorting effects of the engraver's art.

Due to the 'histoire des portraits' (779), Rousseau's faith in the capacity of the artist to represent him as he saw himself, had already been seriously undermined, and the episode with Hume involving the Ramsay portrait and subsequent engravings can be seen as the last straw in a series of events which had challenged Rousseau's self-image and led him increasingly to the belief that, in the face of such false and defamatory images, the only recourse left would be for the author to set about the task of producing his own image, 'son effigie intérieure',⁴¹ and displaying it to the public through his own writing.

³⁹ Girardin, p.xiii, reported that a formidable total of 6000 portraits, busts and engravings existed of Rousseau. Matthey, p.87, also comments on the enormous number of pieces which make up Rousseau's iconography in an exhibition of representations of Rousseau, *J-J Rousseau et le Pays de Neuchâtel* (1962). The La Tour portrait seems to be the ideal against which all other portraits and images were measured, and they invariably failed to live up to the quality of the first image. In a letter to Rey, for example, Rousseau writes 'M. La Tour est le seul qui m'ait peint ressemblant', C.C., 6764/26 July 1770. In Book 12 of the *Confessions*, Rousseau refers to the Lemoyne bust in the following terms: 'Quant au buste, il s'est borné à une mauvaise esquisse en terre, sur laquelle il a fait graver un portrait hideux, qui ne laisse pas de courir sous mon nom, comme s'il avait quelque ressemblance', Buffenoir, p.106.

⁴⁰ Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp.29-131, demonstrates the lengths both Mark Twain and Strindberg went to in order to ensure that the 'correct' image was presented to the public. Rousseau can be seen as one of the first to attempt such manipulation through selection of images.

⁴¹ C.C., 3726/9 Dec 1764.

3) The reflexive turn - Rousseau's conception of the subject.

In the face of the challenge to his self-image presented by the visual images produced by other artists, Rousseau was left with the choice of either agreeing actively or passively to the image being presented in public of him, or of reacting to it by producing his own representation of himself by way of self-defence. As we know, it was the latter course that Rousseau was to choose. Thus the portraits and engravings, particularly of 1762 and later acted as a spur for his self-defence, as Rousseau became painfully aware of the difference between his own view of himself and that held by others. It was as a result of the challenge presented by the portraits and reproductions that Rousseau turned to knowledge of himself and to the presentation of what he believed to be his true self in his auto(bio)graphical works.

As a result of the 'portraits episode' Rousseau turned to auto(bio)graphy and to self-presentation in the only form over which he believed he could maintain control and which would remain free of distorting effects, namely his own writing. Sturrock is surely right to call Rousseau an auto(bio)grapher 'malgré lui':⁴² if he had been able to convey himself adequately to others, there would have been no need for him to write the *Confessions* followed later by the *Dialogues*, for there 'would be no discrepancy to trouble him between his two self-images, that "true" one which he alone possesses and the "false" one which he "shares" by projecting it into the keeping of others'.⁴³ In fact, it could be argued, as Sturrock already glimpses, that the turn to autobiography is always influenced, in some way, by the desire to repossess one's own image:

Autobiographers may write without having first suffered as Rousseau did from the paranoid conviction that the images of them held by other people must at all costs be repossessed and revised in their own favour, but they must still write in the desire to impose a settled image of themselves of which they approve, and as the subject of their own text

⁴² John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.135. Rousseau writes that he is 'forcé de parler malgré moi', O.C., p.279.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.136.

secure their absolution from those heteronomous impressions which they have left behind with others.⁴⁴

The 'false' images propagated by other artists thus came to be seen as the inevitable result, in Rousseau's later view, of the nature of access to the self. It is the underlying premise of Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writing, we shall argue, that access to the self is asymmetrical, so that another can never know, and therefore portray, Rousseau, in anything like as accurate a way as Rousseau himself can.

This notion of the self and the view of the subject as an autonomous site of epistemological certainty, we shall show, had already been expressed in the earlier writings of the *Lettres Morales* and the *Profession de Foi*. We shall illustrate, in the following section, the way in which this belief had been developed from aspects of Descartes's thought in the *Discours de La Méthode* and how the entire project of self-representation in the auto(bio)graphical *Confessions* and *Dialogues* relies on the retention of this theoretical perspective on the self.

Descartes's work is, of course, a significant landmark for any investigation into the Western tradition of autobiography as it has developed, for it is Descartes who inaugurates the anthropocentrism which has been the cornerstone of autobiographical writing from Rousseau's *Confessions* onwards. Yet it would be wrong to attribute to Descartes the attitude of looking to oneself as the basis and centre of all experience, for this 'radically reflexive' position was one which had been taken up long before the seventeenth century in the work by Augustine whose title Rousseau's *Confessions* so obviously echoes.

As Charles Taylor rightly points out, it is Augustine, rather than Descartes, who produces this most decisive shift of focus 'from the field of objects known to the activity itself of knowing'.⁴⁵ The focus of epistemology is firmly placed within the human individual and from this point onwards: 'To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance[...]. Taking the stance of radical

⁴⁴ Sturrock, *ibid.*, p.136

⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.130.

reflexivity is adopting the first-person standpoint rather than a view from nowhere, focusing on oneself as agent of experience and making this one's object'.⁴⁶

Yet the exploration of individuality is not for its own sake in Augustine, but is a step on the path to a more elevated realm of existence through knowledge of God. For Augustine, it is via the mode of radical reflexivity that we may approach God. Human beings, however, are limited by their imperfection and incomplete self-knowledge, thus Augustine declares 'nor can I myself grasp all that I am'.⁴⁷ The important feature of Augustine's view for all subsequent autobiography is that there is a self-presence in this mode of radical reflexivity which means that I am united with my experiences and present to them in a way which cannot be achieved by others, so that a distinction is established between first-person and third person awareness of experience.

It is this important shift initiated by Augustine which has had such a profound effect on the Western understanding of subjectivity and has been so decisive for the course of autobiographical writing. As Taylor writes, the importance of Augustine for the Western 'introspective' tradition should not be underestimated:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it was Augustine who introduced the inwardness of radical reflexivity and bequeathed it to the Western tradition of thought. The step was a fateful one, because we have certainly made a big thing of the first person standpoint. The modern epistemological tradition from Descartes, and all that has flowed from it in modern culture, has made this standpoint fundamental - to the point of aberration, one might think.⁴⁸

Descartes posits the subject as a site of epistemological assurance and paves the way for the subsequent 'cult of the individual' which has expanded with each passing century. Yet Descartes's ideas proved to be even more extreme than those of Augustine, for Descartes was to make the human individual self-sufficient as moral

⁴⁶ C. Taylor, p.130.

⁴⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. R.S. Pine Coffin (London:Penguin Books, 1961), p.216.

⁴⁸ C. Taylor, p.131.

and epistemological centre, thus lifting the veil of the self's opaqueness and replacing it with a lucidity and clarity of self-possession which had never before been envisaged. Nothing has affected the course of Western autobiography more than the planting of this single seed, from which the view of an autonomously existing and self-aware subject was to grow and be developed over the next three centuries of autobiographical writing. This duality of autonomous self and objects of knowledge, first formulated by Descartes, as Sturrock states:

[...] Has clear implications when it comes to autobiography, in appearing to certify the writer's freedom henceforth to envisage himself confidently and lucidly as an object. In its autobiographical version, dualism takes the form of an actively rational 'I' examining the past actions and emotions of a passive, pre-rational 'me'; that optimistic ideal of our own potential transparency to ourselves had been born which was to endure well into the twentieth century, until, under the impact of Freudianism, such optimism dissolved.⁴⁹

That the subject should now not only be the centre of experience in relation to the external world, but should also now be able to attain clear and rational self-understanding and self-knowledge, having the potential to gain access to truths concerning both its own existence and that of the world around it, must be seen as the Copernican revolution produced by Descartes, in particular in his *Discours de La Méthode*, and one which has had such a profound effect on all subsequent investigations into the self.

However, the motivation for Descartes's research in the *Discours*, it must be remembered, was not the desire for self-knowledge, but the attainment, by the rejection through doubt of all previously held truths, of a universal and self-evident foundation for scientific knowledge. Although the *Discours* starts with an autobiographical introduction outlining the past events which led to the narrator undertaking his present project, the aim is not to achieve particularised knowledge,

⁴⁹ Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography*, p.94.

but rather universally-held concepts by which to understand the external world and the place of the subject within it.

In fact, the kind of exploration of individuality undertaken in Rousseau's *Confessions* and now characteristic of autobiography as a genre, must be traced not to Descartes but to that other important predecessor for Rousseau - Montaigne. It is in Montaigne's *Essais* that the human individual is held up for scrutiny precisely in his/her own particularity. Montaigne, as Taylor writes:

Inaugurates a new kind of reflection which is intensely individual, a self-explanation, the aim of which is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which passion or spiritual pride have erected.⁵⁰

Whilst Descartes is 'the founder of modern individualism',⁵¹ because of the anthropocentric shift he achieves, making the human subject the source both of moral values and of knowledge, the truths he seeks remain universal ones and it is to Montaigne that Western autobiography owes the search for, and exploration of, the originality of the individual human personality.

However, it is to Descartes's *Discours* that we must return to look for the origins of Rousseau's own view of the self and for the theoretical positions which Rousseau adopts when faced with the challenge of others' images of him, as epitomised in the portraits episode we have recounted. It is Rousseau's development of, and confidence in, the dualistic position outlined by Descartes, opposing a self-transparent, autonomous, and self-sufficient subject, to the objects of the external world, which, as we shall show, leads Rousseau to believe in the ultimate correctness of his own self-knowledge. As a consequence of these beliefs, Rousseau becomes convinced of the veracity of his own self-representation in contrast to the false portrayals of others, and presents this image to the public in the auto(bio)graphical writings of the *Confessions* and *Dialogues*.

⁵⁰ C. Taylor, p.181.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.183.

Yet, we shall show that it is not simply the case that Rousseau was writing in a period dominated by a philosophy of rationalist essentialism, whose edicts and axioms Rousseau had unthinkingly inherited: close examination of two of Rousseau's earlier works indicates a recent re-reading of Descartes's works, in particular of the *Discours*,⁵² and shows both Descartes's direct influence on Rousseau and Rousseau's considered criticism of Descartes's philosophy and subsequent divergence from it.

Rousseau in his *Lettres Morales*, and perhaps even more noticeably in his *Profession de Foi*, can be seen to have appropriated some of Descartes's most prominent ideas, whilst taking them in a direction quite unfamiliar to Descartes. The unique position Rousseau adopted helped to bolster him when his confidence in his self-image was most under threat, in the period immediately succeeding the distribution of the Ramsay portrait and the subsequent publication of Hume's version of the events leading to the rift between Rousseau and himself. By outlining the major similarities between these texts and Rousseau's subsequent divergence from Descartes, we will illustrate the development of Rousseau's view of the subject and the relevance of this view to the presentation of his own self-image in the form of auto(bio)graphical writing.

The *Profession de Foi* imitates the *Discours* in its transition from personal experience to more general principles of truth, and the aim of both texts appears to be the establishment of certain and indubitable truths upon which knowledge can be grounded. Both texts thus start from the position of the philosopher's 'love of truth' and move from a sceptical view of the plurality of opinions to the establishment of certain solidly founded truths.

The Vicaire, as narrator of the *Profession de Foi*, clearly echoes the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum* in his assertion 'j'existe et j'ai des sens par lesquels je suis affecté. Voilà la première vérité qui me frappe et à laquelle je suis forcé d'acquiescer'.⁵³ This conclusion is arrived at via a presentation which follows closely Descartes's *Discours*

⁵² Henri Gouhier in his article, 'Ce que le Vicaire doit à Descartes', *AJR* 35, (1959-62), 139-54, writes of Rousseau's *Lettres Morales* 'il est clair qu'il commence par relire le *Discours de La Méthode*', p.140, and Nelly Wilson in 'Discourses on Method and Professions of Faith: Rousseau's Debt to Descartes', *French Studies* 37, (1983), 157-167, also writes that Rousseau's *Lettres Morales* 'suggests a recent re-reading', p.159 of Descartes's *Discours*.

⁵³ Ronald Grimsley ed., *Rousseau: Religious Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.125. All quotations from the *Profession de Foi* are from this edition unless otherwise stated.

both in form and method: in both texts the same pattern is to be found. Firstly an autobiographical section introduces the way in which the narrator arrived at his present project:⁵⁴ the autobiographical story thus recounts, in both cases, a disillusionment with scholastic teachings, followed by a period of life experience, finally resulting in the resolution to take the questioning of individual thought,⁵⁵ following certain guidelines, rather than the opinions of others, as the route to knowledge and truth.⁵⁶ The movement of both texts is thus from diversity and incertitude to clarity and certain, self-evident foundations for knowledge. In both cases the acquisition of this knowledge develops from the subject's self-examination, with the certain existence of the *cogito*⁵⁷ acting as a starting point for each investigation.

However, although the overall patterns of the two texts are largely similar, the parallels extend no further, and on close inspection it can be seen that the two texts achieve their ends in different ways, have divergent aims and totally different emphases. It is true to say that Rousseau 'borrows Descartes's method of exposition and presentation',⁵⁸ with both authors starting from a rejection of the opinions of others,⁵⁹ in order to establish their own systems of knowledge, yet for each author there is a clear difference of aims and means.

The use of doubt, for example, appears to be common to both projects, but on further examination, it can be seen that for Descartes's doubt is a methodological tool for the rejection of unfounded opinions, and his sceptical position is thus a means of attaining truth rather than a frame of mind: whilst for Rousseau, the position of doubt

⁵⁴ The text is narrated by the fictional character of the 'Vicaire' in the third and first person, but the events of the life described are loosely based on events from Rousseau's own life. Grimsley writes: 'Rousseau is here relating his own experience in a somewhat imaginatively elaborated form', p.112 n1.

⁵⁵ Whilst Descartes writes of 'd'étudier en moi-même', in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, vol 1, ed., Ferdinand Alquié (Paris: Garnier, 1963), p.578, Rousseau also turns his gaze inwards 'il faut donc tourner d'abord mes regards sur moi', p.350.

⁵⁶ Rousseau writes: 'Il faut donc tourner d'abord mes regards sur moi pour connaître l'instrument dont je veux me servir', p.125.

⁵⁷ Gouhier writes: 'Rousseau refait l'expérience du doute méthodique et voici qu'à nouveau elle aboutit à l'inébranlable certitude du *cogito*', p.140. Whereas Descartes's use of doubt as a methodological tool leads him to the establishment of the certain existence of the *cogito* as the first truth, Rousseau does not subject the existence of the *cogito* or of the external world to anything like such scrutiny, but rather takes them as givens upon which his views can be formulated.

⁵⁸ Wilson, p.157.

⁵⁹ Rousseau, again echoing Descartes, writes: 'Alors, repassant dans mon esprit les diverses opinions qui m'avaient tour à tour entraîné depuis ma naissance', p.123.

is arrived at through the disappointments suffered at the hands of lived experience and the influence of others, and is thus much more of a psychological position than was ever intended by Descartes. Gouhier summarises this difference in the following terms:

Le doute de René Descartes est la suite d'un échec dans l'ordre du savoir: à l'origine de la révision générale de ses opinions, il y a la faillite des sciences qu'on enseigne dans les écoles. Le doute de Jean-Jacques Rousseau est d'abord le bilan d'une faillite morale: 'Voyant par de tristes observations renverser les idées que j'avais du juste, de l'honnête et de tous les devoirs de l'homme' [...] Crise de la raison, d'un côté, crise morale et religieuse de l'autre.⁶⁰

The divergent reference to doubt in the two projects corresponds to a far greater divergence in the aims of each author. Descartes's aim, as we have indicated, is to establish universal criteria of knowledge from the starting point of purely self-evident and indubitable truths which centre upon the existence of the subject itself. Whilst Rousseau shows great admiration for Descartes's originality of thought he is openly critical of Descartes's attempt to build what he saw as 'systèmes absurdes'. Rousseau in fact dissociates himself from philosophers in general when he writes:

Les idées générales et abstraites sont la source des plus grandes erreurs des hommes; jamais le jargon de la métaphysique n'a fait découvrir une seule vérité.⁶¹

Rousseau is most critical, however, of the fact that Descartes's search for universal principles of knowledge leads him away from moral considerations of how human beings should best manage their lives in order to achieve happiness. Rousseau sees Descartes as having been led in the direction of science and the edification of a system, rather than concentrating attention on the true business of philosophical

⁶⁰ Gouhier, pp.142-3.

⁶¹ Grimsley, pp.132-3.

thought - the moral purpose and conduct of our existence. It is for this reason Rousseau refers to Descartes's ideas as 'égarements sublimes'.⁶² Descartes's devotion to science was therefore regarded by Rousseau as the former's greatest weakness, and the reason for which his project did not fulfil the promise it first appeared to hold out. Thus, as Wilson writes: 'It is in the sphere of morality that the major difference between the two texts lies'.⁶³

However, what the two texts *do* show is a common belief in the individual as source of knowledge, albeit that Rousseau's own project becomes one of self-knowledge, whilst Descartes moves outwards from this position to true and certain knowledge of the external world, with 'God' acting as guarantor of the veracity of this knowledge. For the individual thus concerned with the establishment of certainty, the mind turned upon itself reflexively is seen as the firm starting point for any investigation into knowledge and understanding and 'in both cases intellectual introspection becomes the basic instrument in the search for truth'.⁶⁴ The self posited for both Descartes and Rousseau appears to be an unchanging and unified one, and the condition for the acquisition of true and certain knowledge.

It is therefore the twin elements of the 'transparency'⁶⁵ of the subject to him/herself and the epistemological assurance of ideas derived through the subjective thought of the thinker, regardless of the opinions of others, which most influenced the direction of Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writing in response to the challenge posed by the portraits. To the twentieth century reader of Descartes's *Discours*, the transparency posited by Descartes now seems almost naive, as Sturrock comments:

It is a model which excludes interference from those parts of the self to which we have no unimpeded access, to the subconscious mind for which Cartesianism leaves no room. To a modern autobiographer, writing after Freud and the deep soundings of psychoanalysis, the Discourse will seem

⁶² Quoted in Wilson, p.157, from Rousseau's 'Le Verger de Mme Warens'.

⁶³ Wilson, p.165.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.162.

⁶⁵ Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et L'Obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) highlights the importance of this theme in Rousseau's ideas on the self and self-writing.

a disappointing model, because of the confidence which Descartes displays in his own lucidity towards himself.⁶⁶

The type of 'privileged access' proposed by Descartes, in which the subject may have direct access to the workings of his/her own mind but only indirect access to those of others, is one which Rousseau takes up and develops for his own purposes, as we shall see in the following chapter, in the writing of the *Confessions* and *Dialogues*. This 'inwardness', the ability of the subject to turn upon itself in a transparent way and be the object of its own thoughts is therefore 'an inwardness of self-sufficiency'.⁶⁷

The ability of the subject to turn reflexively upon itself, in the movement we saw inaugurated by Augustine, thus enables the subject, for Descartes, and even more so for Rousseau, to become an autonomous centre. Following on from the *Discours*, the subject for Rousseau becomes wholly available to itself, whereas in Augustine this moral self-knowledge had always been partial and subject to illusion. Developed also from Descartes's thought is the notion of the individual as epistemological focus, as site of truth and understanding concerning the world, and Rousseau takes this autonomy of the individual one step further by placing Descartes's property of 'self-evidence' within the individual him/herself rather than in the object of thought.⁶⁸ It is in these ways that, as Taylor writes, Rousseau 'is the starting point of a transformation in modern culture towards a deeper inwardness and a radical autonomy'.⁶⁹

It is in his deepening of the mode of radical reflexivity, in his extension of the notions of privileged access and autonomy, and in his application of these views to the field of auto(bio)graphical writing that Rousseau is a pivotal figure in the history of autobiography. When Rousseau felt outrage at the distorted third-person view of him

⁶⁶ Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography*, p.102.

⁶⁷ C. Taylor, p.158.

⁶⁸ Gouhier, 143, shows that Rousseau's and Descartes's views parallel one another up to the point when Rousseau writes, in the *Profession de Foi*, that he will reject all that is not self-evident, where self-evidence is equated with the following objects of thought 'toutes celles auxquelles dans la sincérité de mon coeur, je ne pourrais refuser mon consentement'. The scientific/moral divergence in the projects of Descartes and Rousseau we have illustrated is also further highlighted in the same passage, when Rousseau states that he will reject ideas 'quand elles ne mènent à rien d'utile pour la pratique', showing that his primary concern is the moral pursuit of happiness for human beings.

⁶⁹ C. Taylor, p.363

being presented in the portraits episode, it was thus to these notions he turned in order to support his belief in the veracity of his own self-perception and self-image.

Under the threat of being portrayed falsely in a negative moral light, as exemplified by the portraits and engravings, Rousseau turns to himself and draws on his autonomous subjectivity to clarify his own view of himself and self-understanding, following the lines of thought he had already sketched out in the earlier texts of the *Lettres Morales* and the *Profession de Foi*. Yet, to have transparent access to oneself and to be convinced of the veracity of this is not enough, for to overcome the threat of another's view submerging one's own in the public eye, it is in the public sphere that this battle must take place. Rousseau is therefore provoked by the challenge of the visual images being circulated, to respond with his own public self-presentation. As one commentator points out:

The conflict which faces Rousseau is that he believes in this deep self, a one-true-inner-portrait, but since that self requires outer approval, he must cast the search for identity (which is in fact a rationalization of identity) as an enterprise conducted in conjunction with others - that is, a cultural act.⁷⁰

However, this time, in contrast with the circulation of the La Tour engraving he had attempted previously in order to achieve this overturning of public opinion, the self-presentation will take the form of a written account of himself, for writing is still considered a medium which will, to a large extent, resist the effects of distortion and manipulation.

The main motivation for Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writings is therefore the transmission to a public audience of his self-image by means of a corrective self-representation in written form. Rousseau, as we shall see, from the very outset of this project, does not consider this self-representation to be an image or representation, but sees it as being literally *himself* on paper, so that he believes those who read his work will gain access to his inner being. For Rousseau, there appears to be no divergence

⁷⁰ Suellen Diaconoff, 'Identity and Representation in the Prose and Painted Portrait', *French Literature Series* 12 (1985), 61-70, (p.67).

between the way in which he sees himself and his true self, between the self and its representation either in mind or in the public realm. Rousseau has faith in the coincidence of self and representation, a faith which we shall see in Chapter Two, both guides and ultimately undermines his own project.

Rousseau is the first to take up the challenge of the image as presented to him in the portraits and thus the first to tackle the relation between self and image within his own writing. His response in terms of an exploration and presentation of self in the auto(bio)graphical *Confessions* and *Dialogues* has had a major influence upon the course of Western auto(bio)graphical writing.

How does Rousseau go about communicating his own image in autobiographical form in these two works, and what are the differences between them? How does the self-image emerge from the style and imaginative form of his writing? How closely related is the self-image which *in fact* emerges in these works to Rousseau's initial aims in, and motivation for, autobiographical writing? It is to these questions that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER TWO

Righting the image, Writing the self in Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Dialogues*

Rousseau, in response to the challenge presented by the portraits and engravings, is forced into attempting to provide a representation of what he feels to be his true self. The motivation to represent the self, and thus to form some conception of his self, is triggered by the challenge we outlined in Chapter One. Under the threat of being interpreted falsely by others, Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical reaction, his wish to give his own story in the *Confessions*, is one which we now accept as almost commonplace. Yet, we begin with Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writings precisely because they illustrate a universal mechanism in its most naively developed form: Rousseau is the first to take up the challenge of the image and to respond with a fully-fledged autobiography.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Rousseau turns to auto(bio)graphical writing armed with the confidence he gains from a 'privileged access' view of the self. No-one knows Rousseau better than he himself, and therefore the portrait he gives will be true and will come to be accepted by others and will take the place of current (false) images.

However, we shall demonstrate in this chapter that Rousseau underestimates, and appears, to a large extent, to be unaware, of the complexities and subtleties associated with the challenge of the image and the task he has set himself. What we can now see, from a contemporary perspective, as Rousseau's naive belief in his access to himself and his ability to provide a true portrait in writing, causes him enormous difficulties of both a literary and personal nature, and, as we shall show, leads to the ultimate failure of the *Confessions* to achieve any favourable alteration of his public image.

Of course, many critics have indicated the ways in which the *Confessions*, as a text, falls short of the declarations of intent Rousseau provides. In this chapter, we concur with many of the views put forward by these critics. However, we also go on

to demonstrate that the failure of this work to achieve its aims relies on two dimensions of his naivety: firstly his belief in a form of privileged access in which he can claim to know himself better than anyone else, and secondly in his naive attempts to stage-manage his own performance and to convince the reader, through manipulation, of a true self which in fact unravels in his very exploration of it.

Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical reaction to the challenge of the image does not end with the *Confessions*, but it is his growing awareness of the difficulties involved in, and the possibilities of both self-knowledge and self-representation, which lead to the writing of the often neglected *Dialogues*. In this text, Rousseau turns, with the experience and insight he has gained from his writing of the *Confessions* and the critical response to his readings of it, to a novel and much more subtle form of self-writing. When taken in conjunction with the *Confessions*, the *Dialogues* may appear a much less ambitious attempt to salvage Rousseau's moral reputation, but, we shall argue, the latter text demonstrates a much greater understanding of the relation between the self and its representation, and thus of the potential and limits of self-writing.

1) Meeting the challenge of the image: Rousseau's early ideas on the auto(bio)graphical project.

Much of Rousseau's motivation for writing the auto(bio)graphical *Confessions* and *Dialogues* came, as we saw in Chapter One, from the desire to counteract the false portrayals, as he saw them, of himself being put forward by others. The ability to counteract the (false) image held by others depends partly upon the belief in a privileged access to the self and thus to an accurate form of self-knowledge. Yet, Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writings also attest to the fact that it is not enough to believe in the correctness of one's view of oneself: this view must also be both communicated to, and accepted by others, as Starobinski rightly points out:

Ce que les écrits autobiographiques mettront en question, ce ne sera pas la connaissance de soi proprement dite, mais la reconnaissance de Jean-Jacques par les autres. Ce qui est problématique à ses yeux, en effet, n'est pas la claire conscience de soi,[...] mais la traduction de la conscience de soi en une reconnaissance venue du dehors.¹

Being convinced of the accuracy of his own self-knowledge through a belief in privileged access and thereby being able to form a true self-image, is therefore only the first step of the journey upon which Rousseau embarks. The second step, as Grimsley writes, is to 'destroy the false images of himself which he believes to exist in the minds of other people'.² However, this latter step can only be achieved by communicating the truth of one's own character and inner being to the public - a truth to which, as we demonstrated in Chapter One, Rousseau believes only he has access. As a result the author is forced into the position of giving his own representation of himself to others. In the following passage he explicitly contrasts himself as he is 'réellement', with the way in which he has been portrayed by his enemies:

Mais puisqu'enfin mon nom doit vivre, je dois tâcher de transmettre avec lui le souvenir de l'homme infortuné qui le porta, tel qu'il fut réellement, et non tel que d'injustes ennemis travaillent sans relâche à le peindre(400).

Rousseau is, then, indeed, an autobiographer 'malgré lui', for if he had not been misunderstood in society and his image and character thereby distorted by others, there would have been no need for him to turn to auto(bio)graphical writing as a means of putting a stop to the continued defamation of his character and as a way of reclaiming his own alienated image:

¹ Starobinski, p.218.

² Ronald Grimsley, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Study of Self-Awareness* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p.143 .

Si j'ai quelque plaisir à penser que je vivrai dans la postérité, c'est par des choses qui me tiennent de plus près que les lettres de mon nom; j'aime mieux qu'on me connoisse avec tous mes défauts et que ce soit moi-même, qu'avec des qualités controuvées, sous un personnage qui m'est étranger(1153).

The misinterpretations of Rousseau's character have been compounded by the fact that Rousseau himself has been unable to present his own true nature and value to others. Numerous are the anecdotes both in the *Confessions* themselves and from the testimonies of others, which recount Rousseau's social awkwardness, his inability to speak when the circumstances required it, and his failure, as he feels it, to do himself justice in public.³ It is therefore unsurprising that in his search for a medium which will present a more adequate image of himself to the public, Rousseau withdraws from social life and seeks sanctuary in writing as the best form of self-defence and a means of resurrecting his true character. Rousseau, interestingly, associates his physical presence with appearances only, whereas it is through his writing, he believes, that he will be able to convey himself accurately and without misinterpretation. Starobinski writes:

Ainsi Jean-Jacques s'arrache aux 'faux jugements' des autres, mais dans l'espoir d'inventer un autre langage qui saura les conquérir, les obliger à reconnaître sa nature et sa valeur exceptionnelles.⁴

Thus, Rousseau writes auto(bio)graphically in order to substitute writing for his physical presence and yet, at the same time, thereby to be better visible to others, for he believes: 'Le parti que j'ai pris d'écrire et de me cacher est précisément celui qui me convenoit. Moi présent on n'auroit jamais su ce que je valois'(116). Through his physical absence and by turning to writing, he will be able to convince others of his

³ In the Second of the *Lettres à Malherbes*, Rousseau claims 'de n'avoir pas l'esprit assés present pour montrer dans la conversation le peu que j'en ai', p.1132. John Sturrock, in *The Language of Autobiography*, also comments: 'By his own admission, Rousseau was in company neither a fluent nor persuasive talker, but shamefully tongue-tied and potentially ridiculous', pp.134-5.

⁴ Starobinski, p.151.

true character: 'Il compose ainsi une image de lui-même, qui s'imposera aux autres à la fois par le prestige de l'absence et par la vibration de la sentence écrite'.⁵

The motivation for writing as a means of defending Rousseau's character is also evident in his other early autobiographical pieces, the *Quatre Lettres à Malesherbes*, *Ebauches des Confessions*, and *Mon Portrait*. The author's defence, in these texts, centres around the idea that it is his character which has been disparaged by others and it is this which he is at pains to salvage through his own writing. Thus in the *Ebauches des Confessions*, as Rousseau specifically states, it is due to the personal accusations of his enemies that he is writing, for they may have forgiven his actions but they have assassinated his character by any means possible, including flattery: 'C'est ainsi qu'épargné dans les faits je fus cruellement traité dans le caractère, et qu'on parvint à me rendre odieux en me louant' (1152).

In the First *Lettre à Malesherbes*, Rousseau also claims that others have misinterpreted his character, but here the misinterpretations are seen as being due to witnessing his actions alone without having any understanding of the inner motivations surrounding Rousseau's behaviour. Thus he writes:

Je me peindray sans fard, et sans modestie, je me montrerai à vous tel que je me vois, et tel que je suis, car passant ma vie avec moi je dois me connoître et je vois par la maniere dont ceux qui pensent me connoître, interpretent mes actions, et ma conduite qu'ils ne connoissent rien.
Personne au monde ne me connoit que moi seul (1133).

Yet, most of all, it is for future generations that Rousseau writes, so that, since his name is bound to live on due to his celebrity, by giving his own portrait, he will be remembered as he was rather than how others sought to represent him. He now believes that it is only by the 'original' counteracting these false representations that the truth will finally emerge:

⁵ *ibid.*, p.153.

Tout me lisoit, tout me critiquoit, tout parloit de moi, mais dans mon absence[...]. Chacun me figuroit à sa fantaisie, sans crainte que l'original vint le démentir. Il y avoit un Rousseau dans le grand monde, et un autre dans la retraite qui ne lui ressembloit en rien (1151).

The forthright and confident nature of Rousseau's claims astound the modern reader of autobiography, well versed in the complexities and pitfalls of the type of project Rousseau is attempting. In fact, Rousseau, at the outset of his autobiographical project, shows an authoritative and naive belief in the ability he has to know himself and to communicate this self to others through his writing. So great is his confidence, in fact, that the motivation of self-defence and of the presentation of his own image to others, which clearly exists in these texts, is not the one which is placed at the fore in the *Ebauches*. Instead, Rousseau places emphasis here on a much more generalised theoretical view that people tend to judge others by their own standards and experience: Rousseau then goes on to claim that this 'règle unique et fautive' means that we can only obtain a biased view of others and that in order to know ourselves better, we must start by having a full understanding of others and get beyond our own subjective vision:

Parmi ceux qui se piquent le plus de connoître les hommes, chacun ne connoît guères que soi, s'il est vrai même que quelqu'un se connoisse; car comment bien déterminer un être par les seuls rapports qui sont en lui-même, et sans le comparer avec rien? Cependant cette connoissance imparfaite qu'on a de soi est le seul moyen qu'on employe à connoître les autres (1148).

In order to fully know oneself, Rousseau proposes, one must be first provided with a model of self-knowledge, and it is this model which Rousseau claims he will provide in the *Confessions*. The text itself is thus proffered as 'un pas de plus dans la connaissance des hommes[...]. Je veux tâcher que pour apprendre à s'apprécier, on puisse avoir du moins une pièce de comparaison; que chacun puisse connoître soi et

un autre, et cet autre ce sera moi' (1149). In offering to the public an image of himself, Rousseau is also to offer 'une image universellement valable'⁶ of a man. Because he is an ordinary man, born without privileges, he has been able to take on the role of observer, he is self-taught, has witnessed many historical events and has a wide range of experience, both professional and social. He therefore considers himself a unique and ideal model for others:

Je dis plus. A compter l'expérience et l'observation pour quelque chose, je suis à cet égard dans la position la plus avantageuse où jamais mortel, peut-être, se soit trouvé, puisque sans avoir aucun état moi-même, j'ai connu tous les états; j'ai vécu dans tous depuis les plus bas jusqu'aux plus élevés, excepté le trône(1150).

The incentive for writing is thus given as wanting to provide others with a person to compare themselves with, so that they might better know themselves and, as a result, may no longer judge others by their own standards. Altruistic as it may appear, the desire to give such an offering to humanity has only come about, the author tell us, as a result of bitter personal experience:

J'ai fait ces observations surtout par rapport à moi, non dans les jugemens que j'ai portés des autres, m'étant senti bientôt une espèce d'être à part, mais dans ceux que les autres ont portés de moi (1148).

The view Rousseau puts forward here on self-knowledge and knowledge of others thus goes some way to explaining the origin of false judgements made against him. If people do not know themselves how can they possibly judge others? The view is one we saw given in the *Dialogues* with reference to portrait painting, where it is claimed that the painter never really paints the sitter but only him/her self. All the wrongs and defects of character attributed to others are thus, using this argument, neatly deflected back to those from whom they originate: any character flaws others

⁶ Starobinski, p.222.

are accused of possessing are in fact due to our inability to get beyond our own personal perspective and are therefore most likely to be our own.

In the published version of the *Confessions*, the preface refers, albeit much more briefly, to both of these motivations for auto(bio)graphical writing. The text will thus serve to enhance the self-knowledge of human beings in general, whilst also providing the only accurate representation of Rousseau which can exist. The work is therefore presented as 'un ouvrage unique et utile, lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes', but also lays claim to being 'le seul monument sûr de mon caractère qui n'ait pas été défiguré par mes ennemis'(3).

It must also be noted, however, that the two motivations for Rousseau's engagement with auto(bio)graphical writing we have outlined above are not the only ones which exist. On a happier note there is always the pure enjoyment of re-living a lost past, of going back through the faculty of memory, at the term of one's life, to beginnings and to joyful times - an impulse which is common to much writing of autobiography. Rousseau thus writes early on in the *Confessions*:

Mais depuis qu'ayant passé l'age mur je décline vers la vieillesse, je sens que ces mêmes souvenirs renaissent tandis que les autres s'effacent, et se gravent dans ma mémoire avec des traits dont le charme et la force augmentent de jour en jour; comme si, sentant déjà la vie qui s'échappe, je cherchois à le ressaisir par ses commencements(21).

2) Rousseau's approach to writing the true self.

Having resolved to write the only authentic portrait of himself he believes can exist, in what he terms 'toute la vérité de la nature'(5), Rousseau's next difficulty is to reveal his true nature in writing. It is obvious from the very opening of the *Confessions* themselves, as it is also from the earlier auto(bio)graphical pieces, the *Ebauches des Confessions*, *Mon Portrait*, and the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, that Rousseau is not so much concerned with the factual evidence regarding his external

actions and what has happened to him during his lifetime, but rather with revelation of inner feelings and of influences which lay behind these events. Rousseau's belief is that although many facts to do with his life are common knowledge, it is from these facts that false interpretations concerning his character have been drawn. Thus in order to achieve this true portrait of himself in writing, Rousseau feels he has not only to reveal the things he has done in his life, but most of all he must expose to the public all the underlying thoughts and motivations which explain much of the behaviour by which he has been misinterpreted. Only once he is able to do this will his true self emerge:

Je vois que les gens qui vivent le plus intimement avec moi ne me connoissent pas, et qu'ils attribuent la plupart de mes actions, soit en bien soit en mal, à de tout autres motifs que ceux qui les ont produites. Cela m'a fait penser que la plupart des caractères et des portraits qu'on trouve dans les historiens ne sont que des chimères qu'avec de l'esprit un auteur rend aisément vraisemblables et qu'il fait rapporter aux principales actions d'un h[omme] comme un peintre ajuste sur les cinq points une figure imaginaire(1121).

The emphasis of the text will therefore be placed on the revelation of inner motivations and feelings as a means of explaining actions, rather than on the actions themselves. Giving an explanation of the way in which his external behaviour came about in terms of inner motivations is thus seen as a way of revealing Rousseau's true *character* to the public, and, as we have shown, it is his character that Rousseau is primarily interested in salvaging through the writing of the *Confessions*. Again Rousseau re-iterates his belief that the reality of his inner being, the 'causes secrettes', are truly accessible only to himself:

Les faits sont publics, et chacun peut les connoître; mais il s'agit d'en trouver les causes secrettes. Naturellement personne n'a du les voir mieux que moi; les montrer c'est écrire l'histoire de ma vie (1151).⁷

It is made abundantly clear from the outset that the *Confessions* are not to be simply a record of past experiences and accounts of events as they took place, but that Rousseau's emphasis will be on what he refers to, on several occasions, as the 'causes secrettes' or 'dispositions secretes' (1153), the secret inner mental and emotional life of the individual which may not always be gleaned from external behaviour.

The key to understanding character is therefore presented in terms of the ability to understand the interaction between events and external behaviour on the one hand, and inner feelings on the other.⁸ This emphasis in Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical work, as we have noted, is not exclusive to the *Confessions*, but also features strongly in his earlier auto(bio)graphical texts: the subtitle of the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, for example, describes the text as 'Contenant le Vrai Tableau De Mon Caractère Et les Vrais Motifs De Toute Ma Conduite' (1130). In the *Ebauches* this emphasis on inner states as opposed to events is expressed in the following way: 'J'écris moins l'histoire de ces éve[ne]mens en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon ame, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés' (1150).

Since the facts of a life can be entirely forgotten or misremembered and others may misinterpret them, Rousseau's adherence to his own feelings, along with their development and modification during his lifetime, are seen as the most reliable way to gain access to the truth of his own being and are therefore to provide the basis of his account:

Je n'ai qu'un guide fidelle sur lequel je puisse compter; c'est la chaîne des sentimens qui ont marqué la succession de mon être, et par eux celles des événemens qui en ont été la cause ou l'effet. J'oublie aisément mes

⁷ Rousseau also writes 'c'est l'histoire la plus secrette de mon ame', p.1155.

⁸ Rousseau wrote in a manuscript 'c'est l'histoire de mon âme que j'ai promise, et cette histoire devient desormais d'autant plus intéressante, qu'elle est la clef d'un tissu d'événemens bien connus de tout le monde, mais qu'on n'expliquera jamais raisonnablement sans cela', p.278 b. The revelation of his inner motivations is thus seen as the 'clef' to understanding his actions and gaining an accurate image of his character.

malheurs, mais je ne puis oublier mes fautes, et j'oublie encore moins mes bons sentimens[...]. Je puis faire des omissions dans les faits, des transpositions, des erreurs de dates; mais je ne puis me tromper sur ce que j'ai senti, ni sur ce que mes sentimens m'ont fait faire; et voilà dequoi principalement il s'agit(278).

Rousseau therefore proposes a highly detailed account of his inner life in relation to the external events through which others have come to know him:

L'objet propre de mes confessions est de faire connoitre exactement mon interieur dans toutes les situations de ma vie. C'est l'histoire de mon ame que j'ai promise, et pour l'écrire fidèlement je n'ai pas besoin d'autres mémoires: il me suffit, comme j'ai fait jusqu'ici de rentrer au dedans de moi (278).

In this manner, Rousseau plainly sets out to achieve a portrait of himself, to replace all (false) portraits and misinterpretations, in the *Confessions*. His choice, as we have seen, is of a written narrative which will trace his historical development, with emphasis placed on the close interaction between feelings and events in his life, revealing the 'inside story' behind his external manifestations in the world. Once this story is made known, Rousseau believes, there will no longer be any possibility of confusion or of misinterpretation of his true nature.

The use of writing as a form of communication of his true being is seen as the safest and most sure way of avoiding being further misconstrued.⁹ The written portrait can reveal the truth of a personality in a way that the painted portrait, for example, can never achieve: 'On saisit les traits saillans d'un caractère, on les lie par des traits d'invention, et pourvu que le tout fasse une physiognomie, qu'importe qu'elle

⁹ Michael O'Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Music, Illusion, Desire* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp.148-50, provides several examples from the *Confessions* where Rousseau resorts to the written rather than to the spoken word, as a way of presenting himself in a better light and avoiding any social embarrassment. One example is Rousseau's reading after dinner at Mme de Beuzanwal's: 'Après le diné je m'avisai de ma ressource ordinaire', p.290.

ressemble? (1149). The artist, it is argued, always fails to capture the true person because s/he has no knowledge of the inner life of the sitter.

The self-portrait thus holds the distinct advantage that the author is able to have access to the inner life of the individual being represented. The extent to which this is true is, of course, disputable, for it may be argued, as Starobinski does, that the self-portraitist is just as guilty of having created an image as the artist who paints another is. Thus Starobinski raises the following question and is critical of Rousseau's failure to apply it to himself:

L'autoportrait ne serait-il pas aussi arbitraire que le portrait? L'image qu'un homme donne de lui-même n'est-elle pas tout aussi fictive, tout aussi construite? Mais ces objections, Rousseau ne les adresse pas à lui-même.¹⁰

Of course Rousseau was fully aware that in writing this self-portrait he was hardly breaking new ground. Others, such as Montaigne, to whom Rousseau specifically refers, had already attempted to provide their own portrayals. However, Rousseau *does* see his own project as unique in that his text will seek to tell the whole truth at all times and will thereby avoid falling into the trap others have fallen into of presenting an image of themselves as they want to be seen rather than as they really are: 'Il se montre comme il veut être vu, mais point du tout comme il est' (1149). It is therefore Rousseau's belief that even those who have attempted their own self-portrait have failed to present themselves in a true light.

The task Rousseau sets himself in producing a portrait of himself in writing is never seen as an easy one. The author often complains of the great cost of writing to him, and the fact that his task has to be accomplished in great haste and in extreme circumstances. He also claims to be sceptical about his text achieving its desired aim:

Environné d'espions et de surveillans malveillans et vigilans, inquiet et distrait, je jette à la hâte sur le papier, quelques mots interrompus qu'à

¹⁰ Starobinski, p.224.

peine j'ai le tems de relire, encore moins de corriger. Je sais que malgré les barrières immenses qu'on entasse sans cesse autour de moi l'on craint toujours que la vérité ne s'échappe par quelque fissure. Comment m'y prendre pour la faire percer? Je le tente avec peu d'espoir de succès(279).¹¹

As Michael O'Dea has recently written: 'The language of truth is present everywhere in the *Confessions*'.¹² It soon becomes obvious that for Rousseau the guarantee of the truth of the *Confessions* lies in the author's ability to 'tell all', to give a 'warts and all' picture of himself, rather than presenting a socially acceptable image to the public as others have previously done: 'Je serai vrai; je serai sans réserve; je dirai tout; le bien, le mal, tout enfin'(1153).¹³ Rousseau wants his desire to show himself in his entirety to his audience to be seen as proof of his sincerity. He therefore undertakes to hide nothing from his reader: 'Jamais elle ne déploya plus scrupuleusement à son confesseur tout les réplis de son ame que je vais déployer tous ceux de la mienne au public'(1153).

Completeness is presented here as an essential aspect of truth-telling and sincerity. To hide anything from one's audience is seen as tantamount to lying, and in this way Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical portrait will be exceptional and distinguish itself from all others. It is Rousseau's view that those who do not reveal all say nothing about their true character 'en ne disant qu'une partie de la vérité, il ne disent rien'(1149). To reveal everything is the only way of being truly understood by others 'car si je tais quelque chose on ne me connoitra sur rien'(1153).

Every single detail of his life must be related even 'ce qui est ridicule et honteux'(18). As Grimsley has commented, Rousseau believes that 'only through the most daring self-revelation will he be able to remove the false image from other people's minds'.¹⁴ Such a task will involve complete exposure of the author: 'Dans

¹¹ Rousseau later writes, in a similar vein 'je suis forcé de faire à la hâte et mal un travail qui demanderoit le loisir et la tranquillité qui me manquent', p.325.

¹² O'Dea, p.134

¹³ Rousseau clearly associates truth with the capacity to tell all. Other references to his desire to say everything are 'je n'ai rien tu', p.5, and 'puisque enfin je dois tout dire', p.190.

¹⁴ Ronald Grimsley, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Study in Self-Awareness*, p.228.

l'entreprise que j'ai faite de me montrer tout entier au public, il faut que rien de moi ne lui reste obscur ou caché (59).¹⁵

Rousseau therefore sees himself as autobiographer as being faced with the choice of either admitting everything, including all his mistakes and the most shameful aspects of his past, or of disguising himself as others have tended to do and of presenting an image of himself other than he really is. The ability to 'tout dire' thus in fact becomes the ability to confess to all the things he has felt, thought and done, without excluding the most humiliating and painful episodes of his life in this account. It is in this way that Rousseau is able to justify the inclusion of the numerous events which make even the modern reader blush. Only by detailing everything that has happened to him will the reader be able to gain a true image of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

Tant tout se tient, tant tout est un dans mon caractère, et tant ce bizarre et singulier assemblage a besoin de toutes les circonstances de ma vie pour être bien dévoilé(1153).

In fact, during the narrative itself, the author appears to take great pride in his adherence to the commitment of revealing everything: 'Telles ont été les erreurs et les fautes de ma jeunesse. J'en ai narré l'histoire avec une fidélité dont mon coeur est content' (272).

The immediate objections which strike in particular the modern reader are that Rousseau cannot possibly remember or relate everything that has ever happened to him, for not only are there the limitations of memory which must be taken into account, but there is the sheer volume of any work which would be required to complete such an enterprise. However, whilst the second objection is not seriously considered by Rousseau and there appear to be no reservations expressed by the author himself concerning the enormity, or indeed the ultimate impossibility, of succeeding in 'tout dire' of one's life, Rousseau does take up the first objection and, as we shall see, provides a neat answer to the problem posed by his limited memory.

¹⁵ Rousseau also makes it clear that if he does not succeed in 'tout dire', the reader may become suspicious and accuse the author of lying, p.60.

It is certainly true that Rousseau does not claim, in the *Confessions*, to have a perfect memory for events, in fact there are many occasions upon which he bemoans the inadequacy of this faculty. There will therefore, he claims, inevitably be times when confusion in memory will result in him having to fill gaps to sustain the narrative coherence. However, Rousseau is adamant that such gaps, and his filling in of them, in no way detract from the veracity or accuracy of his account, for, as we saw, it is upon the memory of his *feelings* that the truth of his account rests and in Rousseau's memory of these there are no mistakes made.

Rousseau thus remains confident in the complete accuracy of his affective memory and in the belief that what is not remembered in this way is unimportant:

J'ai donc pu faire des erreurs quelquefois et j'en pourrai faire encore sur des bagatelles, jusqu'au tems où j'ai des renseignements plus surs; mais en ce qui importe vraiment au sujet je suis assuré d'être exact et fidelle(130).

For Rousseau the awareness he has of his own feelings is equated with self-knowledge so that, as Starobinski points out: 'Il n'y a pas de différence entre se connaître et se sentir'.¹⁶ There persists at all times in Rousseau an unshakeable faith in complete self-possession: 'Il y a chez lui, à cet égard, un optimisme qui ne se dément jamais, et qui compte fermement sur la pleine possession d'une évidence intérieure'.¹⁷ Yet, as has already been noted, it is not enough to grasp himself in this way: the difficulty, for Rousseau, lies in making others recognise this self. Thus Starobinski goes on to say: 'Le problème est d'obliger les autres à se faire une image véridique du caractère et du coeur de Jean-Jacques; cette image devra être, par principe, aussi simple, aussi claire, aussi *une*, que le sentiment intérieur de Rousseau'.¹⁸

Rousseau claims the narrative he will give of these events and feelings in the *Confessions* will be a neutral one, plainly stating what was the case without any subjective bias or fictional elaboration which would undermine his claim to truth.

¹⁶ Starobinski, p.225

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.217.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.226

When he writes: 'C'est ici de mon portrait qu'il s'agit et non pas d'un livre'(1154), Rousseau emphasises his desire to give a portrait from which invention, fictionalisation and artistry are entirely absent: 'Je vais travailler pour ainsi dire dans la chambre obscure; il n'y faut point d'autre art que de suivre exactement les traits que je vois marqués'(1154).

Yet, having made this promise, Rousseau, as is perhaps inevitable, comes up against difficulties in maintaining the neutrality of tone he seeks. On one of the few occasions in the text he considers not revealing all, the reason he gives for this possible omission is that he may be unable to relate the episode in an unbiased voice:

Me voici dans un de ces momens critiques de ma vie où il est difficile de ne faire que narrer, parce que il est presque impossible que la narration même ne porte empreinte de censure ou d'apologie. J'essayerai toutefois de rapporter comment et sur quels motifs je me conduisis, sans y ajouter ni louange ni blâme(377).

As we have seen, Rousseau sets out to 'tell all' in the *Confessions* and claims to have made no selection concerning the events and experiences contained in the work, nor has he contrived to relate them in a way which will influence the reader. Instead his duty, he states, is to tell everything to the reader so that the reader may be left to make his/her final judgement upon his character:

Or il ne suffit pas pour cette fin que mes recits soient fidelles il faut aussi qu'ils soient exacts. Ce n'est pas à moi de juger l'importance des faits, je les dois tous dire, et lui laisser le soin de choisir(175).

The task allotted by Rousseau to the reader thus appears to be to take in all the evidence and to judge the author fairly. As Rousseau says of himself: 'Ma fonction est de dire la vérité, mais non pas de la faire croire'(199).

Rousseau thus presents himself as someone on trial, yet his testimony in this case will be objective, sincere and be guided by the truth. The public will then be left

to decide his fate. Rousseau goes on to write: 'J'ai promis ma confession, non ma justification[...]. C'est à moi d'être vrai, c'est au lecteur d'être juste. Je ne lui demanderai jamais rien de plus' (359).

There does not seem, however, to be any doubt in Rousseau's mind that the neutral presentation of all the details of his life will lead to the reader's correct assessment of his true nature, to the production of an 'image véridique':¹⁹

Si je me chargeois du résultat et que je lui disse; tel est mon caractère, il pourroit croire, sinon que je le trompe, au moins que je me trompe. Mais en lui détaillant avec simplicité tout ce qui m'est arrivé, tout ce que j'ai fait, tout ce que j'ai pensé, tout ce que j'ai senti, je ne puis l'induire en erreur à moins que je ne le veuille(175).

On the surface of it then, as we have shown, Rousseau's presentation of his own image in writing will be one which places the emphasis firmly on his inner motivations and in particular on his feelings during his lifetime, rather than on external appearances and the behaviour many have witnessed and drawn their own (false, in Rousseau's eyes) conclusions from. The narrative Rousseau sets out to give is one which must be able to reflect these inner aspects of his being, and yet present them in both a complete and neutral way, leaving the reader to act as judge and to draw the only conclusion possible from this material. As a result, the reader will be able to gain access to an image of Rousseau as he really is, rather than as he is so frequently portrayed by others. The account itself will also, as we have noted, be a step towards the achievement of a better self-understanding by others in general, as his audience will have been presented with a model which they can make use of for their own self-development.

¹⁹ Starobinski, p.227

3) Dimensions and types of naivety in Rousseau's self-writing in the *Confessions*

In the following sections we shall consider in greater depth the four features of Rousseau's approach to the presentation of his self-portrait in the *Confessions* we have outlined: his emphasis on feelings over events; the wish to provide a complete and consequently truthful account; writing his narrative in a neutral tone; and the role he proposes for the reader of his text. We aim to show that Rousseau holds two naive beliefs in relation to his autobiographical writing which consistently undermine his project and aims.

The first of these naive beliefs is the possibility of self-access, which leads Rousseau to claim knowledge and understanding of the 'causes secretes' of his existence, and further, to claim to be able to give a complete, hence true, account of himself. The second naive belief is Rousseau's faith in his ability to present the image he wishes to his audience and to manipulate the reader's response to this image. Both these naiveties, we shall argue, cause Rousseau immense problems, both in terms of the writing itself, and in terms of the way in which the work is received. Through exposure of these two types of naivety, we explain the critical fascination with the *Confessions* and its shortcomings, and demonstrate the divergence between the image Rousseau intends to give of himself and the image which in fact results from his writing of the *Confessions*.

Rousseau's obvious recourse to a narrative of the development of his inner states rather than to the events of his life in the *Confessions* has proved somewhat of a puzzle for critics. It has been the opinion of many critics, especially those of the Geneva School of Rousseau criticism, comprised of such eminent figures as Jean Starobinski and Raymond Marcel, that Rousseau's approach of devaluing the events themselves in favour of his feelings 're-inforces the belief in an essential self[...] identified as the upcoming story's real protagonist'.²⁰ The view most commonly put forward by such critics, as Sheringham points out, is that 'despite the concern with

²⁰ Susan K. Jackson, *Rousseau's Occasional Autobiographies*, p.6.

causes and explanations, the *Confessions* are permeated throughout by an unhistorical sense of self, remote from causality'.²¹ Thus it is the revelation of a 'total unity of the self',²² or 'unité de base',²³ which persists in these accounts and which, it is argued, is of central concern to Rousseau in the *Confessions*.

According to this interpretation, the adoption of an historical narrative in the *Confessions* is seen either as Rousseau's adherence to 'the dictates of rationality',²⁴ or, as Starobinski writes, it is seen as the most effective way of communicating an image of the self to others: 'Il lui apparaîtrait seulement qu'il est impossible de s'affirmer sans se raconter, et que la narration du détail de sa vie "passera" mieux que l'affirmation globale: *je suis innocent*'.²⁵

Yet in the light of Rousseau's own comments about his intentions in the *Confessions* and the entirely sequential structure of the work, the historical development of the *Confessions* must surely be seen as more than either simple conformity to the stylistic expectations and rationale of the time, or as the best way of communicating an understanding of being which is in fact grasped immediately and in its entirety by the author himself. As Sheringham goes on to say:

Yet, whilst there seems little doubt that the ahistorical, sovereign 'présence à soi', which has been analysed with such finesse, can claim to be fundamental to Rousseau, it nevertheless seems legitimate to ask whether this is the sole criterion by which to evaluate his project in the *Confessions*.²⁶

Frequent are the occasions in the *Ebauches* and the *Confessions* themselves in which Rousseau specifically refers to the need to follow the development of his feelings, often expressed in terms of 'enchaînements' and 'fils', so as to understand

²¹ Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires - Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.32

²² Jean A. Perkins, *The Concept of the Self in the French Enlightenment* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p.101.

²³ Marcel Raymond, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris: Corti, 1962), p.47.

²⁴ Sheringham, p.33.

²⁵ Starobinski, p.226-7.

²⁶ Sheringham, p.33.

the background which led to the 'effets' in his life. This is clearly stated, for example, in the following passage from the *Ebauches*:

Pour bien connoître un caractère il y faudroit distinguer l'aquis d'avec la nature, voir comment il s'est formé, quelles occasions l'ont developpé, quel enchainement d'affections secretes l'a rendu tel, et comment il se modifie, pour produire quelquefois les effets les plus contradictoires et les plus inattendus. Ce qui se voit n'est que la moindre partie de ce qui est; c'est l'effet apparent dont la cause interne est cachée et souvent très compliquée(1149).

In the same passage, Rousseau goes on to re-iterate the point that those who have no understanding or knowledge of the 'enchainements d'affections secretes' will often be led to draw false conclusions about others, based on interpretations clouded by their own subjectivity:

Chacun devine à sa manière et peint à sa fantaisie; il n'a pas peur qu'on confronte l'image au modèle, et comment nous feroit-on connoître ce modèle intérieur, que celui qui le peint dans un autre ne sauroit voir, et que celui qui le voit en lui-même ne veut pas montrer?

Nul ne peut écrire la vie d'un homme que lui-meme. Sa manière d'être intérieure, sa véritable vie n'est connue que de lui; mais en l'écrivant il la déguise; sous le nom de sa vie, il fait son apologie(1149).

Thus, the developmental aspect of Rousseau's account is not to be ignored, for it is the complex relationship between feelings and events which Rousseau is at pains to reveal to the reader, so as to make his 'ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur'(175).²⁷ Feelings and events are seen to interact in a two-way process; for whilst feelings certainly can lead to actions being taken, so that to understand the action itself it becomes important to gain insight into the underlying states of mind: however, it is

²⁷ See also Starobinski, p.219.

also the case that events initiate certain feelings and that these may well influence the course of a particular life and the development of a character. Rousseau appears to be saying, as Sheringham has commented, that neither the event nor the feeling is primordial, but that both are affected, and in some way formed, by the interaction which takes place: 'Something original or prior is entailed by the transformative, dynamic, historical mechanism of "enchaînement", but this "something" only really comes into being in so far as it is modified'.²⁸

As is evident from the comments in the *Ebauches*, Rousseau also conceives of events and feelings in terms of causal chains, with the idea being that the point of origin must be found and the chain followed in order for the individual to be fully understood. There is therefore no 'first edition' but only a 'palimpsest produced through the constant interaction and modification of new by old and old by new'.²⁹

Following Rousseau's comments it appears to the reader that s/he will be presented in the *Confessions* with a narrative which will trace feelings and events in the life back to their point of origin and then follow the interacting chains of these twin elements of existence, so as better to illuminate the character of the author and provide an image of the self as he truly feels himself to be. Accompanying this is the assurance that the author's own feeling for the self is the most faithful guide to truth. Thus Rousseau talks in the *Ebauches* of 'suivre le fil de mes dispositions secretes, pour montrer comment chaque impression qui a fait trace en mon ame y entra pour la première fois' (1153).

This does indeed seem to be the purpose of many of the events described in Book 1. Thus we learn, in this book of the *Confessions*, how reading led to a development of a passionate and sensitive nature 'je sentis avant de penser' (8): how the spanking he received at the hands of Mlle de Lamercier determined the direction of his sexual preferences for the rest of his life: 'Qui croiroit que ce châtement d'enfant receu à huit ans par la main d'une fille de trente a décidé de mes gouts, de mes desirs, de mes passions, de moi pour le reste de ma vie?' (15), leading to tastes which would not have developed naturally.

²⁸ Sheringham, p.41.

²⁹ *ibid.*

Another such episode recounted is the beating he received, this time from M. Lambercier, when he was accused of having broken a hair comb, a crime for which Rousseau, forty years on, continues to protest his innocence, and which he claims led to a lifelong hatred of injustice and the development of a natural affinity for all those who are innocent victims: 'Qui croiroit que ce sentiment invincible me vient originairement d'un peigne cassé?' (1158). Later in the *Confessions* he stresses 'cette pente naturelle qui m'attire vers les malheureux' (359).³⁰

Such episodes in the work are presented by the author as 'primal scenes' or origins of types of behaviour, feelings or attitudes which have persisted in some form throughout his life. Details of childhood are provided in order to show 'la force qu'ont souvent les moindres faits de l'enfance pour marquer les plus grands traits du caractère des hommes' (1157). The way in which Rousseau follows his development from such points of origin surely suggests that he is not concerned with the revelation of any essential or immutable self, but rather, as one commentator has put it, that Rousseau 'seeks the unity of his personality in the very pattern of its change and development'.³¹

These scenes are not only presented as being origins of feelings and attitudes, but are also the initiators of a *chain* (or *chains*) of feelings which develop throughout Rousseau's life. They are therefore important moments which hold great significance for the course of the future. Yet, as the text progresses, the reader is confronted with a whole range of such significant events and episodes which appear to act as 'turning points' in Rousseau's existence.

The moment Rousseau is accused by M. Lambercier of breaking the comb, for example, Rousseau's happy childhood existence is shattered: 'Là fut le terme de la sérénité de ma vie enfantine' (20). The writing of the essay Rousseau was to submit for the Dijon prize, described by Rousseau in the following dramatic fashion: 'Je le fis, et dès cet instant je fus perdu. Tout le reste de ma vie et de mes malheurs fut l'effet inévitable de cet instant d'égarement' (351), provides another turning point in his

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of Book 1 of the *Confessions* see Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, Part Two, particularly pp.49-85 in which Lejeune discusses Rousseau's masochistic tendencies arising from the spanking by Mlle Lambercier.

³¹ Sheringham, p.38. This quotation is from Lionel Gossman, 'Time and History in Rousseau', *Studies on Voltaire and Eighteenth Century* 30 (1964), 311-349, (p.323).

existence. A further turning point in the text is Rousseau's decision to break away from social opinion and convention to forge his own path in the world of ideas:

Je renonçai pour jamais à tout projet de fortune et d'avancement.
 Déterminé à passer dans l'indépendance et la pauvreté le peu de tems
 qu'il me restoit à vivre, j'appliquai toutes les forces de mon ame à briser
 les fers de l'opinion, et à faire avec courage tout ce qui me paroissoit
 bien, sans m'embarrasser aucunement du jugement des hommes(362).

On another occasion, having been ill and dependent upon doctors for some time, and having become gradually disillusioned with the superficiality of Parisian social life, Rousseau resolves to take the responsibility for his health into his own hands and to leave Paris for the country, a decision which provides another turning point in the book:

Je suivis cette indication et résolu de guérir ou mourir sans medecins et sans remédes, je leur dis adieu pour jamais, et je me mis à vivre au jour la journée, restant coi quand je ne pouvois aller, et marchant sitôt que j'en avois la force(389).

It is possible, as Michael O'Dea has recently done, to reveal a great many examples of such moments which appear to be the origin of certain feelings, or turning points in Rousseau's life. Tracing the origin of Rousseau's unhappiness, for example, O'Dea writes:

When did Rousseau's misfortunes begin? The question has many answers. '*Ma naissance fut le premier de mes malheurs*' (Bk 1,7). Like lying, misfortunes begin more than once: after the unjust beating at Bossey, for example ('*La fut le terme de la sérénité de ma vie enfantine*', 20). Later, in adult life, 'mes malheurs' take on a more specific meaning for Rousseau, but again they have more than one beginning. His account

of discovering on his return from Montpellier that another man has replaced him in Mme de Warens' affections presents such a moment, the '*moment funèste qui devoit trâiner à sa suite la longue chaîne de mes malheurs*' (260); at the beginning of Book 8, just before the narrative of the *illumination de Vincennes*, he announces the origin of the same sequence, '*la longue chaîne de mes malheurs*' (349); with the ending of his passionate meetings with Mme d'Houdetot, he again writes: *ici commence le long tissu des malheurs de ma vie.*' (Bk 9, 446).³²

The search for turning points and significant moments thus loses its potential as an interesting and revealing narrative tool and as a way of making sense of a life, purely because such moments appear so frequently within the text. As Sheringham comments, this tendency of Rousseau's to search for origins is both 'comic and painful' as he combs through his memories 'trying to find, like the needle in the haystack, the point at which the downfall becomes irrevocable'.³³ Sheringham continues:

The identification of turning points is a prominent feature of the *Confessions*. But here, so pronounced is his retrospective sense that every step he took was probably a *faux pas* responsible for subsequent misfortunes.³⁴

Suddenly turning points are everywhere, so that they seem to be arbitrarily conferred by the author, for Rousseau could not have been aware of the significance of such events at the time of their occurrence. Thus Rousseau, having said he will present the evidence in an objective fashion so that the reader can judge for him/herself, encroaches upon the reader's task by having, in the isolation of turning points and significant moments in this manner, already judged the relative importance of the

³² O'Dea, p.152

³³ Sheringham, p.54.

³⁴ *ibid.*

events he is narrating. Starobinski also raises these difficulties with Rousseau's approach:

Mais jusqu'où remonter pour trouver ces 'premières causes'? Et de quel droit décider qu'un moment possède une importance déterminante en regard de tel autre événement, qui n'est qu'un simple effet? Distinguer les causes et les effets est un acte de jugement. Or n'est-ce pas ouvertement reprendre le privilège de juger, qu'en principe l'on a confié tout entier au lecteur?³⁵

However, not only are events cited as origins of certain characteristics of Rousseau, but they also often appear to be included in the *Confessions* because they expose or typify some essential characteristic in Rousseau, revealed during that particular episode. In describing his encounter with Mme de Warens, for example, Rousseau clearly puts forward the notion that events which take place are revelatory of underlying traits and that such essential characteristics would not even be gleaned by the subject him or herself, were it not for such 'causes occasionnelles': 'Sans ces causes occasionnelles un homme né très sensible ne sentiroit rien, et mourroit sans avoir connu son être'(104).³⁶

Events are also included because, the author claims, they typify in some way his overall character. The most celebrated example of such a scene is Rousseau's return to the house of the beautiful and seductive Zuleta in Venice, which ends in such a farcical and embarrassing way. Rousseau writes of the incident in the following terms:

S'il est une circonstance de ma vie qui peigne bien mon naturel, c'est celle que je vais raconter[...]. Qui que vous soyez qui voulez connoitre un

³⁵ Starobinski, p.231.

³⁶ See Jackson, p.6, on the history of *Occasio*, the idea that physical and mental powers will go unknown unless there are occasions in which they can be revealed. Rousseau also writes 'les faits ne sont ici que des causes occasionnelles', p.1150. Huntington Williams, *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), discusses Rousseau's adoption of probably Malebranche's 'cause occasionnelle', the cause-effect relation between 'objective sensation and the sentiment which it provokes', p.129.

homme, osez lire les deux ou trois pages qui suivent vous allez connoître à plein J.J. Rousseau(320).

Other episodes are also included in the text primarily in order to reveal the *feelings* underlying these episodes and to place them within a context of Rousseau's personality, so that both the episodes and he himself can be better understood by his audience. This is certainly true of two of the great 'confessions' in the work. The first of these confessions is, of course, the stealing of the ribbon, a crime the young Rousseau failed to own up to, and which led to the expulsion of a servant girl, Marion, from the house to some undeserved fate. The second concerns the decision by Rousseau to give up his children to be brought up in an orphanage. In both cases, Rousseau places the episodes themselves within the context of his own feelings and reasonings at the time these events took place.

However, for the modern reader, there is a fine line between explaining the events which took place by providing a contextualisation of them, and searching for excuses. Whilst Rousseau acknowledges his wrongdoing to a certain extent in both these episodes, the explanations soon become excuses, as though the simple relating of the events themselves absolves his own behaviour, as Mortier puts it, it is as if 'l'intensité de ce repentir efface le péché et exalte le pécheur'.³⁷

Thus, although Rousseau admits to still being haunted by the spectre of his misdemeanour; 'Ce souvenir cruel me trouble quelquefois et me bouleverse au point de voir dans mes insomnies cette pauvre fille venir me reprocher mon crime' (85-86), there is also the tendency, as in many other episodes in the *Confessions*, to look to pin the blame elsewhere and to highlight the author's 'pureté d'intention'.³⁸ Rousseau, in the ribbon episode, thus points to the way in which he was interrogated after the theft as being the real reason for his lying; 'Mais on ne fit que m'intimider quand il falloit me donner du courage' (87). His age too must be taken into account in judgement of this crime:

³⁷ Roland Mortier, 'Rousseau et la Dissemblance', in *Re-Appraisals of Rousseau* eds., Simon Harvey Marian Hobson, David Kelley and S.S.B. Taylor, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1980), p.28.

³⁸ Mortier *ibid.*, p. 28.

A peine étois-je sorti de l'enfance, ou plustot j'y étois encore. Dans la jeunesse les véritables noirceurs sont plus criminelles encore que dans l'age mur; mais ce qui n'est que foiblesse l'est beaucoup moins, et ma faute au fond n'étoit guère autre chose(87).

Not content with having excused himself in this manner Rousseau further argues that it was in fact due to his fond feelings for Marion that he accused her of the crime 'il est bizarre mais il est vrai que mon amitié pour elle en fut la cause'(86). He had intended, the reader is told, to give the ribbon to Marion and this was why her name was on his lips. As Sheringham says of the account given: 'What is disturbing here is not so much the explanation as the fact that Rousseau thinks it excuses him'.³⁹

In Rousseau's 'confession' to having abandoned his five children, one of the book's other 'scandalous' admissions, it is similarly argued that the children were in fact much better off being given away and that this manner of disposing of unwanted children was considered the norm by his contemporaries. In fact Rousseau, far from expressing any remorse over the loss of his children, goes so far as to almost congratulate himself on the wisdom of his decision and says that he saw no wrong in it.⁴⁰

Rousseau appears to believe that an account of his faults, along with the insight provided into the reasons for his actions 'will lead to acquittal'.⁴¹ When he commits faults it is through mistakes rather than malicious intention. Rousseau points out that he is always the first to recognise his mistakes and to learn from them, with the implication again that this in itself goes a long way to excusing his behaviour.

Thus, whilst Rousseau claims to set out to follow the 'fil de tout cela'(1155), the interaction between chains of events and feelings in his life, the events themselves, as we have shown, are narrated in order to serve a multiplicity of purposes within the text and there appears to be no straightforward or traceable relation between feelings and events themselves. The threads that Rousseau has proclaimed he will reveal and follow appear to be too complex and unravel as he tries to trace them. As Sheringham

³⁹ Sheringham, p.51.

⁴⁰ Rousseau writes 'je n'y voyois aucun mal', p.358.

⁴¹ Sheringham, p.51.

says 'the various strands of his narrative - factual, analytical, emotional - seem to come apart and, instead of blending, to evolve independently of each other'.⁴²

Sheringham also notes of one episode in the text, for example; 'Rousseau's account here constantly points to an interaction between feelings and events, but of a sort which makes both ultimately unfathomable'.⁴³

The increasing complexity we have outlined of the relation between feelings and events as the text progresses, along with the associated difficulty for the reader of trying to uncover, as s/he is being asked to do, an 'image véridique' of Rousseau himself from the material being provided, is certainly exacerbated by Rousseau's presentation of his own characteristic features in the *Confessions*. Rousseau comments on several occasions on the fact that one of his most defining characteristics is his propensity for behaving in ways which appear to be entirely contrary to his nature.

The 'inconsistencies' of Rousseau's behaviour have been a favourite point of attack for those who have wanted to undermine Rousseau's integrity.⁴⁴ Rousseau, whilst often acknowledging many instances of such inconsistency in his behaviour - in an earlier text, *Le Persifflé* of 1749, for example, he writes: 'Rien n'est si dissemblable à moi que moi-même[...]cette variété singulière'⁴⁵ - provides two possible explanations for it. The first is that on many occasions in his life he has found himself in situations he was not brought up for; thus his celebrity as an author and thinker has spiralled him into social circles, 'Jetté malgré moi dans le monde' (368), with mores completely unfamiliar to him, and it is therefore unsurprising that his behaviour in such circles has often been awkward and stilted.

Thus, for example, a man of such humble origins cannot be expected to entertain a king, as Rousseau is required to do on one occasion. Rousseau has no facility with language, and is more often than not tongue-tied in public, particularly in grander social circles. He therefore leaves before his audience with the king on this occasion, blaming his desertion on his 'maudite timidité' (380). He is much more at ease, we are told, alone with the two women he loves, in turn, Mme de Warens and

⁴² *ibid.*, p.52.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.54.

⁴⁴ Mortier writes 'les détracteurs de Rousseau ont maintes fois relevé et dénoncé ce qu'ils tenaient pour une incohérence et pour une marque d'instabilité grave' p.25.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Mortier, p.25.

Thérèse, indulging in simple pleasures such as walking in the countryside, and eating. Yet his failure to speak leads him constantly to be misjudged by others, and, as O'Dea writes 'each failure leaves him more vulnerable to a misinterpretation of his actions'.⁴⁶

On several occasions, therefore, Rousseau's way of dealing with his social awkwardness leaves his behaviour open to complete misinterpretation by those around him: 'Je crois que voila dequoi faire assez comprendre comment n'étant pas un sot, j'ai cependant souvent passé pour l'être, même chez des gens en état de bien juger' (116). Thus, for example, when Rousseau appears to take a sarcastic attitude towards others during one period in the *Confessions*, the reader is told that this attitude was in fact to be attributed to his timidity and social discomfort. Rousseau does not know how to deal politely with society so, as a result, he behaves in completely the opposite manner; 'Je me fis cynique et caustique par honte; j'affectai de mépriser la politesse que je ne savois pas pratiquer' (368). Yet this behaviour is 'si contraire à mon naturel' (368-9).

Rousseau's seemingly bizarre behaviour is also attributed to his unique nature which comprises a variety of often conflicting characteristics. The fact that different characteristics come to the fore in different situations means that Rousseau appears to be behaving in ways which are entirely inconsistent. Thus his passionate nature and extreme sensitivity combined with his shyness, existing as aspects of the same being, have meant that, on many occasions, Rousseau has in fact behaved in a way which totally contradicted the way he felt. This combination of passion and shyness resulting in a scene of excruciating embarrassment is never better exemplified than in the second meeting with Zuleta, which Rousseau, as we saw earlier, describes as summing up his entire character; on this occasion, in the face of the conflicting emotions of shyness and desire, Rousseau creates a situation from which it is impossible to extricate himself with any dignity intact.

The combination of passion and timidity which exists in Rousseau leads him to being full of ideas and desires but he rarely succeeds in acting upon these or bringing his projects to fruition. Thus, whilst his imagination is endlessly enflamed

⁴⁶ O'Dea, p.148

'pour concevoir jusqu'ou mon délire alloit dans ce moment il faudroit connoitre à quel point mon coeur est sujet à s'échauffer sur les moindres choses et avec quelle force il se plonge dans l'imagination de l'objet qui l'attire'(101), combined with this is Rousseau's propensity for laziness and inaction: thus he writes, in the same passage, of both 'mon naturel ardent mais foible', and of 'la vie oiseuse et tranquille pour laquelle je me sentoiss né'(277), which mean that he can dream endlessly but is unable to act. Rousseau's experiences continue, throughout the account given in the *Confessions*, to be dominated by 'cette opposition continuelle entre ma situation et mes inclinations'(277). These contrasting elements of his character, he claims, have been an integral part of his being from the very beginning:

Telles furent les premières affections de mon entrée à la vie; ainsi commençoit à se former ou à se montrer en moi ce coeur à la fois si fier et si tendre, ce caractère efféminé, mais pourtant indomptable, qui, flottant toujours entre la foiblesse et le courage, entre la molesse et la vertu, m'a jusqu'au bout mis en contradiction avec moi-même, et a fait que l'abstinence et la jouissance, le plaisir et la sagesse, m'ont également échappé(12).

As well as explaining situations in which he is totally unlike himself by drawing the reader's attention to the co-existence, in his nature, of such characteristics as passion and shyness, Rousseau also attributes uncharacteristic behaviour to his inability to resist flattery: 'Mon plus grand malheur fut toujours de ne pouvoir résister aux caresses'(371), and to the fact that he is easily led astray by those with stronger characters than himself, such as Bâcle and Venture. Referring to this 'foiblesse', Rousseau writes of one such incident in which his behaviour appears to be inexplicable:

Je n'en avois en effet ni l'intention ni la tentation, et malgré cela, par une de ses inconsequences que j'ai peine à comprendre moi-même je finis par me laisser entraîner contre mon goût, mon coeur, ma raison, ma volonté

même, uniquement par foiblesse, par honte de marquer de la défiance(317).

Yet, however hard Rousseau searches for possible explanations for certain of his actions, there are times when Rousseau himself confesses to being at a loss for an adequate explanation of his behaviour, so unrepresentative is it of him, and goes on to claim that by such actions a man should not be judged!

Comme jamais rien ne fut plus éloigné de mon humeur que ce trait-là, je le note, pour montrer qu'il y a des momens d'un espèce de délire où il ne faut point juger des hommes par leurs actions. Ce n'étoit pas précisément voler cet argent; c'étoit en voler l'emploi: moins c'étoit un vol, plus c'étoit une infamie(39).

The *Confessions* thus abounds, as Peter France has pointed out, with references to what Rousseau terms his, 'égarements', 'folies', or 'bizarreries'. Examples are provided by his departure with Bâcle for Turin (Bk 3), the concert he performs in Lausanne (Bk 4), his accusation of Marion (Bk 2). These are not all isolated incidents, however, as France goes on to say:

The most interesting case is provided by Jean-Jacques' behaviour after the illumination of Vincennes, the period of 'intoxication' or 'effervescence' lasting four or five years in which he becomes a new man[...]. Presenting it, like the more comic 'bizarreries' of Book 4, as a deviation from his true nature, he attempts again to preserve his fundamental idea of himself, as the loving, innocent, timid person whom we see in Book 1, the Charmettes episode and elsewhere.⁴⁷

Whilst it may not be surprising that within the context of a life there are things the author has done which appear to defy explanation even to him/her self, in

⁴⁷ Peter France, *Rousseau: Confessions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.65.

Rousseau's case such occurrences are so frequent as to seem to require at least some further attempts at elucidation. Such a demand would perhaps be unreasonable if the author were to admit to a chronic case of self-alienation and opacity concerning his own self-knowledge, but the truly remarkable aspect of the *Confessions* is that, even in the face of all the numerous inconsistencies and unfathomable incidents recounted, provided by the narrative of events and feelings we have analysed, and by Rousseau's own presentation of his character and behaviour, Rousseau still appears to cling to some notion of his being as a unified, and thus graspable, entity. Of this apparent mixture of contradiction and unity, Mortier writes:

Rousseau perçoit son *moi* comme une alternance de mouvements de dispersion et de contradiction, de ruptures soudaines (qualifiés de 'folies', de 'délires', et d' 'extravagances') et de profondes continuités, qui tiennent à son être même et à la vision du monde sur laquelle il ne variera pas.⁴⁸

Although Rousseau does, as we have noted, acknowledge both the inconsistencies between his behaviour and his feelings and between the divergent aspects of his own personality: 'Je crois avoir déjà remarqué qu'il y a des tems où je suis si peu semblable à moi-même qu'on me prendroit pour un autre homme de caractère tout opposé' (128), the belief in what Raymond has termed a fundamental 'unité de base' still appears to persist: 'Répétons-le: Rousseau ne doute pas un instant de son unité, en dépit des contradictions et des discontinuités qu'il a su lui-même accuser'.⁴⁹

Many critics have pointed out Rousseau's faith in the fact that clarity or coherence will result from the portrait in the *Confessions*. As S.S.B.Taylor has written

⁴⁸ Mortier, p.25. See also Marcel Raymond, pp.16-17 and Marcel Raymond, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau: deux aspects de sa vie intérieure', *Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 29 (1941-2), 7-57.

⁴⁹ Starobinski, p.226. Starobinski also makes the point that many seemingly incompatible aspects of Rousseau's behaviour have all been attributed to his 'nature ardent', but that despite these 'Jean-Jacques ne cesse d'affirmer qu'il y a en lui une unité sous-jacente', p.70. It is interesting to note also that Rousseau was preparing a work entitled *La Morale sensitive* which was to be a study of the way in which people become alienated from their real selves due to external and other forces. For discussion of this projected work see Marcel Raymond, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, pp.42-6.

'he gives expression to all the discordant elements in his character in the belief that his essential coherence will emerge from this incoherence, this complex of irreconcilable forces'.⁵⁰ Michael O'Dea raises the same point and goes on to say 'with only occasional inconsistencies, the *Confessions* refer to a stable notion of the true self as a point of reference throughout[...] There is a concept or entity that does not change'.⁵¹

This unitary language is not a new feature of Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writing; it is present also in the *Ebauches*, where Rousseau, whilst he seems happy to see events as origins and to follow the subsequent progression of his inner life in a historical and developmental fashion: 'je vois le fil de tout cela; sa trace est utile à suivre'(1155), also seems to maintain the existence of a 'principe' underlying all this change, a similar kind of continuity or 'unité de base'. In the following passage, for example, he suggests that chains of effects can be followed and be seen to converge upon a single source:

Je m'applique à bien développer partout les premières causes pour faire sentir l'enchaînement des effets. Je voudrais pouvoir en quelque façon rendre mon ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur, et pour cela je cherche à la lui montrer sous tous les points de vue, à l'éclairer par tous les jours, à faire en quelque sorte qu'il ne s'y passe pas un mouvement qu'il n'apperçoive, afin qu'il puisse juger par lui-même du principe qui les produit(175).

Yet surely this notion of a self as 'unity' loses credibility in the face of so many inconsistencies, when there are so many times when Rousseau's behaviour remains a mystery even to himself, and, as we have noted, it truly appears even to himself that he is someone else: 'J'étois vraiment transformé; mes amis, mes connoissances ne me reconnoissoient plus'(416-7). It must be the case that, as Peter France states, 'the very notion of a fundamental nature is placed in some doubt here.

⁵⁰ S.S.B. Taylor, 'Rousseau's Romanticism', pp.15-16.

⁵¹ O'Dea, pp.170-1.

Rousseau is estranged from Jean-Jacques, like an actor from some character he finds himself playing'.⁵²

The self-alienation Rousseau appears to experience cannot be adequately explained in the way he attempts to do. It is not only, as many commentators have noted, the frequency of such episodes, but their length which is particularly disturbing to the reader and increasingly points to Rousseau's 'mauvaise foi' concerning his own actions. Thus O'Dea writes:

The book is also a long account of an unsystematic but permanent divorce between outward appearances and inner reality. Here, Rousseau is not himself; there he has become another man; elsewhere he is at odds with his *naturel*, for example in his years as a Paris intellectual, which was "*l'état du monde le plus contraire à mon naturel*" (Bk 9,417), but which lasted six years and might still be going on, he writes, were it not for special circumstances that restored him to himself.⁵³

Starobinski has concluded that in the face of all this frequent self-alienation, Rousseau can only think of himself in terms of lack: 'je ne puis désormais penser à *moi-même* que comme à ce qui me manque, à ce qui ne cesse de se dérober'.⁵⁴ The self seems devoid of anything which would give it either continuity or unity. Thus when we look for the 'moi-même' to which Rousseau refers, 'there seems to be nothing there'.⁵⁵

There is therefore no simple, clear image which emerges of Rousseau from the writing of the *Confessions*. The notion of any unity or transparency is continually undermined by both the way in which Rousseau approaches his narrative, with his emphasis on what turns out to be, as we have shown, the complex interaction of feelings and events and by Rousseau's own propensity for fragmentation, inconsistency and self-alienation. Both these aspects of the text lead to a growing feeling of incoherence, to the view that the author has no control over himself, and no

⁵² France, p.65.

⁵³ O'Dea, p.168.

⁵⁴ Starobinski, p.76.

⁵⁵ O'Dea, p.170.

clear insight into himself and the that text he is in the process of writing reflects this. As O'Dea has neatly pointed out, there seems to be a flagrant discrepancy between Rousseau's own account and his desire for unity and transparency to emerge from the *Confessions*:

In the text of the *Confessions*, I am suggesting, one can find far more complex versions of the self than the work seems able to encompass in any genuinely unified explicit account. There is a set of articulations missing between two groups of terms - those having to do with calm, consistency and unity, on the one hand, and those having to do with 'ivresse', 'égarements', and 'folies' on the other[...]. The reader is left to make sense of differing and often apparently inconsistent accounts of the self.⁵⁶

The modern reader's faith in the ability of the author to successfully accomplish the task of making 'mon ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur' (175) is, as we shall argue in the next section, to be further diminished by both two further types of naivety which are evident in the *Confessions*: the tone Rousseau actually adopts in his work and his treatment of the reader.

4) Further naiveties and bad faith in the *Confessions*.

Rousseau claimed, as we saw above, to be giving a non-subjective account of his life in the *Confessions*, albeit that this might, at times, be difficult to achieve. However, both the way in which the text is intended to be read and the reaction it seeks to produce, is obvious to any reader from the very outset, due to both explicit statements made by the author and by the tone of the work. Thus from the preface, in which Rousseau refers to 'mes malheurs' and the 'cruelle injustice' of his enemies onwards, the author makes it clear that he is writing the account from a position full of

⁵⁶ O'Dea, p.161.

woe and tragedy, in which the protagonist finds himself unjustly treated and maligned by all around him.

Even in the very early chapters of the *Confessions*, therefore, the narrative is suffused with a sense of impending doom and chapters end with glimpses of what is to follow, creating an atmosphere of foreboding. At the end of Book 1, for example, Rousseau writes: 'Ah, n'anticipons point sur les misères de ma vie! Je n'occuperai que trop mes lecteurs de ce triste sujet'(44). Other narrative sequences are introduced in a similar manner, and bleak pessimism prevails as in the following extract:

'Entrons dans le détail de cette seconde revolution: époque terrible et fatale d'un sort qui n'a point d'exemple chez les mortels'(417-8). Even moments of happiness are brought into relief due to their total contrast with the things to come.

Not only is the tone of the narrative in the *Confessions* anything but neutral, but there is also another aspect of Rousseau's text which serves to undermine the reader's faith in the ability of the author to carry out the task he has set himself: this is Rousseau's attitude to the reader of his work. Having claimed in the *Ebauches* that the reader is to be presented with a dispassionate account of both the inner workings of Rousseau's mind and his external behaviour, with the reader being left to draw his/her own conclusions and form his/her own image of the author, the reader finds that s/he is in fact continually bullied in the text into sympathising with the author's own view of himself. However, statements such as the following do nothing to endear the author to his readers:

Pour moi je le déclare hautement et sans crainte: Quiconque, même sans avoir lu mes écrits, examinera par ses propres yeux mon naturel, mon caractère, mes moeurs, mes penchans, mes plaisirs, mes habitudes et pourra me croire un malhonnête homme, est lui-même un homme à étouffer (656).

Thus, as Peter France writes, Rousseau:

Challenges us from the outset to disagree with him[...]. Like his first listeners, his readers are asked to accept his version of the truth, to take sides, for or against. It is this that makes reading the *Confessions* an uncomfortable experience, however warmly one may respond to the beautiful and entertaining scenes which abound in it[...]he is obviously not expecting a hostile judgement.⁵⁷

The already uncomfortable position of the reader is rendered increasingly uncomfortable as the text progresses and the role of the reader appears to change from that of being a witness to the material being presented who will form his/her own judgement of the author, to being the one made ultimately responsible for placing all the disparate aspects of the text together in order to produce the unity we have seen Rousseau clearly wishes to emerge from the work. Of the reader's task Rousseau later writes: 'C'est à lui d'assembler ces élémens et de déterminer l'être qu'ils composent; le résultat doit être son ouvrage; et s'il se trompe alors, toute l'erreur sera de son fait' (175).

Rousseau clearly believes that once they have been presented with all the details of his existence, his readers, having produced a complete picture for themselves, will be left in no doubt as to the true nature of the author himself. This belief relies firstly on the unattainable ideal of being able to narrate *all* the details of one's life, as we have seen, but also on the notion that there can only be one possible conclusion drawn from the account given and one image formed.

Rousseau appears to make no allowance for any difference in interpretation by the reader. His naive, or some would say, deluded, view is that all readers should reach the same (truthful) image and if they do not it is through no fault of his. There is also a covert threat in Rousseau's appeal to the reader. At times, it seems, as Starobinski points out, that *any* judgement made upon Rousseau's character by the

⁵⁷ France, pp.88-9.

reader will be inaccurate: 'Mais sitôt qu'il se sent atteint par un jugement (et ce jugement fût-il favorable) il lui semble qu'il y a méprise, qu'on le prend pour un autre, qu'on le défigure'.⁵⁸

Faced with the fact that his portrait is by no means as transparent as he hoped it would be, and having been unable to trace the *enchaînements* of feelings and experiences in any clear way, Rousseau is now forced to rely on the reader to provide the clarity and coherence of image that he himself has failed to achieve in his own writing. Rousseau's idea of privileged access to himself, which has led him to the belief that he will be able to both know and communicate this self to others, is now highly questionable, as Rousseau turns to the reader to bolster his increasingly unconvincing project.

However, as we shall see, Rousseau crucially fails to recognise the effect of these appeals upon the reader. Far from being moved by Rousseau's addresses, or sympathetic to his project and aims, many readers find that the appeals made to them by the author only serve to exacerbate an already dwindling faith in Rousseau's project. Not only does Rousseau clearly not know and understand himself in anything like the way he claimed, but his way of regaining some credibility by appealing to the reader only works against him, as the reader comes increasingly to identify Rousseau as the figure who emerges from the writing process, rather than the one of whom knowledge had been claimed. Rousseau had hoped to attain a coincidence of representation and self through his auto(bio)graphical work, but in fact the writing practice in the *Confessions* continually produces a divergence between these two, so that the self Rousseau claimed to have access to almost inevitably comes to be seen as a figment of the author's own imagination.

The burden of responsibility for the image of the self resulting from the *Confessions* is thus placed squarely upon the reader him/her self and 'the possibility of error on Rousseau's part is thus excluded'.⁵⁹ The reader experiences the unnerving sensation of being the one who must not only make the final judgement upon the nature of Jean-Jacques, but must also make sense of all the details being recounted, of all the feelings, events and their possible interaction(s), which, as we have seen would

⁵⁸ Starobinski, pp.172-3.

⁵⁹ Sheringham, p.49.

be no mean feat for any reader. So it is that 'Rousseau confie donc au lecteur la tâche de réduire la multiplicité en unité'.⁶⁰

In the autobiographical text entitled *Mon Portrait*, there is already a hint given that Rousseau is far more preoccupied with 'telling all' than he is with creating unity or coherence. There appears to be an already present belief here that a comprehensible image will emerge even though Rousseau has not attempted to assemble the disparate parts: however, in this text, the task of putting the pieces together has not yet been handed over to the reader: 'Quand j'écris, je ne songe point à cet ensemble, je ne songe qu'à dire ce que je sais et c'est de là que résulte l'ensemble et la ressemblance du tout à son original'(1122).

This pressure conferred upon the reader is further augmented by Rousseau's withdrawal from any kind of responsibility for the outcome of his work and the constant addresses to the reader which seek his/her collusion with the author in comments such as 'on conviendra, je m'assure'(125). Often Rousseau asks for the reader's indulgence and his/her sympathy, for example when he writes: 'Dans tant de menus détails qui me charment et dont j'excède souvent mon lecteur je mets pourtant une discrétion dont il ne se douteroit guère si je n'avois soin de l'en avertir'(235) or 'qu'on se mette à ma place pour en juger'(263). From both these quotations it can also be seen that, despite his remarks, Rousseau does not trust his readers to emerge with the single 'correct' image of the author and therefore must be guided in their reading.

Whilst Rousseau clearly *does* provide a selection of events he wishes to narrate, infusing them with his own distinctive tone, as we outlined above, and providing 'explanations' for his actions, through which he clearly tries to dictate and control the reader's reaction,⁶¹ none of these strategies is recognised by the author himself, who continues to believe that the reader's judgement will be uninfluenced by the text itself.

The idea first presented in the *Ebauches*, that the reader should be left free to make whatever judgement s/he chooses is thus constantly undermined both by Rousseau's statements concerning his own responsibilities and the frequent attempts

⁶⁰ Starobinski, p.227.

⁶¹ See Sheringham who questions 'how far Rousseau explicitly tries to control, through explanation, the meaning the incident is supposed to have', p.50.

to direct the reader's interpretation. It is perhaps understandable, under the circumstances, that the author of the *Confessions* wishes his audience to accept the image he is putting forward; this in a sense is the main motivation behind the writing of the work, for, as we have discussed, Rousseau's aim in writing is 'd'obliger les autres à se faire une image véridique du caractère et du coeur de Jean-Jacques; cette image devrait être, par principe, aussi claire, aussi *une*, que le sentiment intérieur de Rousseau'.⁶²

Modern readers would surely accept, from any autobiographer, and in particular one who is out to offer and defend an image of himself, a certain amount of sympathy-seeking and directing of their reactions by the author. It is perhaps, then, not this which ultimately jars with the reader so greatly but the fact that Rousseau is, in the end, unwilling, or simply fails, to make sense of his own life and hands over responsibility for piecing the fragments of his life together over to the reader. As the 'plot' against Rousseau gains momentum in the Second Part of the *Confessions*, it is perhaps more true to say that Rousseau finds he is incapable of understanding the reasons for what has happened to him and hopes that others, in particular those of future generations, will be able to see without prejudice and produce a clearer picture.

However, readers cannot but feel both betrayed and dismayed by this lack of perspicacity from an author who promised transparency. It is Rousseau's lack of integrity in dismissing responsibility both for many of his actions within the narrative, as we discussed above, and for the text itself, which is really the last straw concerning any possible faith the reader held in the author of the *Confessions*. The author seems to fall into a type of bad faith which undermines his entire project.

The problem for Rousseau lies in the fact that the reader *is* ultimately free to, and will inevitably, form his/her own image of the author. Thus whilst Rousseau attempts to put forward a certain image of himself, the image which in fact emerges from the text is, as we shall continue to demonstrate, very much opposed to the one he set out to achieve. We shall, in the following section, show the main aspects of his character Rousseau aims to put to the fore and illustrate the way these too are devalued by the account given. We shall then close this section with a summary of the

⁶² Starobinski, p.226.

divergence between the intended and resultant images of Rousseau in the *Confessions*, and indicate that this divergence is more a consequence of the Rousseau's initial presuppositions concerning his ability to know and communicate himself fully in auto(bio)graphy, rather than of the structural difficulty of being unable to ensure the intended image is indeed the one received by the audience.

Rousseau presents himself, from the start of the *Confessions*, as a unique individual: 'Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent'(5). Not only does Rousseau feel himself to be unique, but he actively seeks to distinguish himself from others 'j'aimerois mieux être oublié de tout le genre humain que d'être regardé comme un homme ordinaire'(1123). He has lived in many different places, has mixed in many diverse social circles, has exercised a variety of professions, and, as we saw earlier, considers himself a model of universal man, from whose self-knowledge all can learn: as Starobinski comments: 'son expérience a une teneur universelle, ses qualités d'homme du peuple et d'autodictate ne lui donnent que plus de droits à être écouté, car il détient seul la véritable idée de l'homme tel qu'il est'.⁶³

Rousseau thus, on many occasions in the text, points out his difference from others, and places particular emphasis on the uniqueness of his achievements. Following the performance of his opera *Le Devin du Village*, for example, there was in the theatre 'un murmure de surprise et d'applaudissement jusqu'alors inouï dans ce genre de pièces'(378). Another aspect of Rousseau's uniqueness is his independence from the views and opinions of society in general and his ability to stick to his own position even at the risk of being a social outcast: 'On me trouvera ridicule, impertinent; eh que m'importe? Je dois savoir endurer le ridicule et le blâme, pourvu qu'ils ne soient mérités'(378). Examples of Rousseau's determination to be his own man thus abound in the *Confessions*:

Déterminé de passer dans l'indépendance et la pauvreté le peu de tems qu'il me restoit à vivre, j'appliquai toutes les forces de mon ame à briser

⁶³ Starobinski, p.223.

les fers de l'opinion, et à faire avec courage tout ce qui me paroissoit bien, sans m'embarrasser aucunement du jugement des hommes(362).

On another occasion he writes; 'je ne trouvai plus rien de grand et de beau que d'être libre et vertueux, au dessus de la fortune et de l'opinion, et de se suffire à soi-même'(356).

Also presented as unique is Rousseau's capacity for friendship 'j'étois né pour l'amitié'(362), exemplified in his close relationship with Bernard when they were young 'il en résulte pourtant un exemple peut-être unique, depuis qu'il existe des enfans'(14). Not only is this capacity for friendship unparalleled but the reader is also told that Rousseau's tolerant nature is exceptional. When describing an acquaintance he made in Venice, Rousseau writes: 'Hors moi je n'ai vu que lui seul de tolérant depuis que j'existe' (328).

Yet, for Rousseau, it is his individual make-up which, as we discussed earlier, he feels distinguishes him most from any other human being, as it consists of a unique combination of seemingly divergent characteristics which are nonetheless united in him. Thus Rousseau from the outset, emphasises, as we saw earlier, the passionate part of his nature which developed early and continued throughout his lifetime and talks of 'un sang brûlant de sensualité presque dès ma naissance'(16), along with the shyness which, too, was to be a permanent character trait.

This combination of seemingly disparate qualities, however, has not always served him well, for his conflicting emotions have meant that, as was pointed out earlier, he has rarely carried any of his projects to term. People have also misinterpreted him because they were unaware of the contradictions of his nature. For example, explaining why people did not find him particularly intelligent, Rousseau refers to the conflict between his 'passions vives' and his 'idées lentes à naître', so that 'on diroit que mon coeur et mon esprit n'appartiennent pas au même individu'(113). Rousseau's own writing of the *Confessions* is also testimony to the gap between the will to write and the act of actually putting words on the page: 'De là vient l'extrême difficulté que je trouve à écrire. Mes manuscrits raturés, barbouillés, mêlés, indéchiffrables attestent la peine qu'ils m'ont coûtée'(114).

We have already seen that Rousseau's attempts to explain the inconsistencies of behaviour in various ways did nothing to add to the author's credibility in the eyes of the reader or enhance the notion that any integral image might emerge from the text. As we shall show below, Rousseau's other qualities placed at the forefront of his portrayal similarly seem to crumble under closer scrutiny and, in fact, lead to the conclusion that alternative, and far less favourable qualities, might well stand in their place in the reader's final analysis.

Rousseau places emphasis in his work on the fact that, from an early age, and in particular after the beating by M. Lambercier for a crime he says he did not commit, he is sensitive to the needs of others and to the plight of innocent victims 'cette pitié naturelle qui m'attire vers les malheureux' (359). As a result of his own experiences, he has a strong sense of justice and honesty: 'l'amour de la justice m'en a toujours fait supporter le préjudice de mon propre mouvement avant que personne songeât à se plaindre' (304). Often in the *Confessions* this honesty concerns money and frequent emphasis is placed, in Rousseau's adult life, on his always paying back debts 'mais quant aux deux emprunts dont j'ai parlé, je les remboursai très exactement, sitôt que la chose me fut possible' (313). Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that Rousseau never demanded salary raises but gained them through his own merit. His employers offered these increases 'uniquement de leur propre mouvement' (360).⁶⁴

This sense of justice has also made him acutely aware of situations in which he has been mistreated by others and of the resentment he feels as a result of being treated unjustly. Such is the case in Venice, where he feels he is not being given the regard he deserves from his employer: 'Dès lors il ne cessa de me donner des désagréments, de me faire des passedroits, s'efforçant de m'ôter les petites prérogatives attachées à mon poste[...] Je n'avois plus à espérer chez lui que désagrémens au dedans, injustice au dehors' (310-11). Such is Rousseau's distaste at the whole Venetian episode that he seeks justice in Paris immediately upon his return, calling on several officials to have his own position and entitlements vindicated.

What surprises the reader, however, is that having revealed a nature which is at once passionate, sensitive and acutely aware of injustice, Rousseau goes on to relate

⁶⁴ The same point concerning his salary increases is further insisted upon a little later (353). Sheringham has written of Rousseau's 'neurotic relationship with money', p.45.

episodes in which his own treatment of others seems to indicate a singular lack of sensitivity towards the feelings of others and the hurt his words and actions might provoke. We have already mentioned Rousseau's 'affair' with Mme de Larange, during which episode he seemed to give no thought to the effect of his actions upon Mme de Warens, but instead focuses, on his return, on the cruel fate of having being replaced in his absence.

Examples of two incidents which could be cited here, and to which we have already referred, are Rousseau's humiliation of Zuletta and his later decision to give his children away, with little regard in the latter case, it seems, for the pain either the children or their mother would suffer. In fact, it appears that the only demonstration of sensitivity on this occasion is in not actually applauding himself publicly for the way he has resolved the 'inconvenient' (345). On an equally serious note, there is the effect of his exhibitionism on the young women to whom he exposes himself, and the using, for sexual purposes, of other young girls, for example whilst in Venice.

The hypocrisy of Rousseau's own claim to sensitivity can also be illustrated by citing more minor episodes in the text: the occasion on which he was given a theatre ticket only to deliberately lose the person who had offered the ticket in the crowd, promptly re-sell the ticket and then spend the money. There is also his abandonment of Bâcle, on a street corner, after the latter has travelled with him and shared everything he had with his companion. Rousseau's wish, therefore, for an image of his 'real character' to emerge in the course of his writing, whilst no doubt fulfilled, is certainly *not* in the way he intended.

The reader also notes that, in attempting to provide an image of a shy and easy-going character, Rousseau succeeds only in giving the portrait of a man who is self-affirming to the point of obnoxiousness, stubborn and often petty. The self-promotion and self-affirmation which emerges in the text is one of its most notable features. For someone who purports to be shy and retiring, Rousseau certainly blows his own trumpet fairly frequently. With such claims as 'c'est peut-être à ce pauvre Jean-Jacques si bafoué, que la maison de Bourbon doit la conservation du Royaume de Naples' (306), it appears Rousseau is certainly not frightened of taking credit where he thinks it is due!

A frequent feature of the *Confessions* is Rousseau's protestations of being undervalued by others, which consequently makes him feel the need to put himself forward at every turn:

C'est ce que je fis toujours avec une droiture, un zèle et un courage qui méritoit de sa part une autre récompense que celle que j'en receus à la fin. Il étoit tems que je fusse une fois ce que le Ciel qui m'avois doué d'un heureux naturel, ce que l'éducation que j'avois reçue de la meilleure des femmes, ce que celle que je m'étois donnée à moi-même m'avait fait être, et je le fus (301).

On one of the few occasions on which he does actually receive some recognition, the sense of elation is palpable: 'On avoit vu et approuvé ma conduite; j'étois universellement estimé (313). Yet, amidst the frequent self-promotion of the text, one can only read the following sentence with a sense of irony: 'Je résolu de ne plus m'attacher à personne, mais de rester dans l'indépendance en tirant parti de mes talens dont enfin je commençois à sentir la mesure et dont j'avois trop modestément pensé jusqu'alors' (329)!

So great is Rousseau's emphasis on the wrongs done to him by others, and his own disclaiming of responsibility that the reader, instead of being sympathetic to the image Rousseau wishes to convey, begins to see the author as increasingly complaining, self-important, petty and ultimately hypocritical. The fact that Rousseau often fails to acknowledge these aspects of his character, and that he does not, on the whole, apply his own criticisms to himself, only serves to re-inforce the reader's view.⁶⁵

Thus instead of presenting an image of a unique, honest, caring, sensitive, hard-working and loving man, who like anyone else has made mistakes but now has the courage to confess these to the public - the image the reader often feels Rousseau

⁶⁵ Starobinski, p.205, points out, for example, that although Rousseau's tone at the end of Book Two is one full of horror and remorse at his actions, it seems that already by the beginning of Book Three, the episode has been entirely forgotten. However, in defence of Rousseau here it may be that he felt he had dwelt long enough on the incident or the temporal gap between writing the two chapters may have meant he was in a different frame of mind.

would *like* to emerge from the work - the *Confessions*, due to the continual self-promotion of the author, his protestations of ill-treatment at the hands of others, his disclaiming of responsibility for even those actions which are supposedly being confessed to, and his need to cite conflicting aspects of his personality and the influence of others to explain his erratic and often farcical behaviour, presents the reader with no choice but to take a quite different view.

As we have demonstrated, Rousseau goes to great lengths in the *Confessions* to explain the 'inconsistencies' in his behaviour and to paper over the cracks in his fragmented self. Yet, the image fails, in the end, to hold together. The explanations offered are far too weak to account for the frequency of what Rousseau often refers to as his 'folies', 'délires', 'extravagances' and his wish to deflect the decision-making process onto others. His 'nature' seems far too fragmented and dissolute for any coherence to be believed in. In fact, the 'unity' of self which Rousseau refers to becomes for the reader, as Starobinski has pointed out, increasingly a 'manque':⁶⁶

On se demande alors si la notion même de la nature garde un sens. Ce mouvement oscillatoire ne permet pas le repos; le retour stable à l'état naturel[...] *Moi-même*, ce n'est rien d'autre qu'une image entrevue que la vitesse du passage rend confuse et évanouissante.⁶⁷

Any stability of self appears to be an ideal image in the *Confessions* and not one which is borne out by the author's own narrative. The self-alienation which we have found throughout the work is far too pervasive for the reader to be convinced either by the explanations offered, or by the author's initial claim to complete self-knowledge. Further confidence is lost in the image Rousseau is obviously aiming to present, due, as we have shown, to the tone adopted in the work, through which the author continually attempts to guide the reader's response and interpretation, and finally by the author's own treatment of the reader as the text progresses. By the end of the work, the reader has indeed formulated an image, but this image is far from the one Rousseau intended.

⁶⁶ Starobinski, p.76.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.70. Also see O.C., p.417 note 2.

Perhaps, as Micheal O'Dea has suggested, even Rousseau himself did not believe he would be able to present a true and clear image of himself to the reader, and instead presents it as an ideal he knows he can never reach:

Rousseau writes of making his soul transparent to the reader's eye, but this ideal aspiration is hedged about by limitations, both in the form in which it is rendered ('Je voudrais pouvoir en quelque sorte...' - 175) and in the methods which are described. The tasks that Rousseau sets himself - offering his readers a complete description of his soul from every point of view, telling him everything that he has done and felt - are more like a substitute for an unattainable transparency than an attempt to reach that state.⁶⁸

Rousseau was to present several readings from his *Confessions* in Paris, although there were determined attempts made to ban them. Rousseau describes on the final page of the *Confessions* how, at one such reading, the work was greeted with silence, although from one member of the audience, Mme d'Egmont, he managed to extract a visible shudder of emotion.⁶⁹ Several others were also able to get hold of the manuscript, amongst them Duclos, who accused Rousseau of 'perfidie et de fausseté'.⁷⁰ Although there were some favourable reactions,⁷¹ in general the *Confessions* can in no way have been considered a success in terms of convincing the general public of Rousseau's worth.

⁶⁸ O'Dea, pp.167-8.

⁶⁹ This reading of the *Confessions* probably took place at the beginning of May 1771. In the final paragraph Rousseau writes: 'J'achevai ainsi ma lecture et tout le monde se tut. Madame d'Egmont fut la seule qui me parut émue; elle tressaillit visiblement; mais elle garda le silence ainsi que toute la compagnie', p.656. It appears that Rousseau only read the second part, because he deemed the first part unsuitable for women.

⁷⁰ O.C., p.656 note 4.

⁷¹ Dorat's account, first published in the *Journal de Paris* 9 August 1778, expresses one such favourable reaction to the work.

5) A second attempt at auto(bio)graphy - The *Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*. The form and content of the *Dialogues*.

With the failure of the *Confessions*, Rousseau did not, as has often been assumed, renounce the attempt to leave a document to posterity in which his true character and nature would be clear for all to see. In the *Dialogues*, with the subtitle *Rousseau: Juge de Jean-Jacques*, the author presents himself as both protagonist (in fact twin protagonist) and judge. The work itself is a startling and shamefully neglected autobiographical text 'easily Rousseau's most ignored work', as one critic has stated.⁷² It is a startling text in many ways, in both its form and content, in its difference to the *Confessions* and also in its length, detail and propensity for repetition.

The *Dialogues* are thus presented as a final 'defense de mon honneur, pour confondre et démasquer les imposteurs qui le diffament' (840), and a last opportunity to make heard 'la voix de la justice et de la vérité' (841). The writing of the *Dialogues*, just as for the *Confessions*, is seen as a necessary but unwanted act that the author is 'forcé malgré lui de le poursuivre' (836). As one of the characters says of the author's attitude to the work:

Il m'a souvent protesté que cet écrit étoit de tous ceux qu'il a faits en sa vie celui qu'il avoit entrepris avec le plus de répugnance et executé avec le plus d'ennui (836).⁷³

Yet, unlike in the *Confessions*, the author of the text appears to hold out little hope that the work he is undertaking will lead to the clearing of his name within his lifetime and aims instead at convincing those of future generations: 'Il m'a dit cent fois qu'il se seroit consolé de l'injustice publique, s'il eut trouvé un seul coeur d'homme qui

⁷² James F. Jones (Jr), *Rousseau's Dialogues: An Interpretative Essay* (Geneva: Droz), p.13.

⁷³ The *Dialogues* were in fact written over a period of four years (1772-76) at a rate of fifteen minutes per day, see p.837. The way in which the text was executed may explain both its length and the existence of numerous repetitions within the work.

s'ouvrit au sien, qui sentit ses peines et qui les plaignit; l'estime franche et pleine d'un seul l'eut dédomagé du mépris de tous les autres (950).⁷⁴

Following the model of a Socratic dialogue, the *Dialogues* present the discussion, over a period of several months between two characters, Le François and 'Rousseau'.⁷⁵ The topic of the discussion, as laid out early on, is the true character of J.J., the famous author who has been publicly denounced as 'un monstre abominable' (738). As in the dialogues of Plato, the arguments are carefully and rationally laid out, following different avenues and yet always aiming towards a conclusion which is clearly set out and which seems inevitable to the reader.

Of course, in this case, the clearing of J.J.'s name is the conclusion of the text, and the argument, seen in broad terms follows a simple logic. The first proposition is that the man who wrote the much-appreciated and applauded *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and other works cannot be the same man who is being defamed in public as a monster. The second proposition, which is confirmed by the researches of the two interlocutors, is that J.J. is truly the author of these works: thus the simple and obvious conclusion is that J.J. is not a monster but in fact can be credited with all the noble characteristics which abound in his writings.

The clearing of J.J.'s name is therefore achieved with great simplicity of rationale, but the investigation which precedes this conclusion is also conducted with great thoroughness. The arguments for and against are considered at length and each one followed through to its logical conclusion, so that the thread of the conversation and the issues being raised are never lost sight of. Whenever digressions begin to be made, the speaker is brought back sharply to the point. The characters stop the conversation from digressing by insisting upon following all threads and arguments through in a coherent and complete manner, not allowing any room for gaps or divergences, as in the following intervention:

⁷⁴ The text was never intended to be published during Rousseau's lifetime. In the *Histoire du Précédent Ecrit*, which follows the *Dialogues*, Rousseau describes the pitiful story of going on the afternoon of 24 February 1776 to Notre Dame to deposit his manuscript at the altar, only to find that the gates were locked. The manuscript was in fact published in England in 1780 due to the efforts of Brooke Boothby who considered it his 'sacred duty' to see that the work was published. See Jones, pp.13-15.

⁷⁵ To avoid any possible confusion the fictional character in the *Dialogues* will be referred to as 'Rousseau'.

Mais si nous continuons à passer d'un sujet à l'autre, nous perdrons notre objet de vue et nous ne l'atteindrons jamais. Reprenons avec un peu plus de suite le fil de mes observations, avant de passer aux conclusions que j'en ai tirées (791).

The *Dialogues* take as well established the existence of a 'plot' against J.J. and the engineers of this plot and their methods are clearly outlined. J.J. himself emerges as a shining moral light amongst all the moral decrepitude and sinister workings of his enemies, who are exposed as hypocritical, dishonest and malicious as the text progresses. J.J. is, in fact, at times portrayed as a martyr resembling Socrates himself, with some speeches closely resembling those of the *Apology* in style and content, in their fight for truth and justice to prevail within a world of dishonesty and corruption.

J.J., like Socrates, is presented as the only one who dares to speak the truth, even though he knows that he is fated to die without public recognition of this truth: 'il ne se trouve pas dans toute la génération présente un seul honnête homme, pas un seul ami de la vérité' (761). J.J. is a lone voice in the wilderness, deserted by all those who do not have the courage to stand up for their own views against the majority.

The catastrophic reception of the *Confessions* called for a drastic rethinking of the way in which the self could be portrayed in writing. The narrative of the *Confessions*, as we saw in the previous section, was 'based on a developmental theory of individual life-history',⁷⁶ with stress placed upon the succession of emotions and feelings and their inextricable links with the events of his life. This, we have argued above, led Rousseau to having to explain away the apparent inconsistencies in his life, an attempt which we have shown, was successful only in making the reader increasingly sceptical about the existence of any possible unity of self or permanent stability in his nature. Thus by trying to give an account in which emphasis was placed on change within continuity, we saw that Rousseau, in the *Confessions*, only really conveys an image of a fragmented and often lost human being, whose 'real nature', as Rousseau sees it, increasingly appears to be a constructed or ideal self-image which is certainly not borne out by a reading of the text itself.

⁷⁶ Sheringham, p.39.

In the *Dialogues* an entirely different and totally novel approach to self-representation is given. The subject of discussion, the infamous J.J. himself, appears not to take part in the dialogues themselves: instead the reader is apparently presented with impressions of the author in the third person, through the words of Le François and 'Rousseau'. The reasons for Rousseau's new textual construction are not difficult to discern in the light of the historical situation of the author and the motivations for writing which have already been outlined.

As we saw earlier, the writing of the *Confessions* was largely motivated by the need for Rousseau to counteract false images of himself being presented by others, for example in the form of the visual images we discussed in Chapter One. The narrative style of the *Confessions*, with its first-person point of view, along with the assumed greater access to self-knowledge this entailed and its emphasis on sincerity, frankness, and the revelation of inner truths concerning the author, had as one of its major aims the overturning of public opinion to salvage the reputation and character of a celebrity being defamed throughout Europe.

After the silence that greeted the *Confessions* and its failure to swing the tide of public opinion, Rousseau thus opts in the *Dialogues* for an alternative strategy: if the public is more wont to believe the views of others than those of the author himself, what better way to go about one's own rescue operation than to present a self-defence this time disguised as dialogue between two people each presenting their own third-person views of the author.

The strategy certainly holds certain advantages. Gone is the need for sincerity and frankness: self-criticism, which is vitually absent from the *Confessions* can now be provided by the interlocutors, and, furthermore, the opinions generally held by others, including those most likely to read the work itself, can be directly challenged within the text and the arguments they hold and the evidence relied on can be shown to be weak and unconvincing.

By presenting, in the *Dialogues*, the conversion of two men sceptical both about the moral standing of the author and the authenticity of his claim to have written certain texts, Rousseau hopes to achieve two goals - the first that he himself in the text comes out smelling of roses whilst his enemies are exposed as shamefully dishonest

and malicious, and the second that those who read the text are likely to be converted in the same way as those within the text itself, for the same views and arguments are likely to be put forward by both parties. Rousseau therefore demonstrates a remarkable ability, in the *Dialogues*, to imagine the types of arguments being put forward against him, to see himself as he is being seen by others and then to destroy these arguments by placing them in the mouths of his own characters.

No doubt Rousseau also believed that by demonstrating in the work that the only path to true knowledge concerning the author lay in putting aside the opinions of others and listening only to one's own heart, either in reaction to the author's works or through meeting the author himself - one of the main messages promoted by the text - he would be able to persuade others to take the same course and thus to go against the tide of public opinion.

By presenting those who have the courage to abandon prejudice and short-sighted opinions without foundation as admirable human beings, Rousseau therefore hoped to lead others to follow this example. The work itself is addressed not to the present generation but to future ones, who will be able to judge with open minds and hearts, uninfluenced by fear or prejudice.

Unfortunately, history has not shown Rousseau to have been correct on this point. The *Dialogues* are more often than not said to be the work of a sick and paranoid mind. Grimsley, for example, writes that: 'The psychological climate, precipitated by the quarrel with Hume, led to intermittent but persistent periods of mental unbalance, the ultimate literary outcome of which was the writing of the dialogues'.⁷⁷ As James Jones has pointed out, by focusing attention on Rousseau's medical condition at this point in the author's life, most critics have managed to disregard, to a large extent, this 'unique, though hitherto unrecognized as such, form of autobiography'.⁷⁸

Having realised, perhaps, that the inconsistencies presented in his feelings and behaviour in the *Confessions*, were hard for any reader to swallow without undermining belief in a unified and essentially stable human being, and ultimately

⁷⁷ Ronald Grimsley, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: A Study in Self-awareness*, p.187. Grimsley devotes Chapter 6 of his book to discussion of the type of illness Rousseau seems to have suffered from. Also see Jones, pp.29-45 on the critical reaction to Rousseau's *Dialogues*.

⁷⁸ Jones, p.46.

undermining faith in the author's ability to know himself as he claimed to do, the presentation of J.J. in the *Dialogues* differs substantially from that of the *Confessions*. Throughout the former text, the stable characteristics and permanent characteristics of the author are continually placed to the fore.

The construction of the text, the tense employed and the material involved all contribute to the impression of stability and coherence. In fact, the entire work, we shall argue, can be seen as a rejection of incompatibility and inconsistency. The argument which runs as a thread throughout the work and which is the starting point for the *Dialogues*, maintains that the author of the works attributed to J.J. and the person represented to the public cannot be one and the same, for there are too many inconsistencies between them. Someone who can write such moving and morally enlightening texts cannot be a monster. The entire work thus strives to show that there are no inconsistencies to be found where J.J. is concerned. His works and his true nature are to be seen as identical.

The discussion between the two protagonists, Le François and 'Rousseau', thus begins with a mystery and the purpose of their conversations will be to gather evidence in order to clear up this mystery once and for all and reach the truth. Although both characters are at first sceptical about the moral integrity of J.J. and appear to be largely persuaded by the views abounding against the author, there is, however, one important difference between the two: Le François is the spokesperson for the 'Messieurs', the engineers of the plot and under their influence, although he does not know them and therefore represents public opinion, prejudiced against J.J. without having any real knowledge: 'Rousseau', however, enters the conversation from a slightly different perspective, for although he too has heard the rumours concerning the author J.J., 'Rousseau', having read J.J.'s works and found a kindred spirit in these books, cannot believe that the author can be the same man as the monster being defamed throughout Europe.

Although 'Rousseau''s view is at this point unsubstantiated, the latter is determined to follow his instincts and sets out to get to the bottom of the puzzle: 'j'en use en mon jugement sur cette homme comme dans ma croyance en matière de foi' (879). He therefore seeks to discover which of the two possibilities is actually the

case: either J.J. is not the author of the works and *is* in fact the monster being portrayed, or he *is* the author and is the innocent victim of slander and persecution, 'l'homme défiguré que j'imagine à sa place' (762). The moral of the text is an obvious but powerful one. In order to get rid of prejudice, one must have the courage to go against the might of public opinion in search of truth, even if one finds one is hated and alone as a consequence. This is the attitude 'Rousseau' develops as the text progresses.

As we have outlined, the *Dialogues* start with a dilemma and seek to find a coherent solution to the problem posed. The movement of the text is therefore from a position of inconsistency to one of unity, from something which does not make sense, to clarity and reasonable answers. In the following section, we shall show the way in which the author places considerable emphasis in the text on exposing the incoherences in the arguments put forward by the 'Messieurs', thus engendering suspicion over their claims and motivations. We shall further show how, once the two protagonists have decided to find out what J.J. is really like for themselves, emphasis is placed on consistency and rationality: J.J. is portrayed as a consistent and rational human being and his behaviour, which has been so frequently misinterpreted, is given reasonable and careful explanation.

In the First *Dialogue*, the views of the 'Messieurs', put forward through Le François are scrutinised and found to be often contradictory or inadequate. Why, for example, argues 'Rousseau', would these 'Messieurs' want to protect J.J. and be kind to him, as Le François maintains they do, if the man is so awful? Why would they want to continue to be his friends? To such objections, Le François can only provide weak replies and increasingly flounders when it comes to rational explanations of the situation J.J. is in.

'Rousseau's suspicion that 'vos Messieurs ne sont pas dans des dispositions si favorables à la vérité' (764) and his careful investigation of Le François' adopted views, begin to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of both interlocutors and they resolve, at the end of the First Dialogue, to get to know the real J.J. themselves. This is particularly necessary as 'Rousseau', through his questioning of Le François, reveals that all efforts have been made to prevent J.J.'s own voice from being heard in his

defence. However, interestingly, the two characters choose different methods of obtaining this knowledge: whilst 'Rousseau' says he will go and see J.J. for himself and speak to him, Le François says he will read the author's works, so that both have agreed, by the conclusion of the *Dialogue*, to do something they refused to do at the outset.

Throughout the *Dialogues*, the argument presented, as we have already noted, is that the only way to find truth is to rid one's mind of prejudice and the opinion of others, and, by looking with one's own eyes, in complete independence from others, to see what is actually the case:

Que puis-je faire dans une pareille situation pour parvenir, s'il est possible, à démêler la vérité? C'est de rejeter dans cette affaire toute autorité humaine, toute preuve qui dépend du témoignage d'autrui, et de me déterminer uniquement sur ce que je puis voir de mes yeux et connoître par moi-même (769).

Rousseau, in particular, insists on 'examiner par moi-même et de le juger en tout ce que je verrai de lui, non par les secrets désirs de mon coeur, encore moins par les interprétations d'autrui, mais par la mesure de bon sens et de jugement que je puis avoir receue, sans me rapporter sur ce point à l'autorité de personne' (769-70). In order to be able to judge objectively, it is argued, we must get rid of prejudice, emotions and ulterior motives. Only once we have rid ourselves of these, can we possibly see clearly and attain the truth.⁷⁹

The Second *Dialogue* is a cleverly constructed, detailed and convincing portrayal of J.J. in his 'natural habitat'. From the outset, it is made clear that both Le François and the reader will be presented with an alternative image of J.J. as 'Rousseau' has seen him, rather than counter-arguments to the views Le François has put forward.⁸⁰ The emphasis of this portrayal is constantly directed at the consistency and unity of J.J.'s life and actions. 'Rousseau' has been to see J.J. at home, has lived

⁷⁹ This message is a strong one throughout Rousseau's writings, and is a particularly strong theme of the *Profession de Foi*, as we saw in Chapter One.

⁸⁰ See p.799.

with him, talked to him, listened to him and has observed his every action. He will judge him not on isolated occurrences and incidents or ambiguous, fleeting signals 'sans m'arrêter à de vains discours qui peuvent tromper, ou à de signes passagers plus incertains encore'(783), and thus by watching him in his daily life 'je résolu de l'étudier par ses inclinations, ses moeurs, ses goûts, ses penchans, ses habitudes, de suivre les détails de sa vie', and, in this way, he will perhaps be able to get 'en dedans de lui-meme'(783). The only way to really get to know another person is thus to witness 'sa constante manière d'être; seule règle infaillible de bien juger du vrai caractère d'un homme et de ses passions qu'il peut cacher au fond de son coeur'(784).

The trick is not only to rid oneself of preconceived ideas, but also to avoid judging too hastily. It is in this state that 'Rousseau' meets J.J. and is 'attentif à tout ce qui pouvoit manifester à mes yeux son intérieur', making sure he does not judge on the basis of single incidents but on 'le concours de ses discours, de ses actions, de ses habitudes, et sur cette constante manière d'être, qui seule decèle infailliblement un caractère'(792). For, the reader is repeatedly told 'c'est dans la familiarité d'un commerce intime, dans la continuité de la vie privée qu'un homme à la longue se laisse voir tel qu'il est'(794).

The portrait 'Rousseau' gives of J.J. thus stresses the continuity and unity of the latter's habits and way of life through his repetition of the phrase 'constante maniere d'être' and what he reports back to Le François is the fruit of long and detailed observation. The possibility of jumping to conclusions is excluded, with the clear message being that if those who have criticised and ridiculed J.J. had reserved judgement until they had got to know the man fully, they would have formed very different views. We shall now demonstrate the way in which 'Rousseau's' portrait of J.J. is achieved and we shall then go on to contrast the image of J.J. Rousseau seeks to put forward in the *Dialogues* with the image which actually emerges from the text, outlining the aspects of the text which influence the formation of this latter image.

As we have seen, 'Rousseau' describes his gathering of evidence concerning J.J. as methodical, thorough and unprejudiced: 'J'ai soigneusement comparé tout ce qu'il m'a dit avec ce que j'ai vu de lui dans la pratique n'admettant jamais pour vrai que ce que cette épreuve a confirmé'(795-6). Once he has gathered all the evidence he

requires, 'Rousseau''s presentation of J.J. places emphasis on three different types of continuity: firstly, 'Rousseau' highlights the continuity of J.J.'s character from his early childhood to manhood: secondly the continuity in his actions and stability of his daily life: thirdly the continuity which exists between J.J. the man, and J.J. the author.

'Rousseau' demonstrates to Le François and the reader the way in which the same constituents of J.J.'s personality have persisted throughout his lifetime, so that his portrait will explain 'le plus naturellement et le plus clairement la conduite de celui qu'il représente, ses goûts, ses habitudes, et tout ce qu'on connoit de lui, non seulement depuis qu'il fait des livres, mais dès son enfance et de tous les tems'(799). With such statements as 'il garde encore les mêmes goûts, les mêmes passions de son jeune âge'(800), 'Rousseau' shows there has been no sudden or dramatic change in J.J. since he wrote his books, thereby clarifying one of the inconsistencies at the heart of the discussion.

J.J.'s daily life is found to be regular, stable and sedate: 'Je l'ai vu mener par goût une vie égale, simple et routinière[...]. L'uniformité de cette vie et la douceur qu'il y trouve montrent que son âme est en paix'(865). 'Rousseau''s account thus places the accent on the uniformity of his existence rather than on changeability.

Continuity is also highlighted repeatedly in the *Dialogues* between J.J. the man and J.J. the author: 'ce meme naturel ardent et doux se fait constamment sentir dans tous ses écrits comme dans ses discours'(810). As Le François concedes in the third *Dialogue*, the man portrayed by 'Rousseau' and the one which he finds in the works, must be one and the same:

Je crus qu'en méditant très attentivement ses ouvrages, et comparant soigneusement l'Auteur avec l'homme que vous m'aviez peint, je parviendrois à éclairer ces deux objets l'un par l'autre et à m'assurer si tout étoit bien d'accord et appartenoit incontestablement au même individu(932).

It is, indeed, the remarkable 'rapport[...]frappant'(936) which finally convinces Le François that the man 'Rousseau' has encountered and the one whose books he

himself agreed to read are the same person, and therefore that J.J. is an innocent victim of the 'plot' engineered against him: 'je l'honore parce que je veux être juste, que je le crois innocent, et que je le vois opprimé' (937).

However, it would not be true to say that the J.J. of the *Dialogues* has lost all the inconsistency and self-alienation Rousseau revealed in the *Confessions*. Yet, what is notable about the presentation of J.J. given by the character *Rousseau* in the *Dialogues*, is that even when talking of J.J.'s celebrated oppositional characteristics, Rousseau does so in way which brings out the continuity and permanence of this opposition throughout all aspects of J.J.'s life: 'la même opposition qu'offrent les élémens de sa constitution se retrouve dans ses inclinations, dans ses moeurs et dans sa conduite' (818).

Another noticeable difference in the portrayal of the author is that his contradictory characteristics, such as the combination in his make-up of an 'excès de sensibilité' (804) and his slow-wittedness, which we saw led to implausible explanations and, as a result, the gradual erosion of the reader's confidence in the *Confessions* are, in the *Dialogues*, approached in a completely differently way. Instead of 'Rousseau', in the second *Dialogue*, giving examples of J.J.'s inconsistent behaviour and trying to provide feasible explanations for them, his audience is presented with a highly rational and generalised scientific explanation of how such combinations of characteristics might result in a given individual.

'Rousseau' begins his investigation of sensibility, for example, by seeking a definition of the term under scrutiny 'tâchons de commencer par bien entendre ce mot de *sensibilité*, auquel, faute de notions exactes, on applique à chaque instant des idées si vagues et souvent si contradictoires' (805). The search for rational clarification of terms being used means that Rousseau avoids the presence of any confusion or ambiguity, and enables him to develop a scientific explanation of the functioning of the 'sensibilité' and to distinguish two distinct types: the first being sensations to which we are passive, the second being a type of sensibility which is 'active et morale' (805), but which is not linked to reflection: 'ceci est une pure affaire de sentiment où la réflexion n'entre pour rien' (806).

Thus whereas in the *Confessions*, Rousseau had in a sense prided himself on his contradictory nature and the various seemingly irreconcilable aspects of his personality, in the *Dialogues*, the contradictions are very much played down and replaced by a unifying theory which smoothes over the apparent gaps and inconsistencies. The use of the present tense in which the text is written also serves to heighten the impression of continuity. Throughout the work, therefore, emphasis is placed, in the various ways we have shown, upon unity, continuity and rationality.

Rational explanations are also given by 'Rousseau' of the activities many considered suspect, such as J.J.'s wish to live a solitary life-style, his copying of music and his love of botany, thereby clearing such activities of any possible suspicion. The jealousy of his former friends and the malicious way in which he has been defamed have made life away from society the only possible option for J.J. If he were to participate in society, he would have no choice but to expose the cruelty of those who mistreat him. It is the wickedness of others which has forced him into solitary retreat and it is his love for those who persecute him which prevents him from stooping as low as they.

He therefore occupies himself in the countryside with daily walks, observing and appreciating the nature which surrounds him, simple pleasures such as collecting and naming plants, good conversation, and in order to earn some money (which Rousseau demonstrates he needs) he copies music, an occupation to which he finds himself suited, for though hard work it is a dependable form of income and a job he is able to do well in isolation.

There is therefore no mystery to be found in J.J.'s life. His character has been rationally explained, the continuity of his existence outlined clearly and full explanation given of why he chooses to do the things he does. The portrait 'Rousseau' gives is thus of a simple and honest man who is the innocent victim of the professional jealousy and wickedness of others who have misinterpreted him and have deliberately set out to destroy his reputation and his personal life. Not only is there continuity and rationality in all this, but the man found in J.J.'s works demonstrates the same essential characteristics and morals, and so the puzzle facing J.J. and Le François is neatly resolved: the J.J. 'Rousseau' met, and the man whose works are the

centre of debate, are one and the same and this man's name will one day be cleared by those willing and fearless enough to put forward such counter-arguments and reveal the truth.

The image of J.J. Rousseau hoped would emerge from the *Dialogues* is certainly much closer to the image which actually results from the text than we saw was the case in the *Confessions*. As we have shown, by providing a portrait in which unity, consistency, clarity and rationality are continually placed at the fore, both in the construction of the three dialogues themselves, their logical progression, and in the way in which the picture of J.J. unfolds replacing the 'monstre' first introduced to the reader, Rousseau is able to avoid many of the confusions, inadequacies, doubts and gradual losses of the reader's faith which dogged the account in the *Confessions*.

However, the *Dialogues* do also raise different obstacles to the communication of the image Rousseau appears to have wanted to emerge from the text, which detract, to a certain extent, from the image desired. One of the major difficulties the reader encounters in the text is its length and tendency towards repetition. The reader is often given explanations not once, but several times concerning J.J.'s profession of music copying, for example,⁸¹ or his propensity to flee the real world and seek refuge within his own imagination, as well as the reader being constantly reminded that the only way of really getting to know another human being is to rid oneself of prejudice and witness things oneself. Yet it is not only the fact that the subject matter is repeated which gives an impression of monotony, but there is also considerable repetition in the phrases and expressions employed: thus, for example, JJ is, on numerous occasions, referred to as the 'jouet de la société'.

The pristine and clear image of himself that Rousseau hoped would result from his writing in the *Dialogues* is also marred to some extent by the fact that, having chosen a dialogue form for the work, in which J.J. will be presented in the third person by the two characters, what in fact happens as the text progresses, is that the voice of 'Rousseau' begins to sound more and more like the author's own, and at certain points there is even direct quotation from J.J. himself.⁸² Thus, Rousseau, the writer, is seemingly unable to sustain the third-person approach he has adopted and

⁸¹ See, for example, p.794 and p.830.

⁸² An example of direct quotation from J.J. can be found in the long speech, p. 765.

which, on the whole, works very well in serving his purposes. By letting his own voice intervene in this way he reduces the credibility of the discussion between the two fictional characters taking place and undermines his own, largely effective, narrative strategy.

As the character 'Rousseau' increasingly sounds like the beleaguered author himself, the latter's paranoia, which appears to the reader wholly inappropriate in the mouth of the interlocutor, shows through in such exclamations as 'n'est-ce pas que si je multipliois ces oppositions, comme je le pourrais faire, vous les prendriez pour des jeux d'imagination qui n'auroient aucune réalité' (798): Le François has no real reason here, within the discussion itself, *not* to believe 'Rousseau', but the strident and defensive tone adopted reveals the author's own emotions too greatly and reduces the plausibility of his own character.

The plausibility of 'Rousseau' as an interlocutor in the *Dialogues* is also further eroded by his close, in fact far too close, identification with J.J.'s feelings and views and his over-serious approach to the discussion. Again, at these points, Rousseau the author penetrates through the thin veil of his dramatic disguise. Such a moment occurs when 'Rousseau' proclaims 'je n'ai pas un instant oublié dans mes recherches qu'il alloit du destin de ma vie à ne pas me tromper dans ma conclusion' (797): the reader is immediately taken aback here by the suggestion that this investigation would be of such life and death importance to this character. On other occasions, 'Rousseau's voice breaks the bounds of feasibility in its over-dramatic outbursts in favour of J.J. who is 'si cruellement, si obstinément, si indignement noirci, flétri, diffamé' (815)!

Yet, surprisingly perhaps, the use of the third-person approach to auto(bio)graphical writing in the *Dialogues* and the self-criticism this technique allows, does not detract, but rather enhances the image sought by the author. Whilst the *Confessions* were highly defensive in tone and sought excuses, at very turn, promoting the subject whenever possible, the *Dialogues* is not shy to criticise J.J. and to ridicule, for example, 'son imagination effarouchée' and allowing room for such criticism as 'je ne dis pas que tous seront aussi distraits, aussi étourdis, aussi stupides que J.J.' (863).

Thus, whilst the portrait given in this way is not always a flattering one 'en un mot je l'ai presque toujours trouvé pesant à penser, maladroit à dire, se fatigant sans cesse à chercher le mot propre qui ne lui venoit jamais, et embrouillant des idées déjà peu claires par une mauvaise manière de les exprimer' (801), whatever risks the author takes in exposing himself to such self-criticism is more than made up for by the humanity and humour this brings to the text. The credibility of Rousseau the writer is thus enhanced considerably by this narrative strategy as it allows him to show both his strengths and weaknesses in a less defensive manner, resulting in a more three-dimensional image in the reader's mind.

6) Self and image in Rousseau's auto(bio)graphical writings - A Conclusion

In the *Confessions*, as we have seen in this chapter, Rousseau writes with the twin aims of giving a true portrait of himself, thereby counteracting the other images of him presented by others. His approach to self-writing is governed by the faith he holds in a privileged form of access to himself, by his ability to know and understand himself completely and, finally, by his ability to render this in written form to a public audience.

However, as we have also pointed out in this chapter, the writing of one's self is not as easy as Rousseau seemed to think when embarking upon the writing of the *Confessions*. Self-knowledge itself not such a simple matter, as he acknowledges in the later *Rêveries*, where he writes 'que suis-je moi-même? Voilà ce qui me reste à chercher' (995), and therefore the 'self' which emerges through the writing process lacks the clarity and integrity Rousseau had wished to convey and is certainly not as 'transparent' as Rousseau had hoped.

The image of the self he presents in the *Confessions* is instead, we have shown, affected by a whole variety of factors: the type of narrative employed, the approach Rousseau takes to this narrative, the tone he uses, the way in which he addresses the reader, as well as the actual events and feelings he chooses to relate, all

serve to influence considerably the picture of Rousseau the reader ultimately gains - a picture which diverges greatly from the 'self' Rousseau had claimed knowledge of.

As Rousseau sees his own lack of self-understanding exposed in the process of auto(bio)graphical writing, he turns, unsuccessfully, to his readers for support. The way in which Rousseau addresses his reader and tries to place responsibility for the successful communication of himself upon them, only serves further to convince readers of the inadequacy of Rousseau's initial claims and to produce an even greater gulf between the 'self' Rousseau says he knows and the one who appears to readers through the process of writing.

In the *Dialogues*, Rousseau amends his project and the goal he sets himself in this work is one which is far more achievable. No longer does Rousseau seek to present the truth of himself in writing, but the project is now a far more modest one of seeking to show that the view of Rousseau he would like to be accepted is a far more plausible one than the one which has come to be accepted by the general public.

In setting himself this far more realistic target, Rousseau shows a greater awareness both of the limitations of his own self-understanding and of the way in which the writing process the image he is able to communicate through his writing. In employing a dialogue form which gives a third-person perspective on himself, Rousseau rids himself of the arrogance of his previous claims to self-knowledge and insight in the *Confessions*. He presents himself, in the *Dialogues*, as one would present another, and in this way renders a far more coherent and convincing view of himself to the reader.

It is the auto(bio)graphical writing of the *Confessions* which highlights his own inadequacies and triggers a re-assessment of his approach to himself and the acknowledgement of the limitations of his own self-understanding. Rousseau, armed with these new insights into the complexity of the relation between the 'self' and the image one may hold of oneself, turns to a further self-representation in the *Dialogues*. The relation between ideas on the self and exploration or presentation of these ideas in auto(bio)graphy is a reciprocal one, with each new insight in one area affecting the approaches and views in another.

Rousseau is the first of our authors to take up the challenge of the image and to begin to address the relationship between self and representation. The challenge is triggered by the 'histoire des portraits' and by the conflict Rousseau believes exists between his true self and the self perceived by others. However, in turning to auto(bio)graphical writing in order to convince others of this true self, Rousseau finds both an understanding of the self and the practice of self-representation in writing to be far more complex than he appears to have envisaged.

The notion of simple or transparent access to self is replaced by the view that one only perhaps knows oneself as one would know another. The unravelling of his own view of himself which we have shown to take place in the writing of the *Confessions*, thus has both a positive and negative aspect: it leads to increasingly desperate attempts, within this work, to rescue his project, but it also ultimately leads him to new forms of understanding and recognition which provide the motivation for further, more considered and fruitful auto(bio)graphical aims and forms.

SECTION TWO - Paul Valéry

CHAPTER THREE

Paul Valéry: The Crisis of Radical Reflexivity.

As we saw in the last chapter, Rousseau's conception of the self and auto(bio)graphical writings are underpinned by important assumptions: an overwhelming faith in the transparency of the author to himself; and his acceptance of the auto(bio)grapher as an authority upon him/her self. In the work of Paul Valéry, more than a century on from Rousseau, these epistemological assumptions falter and the importance of the representational image is foregrounded. As we shall show in this chapter, it is Valéry who recognises and responds in a radical way to the challenge posed by the image, leading him to a new conception of the subject which profoundly influences his understanding of the possibilities of self-representation. Valéry stands as a pivotal figure in this study because he radicalises the concept of the self we traced emerging from Descartes and developed by Rousseau, and becomes an intrepid explorer of a new approach to problems of identity and self-writing, heralding views which, as will be seen, have had enormous impact on late twentieth century auto(bio)graphy.

As in the previous section, this section will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter of this section, we detail the sense of the 'challenge of the image' for Valéry and illustrate his unique understanding of this challenge. We show the way in which the theoretical crisis which arises for Valéry is triggered by events in his own life and explore subsequent challenges and their effects upon his ideas on the self. In the second chapter we go on to show how Valéry's autography¹ both explores and projects certain conceptions of the self, as he attempts to represent and elucidate the self in a variety of written forms. We shall see that for Valéry, as for Rousseau in the previous section, there are successive readjustments in terms of auto(bio)graphy as the

¹ Valéry, as we shall see in this Chapter, rejects all traditional attempts to write the self autobiographically. The term 'autography' - literally a writing of the self - will be employed when referring to Valéry's works as it is far more appropriate for the aims and concerns of Valéry's writing, as will be illustrated throughout this Valéry section.

crisis triggered by the challenge of the image resonates, producing a variety of representational strategies whose success will be assessed in Chapter Four.

1) Valéry and the impossibility of 'traditional' autobiography

It is in the apparently light-hearted 'Mémoires de Moi' scene (Act I, Scene I) of his later play *Lust* that Valéry fundamentally subverts traditional attempts at autobiography. Writing of this first scene of *Lust*, Bastet comments: 'In the dancing play of parodic irony, Valéry offers a virtuoso exhibition of the pretensions and pretences of a whole autobiographical tradition from Rousseau to Stendhal and Gide'.² We may attempt to detail his critique of the genre, drawing not only on this 'virtuoso' piece of literary bravura, but on the hinterland of the ongoing reflection in the *Cahiers*. Why does Valéry attempt to eliminate the 'bio' from autobiography?

What we observe in *Lust* is that the enterprise of writing one's own life story and presenting one's moral personality to readers is - mischievously and significantly - given to the figure of Faust, whom Goethe had already made into a legendary embodiment of the European mind. Faust therefore combines the maximum presence as a figure of the public imagination with the minimum amount of actual definability. He is also, of course, an avatar of Valéry's own humorous self-recognition as a public figure, as when he puts on the Academician's costume to the delight of his admiring young secretary Lust who exclaims: 'Il a fallu mettre votre beau costume, avec l'épée, les rubans, les plumes et les étoiles... Vous étiez vraiment magnifique, un vrai Prince des Idées'(Oe II,285).³

Lust has been writing down the 'Mémoires' Faust has dictated to her and the scene opens with her reading back to him what has previously been dictated.⁴ The first autobiographical axiom cast aside is the idea that Faust, as autobiographer, is an authority upon his own life, that he has some form of privileged access to the details concerning, and knowledge of, his own existence. Faust shows he is the last person to

² Ned Bastet, 'Towards a Biography of the Mind', in *Reading Paul Valéry: Universe in Mind* eds., P. Gifford and B. Stimpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17-35, (p.17).

³ Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, ed., Jean Hytier, 2 vols, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), II, 285. Hereafter abbreviated to Oe. References to this text will be given after quotations with the volume number in roman numerals followed by the page reference.

⁴ The relationship between Lust and Faust is further discussed in Chapter Four.

be an authority on himself - in fact all he does know of his own life appears to be made up of fragments gleaned from the writings of others 'on a tant écrit sur moi que je ne sais plus qui je suis' (Oe II,283).

Rather than starting from a definite sense of his own identity and being, in Rousseau-like fashion, and wanting to communicate this to others, Faust claims to have read what others have written on him and it is from these works that he has derived a sense of identity: 'Mais ceux dont j'ai eu connaissance suffisent à me donner à moi-même, de ma propre destinée, une idée singulièrement riche et multiple' (Oe II,283).

In defiance of the traditional autobiographer's emphasis on the 'facts' of his/her life and the narration of significant episodes whose certainty is claimed as indisputable, Faust maintains that the details of his life, its significant moments and dates, can be chosen from amongst a rich possible array provided by those who have written about him: 'C'est ainsi que je puis choisir librement, pour lieu et date de ma naissance, entre plusieurs millésimes' (Oe II,283). When Lust comments that all this is a bit ambiguous, Faust replies enigmatically 'tout doit l'être chez moi' (Oe II,284).

Faust demonstrates here more than a touch of casualness about biographical or historical facts and documentary truth in general. His fundamental assumption seems to be that it is all rather beside the point, and that such 'facts' do nothing but describe selfhood or personal identity in the most arbitrary and external manner; that one might as well invent such data, as this is what most people appear to do anyway!

Whilst autobiographers have traditionally placed great emphasis on providing accuracy of detail, Valéry denounces the way in which importance is conferred upon the details of a life which are in fact merely trivia. Speaking in the *Cahiers* of his friend Gide, he writes of the ambiguous interface between factual self-narration and covert self-valorisation: 'Gide est une cocotte. Son diary veut donner du prix à ses moindres moments' (I,209).⁵ Valéry claimed to have no interest in such factual, biographical detail in relation to himself: 'je n'écris, n'ai jamais écrit de journal de mes jours. Je prends note de mes idées. Que me fait ma biographie? Et que me font

⁵ Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, ed., Judith Robinson, 2 vols, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973,1974), I, 209. References to this text will be given after quotations with the volume number in roman numerals followed by the page number.

mes jours écoulés' (Oe II,1507). The events of a life are of no significance whatsoever: 'd'ailleurs les événements m'ennuient (me détournent de l'essentiel)' (C XXIV,776).⁶

What redeems the confessional aspect of autobiography in the manner of Rousseau or Gide, is of course the plea of 'sincerity'. Yet for Valéry, sincerity can in no way be associated with truth or accuracy: 'la "sincérité" est une sensation qui détermine un certain *ton* de voix et qui peut s'associer et s'ajuster (avec ce ton) à la fabrication la plus imaginaire' (C XXVI,650). An attitude of sincerity is seen only as a pretence, a way of producing the desired effect in one's readers: 'La "sincérité" dans les arts (et les Lettres) est toujours toute pénétrée du souci de l'effet de sincérité[...]. En somme, on ne peut être auteur et sincère' (II,1220).

Rousseau was the first to associate the inclusion of sordid detail in autobiography with the notion of sincerity, and Faust ironically refers to this propensity of autobiographers, parodying Rousseau in particular, when he warns Lust that his 'Mémoires' will of course have to contain such confessions if he is to create the sincere effect he wishes:

Je veux donner la plus forte, la plus poignante impression de sincérité que jamais livre ait pu donner, et ce puissant effet ne s'obtient qu'en se chargeant soi-même de toutes les horreurs, ignominies intimes ou expériences exécrables - vraies ou fausses - dont un homme puisse s'être avisé. Il n'est rien de si vil ou de si sot qui ne donne couleur de vérité à une histoire de soi-même (Oe II,286).

The autobiographer's claim of 'sincerity' is seen as a sham, a way of excusing the revelation of events which should really, for the sake of decency, be kept firmly within the author's own ken: 'les prétendues confessions[...]. Toutes les cochonneries et canailleries deviennent des curiosités et des raretés par l'écriture' (II,1160). The writing of autobiography is thus seen by Valéry as a means of conferring significance

⁶ Paul Valéry, *Cahiers* vols I-XXIX, (Paris: Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique, 1957-61), XXIV,776. Hereafter abbreviated to C. References to this edition will be given in the text after quotations with volume number followed by page number.

where there is nothing but petty and vulgar trivia. Rousseau is again uppermost in Valéry's mind when he writes of him as 'le Père de l'Exhibition' (II,1224).

Another charge brought forward against autobiographers is that the acceptable public face they present is the product of construction and manipulation by the author him/her self. Valéry accuses Gide in particular of having written so as to seduce his (mainly young) audience: 'il a voulu séduire les gens, les jeunes surtout; et les charmer' (C XXII, 207). This type of seduction and manipulation of young readers is vehemently rejected by Valéry and this accusation against Gide is re-iterated on numerous occasions. Thus Valéry is keen to emphasise that: 'En particulier je n'ai jamais songé à séduire la jeunesse, à exercer sur elle une influence quelconque' (C XXIV,717). Again in reaction to Gide's *Journal*, Valéry writes: 'Le péché véritable est d'en écrire au public - à l'instar de J[ean] J[acques]. Tout cela est malpropre' (I,206).

Thus where the autobiographer presents sincerity, authority and truth, Valéry sees only falsity, self-construction, and pretence. Rousseau's *Confessions* are condemned as being a 'mascarade de la nudité' (II,1200), and all autobiographers are described as 'acteurs' (II,1226). Valéry exhibits no faith in the assertions of the autobiographer. Gide's *Journal* appears to bring out in Valéry a mistrust of autobiographers in general and their propensity to allow, and actively encourage, fabrication to stand for truth: 'Qu'est-ce qui me dit que le Journal n'est pas une fabrication de toutes pièces?' (C XXVI, 567): later, again in reference to Gide's work, Valéry writes: 'Il fabrique son vrai' (C XXII,888-9).

Valéry, in fact, recognises that the autobiographer constructs rather than discovers an image of the self, a view which has become a familiar one in late twentieth century autobiographical criticism. As Bastet notes, Valéry already questions the autobiographer's claim to truth concerning the self:

To write one's life is to consent to the role of appearances; it means peddling mythical images which, derisively, fail to conceal the real ignorance and autobiographical incompetence of the subject.⁷

⁷ Bastet, 'Towards a Biography of the Mind', p.17.

In his thoroughgoing, yet highly entertaining, attack on traditional autobiography, Valéry is also, implicitly, giving us his own understanding of the challenge of the image. The traditional autobiographer is accused of giving prominence only to images - either as mental or written representations - which are falsely taken to be coincident with the 'self'. Whereas Rousseau and autobiographers who adopted his autobiographical approach had seen themselves and their self-representations as one and the same, Valéry opens up a whole new line of questioning in which suspicion of the image and of its relation to the self is placed at the fore.

For Valéry, the relation between self and image is not considered an immediate, transparent or cognitively reliable one. The autobiographer is no longer seen as an authority upon him/her self, just as the images I have of myself are perhaps no more trustworthy than the images that others have of me. The mistrust Rousseau felt towards the images produced by others in the form of portraits and engravings, in Valéry enters the domain of subject consciousness itself. In this way, Valéry instigates a radically reflexive move in which the mind turns upon itself and attention shifts from the production and manipulation of images with which traditional autobiography has been concerned to questions concerning the mind as producer and source of these images. Valéry thus exemplifies a turning point in modern Western thought on the 'subject' or 'self'.

From the very early work of Valéry onwards, the image is foregrounded and recognised as the only object to which human consciousness has direct access. Representations of the world are not to be confused with things themselves, with external objects, for we have no way of knowing how mental representations relate to the objects they stand for. Valéry's founding insight is therefore to see the mind itself as source of all representational images, of all values and meanings. We shall illustrate in the following section, how such ideas came together under the influence of a very particular and personal challenge of the image which arose in Valéry's early life.

2) Valéry's personal 'coup d'état' - mastering the *imaginaire*.

The trigger to Valéry's mistrust of the realm of images and to his intuitions concerning the self are to be found in certain concrete experiences he underwent as a young man, which provoked a crisis in his own emotional and spiritual existence. The epistemological views he was later to formulate and develop find their origins in Valéry's response to this crisis, and in his means of overcoming it.

These early experiences in Valéry's life were to have enormous and radiating consequences upon Valéry's epistemological approach to the self, leading him to certain ideas concerning the nature of the self which he would spend the rest of his life exploring and elucidating in a multitude of ways. At the age of 18, Valéry experienced a first, deeply disturbing and obsessional infatuation for an older woman, barely glimpsed in the street, considerably older than himself and married. What is more singular about Valéry's passion, is that it remained forever undeclared, and that it determined reactively the entire direction of his life and thought.

Valéry underwent huge bouts of depression during these years of his youth, due to the power exerted on his imagination by this woman, often referred to in his writings and letters as Mme de R[ovira] or 'la dame catalane': 'Je me suis rendu fou et horriblement malheureux pendant des années par l'imagination de cette femme à laquelle je n'ai jamais parlé' (C XXIII, 590). He was, on several occasions, on the verge of taking his own life,⁸ was overwrought and confused, for the image of this woman was clearly an obsessional one for Valéry, one which was startlingly powerful and able to producing the most disturbingly disruptive effects upon him. The most alarming aspect of this image to Valéry was that it could be neither anticipated nor controlled.

⁸ Charles Möeller, 'Paul Valéry et la "La Nuit De Gênes"', in *Littérature du XXeme Siècle et Christianisme*, vol V, (Paris: Casterman, 1973), pp.203-302, refers to three occasions on which the young Valéry had contemplated suicide. Also Denis Bertholet, *Paul Valéry* (Paris: Plon, 1995) writes: 'Mme de Rovira l'affole. Il l'aime, il la déteste. Elle est omni-présente en lui, elle lui fait rater ses vers, oublier ses poèmes. En avril il a beau vouer son âme à la Semaine sainte et tenter de se calmer en se passionnant pour Leonardo de Vinci, il est plongé dans le même état frénétique que l'été précédent. Il songe sérieusement à se suicider' p.86.

The disturbing effects of this image upon him, its violence, along with his seeming lack of control over his own internal functioning, inevitably led Valéry to a feeling of self-alienation: 'je suis un exilé de moi-même'.⁹ The gulf between what he thought he knew of himself and his ability to direct his own mental life broke down in the face of this obsessional, recurring, all-powerful image: an uncontrollable, frightening, and also potentially exciting revelation. Valéry, if he was to survive, was forced to respond in some way to the crisis.

Essentially, Valéry sought to exorcise the image and reduce its effects by adopting a detached and objective stance. This stance, once developed, enabled him to become a witness to the mental processes taking place, rather than being exposed to their effects. As Nadal writes:

Dans ce moment aigu celui qui observe se ressent lui-même s'observant;
l'événement comprenant à la fois la chose regardée et celui qui regarde,
se détache de l'esprit qui la réduit à sa structure et à ses mécanismes.¹⁰

By focusing on the processes taking place, rather than the effects of this experience, Valéry was finally able to distance himself from, and thereby reduce the power of, the event itself.¹¹ It is in this way that he was able to re-establish some control. Valéry thus discovered, through a series of painful circumstances, that the impact of the image upon him could be reduced by performing this reflexive act, by concentrating on and analysing the *mechanism* by which the emotional repercussions of the image are created, rather than on the emotional content itself. In doing so, the image could be seen for what it was - an arbitrary and ultimately powerless symbol:

⁹ *Correspondance André Gide et Paul Valéry 1890-1942* ed., Robert Mallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p.107. Hereafter abbreviated to *G-V Corr.*

¹⁰ *Correspondance de Paul Valéry et Gustave Fourment 1887-1930* ed., O. Nadal (Paris: Gallimard 1957), p 26. This refers to a letter written by Valéry to Fourment on 23 September 1892.

¹¹ Bertholet writes of this episode: 'A l'instant même ou le charme le frappait, l'antidote a agi: il s'est vu lui-même, voyant l'apparition; il a regardé son regard, il a pénétré sa blessure. L'expérience est cruelle, mais il sait qu'elle est possible, et qu'elle peut aboutir. En apercevant la structure de l'événement, explique-t-il à Fourment, il a annulé l'événement. Il est affolé, bouleversé. Mais ce qui le travaille n'est plus l'image de Mme de Rovira. C'est la conscience de cette image, et la violence de l'acte de lucidité qu'il s'impose. L'alerte est passé' p.88.

Le jour où disputant le corps de mon esprit (pour la première fois) aux tourments, aux assauts, aux anxiétés d'une sensibilité surexcitée par une passion absurde, j'ai fini par observer le mécanisme de ces effets invincibles, sa puissance et la bêtise de sa puissance, -et par me répondre: Ceci est un phénomène mental - (C'était mal dit -), - le sort de mon esprit était réglé, fixé (I,207).

Through the adoption of an attitude of reflexive detachment in which the image could be conceived as mental product, Valéry became able to sever the relation between the emotional effects associated with the image and the externally existing object. In this way the image could be prevented from having the damaging influences he had experienced with his previous encounters and thoughts of Mme de R.:

Je voyais qu'il n'y a *aucune relation nécessaire* entre une image et une insupportable affection de la sensibilité générale[...]. Je me disais qu'une image, une pensée, étaient des 'faits psychiques' qui, *par eux-mêmes*, ne sont ni douloureux ni délectables (I,189).

This objective detachment led Valéry to see the image as a purely arbitrary symbol within consciousness, having neither necessary causal reference to anything outside the mind, nor any value in itself. The image of the 'dame catalane', Valéry realised, said nothing about the real woman herself, yet it spoke volumes about the influence and power of Valéry's own imaginative faculty. He was able to conceive of the mind as an image-forming system, one which confers value, and one over which it would be possible to gain control if only the functioning and mechanisms of this system could be uncovered. The image, exposed for what it is, a mental product devoid, in itself, of cognitive validity, corresponds to the Greek sense of 'eidôlon', meaning an idol, an image without truth which serves only to mask reality: 'l'image de la dame catalane, en lui, était une idole, vide, évanescence'.¹²

¹² Möeller, p.226

3) Valéry's 'System' for elucidating the self

As a result of these intuitions, Valéry came to conceive of the subject as image-producer, and his preoccupation shifted, with enormous and radiating consequences, from concern with the image itself, to concern with the self as source of all imagery. Later in his life he was to summarise his response to the challenge of the image, and to this one image in particular, in the following way:

A l'âge de vingt ans, je fus contraint d'entreprendre une action très sérieuse contre les 'Idoles' en général. Il ne s'agit d'abord que de l'une d'elles qui m'obséda, me rendit la vie presque insupportable. Quoi de plus humiliant pour l'esprit que tout le mal que fait ce rien: une image, un élément destiné à l'oubli. D'ailleurs, même l'intensité d'une douleur physique ne dépend pas de l'importance vitale de sa cause: une dent malade rend fou, et ce n'est rien en soi (Oe II,1512).

Valéry, henceforth, practises a process of reflexive self-consciousness advocated by one of his great influences, Poe, a process Valéry outlines in detail in the following passage from his *Cahiers*:

Mon analytique 1892, produit de la 'conscience de soi' appliquée à détruire les obsessions et poisons, les connexions, relais[...]Alors j'ai essayé de *regarder en face* ces poussées, de les réduire à ce que la précision de ce regard en faisait - de constituer en somme, un *Moi* dont le *Moi* qui souffrait fût l'objet, la chose *vue*, et par conséquent, la douleur fut étrangère comme la *couleur* des choses qu'on voit (I,188-9).

Valéry's famous 'System' which has been increasingly understood as his *Cahiers* have come into the public domain, involves the attempt to represent all

mental functioning and the entire range of its products. Valéry undertakes to establish such a representation by direct reflexive observation of his own psychic functioning. Direct access survives here but only in terms of problematisation - a way not of resolving questions but rather of asking them. As in the great love-crisis of 1891-2, the goal remains to master the mind as instrument, by understanding how it works, and thus to gain control over it.

Yet, the youthful inventor of this 'psycho-analytics', as he himself later admitted, paid a high price for this ability to regain control by focusing upon his own mental functioning, thereby eliminating the 'obsessions and poisons' he refers to. Such an attitude of objectivity can only be achieved through repression of the emotionally wounded and sensitive parts of the self: 'Tout ceci procédait d'une volonté de défense contre un Moi trop sensible' and he acknowledges that 'en prendre connaissance, c'est s'en séparer. Les voir nettement, les prévoir, c'est ne pas y être' (C II,219). Rationalisation of emotion is certainly a defence against emotional effects, but it is also a loss of the most powerful and instinctive aspects of his adolescent existence. As we shall see below, these denied emotions would re-emerge in a highly surprising way later in Valéry's life.

Through the reflexive act required to perform this isolation of the image, a detachment and division between the subject and object of consciousness is established - a fundamental division between the self that sees and that which it sees. What Valéry is awakened to through his own painful experiences is the whole problem of the *imaginaire*, the image-making faculty which allows us to represent anything external to the self and also the world of our own subjectivity. It also poses the question of how much we can know of this faculty and control it within ourselves.

It is in this way that the whole problem of representation, and of image-mediated access to the reality of things we have outlined comes about, and with it the question of what we can, ultimately, know about anything including ourselves. Valéry's interest no longer lies with the objects of knowledge, but, more centrally, with the knowing faculty itself, and what can be truly posited of this faculty: 'Toute connaissance cache ce qui connaît. L'attribut obscurcit le sujet. Ce qui connaît est inconnu' (I,591).

As a result of this attitude of resolute self-detachment and self-observation, Valéry effects a transfer of subject-status and a reconfiguration of subjectivity itself: the 'self' envisaged by the 'System' is no longer, as for Rousseau and the Romantics, the individual that feels, suffers, imagines and experiences; instead, it is the impersonal 'puissance du regard' which phenomenalises and objectifies this inner world. The subject is no longer the locus of affective intensity, but now is seen as the mirroring power of consciousness in which the image, with its intensities and resonance, is held, analysed and ultimately rejected as false claimant to identity with the most central 'I'. The reflexive duality thus produces a 'pure' self opposed to a now-relegated second self which Valéry shares with Rousseau.

Valéry's intuitions concerning the nature of the self can thus be interpreted as arising as a response to the intellectual and emotional crises which came to a head in the year 1891-2, and which led to Valéry's own personal 'coup d'état' - the overthrowing of his previous ideas on imagery in relation to the self - yet they also gathered momentum due to the wider post-Kantian reflexive crisis of this period which had placed in considerable doubt the assumed transparency of self and naive view of introspection which had been apparent in the writings of Rousseau and Descartes. Valéry writes of this intellectual climate: 'Aujourd'hui, après le criticisme, le moment est bien meilleur que naguère pour faire la science intérieure'.¹³

In the same way that Kant had directed philosophical views of the mind to the universal categories of the mind which were essential to the shaping of experience, for Valéry the focus of his research, strongly influenced by the post-Kantian tradition, was to be the universal workings and structure of the mind, its operations and processes, rather than concern with particular mental contents. Kant had claimed knowledge only of the world once it had been directed by the categories of the mind, in the form of phenomena, leaving human beings with no possible access to the noumenal world of things-in-themselves, and Valéry's own work shows strongly the influence of this transcendental division, although Valéry remained critical of Kant's failure to go far enough in his research into the categories of the mind he had posited.

¹³ C I, 64.

Valéry's work serves to exemplify, and contribute to, a larger crisis in the conception of the subject at the end of the nineteenth century. This is the age of suspicion: the potential and cognitive value of introspection has been fatally undermined, and the type of naive auto(bio)graphic assurance found in Rousseau gone forever. This introspective confidence is instead replaced by a view which proposes that the self is as likely to be as deceived by its own self-imagery as it is by the correspondence between the objects of the external world and what had been revealed by Kant and his followers to be the representations of them held in mind.

Epistemologically, consideration and examination of the contents of these images themselves will be unrevealing, for it is the mechanisms themselves at work which must be analysed and researched. Valéry can be seen as self-appointed, yet largely unproclaimed, developer of this new conception of the self, which, as will emerge in Chapter Four, was to have new and important consequences upon his approach to autography.

Valéry was by no means alone, at the end of the nineteenth century, in his recognition of the mind as producer of representations of the world, and the importance of such intermediary images in our response to the external world. Parallel insights are also to be found, for example, in Proust's *A La Recherche*, in the doctrine of intermediary images, the notion of *cosa mentale* which pervades this work. In the famous passage on reading in 'Combray', Proust highlights the powerful capacity of the mind to confer value on to the images it produces, giving them a significance which is lacking in the objects they supposedly represent: 'on cherche à retrouver dans les choses, devenues par là précieuses, le reflet que notre âme a projeté sur elles'.¹⁴

The powerful effects upon the mind we attribute to being the result of objects in the external world, are found, in fact, to be the products of our own imagination, so much so that next to what the mind can produce, 'real' things seem pale in comparison: 'on est déçu en constatant qu'elles semblent dépourvues dans la nature du charme qu'elles devaient, dans notre pensée au voisinage de certaines idées'.¹⁵ In evidence of this enhanced influence of mental images constructed within the mind as opposed to intermediary images representing the external 'real' world, dreams can

¹⁴ Marcel Proust, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, vol I (Paris: Gallimard, Folio), p.106

¹⁵ *ibid.*

also be cited, which, as both Valéry and Proust point out, can often be more powerful and vivid than any externally triggered experiences.

Whilst it is certainly true that both authors place due emphasis on the representation itself, rather than on the object to which it is said to refer, and recognise the image as all we have direct access to, what distinguishes Valéry, however, from his contemporaries is the radical way in which he takes up the issue of mental representation, moving from concern with the products and effects of mental imagery to the desire to reveal and represent the mental faculty which is the source of such imagery itself, moving in this hugely influential step, as we have outlined, to the other side of the representational mirror.

4) The Valéryan concepts of the *Moi Pur* and the *Personnalité*

As we have already suggested, the extreme reflexive position with its origins in the adolescent experiences of 1891-2, gives rise to a view of the subject which breaks radically from the tradition preceding Valéry which considered the 'Self' as a pre-established or essential entity. We turn now to a very new conception of the self which has at its heart the reflexive separation between 'pure' consciousness, Valéry's *Moi Pur*, and the concrete incarnation of the individual, constituting the *Personnalité*.

It is a separation between the actualised and potential capacities, between the incarnated characteristics and those which remain only at a potential level, which gives rise to a fundamental duality in Valéry's concept of the self between what he terms the *Moi Pur* and the *Personnalité*. Whilst the *Moi Pur* encompasses the total realm of possibility: 'Je suis ce que je suis-en-puissance probable. Je suis celui que je puis être - et celui-ci est[...] une sorte de généralisation et de déduction de ce que je fus' (II,310), the *Personnalité* is composed of the actualised characteristics of one's existence.

There is no necessity in the person we actually are in the world. Valéry is at pains to stress the completely accidental nature of our personality, which arises from

the acts we perform - but these acts are only a few drawn from the endless resources of the *Moi Pur*:

Un Moi défini comme somme d'aptitudes. Dans ce groupe immense se perdent tous les actes possibles. L'acte est un lapsus au regard de cette multiplicité. Ce sont les invariants de cette multiplicité qui comptent et non les actes (II,299).

The particular characteristics each individual possesses are therefore seen as purely contingent, for the acts we perform, the way we see ourselves and the way in which we are seen by others could all have been otherwise:

Si un être ne pouvait pas vivre une autre vie que la sienne, il ne pourrait pas vivre la sienne. Car la sienne n'est faite que d'une infinité d'accidents dont chacun peut appartenir à une autre vie (Oe II,500).

What makes our individual history and personality is a series of life events which have no necessity and which are distinct from the *Moi Pur*, for there is nothing personal or human about this Moi: '*Rien de plus IMPERSONNEL que ce MOI*' (II,315).

Yet, it is this human personal identity and personality which is constructed and upheld by society, through the use of names, descriptions and life stories. In this way, we represent ourselves to others: however, this must not be confused with the *Moi Pur* which always stands in opposition to this particularity and embodiment, and which we are in spite of these:

Se distinguer de ses goûts, de sa nation /race /, de son accent, de son langage, de ses forts et faibles - de ses erreurs systématiques, de ses talents, de son passé, de ses ambitions, de ses haines, sentir que quoi que l'on soit, on l'est malgré soi (II, 293-4).

It is thus a misconception to identify a person's acts, their works, historical details and achievements with his/her true self, for the *Moi Pur* always overflows the particular actions produced in the world:

On ne peut enfermer un homme dans ses actes, ni dans ses oeuvres, car[...]ce que nous pensons et faisons à chaque instant n'est jamais exactement nôtre, mais tantôt un peu plus, tantôt un peu moins ou beaucoup moins que ce que nous pouvions attendre de nous (II,308).

The *Moi Pur* cannot be identified with any particular incarnation but is the sum of all the possibilities of being. The *Moi Pur*, by rejecting any fixed image, i.e. by perpetually refusing identification of the sense of a central 'I' with any of its manifestations, keeps open the space of 'transcendence' of any given actuality. The figure of Narcisse, who is frequently referred to in Valéry's *Cahiers*, when gazing at his reflection in the pool, embodies this opposition and refusal to identify oneself with one's image: 'Le Narcisse - La Pensée trouve un monsieur dans le miroir' (II,308).

5) The self of the *Systeme*

Valéry's distinctive mission, which he embarks upon early in his life, is to shed light upon the functioning and processes of the mind itself. The reflexive attitude inaugurated by Descartes, and which we saw was developed in his own way by Rousseau, is therefore given a far more radical twist in Valéry's thought. Both Descartes and Rousseau used introspection as a means of acquiring better and clearer insight into the nature of the self in relation to the external world, with, as we saw in Rousseau, the introspecting 'I' and the image of itself seen as coinciding. However, for Valéry this reflexivity gives rise to a radical duality of reflecting 'I' - the source of imagery - and the imaged 'me'. It is thus Valéry's unique concern with the reflecting 'I', doubling back upon itself to explore the reflected 'me', which distinguishes him in a fundamental way from those who had broached the topic of the self before him.

The 'reflexive turn' which for both Descartes and Rousseau had provided a foundation for certainty and truth concerning both the self and the external world, shedding light upon the nature of the subject, has different implications for Valéry. For the latter, the attitude of radical reflexivity he takes up leads him to posit the reflecting potential of the 'I', not as a clear and self-evident *cogito*, as it had been for Descartes, nor a unified and sincere self as we saw in Rousseau, but a totally unknown and unexplored realm to be investigated. Thus Valéry asks: 'Qu'est-ce que le Cogito? sinon tout au plus la traduction d'un intraduisible état?' (I,502).

Valéry's own emerging conception of the self is one in which faith in the transparency of the subject to itself and the epistemological foundations which had been the cornerstone of autobiographical writings hitherto have been severely undermined, opening the door for the new and extreme reflexive view of the self Valéry espouses - a self which is founded on the suspicion of the imaging self and devotion to the maximum power of consciousness of the subject self. The traumatic experiences of 1891-2 result in, and indeed are resolved by, the development of Valéry's own *Système*, an objective elucidation of the functioning and structure of the mind, worked out in the lifelong adventure of the *Cahiers*.

In this self-reflexive 'System', the *Moi Pur* can be seen to have an equivocal status: for not only is it considered a functional property of consciousness, the ability of the human mind to reflect upon itself and know itself, but it is also, in Valéry, an intuition of subject-identity. Valéry thus devotes himself in a quasi-mystical way to the 'cult of the mirror', to the exploration and understanding of the reflective capacity of consciousness which he believes will develop and raise the power of the empirical self, drawing it closer to the limit power of consciousness which the 'true' identity of the subject is equated with.

Turning his back on imagery and concern with the products of the mind, Valéry therefore inaugurates an immense project, developed throughout the *Cahiers*, to understand and represent the whole of mental functioning and the universal laws which govern conscious processes: 'Le problème général est de trouver des lois de représentation de la conscience' (I,829). Thus the objectifying and analytical 'regard', which was conceived as a form of self-defence from the emotional wounding he

suffered as a young man, takes on far greater significance for Valéry as his entire intellectual life is determined by this attitude and will be spent on endeavouring to represent and understand the 'mysteries' of the self.

In order to go about this exploration of mind, Valéry establishes, in the early volumes of the *Cahiers*, this *Système* - a method by which he aims at the reduction of the heterogeneous contents of the mind into universal laws of operation. As Bastet writes: 'L'esprit entreprend donc de réduire la multiplicité de ses actes par la connaissance des lois de plus en plus générales qui les contiennent virtuellement et les annulent en les rendant superflus'.¹⁶

Although Valéry clearly diverges greatly from Descartes in the latter's positing of a unified and accessible *Cogito* which may serve as the basis of all knowledge, Descartes's influence upon the organisation of Valéry's *Système* must not be underestimated.¹⁷ Thus whilst Valéry is often critical of Descartes: 'le charme de son *Discours* est bien au-dessus de sa substance' (I,673), of his faith in clarity 'Descartes. Point de qualités *occultes*' (I,595), along with his desire and tendency in the *Discours* to 'rendre présent et solide ce qui par essence ne l'est pas',¹⁸ it is certainly true that it is to Descartes that Valéry owes much of the recognition of the crucial role played by representations in the mind: 'Mais Descartes a vu le grand principe de la représentation' (I,384), and perhaps even more importantly for the development of a systematic and all-encompassing method of investigation, a method which dictates Valéry's own practice, as Regine Pietra comments, of first destroying 'one's own earlier thinking or that of others in order to better rethink it'.¹⁹

It is this rigorous and uncompromising method, one very much modelled on Descartes's, which forms the basis of Valéry's *Système* as outlined in the *Cahiers*. As Valéry himself acknowledges: 'Le "SYSTEME"[...]. C'était, c'eut été, c'est, ce fut et serait une espèce de méthode à la Descartes' (I,845). What Valéry learns from

¹⁶ Ned Bastet, 'L'Expérience de la Borne et du Dépassement chez Valéry' in *Cahiers Paul Valéry I, Poétique et Poésie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p.62.

¹⁷ Valéry refers to Descartes in a letter to Gide on 25 August 1894, *G-V Corr*, p.213. It was probably at this time that Valéry first read Descartes thoroughly. See also Paul Gifford, *Dialogue des Choses Divines* (Paris: José Corti, 1989), p.261.

¹⁸ See II,1469 for Valéry's criticism of the French being seduced into believing that clarity is equivalent to truth.

¹⁹ Regine Pietra, 'An Art of Re-Thinking: Valéry's Negative Philosophy', in P. Gifford and B. Stimpson eds., *Reading Paul Valéry*, 85-101 (p.92). See also I, 721.

Descartes is the ability to organise, to probe in a methodical way, so that, as Regine Pietra points out, Valéry's tribute to Descartes is offered less to the *Cogito*, than to the method the latter adopts in his *Discours de La Méthode*: 'Descartes represents for him the inventor of a method borrowing its rigour from mathematics, "le premier constructeur d'un univers entièrement métrique" (O I,802)'.²⁰

The *Système* aims to provide a method for the derivation of a structural view of the processes of the mind. The mind is treated as though it were a finite entity, whose overall functioning is therefore potentially resolvable into a finite number of general processes. The type of representation of mental structuring Valéry aims at is thus conceived of as a rational possibility: 'Il y a donc un système fermé de la pensée dont on peut espérer découvrir les lois générales, analogues aux lois de la physique pour la matière'.²¹

Therefore, through an awakened consciousness attentive to its own operations, along with a view of the mind as a finite and closed system, Valéry was striving for the mirroring of a machine-like structure of the mind in a universal form. The self-reflexive 'Je/I', often presented in terms of an all-encompassing 'regard' would thus be able to analytically contain the 'moi/me'. One of the driving forces behind Valéry's work is this 'caligulism',²² the view that the subject would be able to hold himself in the hollow of his own hand, as a closed and limited system. The enigma of the self would dissolve before him as the resolving subject would be able to comprehend the reflected 'me' of consciousness.

6) Teste - the symbol of 'le regard'

Valéry's symbol of the reconfiguration of the subject taking place in response to the crisis of reflexivity we have outlined is, of course, the fictional creation, Teste. M.Teste, as his name suggests, represents the objective 'witness', analysing into laws

²⁰ Pietra *ibid.*

²¹ Bastet, 'L'Expérience de la Borne', p.60.

²² Valéry writes: 'Mon caligulisme. Sentiment puissant de mes moments de plus... profonds - volonté d'épuiser mon principe de vie, de former, produire, atteindre un Moment après lequel tout autre soit incomplet, imparfait, indiscernable'(C XXVIII,822).

and intellectualising in abstract form his own internal experiences and mental functioning. He is the symbol of a mind turned wholly and radically upon itself, illustrating that it is consciousness of mental operations and the structure of mind-body functioning which is seen as the key to the yet undiscovered universe of the mind. Through '*la conscience consciente*'²³ mastery and control will be gained over his own faculties. Bastet writes: 'Valéry now devotes himself [...] to mastering, as science and gymnastics, the springs of the mind'.²⁴

Teste is a cold and detached figure, 'un monstre d'isolement et de connaissance singulière' (Oe II,33), who controls and dominates, through intellectualisation, all around him. He is 'le Grand Capitaine', 'homme toujours debout sur le cap de la Pensée, à s'écarquiller les yeux sur les limites ou des choses, ou de la vue' (Oe II,39). Whilst he is certainly a Cartesian figure in his methodical precision and his devotion to the observation of the mind's principles, Teste goes to far greater extremes than Descartes in his desire is to attain complete autonomy and self-possession. Teste thus represents the constant rationalisation, through an attitude of extreme reflexivity, of potentially disturbing, wounding and alienating mental contents into mere patterns, forms and mechanisms:

Son activité essentielle consiste en des recherches mentales d'un ordre très abstrait, dominées par la conscience, en dehors des données de la sensibilité ou de la personnalité, ces misérables accidents de l'être. Rien de vague n'entre jamais dans son esprit, ni ne passe ses lèvres[...]. Il travaille à reconnaître exactement les frontières de l'inconnu et à se rendre, en deçà de ces limites, toutes choses possibles.²⁵

Teste also illustrates Valéry's rejection of the Romantic devotion to the individual as intrinsically valuable and intimately known to him/her self. Thus Teste dismisses the 'pour-autrui', the ways in which we constantly present ourselves to

²³ Letter to Aimé Lafont, Sept. 1922, quoted in Oe I, 1626.

²⁴ Ned Bastet, 'Towards a Biography of the Mind', p.23.

²⁵ P.O Walzer, *La Poésie de Valéry* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1953), p. 125

others, as meaningless and detrimental to the project of self-investigation he is involved in. He has effaced from his own life all social graces and niceties, has minimal contact with others, refuses to compromise himself to their ideas and opinions or to go in search of fame or glory, and seems in fact neither to hear or see others, so completely is he absorbed in his own analyses.

Teste has eliminated all personal subjectivity from his own life. His devotion is not to himself as an individual, but to the processes and functionings he observes which are universal in their application. He seems to exist in complete emotional and physical detachment from the world around him and appears to have successfully reduced his personal self to an equation-like formula held within the transparency of the pure intellect.

Teste is 'L'HOMME DE VERRE' (Oe II,44): he symbolises the mind as mirror, but there can be no reflections of the man himself. Teste thus refuses to be identified with any particular image '*Teste - L'homme "intelligent" répugne à se sentir une personne, un monsieur, bien défini*' (II,331) He is 'le démon même de la possibilité' (Oe II,14), a man whose existence remains at a virtual level, endlessly avoiding categorisation and definition into a particular form of being or character, yet guided and driven only by the possibility of expanding the realm of consciousness and pushing it to its limits in exploration of the question 'Que peut un homme?'.

Valéry described Teste as one of his '*Idées Monstres*', for he is, as his creator readily acknowledges, a hyperbole, a character who could only have a temporary existence, so extreme is his position. Valéry writes in the following terms of the period in which Teste was produced:

Teste fut engendré[...]pendant une ère d'ivresse de ma volonté et parmi d'étranges excès de conscience de soi.

J'étais affecté du mal aigu de précision. Je tendais à l'extrême du désir insensé de comprendre, et je cherchais en moi les points critiques de ma faculté d'attention (Oe II,11).

Teste can thus be seen as the sign of the reflexive crisis taking place. He is the symbol of the continual effort to elucidate and understand the processes at work - all of which requires analysis, acute attention and rigour. It is this effort which replaces the assumption of transparency which pervaded Romantic thought, for self-understanding is no longer seen as immediate and authorised by the subject him/herself, but the self is now seen as something enigmatic whose complexity can be glimpsed at and gradually uncovered through a constant focus of the will and a devotion to an extreme reflexive position.

The figure of Teste is significant in his embodiment of Valéry's newly developed conception of the self, the reconfiguration of the self attempting to elucidate through a rigorously analytical attitude his own inner mystery, being driven by the impossible temptation of going beyond what appear to be the limits of human consciousness, to reach an all-enfolding mastery of subject identity.

Thus a project which started out as a rejection of mystical intuitions, of essences and of the notion that we can have a transparent view of ourselves, in fact turns out to be driven by another, perhaps equally powerful, if more sophisticated, form of mysticism: that of being able to fully comprehend and represent human identity. Yet, the journey, as we shall see, is a perilous one, driving the individual to the edge of self-destruction, or to 'la Borne', as Bastet has described it.²⁶ The autography of the early *Cahiers*, along with those writings involving the figures of Teste and Narcisse, which we examine in detail in Chapter Four, emerge from the beliefs of this period and dramatise both the 'archi-pur' rationalist in Valéry, his devotion to the 'Idole de l'Intellect', and the tragic fate awaiting those who are tempted to transgress the boundaries of human consciousness and attempt to achieve a god-like perspective of their own identity.

It is the potential of the human being, and not only what is actualised which is of most concern to Valéry. Thus the question 'Que peut un homme?', which recurs with frequency in the *Cahiers* and other writings, serves almost as a slogan for his self-exploration. The actualised capacities, what human beings *actually* do with their

²⁶ See Bastet, 'L'Expérience de la Borne et du Dépassement chez Valéry'.

lives, what they think, say, do or feel, for example, is distinguished from the *potential* for thought, action or feelings.

Valéry's autography is therefore concerned not with the contingent aspects of the human being, but with exploring the potential of the self in all its aspects. In the *Cahiers* writing the self is seen as the attempt to provide analysis and representation, through an attitude of reflexive objectivity and detachment, of the workings of the mind and human functioning. The *Cahiers* could almost be seen as Teste's thought processes, so much does he embody the rationalisation inherent in this writing.

However, the adoption of an intellectual stance to the self, being the observer of one's own processes, fails to recognise or to incorporate the fundamental significance of bodily existence, nor does it take into account the desiring aspects of the human being - the *eros* - which had been so successfully repressed following the events of 1891-2. It was only in 1913, that Valéry's *Système* was to falter as he was provoked, in a highly disruptive and startling way, by a new challenge of the image. This second challenge forced Valéry to recognise and to begin to integrate both these neglected aspects of the human condition, and led to a re-evaluation of his intuitions concerning the 'self' with its consequent effects upon his self-writing. In the following section we illustrate this second challenge of the image faced by Valéry.

7) 'L'étrangère voilée': A second challenge of the image and the evolution of Valéryan intuitions of the self.

In 1913, when he was approached by André Gide and Gaston Gallimard with a request to publish some of his early poetry, Valéry embarked upon a revision of his youthful poems, in what he intended to be an 'adieu à la poésie'. However, whilst undertaking this task, Valéry's entire framework of ideas concerning the self was profoundly shaken by the re-emergence of what he describes in the manuscripts of the poem *La Jeune Parque* as 'une voix qui me fut étrangère' - a voice which is his own and yet from which he feels strangely detached.

The voice appears to emerge from some hidden depths of his own subjectivity. Valéry identifies this voice as unmistakably feminine and it is linked in the manuscripts of *La Jeune Parque* with the image of 'une figure voilée' suggesting a half-seen face, close to him but separated from him, of which he has only a very shadowy grasp, the details of its form remaining hidden to him:

Une étrangère loin de moi-même voilée
et pourtant dans sa vigueur voilée
elle se déchirait²⁷

Valéry was taken aback by the intensity of such an alienated part of himself which he could barely recognise and from which he felt a terrible sense of dislocation. The voice Valéry suddenly becomes attuned to is a cry, 'cet étrange cri',²⁸ breaking out from the very depths of the self, a shockingly shrill scream which pierces the silence:

Mais il y a autre chose, chose plus énigmatique et plus troublante, qui affleure: un cri que l'on sent monter intérieurement en soi, traversant la voûte cristalline du Silence, la faisant éclater même, telle une épée fracassant un château de verre.²⁹

The manuscripts of *La Jeune Parque* reveal Valéry's early attempts to convey the disturbing effect of this cry upon the author and, as the following passage indicates, the feeling that this scream is connected to some violence done to himself, some wound within him:

les bords mystérieux de cet étrange cri/m'ont déchiré d'un
Encore dans mes os vibre la violence

²⁷ *La Jeune Parque* ms III f.33; see P. Gifford, 'Les Pas de l'Écriture dans *La Jeune Parque*', in P. Gifford and A. Goulet eds., *Voix, Traces, Avènement: L'Écriture et son Sujet* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1999), forthcoming.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Gifford, *ibid.*

Du cri dont j'ai plongé le fer dans le silence
 Vol de toute ma chair au plus haut de ma voix.³⁰

Upon hearing this voice, and being struck by the image of a 'figure voilée', Valéry recognises the adolescent part of himself, the sensuous and desiring aspects, the 'substance trahie',³¹ which had been forcibly repressed due to the events of 1892 and his response to this crisis which, as we have seen, resulted in the advent of the *Système* and the writings on M. Teste. The 'cri' is one which emerges from the mysterious depths of the self, that which was denied during the twenty years he devoted to a Testian equation-like reduction of the self and which has grown in power and violence precisely due to this prolonged repression, so that it has become 'le monstre d'une voix':

Je me suis déchiré et j'ai connu ma voix
 pr la premiere fois

Le monstre d'une voix.³²

The fact Valéry is now confronted with, that he now has to come to terms with, and which opens up for him a whole new and fertile realm of self-investigation, is that there are mysterious depths to the self, which here takes the form of another - a feminine Other - within the self, that he has failed to explore and represent in an adequate way. The recognition is a disturbing one, undermining his entire approach to self-mastery, as the self which he had hoped to hold in his own hand, proves itself elusive and still full of mystery: thus it is 'un choc qui se propage en ondes de résonance; et une sorte d'immense et troublante rencontre avec un soi-même occulté, ignoré, méconnu'.³³ The voice he hears is recognised as the only connection to a deeper and yet undiscovered self: 'je ne tenais à lui que par le son de ma voix'.³⁴

³⁰ *La Jeune Parque* ms f.33

³¹ *ibid.*, f.31

³² *ibid.*

³³ Gifford, 'Le Pas de l'Écriture', forthcoming.

³⁴ *La Jeune Parque* ms III f.31

There are clear indications, however, from the early *Cahiers*, as Gifford points out, that this voice, 'quelque chose autre', had already been acknowledged by Valéry during his adolescence, although it was to remain unexplored and denied from this period onwards, until its dramatic re-emergence in 1913:

Si Valéry consent ainsi à articuler une fois dans le premier *Cahier* cette voix issue des profondeurs de lui-même, il n'entend pas pour autant s'arrêter à son témoignage, ni en faire le point de départ d'une réflexion métaphysique sur le sujet qui ainsi se parle en lui et lui parle. Aussitôt suit, en effet, le geste de dépréciation et de refoulement: 'L'homme ainsi parle - dit juste - fait bien - mais rien n'est derrière' (I,293).³⁵

With the resurgence of this 'voice' for Valéry, his Testian conception of the self as potentially reducible to an equation-like formula is well and truly over. The new mode of apprehension is one which highlights the uniqueness and particularity of the individual, rather than one which attempts to reduce all to universality and sameness. What emerges is a view of selfhood and identity rooted in the physiological and sexual body, for this voice emerges from the depths of the organism and is intimately connected with this body.

The Testian view of the self Valéry had adopted in response to the events of 1891-2 had been a Cartesian-like elimination of the body in favour of the dominance of mind. Teste's struggle, in fact, had largely been with overcoming the influence and contingency of his body, which was seen as a constant threat to the attainment of his ideal. However, the trigger for the writing of *La Jeune Parque* is a very different mode of self-apprehension - one in which the bodily organism resurges and demands attention, forcing itself to be recognised and articulated through his self-writing.

In the composition of *La Jeune Parque* Valéry attempts a much more complex and more complete attempt to write the self as he now understands it. Having realised the limitations of his own fictional figure, M. Teste, Valéry has the courage to take on board an entirely new way of approaching and writing the self, giving rise to a new,

³⁵ Gifford, *Le Dialogue des Choses Divines*, p.258

poetic, form of autography, his own attempt to explore and mirror the voice of the deeper and repressed self he had discovered within him. The poem he embarks on is thus considered, from the outset, as a response, an echo to this voice:

Sonorité écho et voix

pour pouvoir répondre à une voix que j'entendais.³⁶

The voice is intimately associated with the body, and the incorporation of a sense of bodily existence into his conception of the self, along with the contextualisation this entails of the self within the human condition, provides a huge shift for Valéry's ideas on the self and for his subsequent autography. Whilst the *Cahiers* had attempted to reduce psycho-organic functioning to analytical formulae and Teste had seen his body as an obstacle only to his purer ideal of self-enfolding, with the composition of *La Jeune Parque*, Valéry is now faced with the task of providing a representation of the self which is centred around the sense of bodily, sexual and contingent existence.

In his later works, the poetic *Fragments du Narcisse* and the two unfinished plays, *Lust* and *Le Solitaire*, Valéry was able to further explore the intuitions of the self he had begun to work out in his composition of *La Jeune Parque*. His autography shows signs of the progressive recognition and crystallisation of two fundamental desires at the foundation of the human experience of self, each of which draws him to a notion of the Other as complement to the self: the first is a desire for communion with others which drives one towards existence and into the world: the second is a 'transcendental' desire for absolute self-possession, which involves a rejection of life and existence and drives the individual to inevitable self-destruction, for such a goal remains forever beyond the grasp of any human being. It is these opposed, but equally fundamental, drives and desires making up the human condition both of which move towards the integration of some form of otherness within the self, which Valéry explores in his later autographic works.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.258

8) Conclusion

This chapter has traced the way in which Valéry came to distinguish the realm of images in the mind from the mirroring capacity of the mind itself and has demonstrated that this distinction arose for Valéry as a result of personal experiences and the effect of one image in particular upon him.

Valéry interprets the challenge of the image in a way which is radically distinct to Rousseau's understanding. Rousseau had claimed that all images of him which were not produced by himself were false and distorting, for only he could attain true and transparent access to his own self: Valéry categorically rejects these ideas and extends the kind of suspicion and rejection of imagery Rousseau had shown to the portraits and engravings produced by others to the images which exist in the mind. Valéry thus severs the relation between selfhood and imagery which had been assumed by Rousseau.

In this way, Valéry inaugurates an entirely new investigation into the realm of the self, in which the mind turns upon itself to try to elucidate its own enigmatic nature, no longer considered transparent. This radically reflexive move involving the rejection of all images is one which has dominated late twentieth century views on the self, leading to the present crisis of the subject, for once the relation between the self and its images has been broken, the questioning of the nature of the self takes on a highly challenging and problematic aspect.

It is precisely to the elucidation of the self as he conceived of it, divorced from the realm of images, that Valéry devoted his creative energies. The youthful Testian conception of the self, in which the self was considered potentially resolvable, through attentive self-consciousness, into a self-cancelling equation, gave way under the dramatic resurgence of the inner 'voice', to a recognition of further complexity involved in the notion of the self: this complexity involves the re-integration of the self as a being of desire and the acceptance that the key to subject identity may well lie beyond the self, in the relation between the self and Other to which this desire reaches out.

The many forms of Valéry's autography, his creative attempts to explore and elucidate his successive and increasingly complex ideas on the self in response to the challenge of the image we have presented in this chapter, is the subject of our next chapter. It is here that we hope to demonstrate the fruitful and stimulating reciprocity which exists between the ideas and intuitions which exist on the self and the diverse forms of self-writing which serve both to reflect and project these notions still further, providing us with new perspectives to view that which still remains enigmatic - the self - now referred to poetically, but accurately, by Valéry as 'la Mystérieuse Moi'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Writing the Unrepresentable : Paul Valéry's autography.

The function of this chapter is to show the way in which the highly varied autographic writings of Paul Valéry serve to explore and enhance the ideas on subject identity and selfhood which were presented in Chapter Three and which emerged due to his own understanding of, and responses to, the challenges of the image he faced. Valéry's autography seeks to explore a self which is now conceived as beyond images, standing on the other side of the representational mirror. The works we shall be discussing are the prose works, *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste* and the *Cahiers*, the poems *La Jeune Parque* and the *Fragments du Narcisse*, and the unfinished plays *Lust* and *Le Solitaire*. It will be our aim in this chapter to demonstrate, through the analysis of selected passages from these works, the features of Valéry's autography which both reflect and explore his evolving ideas. The relation between conceptions of the self and the writing process is therefore seen as a two-way and dynamic one. Valéry starts from certain intuitions concerning the self and, by exploring and projecting these in writing, more complete formulations of the self emerge which in turn lead him to new and diverse forms of autography which we shall see gain in complexity and subtlety.

Valéry is not, therefore, an abstract thinker who has a fixed conception of the self which he is attempting to express in his writing, but is a creative writer, seeking imaginative forms in which to explore intuitions concerning the self, and in whom the impulse for creativity comes from precisely the fact that ideas which are explored through creative composition are sketchy, so that the author can be seen as akin to a detective, following the clues of the self to see where they lead through his writing.

1) Monsieur Teste: adumbrating the 'homme de verre'.

La Soirée avec M. Teste (1896) is one of Valéry's earliest prose pieces and serves to mirror and to project the intuitions concerning the self that Valéry began to

work on during his late adolescence following the events and discoveries of 1891-2. Teste is thus a fictional figure in the creative work of Valéry, but he is also a hyperbole, an intellectual experiment, encompassing all the youthful ideals of Paul Valéry in an extreme form. Valéry himself saw the incongruity of claiming this figure as his 'idéal':

J'ai, une fois, essayé de décrire un homme *campé* dans sa vie, une sorte d'animal intellectuel, un Mongol, économe de sottises et d'erreurs, leste et laid, sans attaches, voyageur sans regrets, solitaire sans remords - tout entier à ses moeurs intérieures, à sa proie profonde, logé dans un hôtel avec sa valise, sans livres, sans besoin d'écrire, méprisant l'une et l'autre faiblesse - réducteur impitoyable, énumérateur froid, capable de tout - dédaignant tout, mon Idéal (1,239).

Teste epitomises for Valéry, the radically reflexive view of the self he had developed whose ultimate aim was, through objectification, attention and reduction, to become master of its own functioning. What concerns us in this section however, is the way in which the *Soirée* attempts to dramatise and enact in fictional form the ideas on the self Valéry had begun to work on. However, because the writing inevitably contributes to the clarification of ideas and sketching of the self, we shall show the way in which a more defined image of the self emerges through the literary style and form of the *Soirée*.

Teste is a unique figure in Valéry's autography, for whilst all the other protagonists we shall see emerging in his works are based in some way on familiar myths or literary symbols - Narcisse, the Parque and Faust - Teste stands as Valéry's own personal myth.¹ Yet, Teste's existence, even in fiction, is somewhat of a paradox, for everything in Valéry's conception of Teste works against the possibility of such existence. If Teste is to epitomise the drive for universality and reduction of everything to laws and formulae in the attempt to achieve total self-elucidation, the

¹ See C.A. Hackett, 'Teste et *La Soirée avec Monsieur Teste*', *French Studies* 21 (1967), 111-24, (p.112).

very fact that he may exist contingently in the real world is paradoxical. The writings on Teste have to confront, first and foremost, this dilemma of a man who wants at all cost not to be a man, who wants to eliminate all contingency and particularity in order to explore his own potential: 'mon possible ne m'abandonne jamais' (Oe II,73).

The narrative technique Valéry adopts of Teste has its roots firmly in the Symbolist movement Valéry had been influenced by in his youth. In line with the Mallarméan notion that poetry should depict not things themselves but the effect they produce,² Valéry does not present Teste through the character himself, but from the point of view of a variety of narrators. Teste is, as we pointed out in Chapter Three, 'l'homme sans reflet' (Oe II,64), representing that which has the power of reflection, but which has no reflection itself: 'il n'y pas d'image certaine de M.Teste. Tous les portraits diffèrent les uns des autres'(Oe II,63). Valéry thus adopts an approach to Teste which follows the Symbolist apprehension of the transcendent - a realm that cannot be experienced directly, but can only be apprehended in an indirect way. In the same way that the Kantian categories of the mind serve to filter and mould the noumenal world into human phenomena, information concerning Teste is filtered to the reader through others.

It is indirectly, through the eyes of the narrator in the *Soirée*, that we see and learn of Teste. Teste, whom this narrator appears to admire so greatly, and whose mode of existence he seems to mimic, must, it inevitably strikes the reader, be a truly exceptional character. Ince writes of Teste's introduction to the reader: 'Valéry here practises an art of gradation and preparation in the dosages of enthusiasm and reverential awe which might be envied by any king, priest, general or witch doctor'.³

The presence of the narrator as a literary device also has the effect of ensuring that Teste remains an elusive and unknown figure. The aura of mystery which surrounds him means that Teste never seems quite real, for to provide intimate knowledge of him would be to destroy his enigmatic status: as Ince remarks, Valéry recognised that 'nothing weakens the force of the superhuman so much as precise detail[...]. Any actual example of M.Teste's powers inevitably runs the risk of

² See 'Avant-dire au Traité du Verbe' (1886), in S. Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* eds., H. Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1945).

³ W.N Ince 'Composition in Valéry's Writings on *Monsieur Teste*', *Esprit Créateur* 4 (1964), 19-27, (p.21).

appearing bathetic, so Valéry rations these examples',⁴ supplementing them instead with conjectures from his observers. The irony of this is, of course, that Teste, the only central character in the autographic works we shall be considering who is not drawn from popular Western mythology or literature, is in fact the figure who emerges as the most mythical of them all.

In the *Soirée* almost all the information the reader is given about Teste comes from the narrator's own interpretation, and the narrator plays a crucial role in making Teste credible to the reader. Ince goes as far as to describe the narrator in the *Soirée*, 'Monsieur X', as 'the biggest single factor in the achievement of Valéry's goal'.⁵ The narrator thus communicates what he sees as Teste's vast potential for analysis and understanding, rather than referring to any particular events or achievements the narrator has witnessed himself: 'si cet homme avait changé l'objet de ses méditations fermées, s'il eût tourné contre le monde la puissance régulière de son esprit, rien ne lui eût résisté' (Oe II,19). However, the narrator can only conjecture as to Teste's mental processes:

Je devinais cet esprit maniant et mêlant, faisant varier, mettant en communication, et dans l'étendue du champ de sa connaissance, pouvant couper et dévier, éclairer, glacer ceci, chauffer cela, noyer, exhausser, nommer ce qui manque de nom, oublier ce qu'il voulait, endormir ou colorer ceci ou cela (Oe II,19).

The narrative technique of giving Teste's image only through the eyes of others, and the frequent employment of the imperfect and conditional tenses, cleverly serve to convey precisely that view of the self we have seen Valéry espouse - one where the *Moi Pur* is defined through negative identification and the self is expressed in terms of its endless potential rather than in terms of concrete or 'real' occurrences in his/her existence.

Closely related to this emphasis on the potential rather than actualised capacities of the human being is, of course, Teste's lack of overt behaviour and near-

⁴ *ibid.*, p.21

⁵ *ibid.*, p.20

total elimination of his personal subjectivity and the 'pour-autrui' aspects of his being. From the narrator we learn that he has eradicated all superfluous aspects of his mental and physical existence and he comes across as an anonymous figure who rejects all social interaction and functions. In fact, as Hackett rightly points out, Teste is defined by negations, by what 'he does not say, and does not do'.⁶ The narrator says of Teste 'il ne souriait pas, ne disait ni bonjour ni bonsoir; il semblait ne pas attendre le "Comment allez-vous?"' (Oe II,17).

As we have seen, Teste's whole 'raison d'être' is the embodiment of Valéry's idea of the power of the mind to universalise and achieve a state of pure self-coincidence, fighting his own contingency. He is therefore presented as an anonymous figure, barely acknowledging his surroundings and detached from those around him. One of the most noticeable and successful aspects of the writings on Teste is, in fact, the effect of dislocation and detachment they produce which is brought about by a variety of factors. These factors, when taken in conjunction, function to produce precisely those intuitions of the self gleaned by Valéry - namely a view of the mind as an enclosed and finite system, objectified and analysed through intellectual rigour and over which the subject can potentially gain absolute and perfect control, and it is through this detachment and negative description that the reader is able to glimpse the world of the Valeryan *Moi Pur*.

In the physical description given of Teste, for example, the use of short, precise sentences which are broken up and prevented from flowing, produces a staccato-like effect of abruptness and a certain coldness, both of which are characteristics attributed to Teste; this effect both conveys to the reader a conception of the self as autonomous and objectified, and is also very much in line with the Symbolist's impressionistic glimpses of the transcendental:

M. Teste avait peut-être quarante ans. Sa parole était extraordinairement rapide, et sa voix sourde. Tout s'effaçait en lui, les yeux, les mains. Il avait pourtant les épaules militaires, et le pas d'une régularité qui étonnait (II,17).

⁶ Hackett, *ibid.*, p.118

Teste's use of language, the reader learns, is extreme in its precision, so much so that the narrator has to admit that most of what Teste does say is virtually incomprehensible. His voice is hushed to a whisper, his movements are wooden and his talk stilted, neither directed at anyone nor expecting a response, but simply put forward as though impelled by some kind of inner necessity. There is no thread in his dialogue, leaving the narrator to fill the gaps in for himself. Teste's memory is a purely functional one, stripped of anything that may cause complications or reverberations. In the *Soirée*, the narrator famously describes Teste as having '*tué la marionnette*' (Oe II,17), a metaphor which so evocatively calls to mind the image of an inanimate puppet dangling from a string, having eliminated all superfluous social gestures, but also conveys the equally important notion that no-one but Teste himself pulls his strings.

Not only is his own being stripped of any social amenity or relation, but Teste's surroundings also reflect the desire to reduce all to functionality: thus the reader learns that Teste lives in a room which reflects his own mind, purged of everything except the bare essentials for living - a bed and a chest of drawers. The narrator is surprised by the absence of books or ornaments and by the impersonality of the place.

The importance of the 'regard' is stressed throughout the *Soirée*. Teste is the supreme observer and witness of his own mental processes, a mind turned wholly inwards, presenting Valéry's newly developed reflexive conception of the self as outlined in Chapter Three. This approach to the self as the power to oversee everything and to reduce all to algebra-like formulae is particularly highlighted in the second 'scene' of the *Soirée* in which the narrator accompanies Teste to the opera.

The energy of the scene is palpable in the description given by the narrator, with the bubbling of voices and the fluttering of fans, and particularly evident is the energy created by the various sources of light and heat, conveyed by the 'éblouissement', 'brillait' and the 'feux' of the following description:

Une immense fille de cuivre nous séparait d'un groupe murmurant au delà de l'éblouissement. Au fond de la vapeur, brillait un morceau nu de femme, doux comme un caillou. Beaucoup d'éventails indépendants vivaient sur le monde sombre et claire, écumant jusqu'aux feux du haut (Oe II,20)

As ultimate witness to all this, stands Teste himself, coming to life, glowing red at the centre of all this energy. The scene conveys the immense power of his attention, against the background of a gold pillar symbolising the 'masculine' rationality of his mind, absorbing the energy of the scene and reducing everything with the intensity of his intellect. Whilst others' attention is focused on the stage, Teste oversees the audience itself and his surroundings:

Je le revois debout avec la colonne d'or de l'Opéra; ensemble.

Il ne regardait que la salle. Il aspirait la grande bouffée brûlante, au bord du trou. Il était rouge (Oe II,20).

The dramatic energy of this scene is also enhanced by the fact that the crowd of this period were probably in anticipation of an opera by Wagner with all the tumult and intensity associated with this music.

In the *Soirée*, the search Teste is engaged in means that his intensity is presented as overwhelming to those around him. In the opening passages of the *Soirée*, the narrator seems to be in awe of Teste, watching his every move, reading the newspaper Teste leaves on the café table and mimicking his behaviour. However, as the *Soirée* progresses, this awe becomes suffused with a feeling of incomprehension which at times borders on fear. The room the narrator is taken back to by Teste at the end of the *Soirée*, for example, fills the former with horror and sadness, due to its emptiness and bleakness: 'j'eus peur de l'infinie tristesse possible dans ce lieu pur et banal' (Oe II,23).

The emptiness is not only due to the physical state of the room, its lack of furniture, but also results from the dislocation which exists between Teste and the

narrator, the detachment afforded by the 'regard', and the effect of an unreal void which this produces. It is the bleakness and coldness of this inhospitable environment, the isolation and anonymity of Teste, which is conveyed above all else and which the author cultivates to great effect in order to represent in an adequate way the conception of the self which dominates these writings.

It is the mind as negation that Valéry wants to show, and again, the incompatibility of such a mind with any comfortable human existence is striking and the fear the narrator conveys is one associated with witnessing the determined and sustained effort Teste represents to transgress the limits of human existence and master himself. To be in the presence of a mind so totally self-sufficient and rigorous is shown to be an uncomfortable and intimidating experience. The mind pushed to its extreme reaches a point of negativity and autonomy makes it incompatible both with human interaction and interaction with the physical world as a whole; the text suggests it is a bleak and lonely realm.

Yet, it is not only this which causes shivers to run down the reader's back when presented with this text. There is also a tremendous sense of discomfort generated in the *Soirée*, which adds to the sense of other-worldliness associated with the Testian figure and seems to indicate an idea of the self which cannot be reconciled with harmonious human existence. The discomfort is often of a physical nature, for example the description of Teste's 'face enflammée' (Oe II,21) with heat whilst at the theatre, the shrillness of both the light and clapping once the performance has finished, 'l'applaudissement et la lumière complète nous chassèrent' (Oe II,22) along with the contrasting melancholy sparsity of Teste's room 'il n'y avait autour de la bougie que le morne mobilier abstrait' (Oe II,23).

This physical discomfort increases towards the end of the *Soirée*, as the narrator is struck even more strongly by 'la chambre froide, la nullité du meuble' (Oe II,23), and he becomes increasingly conscious of his desire to escape these abject surroundings. Yet the narrator is retained by Teste and he witnesses the latter's 'corps sec' (Oe II,24) as he undresses and lies down in a cold bed too small for him.

Yet, interestingly, Teste's autonomy and will to universalise is constantly relativised by his enforced social interaction, kept though this is to the bare minimum

of, for example, ordering a meal in a café. The *Soirée* suggests that Teste *needs* the narrator and leans on him at certain moments, so that this character, paradoxically, over-sees Teste himself, supporting him in his searches, looking out for him and seeing things in him which he himself is unable to see.

Thus the narrator of the *Soirée* is left to make sense of Teste's increasingly formulaic utterances and, while Teste remains largely immune to his own suffering, it is the narrator who draws attention to it 'tout a coup, il se tut. Il souffrit' (Oe II,23) and it is left to the narrator to wait, in an almost parental role, until Teste is calm and has gone to sleep, and to blow out the candle as he leaves.

The narrator of the *Soirée* serves to present the human face of an otherwise wholly inhuman character, enforcing Valéry's message that total mastery of the mind remains a dream for the human individual and one which is constantly being undermined by one's own contingency and the necessity of being-in-the-world. Through Valéry's portrayal of the Testian mind - a portrayal which stresses above all the dominance and autonomy of this figure - there emerges, however, an impression of dependency upon others and child-like vulnerability.

At the end of the *Soirée*, Teste yields to sleep, as a release from the efforts of his intellect, 'le sommeil continue n'importe quelle idée' (Oe II,25) and the suffering of his body, and this sleep is likened to death in the phrase 'fit le mort' (Oe II,24). The drawing of M. Teste sleeping which accompanies the 1945 edition of this text,⁷ indicates the loss of self-possession, and control over language in particular, which sleep provides. However, Teste's self-control remains undiminished right until the point when he at last gives way to sleep, as is indicated by the active verbs in 'il se plia sur le côté, baissa les yeux' (Oe II,25).

For Teste, sleep is a means of escaping the activity of consciousness, the drive to universalise everything and to reach a realm of pure thought, yet it is also, however, a failure he encounters every night - the failure of his mind to overcome the influence and needs of the body which constantly undermine his intellectual power. Thus the *Soirée* shows that however powerful the will may be, the attention of the mind is constantly relativised by the presence of the contingent body.

⁷ C.A. Hackett, 'A Note on the *Album de Monsieur Teste*' *French Studies* 18, (1964), 33-35, (p.34).

2) Valéry's lifelong autography - the Cahiers

The *Cahiers* are Valéry's first and most constant autographic response to the challenge of the alienating and inadmissible image. The *Cahiers* comprise of an enormous collection of notebooks, 26,600 pages in all, beginning in 1896 and written right up to Valéry's death in 1945. Far from being personal journals, these pages are filled with precisely that which is impersonal, in line with Valéry's 'universalist vocation':⁸ thus the early *Cahiers* are devoted to analysis and abstraction, often in the form of reduction into algebraic formulae, of a wide range of mental functioning. An enormous variety of fields of knowledge are taken up in these notebooks, although they are predominantly concerned with psychology, physiology, philosophy and language.

Valéry's aim in these *Cahiers* was precisely not to write for others, to seduce or influence as he was to accuse Gide of doing with the publication of the latter's *Journal*: 'Les autres font des livres. Moi je fais mon esprit'(I,30). In this section we point to the features of this autography which both reveal and project Valéry's newly-discovered view of the self in response to the challenge of the image and the experiences of 1891-2. Having realised that the desire to resolve mental functioning into final intelligibility formed part of a mysticism of the intellect, Valéry sought, in the *Cahiers*, to *represent* the whole of mental functioning and the processes of the mind.

The *Cahiers* are therefore highly paradoxical in that they are both intensely self-reflexive and yet wholly unconcerned, particularly in their beginnings, with the realm of the personal. Instead the subject, Valéry himself, is taken as the basis for research in the attempt to represent *universal* patterns and mechanisms. The *Cahiers* seek to probe and attempt to answer the oft-posed question in Valéry's work, 'Que peut un homme?' (Oe II,23) - to explore fully the possibilities of the human intellect.

⁸ Paul Gifford, 'Thinking-Writing Games of the *Cahiers*', in *Reading Paul Valéry*, eds., P. Gifford and B. Stimpson, 36-52, (p.37).

Thus Gifford describes the *Cahiers* as 'the analytical unfolding to conscious understanding of everything that is implied in "mind"'.⁹

Valéry was later to explain the guiding idea of the *Cahiers* in the following terms: 'Mon idée est simple. Je suis sûr qu'il y a une mécanique de l'esprit dont dépend tout - de sorte que tout doit pouvoir s'exprimer en termes de fonctionnement' (C XVII, 216). In the early *Cahiers* mathematics is seen as providing an ideal language for the representation, in purely formal terms, abstracted from the particular acts and contents of our mental life, of the processes of the mind.

The *Cahiers* are written without order or continuity. Valéry passes from one subject to another without concern for linkages, and the entries vary widely in length, from a short paragraph to several pages. Nor is there continuity in the writing itself; the entries are highly fragmented, and the arrows, hyphens, writing in the margins and dashes, along with the doodles, sketches and later, full water-colours, serve to fragment further the already fragmented. The *Cahiers* thus give the impression of an enormous work in progress, feeding off whatever ideas come to mind at the given moment, regardless of organisation or structure. Themes and patterns¹⁰ constantly recur, showing that the huge analysis and representation of mental functioning Valéry was undertaking is a process which is constantly under revision, that no satisfactory end-point or conclusion is ever reached - hence the endless probing and unfinished nature of the *Cahiers*.

The fragmented structure, which has become so fashionable in late twentieth century writing, is thus here a result of the project itself, rather than of narrative artifice or construction. The reading of the fragments, as Gifford comments 'is one of the greatest challenges to acquired habits of reading',¹¹ for there is no story-line, no succession even in the flow of ideas, but the *Cahiers* have to be read as totally open-ended and discontinuous, with all hope of coherence in narrative, closure or conclusion being suspended.

⁹ Gifford *ibid.*, p.41

¹⁰ This repetition and recurrence of certain themes led to the editing and organisation of the *Cahiers*, in the Pléaïde edition by Judith Robinson, into sections according to these themes or central ideas, such as *Ego, Eros, Langage, le Moi et la Personnalité* etc.

¹¹ Gifford, "Thinking-Writing games of the *Cahiers*", p.38.

With no rigidity of structure to guide him/her, the reader is left completely to his/her own devices as to how to read the fragments and what sense is to be taken from them. It is precisely the notion of developing a 'system' which is fixed and immutable that Valéry, at all costs, hopes to avoid. However, this mode of reading, once adapted to, offers huge rewards for those who are willing to invest in it, due to the endless possibilities of combination and recurrence in the notations. Ideas are left to drift until they are caught up once again in the huge mental force which is Valéry's creative mind within these notebooks, and then they are propelled on dynamically, to some further, yet still not final, destination.

The structure, or rather lack of it, in the *Cahiers*, reflects Valéry's view of the mind as being open-ended, as never reaching a point of completion, as an organic machine in which the parts continue to reverberate and produce still wider repercussions, so that although links may well be provided by the reader, these are always a matter of choice rather than dictation. The open structure of the *Cahiers* symbolises Valéry's view of the mind as being a locus of endless potential, rather than an embracing of the actualised capacities of mental processes, so that the *Cahiers* entries can be seen as minute and infinite approaches to the question of the self, in rejection of any finality or closure - of any projected *image* which could be settled on and accepted.

In order to suggest more fully the ways in which the writings in the *Cahiers* explore and reflect upon the questions of identity and selfhood with which we are concerned here, a fragment from the section entitled '*Le Moi et la Personnalité*' in the classification by Judith Robinson has been selected and is given below in full:

Ipséité

En quoi es-tu le *Même* que *celui* qui eut 10 ans, 15 ans - etc.? Et que *celui* qui fut embryon, foetus - ?

Et que celui qui a fait ce que tu refuses maintenant d'avoir fait, comme l'acte d'un étranger? Ou qui ne peut plus faire ce que tu faisais?

Il y a donc dans ton *Même*, dans cette *Ipséité*, des parties et des éléments aussi étrangers à toi que s'ils étaient d'un autre que toi - ; et tu

es bien surpris par les rêves où il arrive que tu aies affaire à des gens auxquels tu ne penses jamais et te trouves dans des situations inconnues. Pourquoi dire: *J'ai rêvé* - quand il faudrait dire: *Il a été rêvé* - ?

Et dire: *J'ai oublié* est une expression extraordinaire. C'est dire: le MÊME N'EST PLUS LE MÊME. (D'ailleurs, c'est exprimer en forme *d'acte, le contraire d'un acte.*)

Et, ainsi, le Même et le *Moi* sont bien *différents*. Le Même est attesté, et le *Moi* atteste, et le Même est une négation de la pluralité.

Valéry starts his fragment asking naive questions about identity - how is it that I am the same person I was in the past? What is the principle of identity which means that there can be sameness in transformation? These are questions which occur in everyday existence as well as being particular questions addressed by philosophers and psychologists. Valéry poses these questions in their simplest forms as problems for all human beings. The notational form of the writing means that these thoughts are expressed in a compact and direct manner, and yet they are presented as enigmas to be probed rather than thoughts to which a ready or definite answer can be offered.

Further, he says, there are elements of otherness within this sameness. There are domains over which the human being seems to have very little control and which we do not seem to know much about. Valéry cites dream life and forgetting as two of these phenomena requiring more research and sufficient explanation. We say that 'we dream' but who is it that dreams, Valéry asks. He points here to the inadequacy of language which posits an active subject when in fact there does not appear to be any such subject. He suggests the employment of the passive form: 'it was dreamed' (in me) - which would appear to be more faithful to what actually occurs. Similarly, for the phenomenon of forgetting, to say 'I forgot' is more or less absurd, for there is no such action taken on the part of the subject.

In examining the types of questions he raises in this straightforward and almost positivistic manner, Valéry is always concerned with the actual functioning of the human being; his attention is constantly directed to what actually is occurring

when we remember, think, forget, dream etc., so that the *Cahiers* provide an on-going functional representation of the sentient psycho-organic being. He looks behind the terms of language we commonly use and exposes them for what they really are - blanket and shorthand terms for that which we understand only very little.

Because all the writing in the *Cahiers* fragments relate to the subject as a functional system, they are inter-related and ideas such as the ones Valéry has begun to work on in the passage above inevitably recur in different ways in other passages in the notebooks. Thus Valéry seeks to enhance the mirroring power of the mind, to go beyond its own empirical being by turning upon itself in this way and, as Valéry suggests at the end of the cited fragment, to get closer to the limit power of the *Moi* which cannot be equated fully with any particular idea or representation of it.

There is no doubt of the value of the *Cahiers* to Valéry himself. Anyone spending several hours, mainly of the very early morning, of almost every day of his adult life, working on them, could not but feel, as Valéry did, that these were his 'seul fil de ma vie, seule culte, seule morale, seul luxe, seul capital, et sans doute placement à fonds perdu'.¹² Thus even when considering, as we shall do, in the following sections of this chapter, more dramatised and polished attempts to write the self in his literary works, it must be remembered that the *Cahiers*, Valéry's most sustained, and sustaining, form of autography, are the generating force behind the ideas which Valéry explores and develops in the other representational forms we now turn to.

3) *La Jeune Parque* - 'une auto-biographie dans la forme'¹³

The re-emergence of a 'voice', given a feminine form by Valéry and referred to as the 'figure voilée', which seemed to come from the very depths of Valéry's own being, presented, as we saw in Chapter Three, a further challenge to Valéry. The challenge is now to explore this image in his self-writing, to decipher it, and to give it adequate expression and representation, so as to arrive at a more complete formulation

¹² Paul Valéry, *Lettres à Quelques-uns* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p.70.

¹³ Declaration to Frédéric Lefèvre: 'Qui saura me lire lira une auto-biographie dans la forme', Oe I, 1631-2.

of a sense of selfhood.

Only poetry, Valéry believes, will be up to the task of integrating and exploring this voice: the poetry of *La Jeune Parque* is to be a 'miroir formé par cette voix'.¹⁴ The poetic voice reflects back upon the uttering subject and offers more far-reaching access to zones of the deeper self which escape the analytical 'regard' of Teste: it is considered the only language capable of expressing 'ce qui est inexprimable en fonctions finies de mots' (Oe I,1450). As Maulpoix writes: 'Poetic labour takes over from the labour of the intellect precisely at the point where the latter declares its inadequacy before the unsayable'.¹⁵

Poetic writing is therefore the writing of this strange music of the inner voice, and it is through this writing that Valéry hopes to achieve an adequate representation of the idea he terms the 'mystérieuse Moi' ('mystérieuse MOI, pourtant tu vis encore', line 325), which speaks in the poem. In poetry, Valéry attempts to convey the resonance and qualities of the voice he hears and which has demanded some form of recognition from him. The autography of *La Jeune Parque* must therefore be seen as Valéry's attempt to produce a more complex and subtle imaging of the self, in which the poetic voice will serve to express the bodily and sensual aspects of the subject which Valéry had for so long sought to eliminate, and present an integrated representation of human selfhood in time.

La Parque's journey can be described as a coming-to-awareness of the self. The 'episodes' of the poem each explore a different phase of consciousness. Valéry, through the writing of the poem, seeks to get close to the varied texture and content of psychic experience and to recompose its secret continuity. By analysing several passages taken from the poem, we will demonstrate the way in which the features of the poem we concentrate on manage to compose an adequate representation or idea of the 'mystérieuse Moi' as Valéry had come to intuit it: and with the support of critics who have contributed to the understanding of this challenging poem, we will attempt to answer the question of what view of the self the poem finally projects.

The choice Valéry makes of a female protagonist for his poem is perhaps

¹⁴ JP ms III f,30, see J-P Maulpoix, 'Revisiting the major poems: The Voice of the Subject', in *Reading Paul Valéry*, eds., P. Gifford and B. Stimpson, 170-186, (p.171).

¹⁵ Maulpoix *ibid.*, p.172

unsurprising given these origins and the task Valéry sets himself, to incorporate the alienated psycho-sexual aspects of being, and to portray the human self as a being of desire. *La Jeune Parque* appears, due to the poem's temporal movements, as child, adolescent, and woman, acutely aware, at many points, of her developing bodily and sexual nature and of the demands it will make upon her. She is, in this sense, the antithesis of Teste. Where Teste had been equated with the all-enfolding, dominant and rational mind, the Parque is presented as being rooted in the world and the elements, with the decor of the poem constantly mirroring her own moods and the changes in her body.

The opening lines of the poem present a dislocated sense of identity. A woman awakens, but has no idea of her name, her history. She is aware only of a sound close to her, which seems to emerge from some suffering or grief, yet she is unable to tell even if this grief is hers. The questioning nature of the opening three lines reflects her confusion and this disarray of subject identity:

Qui pleure là, sinon le vent simple, à cette heure
 Seule, avec diamants extrêmes?...Mais qui pleure,
 Si proche de moi-même au moment de pleurer?(1-3)

Valéry employs a Symbolist technique in this Prelude of *La Jeune Parque*, in which the elements surrounding the awakening figure 'speak' for her and reflect both her sense of some deep and mysterious upset, of tears rising within her, and of her dispersed identity. Thus the stars are 'diamants extrêmes', the wind moans and the 'houle' of the sea approaches the shore and is sucked back like the upsurge of a sob:

La houle me murmure une ombre de reproche
 Ou retire ici-bas dans ses gorges de roche
 Comme chose déçue et bue amèrement,
 Une rumeur de plainte et de resserrement...(9-12)

Whereas Teste was presented as being largely unaware of his own suffering, so

detached was he from his own human condition and body, the Prelude of *La Jeune Parque* indicates that our first and basic sense of identity arises from being the subject of successive bodily states. Thus, the Parque is aware of her physical isolation, of the cold of her body, the 'main glacée'(l.4), and of the rising of her own tears, 'attend de ma faiblesse un larme qui fonde'(l.6). Valéry here posits a primitive form of identity through the body, in which the subject is aware of itself only as the subject of suffering and upset, but is not yet able even to recognise herself, for she has no images of herself through which this recognition could take place. Her quest will be precisely to re-collect this dislocated selfhood through her awakening consciousness, and thereby to be able to possess her own identity and achieve self-recognition.

The Parque remembers, in the third episode of the poem, the way in which she first embarked upon this quest for perfect self-understanding. She was initiated to this desire by the bite of a serpent she saw in a dream. The serpent, the mythical serpent of Genesis, is the symbol of desire, temptation and transgression. The bite of the serpent recurs variously throughout the poem as a wound, a 'blessure', a 'crime', some harm done to herself - 'dans ma lourde plaie une secrète soeur brûle'(l.48) – with this wound representing the advent of the division within her between being and conscious knowledge, brought about by the reflexive search for self-identity.

Yet, the Parque dismisses the snake as a naive mythical symbol – she does not need to be tempted by another, for her temptation lies precisely within herself in the form of the desire to understand this mysterious 'Other within'. She declares her autonomy from all myths, and, in turning her gaze upon herself, is prepared to undertake her quest alone:

Va! Je n'ai plus besoin de ta race naïve
Cher Serpent.....Je m'enlace, être vertigineux!

At the same time, the Parque declares herself complicitous with the spiritual dangers inherent in the adventure of self-knowledge. She is aware that by following temptation, as in the Genesis myth, she may be leading herself towards evil and disaster, to what she terms 'mes périls'. However, the Parque accepts the perilous

nature of her quest: her own self-consciousness is accepted as both dignity and danger: 'ornement de ruine' (1.54)

However, the Serpent is not only the symbol of spiritual desire: it also symbolises erotic temptation. Valéry uses these two opposed desires to reflect the 'pure' choice the Parque is making. As she later comes to understand, the quest for self-knowledge involves a sublimation of her erotic instincts.¹⁶ In the following passage from the third episode of the poem, Valéry brilliantly conveys the latent conflict of spiritual and sexual desire. The protagonist's adolescent revulsion at all things sexual is already seen here as the spring of what she will later call the 'devins dégoûts qui me donniez l'essor' (1.363):

Reptile, ô vifs détours tout courus de caresses,
 Si proche impatience et si lourde langueur,
 Qu'es-tu, près de ma nuit d'éternelle longueur?
 Tu regardais dormir ma belle négligence...
 Mais avec mes périls, je suis d'intelligence,
 Plus versatile, ô Thyrsé, et plus perfide qu'eux.
 Fuis-moi! du noir retour reprends le fil visqueux!
 Va chercher des yeux clos pour tes danses massives.
 Coule vers d'autres lits tes robes successives,
 Couve sur d'autres coeurs les germes de leur mal (78-87)

The poem evokes the sexual promises and temptations of the snake 'tout courus de caresses', its slithery and sensuous movement conjured up by the onomatopoeic 'coule' and 'couve'. The word 'impatience' reflects its sexual ardour, and yet the adolescent is precisely repulsed by this young erotic excitement, the 'danses massives' and 'fil visqueux' of the sexual act, causing her to dismiss the snake in abrupt fashion: 'Fuis-moi!' (1.84), she cries.

At the same time, this passage demonstrates her will to be autonomous and her acceptance of the risks which go hand in hand with the thrill of desire and aspiration

¹⁶ See Malcolm Bowie, 'Dream and the Unconscious', in *Reading Paul Valéry*, eds., P. Gifford and B. Stimpson, pp. 262-79, which discusses the relation between *La Jeune Parque* and Freudian theory.

she experiences. She now sees herself as having become 'perfide' like Thyrsé - the Romantic figure of the snake symbol on the staff, evoking the feminine sensibility which circles around the ideal of rationality. Nothing the snake can offer comes close to her 'nuit d'éternelle longueur' – the inherent mystery of her identity. Her initiation to the search for autonomous self-knowledge sets up a dualist opposition between the spirit and the flesh. The coming-to-consciousness the Parque undergoes is the advent of another form of desire - not sexual but intellectual; the pull between these two, and the conflict they produce within her, will be the leading thread of her self-remembering of Act I and will only find a form of reconciliation in Act 2.

As the Parque discovers, through her self-recognition pursued in the present of existential memory, the wound within her is the product of this effort of self-understanding initiated by the advent of consciousness itself: it is in this intrinsic and fundamental wound that she discovers the source of her grief and upset. A division is produced in the unified being with the advent of consciousness – a division between being and knowing. With this division comes a loss of harmony with the world. With the growth of self-consciousness and the acceptance of unknown and mysterious aspects of selfhood comes a renunciation of the type of self-assurance and self-mastery Descartes and Rousseau envisaged.

In the fifth episode of the poem, the Parque recalls with all the vividness of a dream a lost time when she was at one with the cycle of nature, when she was an 'Harmonieuse MOI', free from the upset and pain which now surrounds and inhabits her. Yet the pain of 'déchirement' she feels is one which characterises the human condition in general. Consciousness has expelled human beings from the paradise of being and their harmony with the exterior world. This episode, set at the heart of Act 1, brings light and joy into an act which is otherwise dominated by themes of obscurity and confusion, and can be seen as a lyrical eulogy, within the darkness of her mystery and dislocation, to what she was once, before she became involved in the conflictual and dualistic drama which characterises the remainder of Act I.

A short passage taken from this fifth episode will serve to convey the way in which the writing evokes this past joyous period when she was, unproblematically and immediately, 'l'égale et l'épouse du jour'(l.107)

Quel éclat sur mes cils aveuglément dorée,
 O paupières qu'opprime une nuit de trésor,
 Je priais à tâtons dans vos ténèbres d'or!
 Poreuse à l'éternel qui me semblait m'enclorre,
 Je m'offrais dans mon fruit de velours qu'il dévore;
 Rien ne me murmurait qu'un désir de mûrir
 Dans cette blonde pulpe au soleil pût mourir:
 Mon amère saveur ne m'était point venue.
 Je ne sacrifiais que mon épaule nue
 A la lumière; (110-119)

This passage is full of brightness, light, and glowing tenderness; the Parque basks in the sun with her shoulders bare, carefree and taking delight in the nature around and within her. This dancing and enchanting episode, full of smiles, simplicity and sunshine, forms a strong contrast to the 'amer savoir' and dark states she has been remembering in the previous episodes of this act. There is no uncertainty or fear in this passage, but the poetic writing produces a feeling of serenity and security which has hitherto been absent from the poem.

The various movements to more or less distant pasts as the protagonist remembers, in the first five episodes of *La Jeune Parque*, are indicative of the complex temporal structure which exists throughout this poem. There is no simple chronological movement to be found in the narrative: the first five episodes are concerned with the immediate past, whereas after the fifth episode dealing with a distant 'pre-original' past, there is a return to the present of self-remembering with only occasional flashbacks. The second Act however, is presented as one of anticipation of the future, from dawn to midday. The overlapping of the tenses and their diversity in this poem reflects the temporal complexity of consciousness, which rarely concerns only the present, but which is suffused with past and present moments. An understanding of selfhood involves precisely these temporal loops, and the form of the poem espouses this complexity. In order to adequately 'write the self' as Valéry

has set out to do, he must incorporate and explore this inter-relation of subject-tenses.

The path the Parque has chosen to take, in exploring and attempting to elucidate the mystery within her, is shown, however, to push her to the very edge of despair. In the tenth and final episode of the first act, the tension arising from the opposition of her intellectual vocation and blossoming sexuality is exacerbated, leading the heroine to a desperate climax. There is a continual oscillation in this episode between existential and essentialist desires, the sublimated *eros* leading her, at the end of the first Act, to a state of extreme 'déchirement' and disarray:

Quelle résisterait, mortelle, à ces remous?

Quelle mortelle?

Moi si pure, mes genoux

Pressentent les terreurs de genoux sans défense...

L'air me brise. L'oiseau perce de cris d'enfance

Inouis...l'ombre même où se serre mon coeur,

Et, roses! mon soupir vous soulève, vainqueur

Hélas! des bras si doux qui ferment la corbeille...

Oh! parmi mes cheveux pèse d'un poids d'abeille,

Plongeant toujours plus ivre au baiser plus aigu,

Le point délicieux de mon jour ambigu...

Lumière!...Ou toi, la Mort! Mais le plus prompt me

prend!...

Mon coeur bat! mon coeur bat!...Mon sein brûle et

m'entraîne!

Ah! qu'il s'enfle, se gonfle et se tende, ce dur

Très doux témoin captif de mes réseaux d'azur...

Dur en moi...mais si doux à la bouche infinie!...(243-257).

The Parque is still fully aware of her own psycho-sexual, bodily self, conveyed in the plaintive and frustrated sob of 'quelle mortelle...?'. Far from having reached a state of

'pure' self-transcendence, her entire quest is placed in peril by her incarnate nature. The phrase 'ces remous', reminiscent of the Serpent in episode three, this time represents the sexual stirrings within her which she struggles to resist, while still obedient to the call of her ideal adventure. The force of her own burgeoning sexuality, complicit with the invasive power of springtime in nature, is experienced as a rape 'l'étonnant printemps rit, viole...On ne sait d'où/ Venu? (l.227-8), as the world comes to life in the spring-time, with all its new-found growth and vigour, and she presses her knees together against the growing onslaught of desire.

Whereas her developing sexuality should, if nature were to take its course, follow this growth of sexual desire the Parque, devoted as she has become to the attainment of a self-enfolding, god-like lucidity of the intellect, has to try to prevent her body from being reclaimed by the world, by the cries of the young birds which pierce her, the sounds of the cycle of life renewing itself. In her description of herself as 'moi si pure', the Jeune Parque clings onto the dream of achieving pure self-coincidence, although she feels her will and determination are being broken, ('l'air me brise' l.248), by the world which surrounds her and which continually seeks to bring her back to her contingent and bodily nature.

The unfinished sentences and short exclamations of the passage cited attest to the difficulty the Parque experiences in resisting these violent forces of nature in the hope of penetrating her own darkness and mysterious grief. Her sighs of despair uplift her breasts, these fruits in the basket of her body. The passage illustrates the Parque's awareness of her physiology, her feminine tenderness and the natural course of life she is being drawn towards. Again, as in the third episode, Valéry places the opposition between the sexual and spiritual vocations at work within her at the fore: the 'baiser ambigu' of the bee represents the two-fold nature of her desire, for the sting of the bee is like consciousness in that it is sharp and illuminating, representing the curiosity of her intellect which has been aroused, but this sharpness can also be associated with sexual excitement.

The oscillation between the opposed temptations of flesh and the spirit which characterises this dualist drama causes la Parque to become dizzy and faltering. Her desperation for release from the tension she is experiencing within her evokes an

impatience akin to the sexual release of orgasm. This palpably breathless and excited race to some resolution of her dilemma continues in the hurried beating of her heart, the repeated exclamations and the sense that she is being taken over by uncontrollable desire, 'mon sein brûle et m'entraîne'.

Her increasing shortness of breath is conveyed by the fragmented sentence structure, the frequent sighs of exclamation and the trailing off of her sentences. Finally, she pleads for some relief from this tortuous battle with herself, either through the achievement of lucid self-coincidence, her 'transparente mort', or by death itself: 'Lumière!...Ou toi, la mort! Mais le plus prompt me prenne!'. The Parque, in a state of total exhaustion, abandons herself to whatever will bring the quickest escape from her present situation. The writing here conveys the sense of her slipping out of control as she is torn apart by forces she is no longer able to resist.

The choice between the Mallarmean 'azur', the symbol of transcendence, and her own hardening breasts, highlight the crisis of the *eros* la Parque is faced with: the choice between following her spiritual and intellectual aspirations to the 'bouche infinie' of the Absolute of being itself or yielding to the sexual drives of her own body. Whilst the Western search for self-knowledge and reflexivity has traditionally been associated with rationality and self-mastery, Valéry here gives it a more subtle and complex rendering, by showing that there is a feminine Other behind this approach and that the seeking of 'self-transcendence' is in fact a sublimation and channelling of the *eros* away from sexuality and towards the temptations of a transgressive form of Intellect.

It is in this tenth episode of the poem, that the crescendo of anguish and despair which has been building up, finally comes to a climax, as la Parque, increasingly disorientated and unprotected, wrenched apart by the rising tension of conflicting desires, comes to the very edge of life and is ready, in her confused and tormented state, to make the ultimate self-sacrifice for the sake of knowledge and understanding she yearns for, setting the scene for an apocalyptic ending.

She moves towards the precipice and is ready to accept death either as the gate to knowledge, or else as the despairing release from torment. The rejection of her sexuality overflows into a rejection of the whole human condition and of the cycle of

existence as a futile repetition. The Parque pronounces a resounding 'NON' to everything including her own existence and her steps falter as she reaches the very limits of her existence, in stark contrast to the beautifully elegant and graceful dancing figure she cut in the earlier scene of the 'Harmonieuse MOI'. The first act of the poem ends in chaos and confusion. The beginning of Act 1 is mirrored here as the intensified disarray of the same cosmic elements, the sea, wind, and stars reflect the mortal disarray and confusion of the protagonist herself.

The second Act opens with the calm after the storm. La Parque is, inexplicably, still alive. There is therefore a 'new dawn', but Valéry stresses that dawn is both a new day and continuous with the past, so that the Parque awakes, 'amèrement la même' (l.327). The bitterness associated with the dualist dilemma remains unexorcised as the heroine, like all other human beings, still exists without any foundational understanding or recognition of her own identity. The bitterness is the symbol of all the hidden secrets she has yet to discover within herself, and yet it also recalls the bitterness of tears recently shed.

Having lived through her own 'nuit noire', and being now reunited, in Act 2, with the vitality and exuberance of both nature and her own sexual and bodily self, she must come to terms with what has happened to her, and try to understand how she came to escape the clutches of death. Thus whilst the dominant symbol of the second Act is the 'Lumière', suggesting a jubilatory acceptance of life, there is also present, at the centre of this Act, a darker section in which La Parque recalls her attempt to formulate her own essence and to reach a realm of pure subjectivity. Thus the second Act mirrors the first in the alternation of patterns of Light and Dark, but here the pattern is inverted, as it is the symbol of Light which gives way to the interlude of Darkness, whereas the opposite had been true of the first Act.

It is in episode fifteen, almost at the end of Act 2, that the Parque finally comes to understand her mysterious continuation from the precipice: she realises that it was the onset first of tears, and then of sleep that pulled her back from the edge: 'Lasse femme absolue et ses yeux dans ses larmes' (l.477). It is her body, giving way to the tears which had been rising from the opening passage of Act 1, which at the extremity of her mortal desperation, provided her with a failsafe mechanism: the

release and relaxation of nervous tension necessary to ensure her survival and substitute for death the everyday alternative we know as 'sleep'.

In the same way that in the Prelude of the first Act, it is the bodily apprehension of tears, cold and upset which arises before conscious understanding, here, again, the body 'la chair maitresse, la chair profonde' (1.425), is shown to provide insight into our being: it is the mind which has to trace the 'fil.....aveuglement suivie' (1.417), and attempt to grasp, through reflection and the production of images of the evolving self, that which the body already understands.

It was her descent into sleep which saved her from her own self-destruction in pursuit of her mystical, essentialist dream to attain the perspective of the 'Cygne-Dieu' (429), a 'transcendental' view of her own being and identity. Thus, even in offering herself openly to this sacrifice, it was sleep which possessed her first and which served to bring her back from the brink of suicide. Sleep is conveyed as a gentle release from reality, replacing death, through which we are renewed, in opposition to the torment and tumult, the roaring of the elements experienced at the end of Act 1:

Vierge, je fus dans l'ombre une adorable offrande...
 Mais le sommeil s'éprit d'une douceur si grande,
 Et nouée à moi-même au creux de mes cheveux,
 J'ai mollement perdu mon empire nerveux.
 Au milieu de mes bras, je me suis faite une autre...
 Qui s'aliène?...Qui s'envole?...Qui se vautre?...
 A quel détour caché, mon coeur s'est-il fondu?
 Quelle conque a redit le nom que j'ai perdu?
 Le sais-je, quel reflux traître ma retirée
 De mon extrémité pure et prématurée,
 Et m'a repris le sens de mon vaste soupir?
 Comme l'oiseau se pose, il fallut m'assoupir (432-444).

La Parque gradually loses control of her body and her 'empire nerveux', but

here there is no threat to her, she feels safe and protected, wrapped up in the warmth of her own body. The poem here recreates the gentle release of sleep and the comfort it provides after her exhausting efforts. Sleep is 'douceur' and there is softness in her 'cœur fondu'. La Parque is reduced to a passive and accepting state as she is overtaken by 'la chair maîtresse' (l.425): the body always wins out, just as in Teste, and in sleep she becomes an 'offrande'; totally offered up in place of the 'vaste soupir' of her essentialist aspiration, her 'extrémité pure'. The protagonist thus seeks, by retracing her own movements and providing answers to the questions she poses, to understand what happened to her so that she will be able to come to terms with, and take control of, her own existence from this point onwards.

Sleep is the only state in which the Parque, and all beings, are truly united with themselves, it is the only point in the poem in which the Parque's being and her knowledge coincide completely, but it cannot be observed and its mysteries remain unknown. We are unable to have full mastery over our own identity, for a transcendental perspective remains a constant aspiration for the contingent human individual, but one which it is impossible to attain. So whilst the Parque wished to descend into the type of self-possession only attained in sleep, remaining lucid within this state, she has to accept, ultimately, that she remains bound to her contingency and unable to fulfil the dreams of her desiring.

Her self-knowledge therefore comes not through the answering of ultimate questions, but through following the thread of her diverse inner states through time and shaping them into a coherent story. It is the production of this self-narrative, the ability to see patterns in her existence and to indicate the tensions and movements which occur, as Ricoeur¹⁷ and others have suggested, which gives us a stable sense of our own being amongst the heterogeneous elements which all go to make up our existence. We know our identity only by image-making and by modelling that which cannot be grasped immediately. Yet the self-narrative is a temporary and dynamic one. This is no final or definitive version, but one step along the endless road to self-understanding.

¹⁷ See Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, vol 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1983), David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, (London: Routledge, 1991) and P. Gifford and J. Gratton, eds., *Subject Matters: Self and Subject in Modern French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), forthcoming.

It is only once the end of the poem has been reached, and it can be seen as a whole, that its architecture can be fully appreciated. The architecture of *La Jeune Parque* must firstly be seen in terms of a musical model. It is the music of changing and developing inner states which is evoked by progressive alterations in tonality and key. Act 1, as we have seen, is dominated mainly by a minor key, established at the beginning and end of Act 1 by the wailing and moaning of the wind, the coldly gleaming stars, the night sky and the rising of the bitter sea-swell. Antithetically, the lost joy and the simplicity of the 'harmonieuse MOI' forms a remembered parenthesis of Light within present Darkness.

In contrast, and reciprocally, Act 2, opening with the dawn, the renewal of life, is dominated by a major key, evoking both calm and anticipation of the activity of the day. Yet, as in Act 1, even at the heart of this time of Light an inflection of the minor key occurs, reflecting the fervent nostalgia of the ideal love, la Parque's 'noces avec le Noir' - the mind united with the essence of things. Yet, this also gives way to tenderness as she gazes upon her sleeping figure, and the poem ends with a joyous evocation of existential light and vigour as she describes the energy of the waves upon the shore and her own body as she revels in the glory of this scene.

The poem gives a superb demonstration of vocal range, structured by the reflection of light and dark patterns and given continuity within change by the numerous Wagnerian leitmotifs to be found in the poem – elements such as the 'larme', laughter, the Serpent, and the wound, which recur in different contexts and under different guises throughout the poem. Valéry wrote: 'La notion des récitatifs du drame lyrique (à une seule voix) m'a hanté. Je vois, par exemple, un commencement d'*acte* à ce vers: "Mystérieuse *Moi*, pourtant tu vis encore!..." J'avoue que Gluck et Wagner m'étaient des modèles secrets.' (Oe I, 1626). There are moments of intense orchestration, for example the climactic ending of Act 1 in which the crashing sounds of upset, turmoil and confusion are resoundingly expressed and again, symmetrically, the excited vigour of crashing waves and the rising will-to-live at the end of Act II. At other points in the poem, however, this orchestration gives way to 'arias' in which the music of the poem conveys single-voiced, uncomplicated emotion: awe at the fateful night sky, love of the sunlit world, tender self-contemplation and fervent nostalgia.

The musical modulation of the poem, the change from one key and tonality to another, is, however, tightly structured and carefully composed to suggest both balance and oscillation. Valéry said that it was precisely these 'passages' which gave him the most difficulty during the composition of the poem: 'J'ai essayé, de mon mieux, et au prix d'un travail incroyable, d'exprimer cette modulation d'une vie'.¹⁸ The movement from Light to Dark, from major to minor keys, represents the antitheses and symmetries which are recognised as able to structure our conscious existence. The dualism within us is held in constant tension, and selfhood is shown to be precisely this precarious balance reconciling the potentially conflicting tendencies within us.

Valéry does not solve the mystery of 'the self' in this poem, but by projecting it and enacting it in his own poetic rendition of the voice, he composes a model of our existential form - the form of a viable 'identity'. He provides a narrative which binds together the disparate elements of existence, and by giving them shape and unity, helps us to understand and to glimpse the idea of the 'mysterieuse Moi' which forever remains enigmatic.

When Valéry spoke of his poem being an 'auto-biographie dans la forme', it is precisely this reflection of the form of a life which he was referring to, and there can be no doubt that this is what the poem admirably achieves. When he uses the term 'auto-biographie', however, Valéry was not talking of any anecdotal form of autobiography which would contrast one personal existence from another, and serve to project a self-image which the author sought acceptance for, but the basic structural form of human existence valid for us all.

The human self is permanently exposed to this crisis of identity dramatised in *La Jeune Parque*: we are torn between accepting our limitations and wanting to seek ultimate answers. The division produced by consciousness is one which haunts us and means that we are never at rest, never truly united with our own being or with the natural world which surrounds and conditions us. The mind seeks to be more than the body, but, as the poem shows, it is the body that leads and the mind which has to follow, for we cannot get away from our own bodily contingency, just as the flame

¹⁸ Frédéric Lefèvre, *Entretiens avec Paul Valéry* (Paris: Flammarion, 1926), p.61

cannot escape the candle, but is inextricably linked to it. We are embedded in the cyclical rhythms and patterns of the world and in our own mortality.

La Jeune Parque, in its form and content, helps us to get close to the whole range of our human experience as 'embodied spirits', and to reflect the complexity of tensions and oscillations that exist between these two polarities. It evokes the drama of the self in time and gives a pattern by which an understanding of existence can be grasped. Valéry shows us, through this musical and poetic writing, with its lovingly *composed* representation of the 'mysterious self', just what it is like to be a subject driven on by our own ungraspable, inner mystery. But it is precisely the continuation of this mystery which provides the motivation for the quest for self-elucidation, attempting in more complex and subtle ways to provide glimpses of that which we will never know and yet which we shall carry on searching for. Valéry offers, perhaps, the formula for the *need* for autobiographical writing, and its ever-provisional status.

4) The tragedy of Narcisse in the *Fragments du Narcisse*

After the oscillation between existential and essentialist longings and the ultimate reconciliation of these two opposing and yet co-existent desires in *La Jeune Parque*, Valéry distils out in the *Fragments du Narcisse* the purely tragic elements of the human condition by dramatising, in an acute way, the confrontation of the contingent human being and the power of lucidity s/he desires to attain. The poem focuses in a new and provocative manner the dream of lifting the personal self to coincide with the power of universal self in order to achieve 'real' being, and the inherent tragedy of this desire due to the structural duality of consciousness which produces a divided self: 'C'est en quelque sorte l'opposition d'un tout à l'une de ses parties et l'espèce de tragédie qui résulte de cette union inconcevable', Valéry said of this poem.¹⁹

The confrontation which crystallises these elements of the human condition is the meeting of Narcisse and his mirror image in the still water of the pool, in Valéry's

¹⁹ Oe I, 1661. Quoted from Lefèvre, p.358.

reworking of the Narcissus myth. The poem dramatises both the temptations and the dangers of proximity - the yearning for an ultimate self-intimacy and nearness to one's own intuited 'essence'. The poem enacts the nature of this proximity, the drawing near of Narcisse to the reflective power of the pool in which all images are held, and reflects the changes in mood he undergoes, the modulations from hope and expectation to despair and frustration at the impossibility of achieving perfect self-coincidence.

The *Fragments du Narcisse* follows *La Jeune Parque* in being based on an overtly musical model, although in this case both the musical construction and the content of the poem is far more simplified. The poem divides clearly into three 'movements', each dominated by and concentrated into a single mood. The simplicity of the form of the poem is also reflected by the Racinean unity of time and place. The poem involves a single protagonist, in a single location, and the time interval covering the action of the poem is short. The tragic nature of the poem is also enhanced by the vocabulary and understated emotional content which both closely follow the model of Racinean tragedy. Thus in its description of Narcisse's condition as being one of 'ennui' or 'détresse', the poem remains subtle and the language chaste. The poem reads as a lament, enhanced particularly by the use of the alexandrine.

At the start of the poem the young man contemplates the pool as dusk begins to fall; it is not his reflection which first fascinates him, however, but the pure reflective surface of the pool. Valéry likens this to the mirroring power of consciousness which provides reflections of the world, but also has secret hidden depths which the young Narcisse longs to discover. Thus the Latin quotation at the head of the poem and the opening line are in reverence to the pool as reflective power in itself, without any preoccupation with the actual objects which may be mirrored:

*Cur aliquid vidi?*²⁰

Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course!(l.1)

It is Narcisse's awe in the face of this great power of consciousness and his

²⁰ 'Why did I see anything?'

yearning for the reflective power of the pool to last eternally, so that he may coincide completely with it, thereby achieving the key to his own subject-identity, which forms the central theme of this poem. Narcisse's tragedy is that he is confronted with the image of himself in the pool, and is not able to get beyond his own contingency, to raise the empirical self to the 'ideal' self held in, and promised by, the reflective power he beholds and admires. His frustration and desire increase as he realises that night is falling and that the reflection will soon disappear, and, in desperation, Narcisse performs the self-destructive gesture of embrace, in a last, frantic attempt to solve the mystery of his identity and be united with himself. The fateful limit beyond which no mortal can pass, is thus transgressed, and Narcisse in the poem, as in the Greek myth it is based on, destroys himself.

The first movement of the poem is dominated by a mood of hope and expectation. The stage is set for Narcisse's quest, he has come 'pour désaltérer cette amour curieuse'(5). The air is calm, the pool a perfectly still surface, and yet Narcisse is aware of the precarious nature of this stillness, and how little control he has over it:

La moindre âme dans l'air vous fait toutes frémir;
 Même, dans sa faiblesse, aux ombres échappée
 Si la feuille éperdue effleure la napée,
 Elle suffit à rompre un univers dormant...
 Votre sommeil importe à mon enchantement,
 Il craint jusqu'au frisson d'une plume qui plonge!(8-13)

The vocabulary of this passage, the gentle sounds of 'frémir', 'faiblesse', 'sommeil' and 'enchantement', combined with the incantation of the alexandrine rhythm, which, as Valéry was to state 'donne au discours un uni, un poli' (C VII,636), create an atmosphere of almost surreal softness and stillness. Yet mingled with the atmosphere of hope and expectation is Narcisse's anxiety, his fear that either the water will be disturbed or that night will fall. The moon is described, for example, as 'la lune perfide'(l.38) which threatens to make the 'fontaine éteinte'(l.39). The setting is alive with creatures which interact with Narcisse, the Nymphes of the water and the 'Fées'

who whisper in the background, their mocking adding to Narcisse's uneasiness, his awareness of his human separation from these elements, and foretelling of the tragedy to come.

When Narcisse does see his own reflection, he is horrified by the image of a *body*, the 'corps tyrannique' he is confronted with, which seems to be denying him the possibility of 'transcendence' symbolised by the 'éternelle nuit'. Here Valéry exemplifies the opposition between the *Moi Pur*, which refuses identification with any image, which cannot be objectified and with which Narcisse yearns to be united, and the *Personnalité*, the incarnated aspects of the living being which is reflected in the image in the water. Narcisse thus encounters the challenge of the image in a very direct way. The central 'I' refuses any image, i.e. any contingent identification. It is with the alienating fixity of the image that Narcisse cannot identify, and it is this which is seen as an obstacle and a challenge to be overcome in order to reach that which lies beyond:

Mais ce n'est pas le calme, hélas! que j'y découvre!
 Quand l'opaque délice où dort cette clarté,
 Cède à mon corps l'horreur du feuillage écarté,
 Alors, vainqueur de l'ombre, ô mon corps tyrannique,
 Repoussant aux forêts leur épaisseur panique,
 Tu regrettes bientôt leur éternelle nuit!
 Pour l'inquiet Narcisse, il n'est ici qu'ennui! (63-69)

The lamenting quality of the alexandrine, enhanced by the Racinian vocabulary, 'ennui', 'délice', 'calme', 'ombre', understates the emotion of the scene. Narcisse is devastated by the realisation of the impossibility of his quest, but the filtering of emotion in this way makes the poem both beautifully elegiac and profoundly moving.

Whilst the atmosphere which dominated the first Act was one of expectation and excitement at the possibility of realising his greatest desire, albeit tinged with premonition of the tragic outcome, the opening of the second Act of the poem is dominated by a mood of detachment and is devoted to a eulogy of the secret

knowledge held by the pool and revered by Narcisse:

Mais si pure tu sois des êtres que tu vis,
 Onde, sur qui les ans passent comme les nues,
 Que de choses pourtant doivent t'être connues,
 Astres, roses, saisons, les corps et leurs amours!(156-9)

Through the testimony of the pool, other-centred love is compared to self-centred love, and Narcisse is filled with renewed hope as other-centred love is found to be bestial and imperfect in contrast to the purity of self-proximity Narcisse seeks, in which his contingent self would be raised in power to coincide with his 'pure' self:

Ces grands corps chancelantes, qui luttent bouche à
 bouche,
 Et qui, du vierge sable osant battre la couche,
 Composeront d'amour un monstre qui se meurt...(185-7)

Nothing can possibly live up to the absolutist dream he has of wanting to find a complete understanding of his own identity. The comparison of the two forms of love echoes the comparison the Parque makes: 'qu'es-tu près de ma nuit d'éternelle longueur'(80). Desire here may take two forms, it may be outward or reflexive. Other-centred loves are, however, presented as imperfect and relaunch Narcisse's hope of succeeding in self-seizure. While mortal love is full of broken promises and disappointments, the love he yearns for is untainted. Self-proximity is above anything that can be attained through proximity to others. His is the only love which seems to promise self-fulfilment:

Mais moi, Narcisse aimé, je ne suis curieux
 Que de ma seule essence;
 Tout autre n'a pour moi qu'un coeur mystérieux,
 Tout autre n'est qu'absence.(231-4)

Yet, at the same time, the desire is marred by the tragic realisation of the impossibility of attaining what Narcisse longs for. The desire for self-transparency is the same as that held by Rousseau, for who else can we know if not ourselves, and yet it is shown here, as in *La Jeune Parque*, that this is a mirage brought about by our own desiring. This realisation leads to desperation in the third and final act and brings the poem to a climax as Narcisse sees that nightfall is imminent, and that as the light fades so will his reflection, and with it all his dreams of realising a self-transcendent identity as intuited and pursued in *Desire*.

However, Narcisse, in opposition to the *Parque*, refuses to be reconciled with his incarnate self and to let go of all his deepest longings. In a last, tragic attempt at self-seizure, Narcisse, in his frustration, attempts the union by embracing his ideal self in the water. In the Greek versions of the Narcissus myth, the young man drowns, yet Valéry does not commit himself to this ending, evoking a spiritual rather than a corporeal death by leaving the fate of Narcisse elegiacally understated: as Narcisse breaks the surface of the water, destroying through his own desire the object of this desire:

L'insaisissable amour que tu vins de me promettre
Passe, et dans un frisson, brise Narcisse, et fuit' (313-4).

Narcisse even dreams that his other might be enticed onto the bank, but the reflection cannot exist outside the mirror precisely because it is an ideal, a fantasy incapable of existence in the real world. In the same way, the real cannot enter the ideal world of the mirror; the division between the contingent subject of consciousness and desire and the pure self is one which cannot be bridged, and it is this which makes the fate of Narcisse inevitable and thus tragic. By focusing in such a simple form upon this tragedy, Valéry is also representing the condition of all those who would try to know and write the self. The image is always a mockery of the human condition, for it holds out a hope and promise which is ultimately unrealisable and can only end in frustration and even self-destruction.

The challenge of the image is therefore put in a very poignant and striking way in this poem, for by placing the contingent and ideal forms of 'self' in such stark contrast, Valéry highlights the desire of human beings to know themselves, to fathom the depths of their identity, whilst, at the same time, stating with evocative simplicity and understatement of action, tone and vocabulary, the tragic fact that the temptations it gives rise to are always to be frustrated by the limitations of our human being. The image is an enticement to proximity but the potential it seems to offer is far greater than anything which may be achieved in reality. This reflects of course, unfavourably upon the human condition itself, for the message Narcisse receives is that he is not worthy of the ideal he has glimpsed but can never attain.

The *Fragments du Narcisse* dramatises beautifully and profoundly the secret yearnings of the human being and the temptation Narcisse yields to of passing the ultimate frontier in order to reach a state of pure self-identity. The *Fragments du Narcisse* helps us to understand this dilemma in its dramatisation of Narcisse's hope, longing and eventual desperation, and perhaps to come to terms with the fact if that the contingent 'I' cannot achieve self-coincidence; self-destruction is the only possible fate this temptation can lead to.

Valéry's poem offers a profound and memorable formulation of *why* the 'image' is always a challenge, why writers are both impotent to resolve it and incapable of attempting not to do so. Through the poetic writing of the *Fragments*, Valéry therefore achieves a more mature statement about the nature of selfhood. What is particularly striking about this poem is that it is so purely a tragedy. Whilst *La Jeune Parque* had shown the continual movement from *Lumière* to *Ombre* and the conflicting desires at work, in the *Fragments*, Valéry, perhaps only due to the fact that he had already written the hymn of ultimate reconciliation achieved at the end of *La Parque's* journey, represents the tensions which face not only the autographer, but anyone who attempts self-understanding, in an acute form. So it is that the autographer works within the knowledge of ultimate failure of fully expressing the human subject or self, but the question remains as to what one can do within that failure and what forms of representation can emerge from this confrontation with the image?

5) *Lust* and *Le Solitaire* - the unfinished plays.

Even less so than for Valéry's other works, is it possible to envisage an exhaustive study of Valéry's two plays, *Lust* and the *Le Solitaire*, if only because the plays themselves remain unfinished. Valéry left manuscript drafts indicating the form and content of the final Acts of both plays, yet he would not or could not bring them to any conclusion, so that the two plays can only be studied as 'works in progress'. Three quarters of *Lust* and two thirds of *Le Solitaire* does, however, exist in published form, and it is from these texts and from published fragments of *Lust* IV and *Solitaire* III that we are able to highlight fundamental points which help us define or refine our idea of the whole of Valéry's 'autography' and the view of selfhood he held the end of his life.

The unfinished plays serve indeed as supreme examples of Valéry's constant tendency to push his writing to extreme limits of experimentation, 'jusqu'au bout fut mon désir' (C XXIX, 765) wrote Valéry in the final volume of the *Cahiers*. The fragmentary quality of the unfinished Acts corresponds here to the search for new and deeper powers of expression in the attempt to elucidate ever more fully the enigmatic 'Mystérieuse Moi' - the mystery of subject identity.

The plays particularly focus on the desire principle which Valéry increasingly isolated as the depth and essence of the 'Mystérieuse Moi'. The writing of his two plays, *Lust* and *Le Solitaire*, these 'exercices d'imagination et de self-conscience' (I, 231) as he described them, aimed at dramatising this view of selfhood, modelling the self of the writing subject and seeing what this selfhood would look like when staged imaginatively as a production of writing.

The plays demonstrate that, up until the very end of his life, Valéry was to remain, like his own Narcisse 'curieux de sa seule essence', faithful to a fundamental determination to approach as closely as possible the enigma of subject identity. What emerges in particular is a dialogue of voices held in tension, a psychodrama in which the desire principle is placed at the fore and its trace followed in two antithetical

realisations. Each of the two plays focuses on a different aspect of desire, both of which are crystallised versions of the two forms of desire, the 'essentialist' and 'existentialist', which already structure *La Jeune Parque*.

Thus, in *Le Solitaire*, Valéry dramatises desire, in its intellectual sublimation, as a pure energy of negation - a powerfully destructive force which rejects all that exists: whereas in *Lust*, Valéry stages the positive aspects of desire, the self as united and integrated with the Other through intimacy, love and tenderness - a deep communion of selves, embracing life and existence. The self-writing Valéry undertakes is the attempt to represent as exactly as possible these foundational forces of being and thus, through an experimental enactment of these two opposed forms of desire in writing, to gain an understanding of what is most fundamentally true about the self, and of what can be said to characterise selfhood most deeply.

The figure of Faust is the protagonist of both *Lust* and *Le Solitaire*. Valéry employs the Faustian myth as both a vehicle and stimulus to his self-writing. If Faust represents the Western intellect, the desire for mastery and dominance of both himself and the world around him, the question Valéry tackles in these two plays is what will happen to Faust when confronted with these forces of desire which lie within him and which are, as yet, enigmatic and remain beyond his control and understanding.

Le Solitaire pushes to an apocalyptic extreme his writing of the destructive energy of desire for consciousness, the *Moi Pur*, seen as immanent principle of 'transcendence' within functional self. Faust's confrontation with his own inner demon takes place in the quasi-biblical setting of a cold and barren mountain top. The *Solitaire's* strange 'demon on the mount', reminiscent in its negative energy of Nietzsche's Zarathoustra, is an ultimate statement of the mind's drive to summarise, liquidate and reject all possible 'objects', all 'images' to which existing things will be reduced. He delivers a litany of execration upon all things, all values, the dignity of the human intellect which creates them - all these 'merveilles d'un sou' (Oe II,389); it is a fierce and radical indictment of the nineteenth-century humanism embodied in Faust. His refusal of all identification with existence invokes, in a chilling, quasi-mystical prayer, the unseizable Absolute.

Oh...Passez en moi, Vents superbes!
Couchez en moi toutes les herbes,
Rompez les ronces du savoir,
Foulez les fleurs de ma pensée,
Broyez les roses de mon coeur,
Et tout ce qui n'est pas digne de ne pas être!
Je veux que l'air glacé que vous soufflez me lave
D'une faute commise avant que rien ne fût!
Hâtez-vous, hâtez-moi!
Il est l'heure, il est temps que je me change en loup
 Ah...â...â... (Oe II,391)

The writing here produces an intense and violently destructive exaltation, mediated by the hypnotic accumulation of strong active verbs, ('passez', 'couchez', 'rompez', 'foulez', 'broyez'), and the repetition of 'hâtez-moi' with its quasi-sexual impatience to have done with all merely worldly and human things. The Solitaire rejects the 'savoir', 'pensée' and 'coeur' which constitute and valorise the contingent human being, and, carried away by the transcendent force of his desire, he reaches another realm - a realm intuited by his own pure energy of negation and which language is incapable of expressing. Words give way to an animalistic scream, beyond anything human. Gifford describes the end of this speech as 'ce suicide du langage et de la pensée devant l'Inexprimable'.²¹ Sustained in the purity of its own principle, the mind's confrontation with existence is incompatible with human selfhood: it disintegrates us into ferocious angel and demented beast.

It is this force which Faust is confronted with on the desolate mountain top representing the very limits of existence. Faust is stunned by the whirlwind force of the Solitaire: 'mais ce hurleur est assez effrayant' (Oe II, 382). Insulted, 'tu souilles' (Oe II,384) and abused 'Minime Ordure' (Oe II,386-7), he is finally hurled off the mountain.

Faust awakens in the abyss surrounded by the Fées, the mythical expression of

²¹ Gifford, *Le Dialogue des Choses Divines*, pp.384-5.

our own 'magic' powers of organic regeneration, who try to restore him to existence. Faust's disorientation and amnesia as he regains consciousness here are reminiscent of the awakening of the Parque in the opening lines of the poem. Like la Parque, Faust has lost the thread of his identity and is aware of some 'plaie d'entendement' (Oe II, 394) at the root of his suffering, but in this play, as he tries to recall the events which have taken place, there is no reconciliation with his own contingency. In a proud, final gesture of renunciation, he assumes the vocation of transcendence whatever its consequences and turns his back on life and the possibility of 're-vivre', refusing to be persuaded to take part once more in the cycle of human existence: 'je suis excédé d'être une créature' (Oe II, 402). He consents, in fact, to be consumed by the irresistible energy of negative transcendence within him. Having been at last initiated to its ultimate meaning, Faust is annihilated by his own principle of pure transcendence.

In the unpublished third Act of *Le Solitaire*, it seems that Valéry envisaged an intimate Duo beyond life, in the abyss, between Faust and Le Solitaire. Still terrible, but now strangely tender, the Solitaire attempts to help Faust come to terms with this force within him which he had invested in his own self-destruction. In an almost fraternal dialogue with the Solitaire, Faust hesitates between seeing his self-destruction as a catastrophe and trying to justify his own extermination to himself. In an 'échange d'intimité' between the two main characters, Faust would come to recognise this inner demon as a fundamental part of himself: 'Ne vois pas tu que je suis Toi?',²² and as the symbol of his devotion to this dynamic of conscious refusal of any and every contingent identity: 'je suis la pureté de ton refus - ta victoire sur tout ce qui se sent et qui se pense. Ton étincelle d'éternelle opposition, détachée'.²³ This final Act seems to move towards a communion of the two central figures in celebration of their common devotion to a mysterious vocation of 'Essence' which is itself unseizable and unsayable: we can only ever know in its manifestation, never in itself, the ground of intellectual sensibility from which subject-identity emerges. Of this movement beyond words Bastet writes:

²² Ned Bastet, 'Le Même avec le Même: Le Dialogue Unitif Valéryen et le Troisième Acte du *Solitaire*', *BEV*, 28 (1981), 19-40, p.23.

²³ *ibid.*, p.24.

Le Moi Pur invente désormais son langage qui, à l'égal de son propre bondissement hors du Tout, semble ne toucher aux mots que pour les incendier et les détruire, supports cahotiques et dérisoires à la seule délivrance d'un cri.²⁴

Lust dramatises, as we shall see, a similar breakdown of language before the unsayable. Yet, this play traces the opposite pole of desire constitutive of selfhood. It stages and writes out the hypothesis of a Faust faced with the possibility of intimacy with the existing Other. Faust, as we mentioned in Chapter Three, appears here as the embodiment of the rational Western mind, characterised by the will for self-mastery and control. Lust is first presented as his secretary and it is to this role that Faust wishes to reduce her. She is simply to be an instrument of his mind, helping, as we saw in the scene of the 'Mémoires de Moi', to organise his thoughts, trigger his memory and provide an agreeable diversion, while secretly energising the pure Mind.

Yet Lust is far more than a vessel for Faust's great intellect. She is, as her name suggests, the source of vitality and joy. As the play develops, it becomes clear that Lust represents the mysterious Other within Faust himself, which Faust attempts to suppress through his entire labour of objectification and mastery as Cartesian subject. Lust is far from being the transparent 'demoiselle de cristal' Faust wishes her to be; and it is her hidden depths, unknown to both protagonists, which will emerge in the action of the play and which the writing of this 'work in progress' seems designed to express.

Valéry presents with humour Faust's attempt to reduce Lust to the role of supporting instrument, and his severe and authoritative reprimand of her when she tries to make suggestions or contribute to the dictation taking place:

Vous n'êtes pas ici pour comprendre, mon enfant. Vous y êtes pour écrire sous ma dictée, me relire ce que je vous ai dicté, et en outre, pour n'être pas désagréable à regarder sans réflexion. Vous comprenez?(Oe II,280).

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.25.

The stance of intellectual detachment taken by Faust is one which protects him from the disappointment produced by amorous adventures, and one which he must overcome if he is to allow himself to be united with the Other, embodied in Lust.²⁵

It is in the garden scene of *Lust* (Act II, Scene V), with all its mythical connotations, that Faust abandons his dictation and permits himself to be drawn in by the possibility of intimacy with Lust. The tone of the writing shifts perceptibly in this scene and the humour and teasing of the previous act gives way to an intense seriousness. Faust is tempted during this scene to move from the position of intellectual observer: 'Mais non...Je ne dicte pas...J'existe. Il fait divin, ce soir. Trop bon, trop doux, trop beau, même...La Terre est tendre'(Oe II,318). It is at this moment that Faust believes himself to be truly living, to be united in the present with his own existence, rather than being alienated from it through the analytical processes of the intellect: 'Me voici le présent même. Ma personne épouse exactement ma présence, en échange parfait avec quoi qu'il arrive[...]Je suis celui que je suis'(Oe II,321-2).

Faust's exaltation at being and his achievement of a poised and harmonious self-coincidence is, however, short-lived. As Lust, enchanted by his words, draws closer to him and touches Faust on the shoulder, he is suddenly confused; and, oscillating between the intimacy of 'tu' and the more formal and distant 'vous', he gradually gives way to fear and withdraws. The intimate moment conveyed by this scene fails to produce more than a passing or partial openness to the Other, since the Faustian subject is unable to surrender his own autonomy. It is an 'exquisite irony' of the play that this potential moment of supreme intimacy should be experienced by Faust as a 'masterpiece of the solitary mind'.²⁶

There is, however, much evidence in the unpublished manuscripts of *Lust* to indicate that Valéry envisaged an ultimate union between the two central figures in a 'duo lyrique' in Act IV, giving way to a positive view of the self in communion with the other.²⁷ The unfinished act suggests a higher union, no longer that of the vulgar 'convulsion grossière'(Oe II,292), to which Mephistopheles would reduce love, but a

²⁵ On the desire for extreme intimacy exemplified by Faust's relationship with Lust see Paul Gifford, 'Self and Other: Valéry's "Lost Object of Desire"', in P. Gifford and B. Stimpson eds., *Reading Paul Valéry*, 280-296.

²⁶ Gifford, 'Self and Other', p.292.

²⁷ See extracts of the final act of *Lust* published by Ned Bastet, in *Cahiers Paul Valéry 2: Mes Théâtres* (Paris, Gallimard, 1977), 51-88. and his article in the same journal, 'Ulysse et la Sirène', 88-141.

communion of sensibility and intellect, a total communion of selves, raising to a higher power the sometimes marvellous adaptation of male and female bodies.

The final Act was to provide a crescendo of tenderness, seeking to isolate and express the highest note of amorous sensibility, and to convey a wholeness of being emerging from an existence laid waste by too much abstractive consciousness and intellectual objectification. It tends towards a final enactment in writing of this opposite pole of desire, one in which life and love are affirmed and embraced. Such a hypothesis is antipodally different from that envisaged in *Le Solitaire*. Here 'the Other' is not seen as an impurity to be reduced to an image of the Same, but, on the contrary as an essential complement, a vital chance for wholeness, affirming human existence as such. Yet both antithetical postulations answer each other in the respect that they seek a kind of epiphany beyond language.

Bastet writes: 'Mais plus l'oeuvre avance dans la durée et dans cette sourde émergence du Désir, plus elle tend à transcender l'ordinaire du discours pour une approche comme musicale d'états de pure résonance, d' "accords harmoniques"[...] Le discours éclate en fragments plus lyriques que dramatiques'.²⁸

The tenor - and the ambition - of Valéry's lyricism is perhaps suggested by the following fragment of Act IV:

Et voici ce que je te dis, ce qu'il y a de plus précieux dans la vie et qui seul peut la faire aimer, garder, regretter, c'est précisément ce qui la refuse, la domine, l'apaise et la consomme et qui se trouve ou se retrouve dans la présence et la correspondance, ou dans l'échange inouï, muet, de ce que je ne sais pas en moi, ni de moi, contre ce que je ne sais pas en toi, ni de toi' (Oe II, 1413).

Is there a form of writing which can at least suggest or sketch the silent epiphany of subject identity sometimes experienced by lovers?

²⁸ Bastet, 'Ulysse et la Sirène', pp.126-7

'Tout qui peut se dire est nul' (Oe II, 388) says the Solitaire - an excessive statement, yet it is true that the normally unsayable is that which Valéry the artist is interested in exploring and dramatising in these 'exercices d'imagination' and self-awareness: the paradoxical attempt to pursue in writing that which precisely escapes the imaging or representation of common language. In both plays, the increasing proximity to the very principle of Desire which underlies both life and mind is characterised by an explosion of language, and a confrontation with the limits of the subject voice.

It is to these limits that Valéry goes in his last two plays, carrying even further his life-long vocation to explore the foundations of selfhood and to arrive at the 'limit' where answers to the enigma of subject identity are clearly seen to escape us. In these two plays, perhaps even more so than in his prose and poetry, Valéry demonstrates that which sets him apart from other auto(bio)graphers - namely the persevering will to follow the threads of identity to their furthest limit in writing, and, through his own dramatisation of intuitions in writing, to come to a less inadequate understanding of the 'Mystérieuse Moi'.

6) Conclusion

The youthful project Valéry embarked upon to turn the mind upon itself, in rejection of all identification with images, evolves into the plurality of representational forms we have discussed, as he attempts to explore and develop in ever more subtle and complex ways these early intuitions of subject identity. As Valéry's autography and his ideas on the self grow, through mutual enhancement, it is increasingly evident that, for Valéry, the writing of the self can only ever give a form to, or indication of, that which remains ultimately ungraspable. Valéry's continuing writing projects, right up until the eve of his death, demonstrate the difficulty of accepting this limitation, and both the negative and positive energies which result from this dilemma. Yet, the

realisation of limits does nothing to deter Valéry from questioning, through his writings, just where these limits lie.

Such questioning is very far removed from the elaboration of a more-or-less anecdotal self-image and the communication of this image to an audience, for purposes of self-justification, self-gratification or for financial reward. Valéry stands apart not only amongst the auto(bio)graphers we have chosen to study here, but perhaps amongst auto(bio)graphers in general, in his radical pursuit of insights about the constitution of selfhood as such. Yet, this task can never be completed. Valéry reaches the limits of what can be said or written. The last plays remained, like his exhausting and almost exhaustive pursuit of the principle of subject-identity and of selfhood, both unfinished and unfinishable.

The self remains ungraspable, but with every attempt it seems to Valéry that he gets closer, that the outline becomes a little clearer. To Valéry there can be no coincidence of self and image - the ideal Rousseau had thought possible - for the self always lies beyond the realm of imagery, but each failure to write the self is also a success, for it provides new insights and new avenues of exploration, which in turn lead to new and ever more subtle forms and styles of writing: 'Je ne puis me reconnaître dans une figure finie. Et Moi s'enfuit toujours de ma personne que, cependant, il imprime en la fuyant' (C IV, 392).

SECTION THREE: Roland Barthes

CHAPTER FIVE

The staging of the imaginary and the 'exclusion of the self'.

The writing of Roland Barthes represents a certain logical end-point of Western critical reflection on the notion of the self and its relation to representation, in which the subject-object divide we demonstrated in the work of Paul Valéry is taken to the point where it appears that all that remains are representations of the self with no self as the source of or behind these representations. The structuralist attack on autobiography which Barthes has frequently been associated with is one which has as its target the naive assumptions of transparency and unity of self which formed the basis of Rousseau's turn to autobiography in the *Confessions*. Barthes follows the path pioneered by Valéry with his questioning of the image and his mistrust of the *imaginaire*. However, Barthes appears to take this questioning one step further, for the suspicion of the relation between self and image now extends to the suspicion of validity of the very notion of a 'self': it is this further deconstructive move which threatens the survival of both the self and of autobiography as we have come to know it.

As with the previous two sections, this section will comprise two chapters: in the first we detail the way in which the structuralist suspicion of referentiality creates a textual subject wholly divorced from any 'self' existing outwith the text, and present Barthes's own pronouncements which appear to demonstrate an adherence to this theoretical position. Following this presentation of the structuralist threat to traditional autobiography, we will introduce Barthes's understanding of the term *imaginaire*, and the way in which this understanding determines his 'staging' of the subject in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. From this, it will be argued, however, that an understanding of the *imaginaire* does not lead to an exclusion of the self from autobiography, rather that it is due to Barthes's recognition of the power and

proliferation of imagery and his fear of the stultifying and limiting aspect of imagery that he makes the staging of the *imaginaire* the focus of his autobiographical work.

The central argument being put forward in Chapter Five is therefore that, in response to this challenge of the image, Barthes does not provide an exclusion of the 'self' from the realm of autobiography in the way in which many of Barthes's readers and critics have supposed or wished. In fact, it is precisely from a desire to protect an intuition of 'selfhood', to prevent it from being confounded and seen as synonymous with the written 'subject' of autobiography, to constantly pay attention to and flag up this distinction, that Barthes's preoccupation with the *imaginaire* in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* stems. The tactics Barthes employs to keep the text circulating, with no one image being settled upon, is a way of preventing the false identification of self and textual subject.

This argument is supported by many of Barthes's own pronouncements on the subject and selfhood in his autobiography. Under close examination, as several Barthesian critics have recently pointed out, there emerge clear tensions in Barthes's writing between the theoretical position he is most constantly aligned with and that which can be interpreted from both the tone and content of the statements he makes within his own work. We shall demonstrate that, far from excluding or destroying the notion of a 'self' in his own writing, his autobiographical writing can be shown, in fact, to both imply and require such a self.

1) L'Anti-Rousseau: Barthes and the structuralist attack on 'traditional' autobiography.

For many, the idea that Roland Barthes should write an autobiography seems a paradoxical one. As Dorothy Kelly, in a recent article, writes:

But what can Roland Barthes' autobiography be? How can one write an autobiography in the advent of post-structuralism? If autobiography *is*, in fact, an attempt to represent and uncover the self through writing, and if deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis have exploded both

the concepts of representation and of the self, a post-structural autobiography is a contradiction in terms.¹

It is certainly true that Roland Barthes takes on board many such theoretical considerations and, as a consequence, his approach to autobiographical writing is both unique and, in many ways, 'anti-autobiographical'. In fact, the hand-written inscription inside the cover of the Seuil edition of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* could be seen as a direct and provocative challenge to the reader or critic of autobiography. Anyone who holds any faith in a clear distinction between autobiography and other forms of writing, particularly those who look for the establishment of some sort of 'autobiographical pact' between the reader and the author of the work, in which there is a guarantee given by the author, either explicitly or implicitly, both that the events described in the text took place in the life of the being who exists outside the text, and that they are being recounted as faithfully as possible, will be disappointed by the first words of this book 'tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman'.

These words do not appear within the text itself, no page reference can be given to them; unlike the rest of the text which is type-written this sentence is hand-written and is not claimed by any author.² For those critics who have attempted to put forward provisional definitions of autobiography, or at least some ideas on the criteria which any text to be considered an autobiography must go some way towards meeting, these initial words are seriously confounding. The 'definition' of autobiography given in Lejeune's early work, is, for example, seriously undermined by this opening statement. Lejeune writes of autobiography as a:

¹ Dorothy Kelly, 'The Cracked Mirror: Roland Barthes' Anti-Autobiography', in *Autobiography in French Literature*, French Literature Series, 12 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 122-28, (p.122).

² In fact, the same could be said for the entire work, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, where the only names that appear are given as part of the title. There is no claim made as to who the 'author' is. For this reason we shall refer to the 'narrator' rather than the 'author' of the text. The disjunction here is in the same vein as that highlighted in Barthes's earlier article 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', *New Literary History* 6 (1975), 237-72, in which he writes 'the one *who speaks* (in the narrative) is not the one *who writes* (in real life) and the one *who writes* is not the one *who is*', p.261.

Récit retrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent principal sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité.³

Yet, what is to be made of the hand-written inscription in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*? Are these words an explicit rejection of an autobiographical pact, the idea that in no way should the work be read as being a statement of identity between the author and the narrator of the work? Does it mean, in that case, that it should be read as fiction?⁴ This may be the immediate response to the statement by many readers, but it is not what is actually being asserted. On closer examination, the claim indicates that the words of the text are to be read as though they are *spoken* by a character in a novel. But why, if this work is an autobiography, should this be the case? Why the need to go to the lengths of putting this initial statement before the text begins? Why is it hand-written? Further, *who* put it there?

In fact, this initial hand-written statement is reiterated and enlarged upon later in the text, in a paragraph which, as will be illustrated, summarises Barthes's entire approach to self-writing. The paragraph is aptly entitled 'le Livre du Moi':

Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman - ou plutôt par plusieurs. Car l'imaginaire, matière fatale du roman et labyrinthe des redans dans lesquels se fourvoie celui qui parle de lui-même, l'imaginaire est pris en charge par plusieurs masques (*personae*), échelonnés selon la profondeur de la scène (et cependent *personne* derrière)[...] Pas de plus pur imaginaire que la critique (de soi) (186).⁵

³ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, p. 14.

⁴ Lejeune, in 'Le Pacte Autobiographique (bis)' in *Moi Aussi* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp.13-35, writes of the fascination *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* holds for him precisely because of its challenge to any notion of a conventional autobiographical pact: but he goes on to write 'dire la vérité sur soi, se constituer comme sujet plein - c'est un imaginaire. L'autobiographie a beau être impossible, ça ne l'empêche nullement d'exister', p.31. See also Paul John Eakin, 'Philippe Lejeune and the Study of Autobiography', *Romance Studies* 8 (1986), 1-14.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol III, ed., Eric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1995), p.186. All page references to this work will be given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

Anyone who talks about themselves, Barthes stresses on several occasions, becomes caught up in the web of the *imaginaire*. In fact the entire project of the series for which Barthes is writing, 'X par lui-même', is 'le programme même de l'imaginaire' (211), and the use of the 'I' which characterises most autobiographical writing, Barthes sees as 'le pronom de l'imaginaire' (139). But what does Barthes mean by the *imaginaire*? How does this relate to the notion of writing autobiographically?

The term *l'Imaginaire*⁶ is usually associated with the work of Jacques Lacan, whose lectures Barthes attended in Paris in the 1960s, and is particularly connected with what Lacan called the 'mirror-stage' of a child's development.⁷ Sometime between the ages of six and eighteen months, the child becomes fascinated with its image in the mirror, although not at first realising that it is its own. However, as the child develops, it does come to recognise its own image in the mirror.

Lacan highlights several important aspects arising from this recognition; a positive aspect in that the child sees in its image, a unified and integrated individual, which differs substantially from its previous fragmented and confused experiences of its own being 'at first, the *imaginaire* is euphoric, since it grants us a relatively stable identity'.⁸ For the first time, the child sees itself as a separate being from its mother. The identification of the subject's image is thus a source of intense fascination to the child, and yet the recognition of the image in the mirror, is, for Lacan, essentially a misrecognition, or 'méconnaissance', for the image is *of*, and yet *is not*, the child itself. The child thus, in fact, sees itself in the way in which it is seen by others, and this is essential, Lacan maintains, in the development of the child's ego, as an idealised and 'other' self:

⁶ When used by Lacan, the *Imaginaire* is always written with a capital 'I': however, in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the first letter is usually written in the lower case, although in this, as in all other things, Barthes refuses consistency.

⁷ See Jacques Lacan, 'Le Stade du Miroir comme Formateur de la Fonction du Je', in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 89-97.

⁸ Andrew Brown, *Roland Barthes: The Figures of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.88.

Mais le point important est que cette forme situe l'instance du *moi*, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu.⁹

It is due to the child's recognition of itself in the mirror that it is able to refer to itself and to learn to use the first-person pronoun, although the child does this under the fundamental misconception that the (specular) image it sees in the mirror can be identified with itself, presenting the child's self-identification on a 'ligne de fiction'. The relation between the child and its image is therefore, from the outset, one of misapprehension, although the child remains unaware of this:

The subject merges with his own image and the same imaginary trapping by the double can be seen in his relationships with his fellows. It should be noted that the subject is ignorant of his own alienation and that is how the chronic misrecognition of self and the causal chain determining human existence takes place[...] The mirror stage realizes the conquest of the totality of one's own body, but it does so by way of a narcissistic identification with the image of the self and with others.¹⁰

The child thus appropriates the image as itself, and yet this identification is one dominated by absence and lack:

The child identifies with an image of itself that is always also the image of another. Its identification can only ever be partial, wishful, anticipated, put off into the future, delayed. Its internal or felt reality can only ever be incompletely approximated or represented by the mirror image. This constitutive identification is necessarily alienating.¹¹

⁹ Lacan, p.94. See also Fredric Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Problem of the Subject', *Yale French Studies*, 55-56 (1977), 338-395, (p.353).

¹⁰ Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* transl. David Macey, (London: Routledge, 1977), p.178.

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London, Routledge, 1990), p.40.

Barthes's use of the term certainly bears much resemblance to the central tenets of Lacan's thesis, but to reduce Barthes to a 'borrowing' of the Lacanian *Imaginaire* for his own ends would surely be a mistake. In fact, in a text which explicitly goes out of its way to reject any formal theory, this kind of superposition of ideas could lead to grave misunderstandings. Barthes, as Moriarty writes, 'has never absorbed systems conceptually, has simply cannibalised them, treating them as stockpiles from which he lifts desirable signifiers'.¹² Barthes is not interested in expounding Lacan, he has his own ideas and his own project underway.¹³ He also is an unlikely candidate to be a disciple of any theoretician, 'je n'aime pas les disciples' (900), he stated during one interview.¹⁴

Barthes does, however, retain the Lacanian notion that the subject, in talking of him/her self, is immediately and inevitably embroiled in the *imaginaire*. We do not see, nor can we describe ourselves, simply because there is no such 'self' which can be experienced or apprehended. We can only see or apprehend ourselves in the realm of images/*imaginaire* and any self-writing thus involves a view of oneself as another, for self-apprehension is always mediated through the other, through imagery, which is falsely taken to be the individual him/her self. Thus, in the fragment 'Abgrund', the narrator of the text asks:

Peut-on - ou du moins pouvait-on autrefois - commencer à écrire sans se prendre pour un autre? (170)

Barthes, in this way, echoes the view put forward by Valéry in his dramatisation of the dilemma of Narcisse. The image which is constitutive of the

¹² Michael Moriarty *Roland Barthes* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp.169-170. Moriarty also writes, on Barthes's debt to Lacan: 'But then he is not concerned with theoretical fidelity to a system, for systems tend to oppress', p.171.

¹³ A fragment of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* entitled 'Rapport à la Psychanalyse' also suggests that the narrator's references to psychoanalytic language should not be read as a thoroughgoing acceptance of these views, 'Son rapport à la psychanalyse n'est pas scrupuleux[...]. C'est un rapport *indécis*', p.209.

¹⁴ Interview for *L'Express* 17 April 1978. In another interview given around the same time, Barthes refers directly to the relation between Lacan's use of the term *imaginaire* and his own when he says: 'j'entends *imaginaire*, non au sens de l'Imagination, mais dans le sens assez technique que lui donne Lacan: un registre psychique, différent du Symbolique et du Réel, qui est caractérisé par l'adhérence très forte du sujet à l'image', p.896.

sense of identity is always alienating and promises more than it delivers. The notion Barthes resists here is, of course, that which asserts that the individual is able to 'introspect' to know and understand his/her true nature, and then go about the business of communicating this autobiographically to others. To Barthes this idea belies a fundamental disregard of the involvement of the *imaginaire* in self-writing. The intervention of the *imaginaire* is here being construed in a similar way to Barthes's earlier definition of it in, *Sade, Fourier et Loyola*, where it is seen as 'la méconnaissance que le sujet a de lui-même au moment où il assume de dire ou de remplir son je'.¹⁵ For Barthes, the *imaginaire* is constitutive of the 'subject', but does not 'represent' any core of selfhood in essentialist terms. There can be presentations or performances of the *imaginaire*, but there is no unified entity to be found at the centre of, or behind, these expressions. Thus, the narrator is not trying to bring the 'self' to life in the work, or to 'represent' the self in the text:

Je renonce à la poursuite épuisante d'un ancien morceau de moi-même, je ne cherche pas à me *restaurer* (comme on dit d'un monument). Je ne dis pas 'Je vais me décrire', mais 'J'écris un texte et je l'appelle R.B.' Je me passe de l'imitation (de la description) et je me confie à la nomination. Ne sais-je pas que, *dans le champ du sujet, il n'y a pas de référent?*[...] Je suis moi-même mon propre symbole[...] Je n'ai rien à quoi me comparer (137-9).

2) Barthes's staging of the *imaginaire* in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

Throughout *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the refusal to have the text identified with a certain person/speaker beyond the text itself is of the utmost concern:¹⁶ the ideal would be to have fragments with a voice, but where the origin of

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p.55.

¹⁶ Most auto(bio)graphers, it could be argued, ignore these appearances of the 'imaginaire' and the fact that their sense of unified identity is bolstered by the image-system they are promoting through their self-description. Barthes, as Johnnie Gratton writes in 'Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: Autobiography and the Notion of Expression', *Romance Studies* 8 (1986), 57-65, 'knows too much, as it were, to be a straight autobiographer', p.63.

the voice could never be detected. Instead the 'subject' would be an endless echo, an image the narrator identifies with when he writes:

Par rapport aux systèmes qui l'entourent, qu'est-il? Plutôt une chambre d'échos: il reproduit mal les pensées, il suit les mots; il rend visite, c'est-à-dire hommage, aux vocabulaires'(151)

Another similar image frequently invoked is that of 'retentissement', with, again, its connotations of endless movement, of never quite being able to settle on one object (or subject): 'comment est-ce que les rayons du miroir réverbèrent, retentissent sur moi?'(211).

The guiding line of thought, often encountered in the text, is that the writing subject cannot be 'translated', 'described', 'represented' or 'expressed' in the autobiographical text, for the image one has of oneself is always dependent on the existence of images by which one comes to be seen, and sees oneself, as a 'subject', but that this subject is not to be confused with any inner or fundamental identity. The narrator of the text clearly wants to associated with views of the subject in which this subject is seen as a product of language and writing, and not a unified entity to which this language refers in any way: 'il se sent solidaire de tout écrit dont le principe est que *le sujet n'est qu'un effet de langage*'(154).

Such a view of the self has important implications for the autobiographer, for, in this case, as Dorothy Kelly states:

The self is not something that pre-exists, as a thing which language will later be used to represent; this would be the constative understanding of autobiography as a text which describes a pre-existing, non-linguistic entity. Rather it is language which *constructs* the self in the performative sense.¹⁷

¹⁷ Kelly, p.123.

The entire autobiographical enterprise is, in fact, seen by the narrator of this text as the stage-managing of a performance of the imaginary 'subject':

L'effort vital de ce livre est de mettre en scène un imaginaire. 'Mettre en scène' veut dire: échelonner des portants, disperser des rôles, établir des niveaux et, à la limite: faire de la rampe une barre incertaine. Il est donc important que l'imaginaire soit traité selon ses degrés (l'imaginaire est une affaire de consistance, et la consistance, une affaire de degrés), et il y a, au fil de ces fragments, plusieurs degrés d'imaginaire (175).

The *imaginaire*, it is stated here, exists in degrees: thus, having recognised that in talking or writing about oneself one inevitably, to a certain extent, becomes caught up in the *imaginaire*, the task of the author now becomes the 'staging' of the subject being presented in the work, to prevent this subject from being associated with a fixed or determinate image, or becoming defined by a limited image-system. The avoidance of a stagnation, a consistency, or a solidity of the subject which is likened, as we shall see, to a death, is thus of paramount concern in the narrator's staging of the imaginary in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

The notion of 'staging' implies a presentation or performance for an audience, and it is precisely this that the narrator of the text enacts: yet the audience must also participate in the performance, for without the reader taking on board and 'playing' with the text in the same way as the author, there will be no successful avoidance or limitation of the imaginary: this is due to the imaginary being constituted both by the way in which we see ourselves as subjects/objects and the way we are seen by others, which also leads to our objectification. As Andrew Brown comments on Barthes: 'he thinks that writing, if it is to be a successful escape from the immobility (itself "funereal") of the subject's imaginary, needs the co-operation of the reader'.¹⁸

In his rejection of a 'self' which can be brought to life in the text and conveyed to the reader in autobiography, Barthes works against the fundamental assumptions of the 'introspective' view of autobiography pioneered by Rousseau, as we saw in the

¹⁸ Brown, p.125.

first section of this thesis, in his *Confessions*. Rousseau's reaction, in the face of the distorting images being propounded of him, was to look within himself, and to produce, in his autobiography, the result of this privileged view of himself. Whilst others could look upon him objectively and provide their own interpretations of what they saw, the truth was reserved only for Rousseau himself, for only he could have access to his inner self. The narrator of the *Confessions* and the ontologically existing Rousseau were seen as co-substantial, with the former simply being the outward expression of the latter.

Barthes's position can be seen as diametrically opposed to this. In fact, with direct reference to the Rousseauesque school of autobiography Barthes writes:

Ce livre n'est pas un livre de 'confessions'; non pas qu'il soit insincère, mais parce que nous avons aujourd'hui un savoir différent d'hier; ce savoir peut se résumer ainsi: ce que j'écris sur moi n'en est jamais *le dernier mot* (187).

The entire notion of any transparency between the author and the subject of the text appears to be dispensed with. The 'author' as originator or founder of the text whose ideas are translated into the text is rejected.¹⁹ There is no longer any valid access posited between the writing subject and the subject written about. As soon as the writing subject views him/her self, s/he becomes caught up in the processes of the *imaginaire*, and in the production of a textual 'I', embedded in otherness. The rift between the subject and object of autobiographical discourse appears to be complete and irreparable.²⁰

What takes place in Barthes's autobiography, differentiating him in a fundamental way from Rousseau, is that not only is there an unbridgeable gulf posited

¹⁹ This rejection of the author as 'God' of the text, as founder and creator is a feature of Barthes's earlier writing, in particular of his essay 'La Mort de l'Auteur'. As Seán Burke has shown, however, it is possible to interpret this essay as being the closure of representation in writing rather than a literal rejection of the author from writing, see Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p.48.

²⁰ As Burke rightly notes, this is by no means a new development in autobiography. Many of the 'great' autobiographers such as Montaigne and Augustine have famously raised this problem which has been they seen in terms of the schism between their past and present selves, or the self who is writing, as opposed to the self who is written, see Burke *ibid*, pp.55-6.

between the 'self', and any entity which has a recognisable textual existence as the subject of autobiography, but 'Barthes directs all energies to maintaining this breach at the level of the utmost visibility'²¹ in his autobiography, like a gaping wound which Barthes refuses to plaster over or to ultimately ignore as so many 'traditional' autobiographers have been prone to do. The problem is not therefore conceived as one concerning the nature of language, which could be seen as limited or insufficiently subtle to 'translate' the private understanding of a pre-existing subject, but rather that an autobiography cannot be a transparent reflection of an externally existing self, for the very notion of a unified and coherent subjective existence only comes about as the result of the autobiographical creation itself.

The refusal of referentiality Barthes's autobiographical text is so often seen as performing is, we are arguing, in fact, an enactment, through his own autobiographical production, of the difficulties inherent in any simplistic view of reference between self and textual subject: 'c'est donc pour déjouer les leures de l'imaginaire que Barthes incorpore dans le texte de son autoportrait un discours fait d'avertissement et d'injonctions'.²² To say that an image does not attain its referent does not necessarily imply that there is no referent to attain. What Barthes is refusing to be is an object for others - he refuses to constitute himself in the way Rousseau did. He refuses to make himself an 'objet pour-autrui', to become a prisoner of the 'regard de l'autre' in a very Sartrean sense.²³

Barthes's work clearly shows that however troublesome it may be revealed to be, autobiography is a long way from disappearing, but it must face up to certain long-ignored assumptions if it is to progress as a credible genre. In fact, as will be shown in Chapter Six, once the techniques Barthes uses in his autobiographical writing are exposed, his own writing does not differ substantially from what we have come to know as 'traditional' autobiography.

The view being argued for here will sorely disappoint those who have seen, in works such as Barthes's *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the complete

²¹ Burke, p.56

²² J. Gratton, 'Expression et Enonciation dans l'Oeuvre de Roland Barthes' Colloque de Cerisy Oct. 1997 Colloque de Cerisy 1997, in *L'écriture du Sujet* eds., P.Gifford and Alain Goulet (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1999), forthcoming.

²³ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'Ontologie Phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), Part Three, Chapter One.

elimination of the 'self' from Western autobiography which follows a Cartesian model, and of the notion of autobiographical referentiality. In fact, rather than dismissing the 'self' or any notion of selfhood from autobiography, we shall show that Barthes's autobiographical work appears to imply and need the support of some form of selfhood beyond the textual 'I', and it is the gaps in Barthes's writing, deliberately incorporated in the structure and content of his work, which allow to emerge, albeit in a shadowy way, that which is *not* present in the text itself, namely an idea of selfhood which resists theorisation.

If this is the case, and we shall argue in the following section that it is, then Barthes's views on the subject/self can be seen as closer to Valéry's than many of his commentators have wished to acknowledge. It may well be the case, as Wiseman writes in *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes*, that 'rewriting is performance and the performer dissolves in the performance of the "novel without proper names"',²⁴ but as well as there being a performer, the question remains as to who directs the performance. It could well be, as Sheringham suggests, that 'the space of subjectivity in Barthes, then, is not homogeneous, nor is it simply conflictual; it is theatrical',²⁵ and that Barthes's deliberate stage-management of the *imaginaire* in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* allows us 'to glimpse or to overhear the subjectivity which is dispersed through the performance'.²⁶

The argument we shall put forward here gains support from two directions. The first, bringing Barthes close to Valéry, is the notion that Barthes's performance of the *imaginaire* in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is motivated by a fear of the stultifying power of imagery. Many examples drawn from both this work and other writings will be cited to give this view a firm basis. If this view is correct, and the performance of the *imaginaire* in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* were to be construed as the desire to protect untainted the realm of an unrepresentable intuition of selfhood, Barthes could be seen as coming up against the very frustrations of Valéry's Narcisse in confrontation with his image.

²⁴ Mary Bittner Wiseman, *The Ecstasies of Roland Barthes* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.112.

²⁵ Sheringham, p.195.

²⁶ *ibid.*

The gap between self and textual subject which Barthes appears to imply and attempt to preserve could be closely correlated to Valéry's disjunction between the *Moi Pur* and the *Personnalité* explored in Chapter Three, with Barthes seeing in the imagery of his textual embodiment a fictional and limited reflection of something which is not present in the text itself, namely his 'self'. On this interpretation, Barthes is seen as echoing Valéry's statement 'je ne puis me reconnaître dans une figure finie, et Moi s'enfuit toujours de ma personne que cependant il imprime ou dessine en la fuyant'.²⁷

3) The first challenge of the image in Roland Barthes

Barthes's abhorrence of the image is well documented within his own work. In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* the narrator writes: 'il supporte mal toute *image* de lui-même, souffre d'être nommé. Il considère que la perfection d'un rapport humain tient à cette vacance de l'image'(127). In Morocco, the narrator describes the way in which the Moroccans failed to fuel his *imaginaire*, and the text suggests that once he got used to this state of affairs, the narrator found not having to strive to present an image of himself as '*ceci*' or '*cela*' a great relief and grew to see it as a 'bien de civilisation'(127).

In Barthes's work, the image is constantly referred to as limiting, oppressive and tantamount to a death of the 'self'. In the 1977 Cerisy conference devoted to Roland Barthes, Barthes himself gave a paper entitled 'L'Image' in which he talks explicitly of the impossibility of escaping the image in a society 'malade d'Images'. Even if one refuses images, says Barthes, one is given the image of one who refuses imagery:

Rien à faire, je dois passer par l'Image: L'Image est une sorte de service militaire social: je ne puis m'en faire exempter: je ne puis me faire

²⁷ Valéry, C IV, 392.

réformer, désertter, etc. Je vois l'homme malade d'Images, malade de son Image.²⁸

So pervasive is this suspicion of the image in Barthes that one of his friends, when asked, following Barthes's death, to describe Roland Barthes to the audience finds himself faced with the following dilemma - how can he describe his friend without introducing an 'image' of him, thereby betraying his friend's lifelong refusal of the image?²⁹

Barthes, in the same Cerisy conference paper, talks of the power of the image to hurt, and asks of the image: 'comment une image de moi "prend"-elle au point que j'en sois blessé?'.³⁰ The individual becomes constituted in the *imaginaire* of language as a piece of potato, when dipped in fat, is transformed into a French fry. The *imaginaire* serves to make us an object for others, and Barthes speaks of the 'intimidations du langage'. Above all there is present in this paper, in fact from the very first sentence, Barthes's fear of the rigidity imposed by the image: 'A l'origine de tout, la Peur'.³¹

Since images cannot be avoided, the only recourse is to confound them 'donc, non pas détruire les Images, mais les décoller, les distancer'.³² Barthes's determination to keep the involvement of the *imaginaire* in his own writing clearly visible thus arises from the author's paranoia, the fear of being given a certain image by others. Barthes does not want to constitute himself as an image 'pour autrui' and the tactics he employs in his writing, which we highlight in Chapter Six, can be seen as a means of preventing a claustrophobic adherence of any image which would be seen to stand for the figure 'Roland Barthes'.

The first challenge of the image, which Barthes confronts and responds to in the writing of his autobiography, is the all-pervasiveness of images and their tendency to 'objectify' and to attempt to summarise the 'subject'. However, Barthes's concern with the 'image', along with his lengthy and exhaustive attempts to highlight the

²⁸ Roland Barthes, 'L'Image', in *Prétexte Roland Barthes*, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy 22-9 June 1977, ed. Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978), 298-308, p.305.

²⁹ Sevros Ossardi interviewed for the programme *Les Saveurs du Savoir* for France Culture, 1988.

³⁰ Barthes, 'L'Image', p.304.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.298.

³² *ibid.*, p.306.

intervention of the *imaginaire* in self-writing, is surely puzzling if Barthes were to truly hold, as he has often been interpreted as doing, that there are only images of the 'self', that beyond the textual subject of writing, there is only emptiness. It would surely not be unreasonable to suppose that Barthes in fact demonstrates this distaste or fear of imagery and the *imaginaire*, precisely because these are signs of betrayal: and the notion of a betrayal points to an irreducible sense of something/someone who is being betrayed.

Thus, whilst 'staging' a subjectivity which is light and dispersed between the fragments of his text, Barthes, we are here arguing, at the same time points to a fundamental inability of the textual subject, however written, to reflect some intuition concerning the extra-textual self, which remains ungraspable and unrepresentable. Barthes's fear and paranoia concerning the involvement of imagery in his autobiography stems from the fact that it results in a superficial objectification of something which perhaps exists in a profound but fundamentally unattainable way. Barthes resorts to staging the *imaginaire* as defence mechanism against the stultifying effects of the image, and it is the desire to protect an intuition of the 'self' which provokes this elaborate and painstaking defence.

4) Is there an 'exclusion of the self' in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*?

A second line of support for the view we are advocating comes from close examination of both the form and content of a number of statements Barthes makes upon the issue of subjectivity and selfhood in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. By looking at these, we will argue, in line with several other critics of Barthes's work, that from these pronouncements there emerges a discernible discomfort with the theoretical position these statements have usually been read as championing. We will conclude, after highlighting and discussing these statements, that the ironic and unconvincing nature of Barthes's dominantly structuralist-inspired reflections again implies a 'self', which although not present in the text itself, can be glimpsed at through the writing practice which takes place.

An attentive reading of the passages in which Barthes refers to the self/subject in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is revelatory in this way. Johnnie Gratton³³ has already pointed out the common misreading of the statement 'ne sais-je pas que, *dans le champ du sujet, il n'y a pas de référent?*'. Whilst the majority of commentators have seen in this statement only proof of Barthes's structuralist allegiance and his wish to bring about the downfall of any conception of a unified and coherent Cartesian self, Gratton highlights the ambiguity which exists in both the tone and presentation of Barthes's statement which many commentators have failed to recognise. Gratton concludes from the italicised and questioning nature of the sentence that:

Barthes's assertion turns out to be set in a question whose status is rhetorical: not only self-directed but requiring no answer as such. Doubly rhetorical, in fact, in that it seems to amount to an effort of self-persuasion, as if Barthes had to remind himself of what he once knew.³⁴

We are not here suggesting that Barthes, by the questioning nature of this sentence, is returning to any simplified view of the relation between 'self' and textual 'subject', or any equally simplified conception of referentiality, but the ambiguity that Gratton highlights is interesting when seen in the light of the view we are advocating. Perhaps, by the use of self-irony in this statement, Barthes suggests the re-emergence of the self under a different guise, as something which cannot be plotted by any simple relation to the textual subject, but for which there is space nonetheless.

In the same way, when Barthes writes, 'il se sent solidaire de tout écrit dont le principe est que le *sujet n'est qu'un effet de langage*' (154), the italicised final words of the sentence seem to be a further attempt at self-mockery, which demonstrate a certain weariness with the position he is usually seen as upholding. This same weariness comes across in the image of being a 'chambre d'échos' which Barthes

³³ See J. Gratton, 'Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes: Autobiography and the Notion of Expression', pp.57-8.

³⁴ Gratton, *ibid*, pp.58-9. This ambiguity is, however, as Gratton goes on to point out, very much in line with Barthes's general avoidance of assertion. Gratton's point here is that there is a 'recessive' movement here - a resistance by Barthes 'to his own brand of post-modernism', p.58.

employs. Again, far from supporting or affirming the structuralist views on offer, the narrator presents a figure who has latched on to the vocabulary and ideas of his contemporaries, but who has now outgrown them and is ready to move on to claim his own position in the discussions surrounding the 'subject'.

Many of Barthes's statements or questions in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* which refer to conceptions of subjectivity and selfhood can thus be seen to involve a certain degree of self-mockery, irony, or questioning and appear to indicate a certain disenchantment with the structuralist dismissal of 'the self' and its complete replacement by a textual subjectivity. At several points in the text, Barthes questions the referentiality which may exist between his text and his 'self': 'par rapport aux systèmes qui l'entourent, qu'est-il?'(151), and 'comment est-ce que les rayons du miroir réverbèrent retentissent sur moi?'(211). In another of the fragments which make up the text he writes: 'les fragments sont alors des pierres sur le pourtour du cercle: je m'étaie en rond: tout mon petit univers en miettes', and again leaves the final question hanging, 'au centre, quoi?'(165).

Indications and suggestions of an intuition of selfhood thus form very much part of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Rather than having evacuated or excluded the self from the space of autobiographical writing, Barthes, by keeping the spotlight tenaciously upon the division between subject and object of autobiography suggests the re-emergence of some new notion of the self, not the unified, coherent self of Cartesian thought - but a 'soi' as distinct from the 'moi' of the *imaginaire*:

Aujourd'hui, le sujet se prend ailleurs, et la 'subjectivité' peut revenir à une autre place de la spirale: déconstruite, désunie, déportée, sans ancrage: pourquoi ne parlerais-je pas de 'moi' puisque 'moi' n'est plus soi (223).³⁵

It is precisely so as not to add to the view generally accepted by Western autobiographers since Rousseau that the alienated textual subjectivity can be (mistakenly) taken for the existing 'self' and seen as interchangeable with it, that

³⁵ See also Sheringham, p.175

Barthes writes the autobiographical work he does, leading him to the form and content of the work which will be thoroughly examined in the second chapter of this section.

The motivations behind this form and style of writing must therefore be interpreted not as a rejection of any form of 'self' and thus an apparent exclusion of a 'self' from the work: Barthes's writing takes the form it does not because there is no such thing as a self and no possible external referent to autobiography, but because Barthes wants to illuminate the pitfalls awaiting the autobiographer, and to demonstrate that the self cannot be 'represented' in any transparent way by a textual subject. It is therefore to protect this notion of the 'soi' that his writing aims, as Sheringham comments, 'it is when it is threatened, and in the strategies he adopts to counter what threatens it, that the subjectivity Barthes wishes to disclose signals its existence'.³⁶

Despite the confounding and complex tricks and techniques Barthes uses to keep his reader on his/her toes and outlined in the following chapter, in fact much of the material provided, as we shall show in Chapter Six, does not differ substantially from more mainstream autobiographies. There is no loss of self in the work, but rather a redefinition takes place, allowing some indication of a 'self' to 'reappear at another place on the spiral'.³⁷ Gratton makes the same point when he talks of Roland Barthes's earlier work in which he sees not the rejection of the subject, but a decentering of it: 'je dirai [...] que le passage de l'expression à l'énonciation effectué par Barthes dans "La Mort de l'Auteur" correspond moins à un processus de désobjectivation pure et dure qu'à un mouvement de déstabilisation du sujet'.³⁸

In *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, an intuition of selfhood, however sketchy, emerges through the writing, but at the same time the reader is constantly being warned against the dangers of simplistic identification between subject and referent and manipulated into questioning and breaking with the traditional assumptions of the genre. Those who have interpreted Barthes's 'anti-autobiography' as signalling the 'end' of autobiography can therefore be shown to be grossly misinterpreting his work and aims:

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.194

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Gratton, 'Expression et Énonciation' (forthcoming)

To see the demise of autobiography in *Roland Barthes* is quite simply to affirm a greatly simplified conception of the autobiographical act, as though once the autobiographical becomes troublesome, it disappears.³⁹

Critics of autobiography have treated Barthes's work as an anti-autobiography and seen it as an attempt to evacuate the self from the autobiographical arena. However, as both Seán Burke and Stanley Corngold have recently pointed out, the structuralist attack by Barthes is an attack not upon the notion that there is a self, but upon the generally-accepted notion of a unitary, invariant and pre-existing self: 'the new criticism is therefore misrepresented when readers identify the fate of the self with that of the unitary subject addressed by deconstructive readings'.⁴⁰

This misinterpretation has arisen because the references within the text to the subject have been taken at face value, leading to a reading of the text as a rejection of all autobiography and a deliberate intention to throw the spanner in the works, rather than being given close scrutiny and being read not as a complete rejection of all autobiography, but rather as a subtle and creative exploration of the all-too-readily accepted and uncritically accepted presumptions about selfhood implicit in the genre itself. They can also be seen as the attempt by Barthes to reconcile the theorisations of structuralism he is associated with promoting with his own intuitions concerning the possibilities of autobiographical (re)presentation; as Gratton argues, it may be precisely the satisfactory destabilisation of the subject which allows the return of the self to autobiography:

N'est-on pas en droit de suggérer que c'est par la désubstantialisation du sujet préconisé au sein même du texte annonçant la mort de l'auteur que commence effectivement chez Barthes une certaine réhabilitation, un certain retour, du sujet?⁴¹

³⁹ Burke, p.57

⁴⁰ Stanley Corngold, *The Fate of the Self: German Writers and French Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp.3-4.

⁴¹ Gratton, 'Expression et Énonciation' (forthcoming)

It is also obvious that Barthes, having suggested the re-emergence of some notion of a 'self', has no interest in pursuing this any further. His main priority has been a defensive move - to prevent the attribution of false images to himself, and thus the avoidance of being in the position Rousseau found himself in when confronted with the portraits. Barthes's vague questioning 'au centre, quoi?', contrasts strongly with Valéry's lifelong search for an adequate formulation of precisely this 'centre' Barthes hints at. For Barthes there is none of the dogged determination to answer these profound questions, he is not interested in the attempt to 'aller jusqu'au bout' in any Valéryan sense. Barthes's writing characteristically remains open and ambiguous, showing an almost lazy curiosity rather than an intense or anguished will to know.

His auto(bio)graphy although no doubt pursuing its own sense of completeness, is far more hedonistic than either Valéry or Rousseau, and Barthes takes obvious pleasure in the game he is successfully involved in, rather than seeking either firm resolutions or acceptance by others. Barthes's double aim in writing his autobiography, to both protect an area of selfhood untainted by the *imaginaire* and to derive some pleasure from his exercise in staging the *imaginaire* he is aware is involved, to a certain extent, in all self-writing, is in fact stated in the very first fragment of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, where he talks of there being, in what he writes, both a reactive and an active text.

The first text is defensive, in that it is motivated by fear and paranoia and by the wish to insulate himself from the false associations set up through the *imaginaire*: 'le texte 1 est réactif, mû par des indignations, des peurs, des ripostes intérieures, de petites paranoïas, des défenses, des scènes' (127). The second text, on the other hand, is 'mû par le plaisir', it is the attainment of a certain comfort zone 'c'est un confort qu'il s'arrange, qu'il se bricole lui-même' (127), through his own autobiographical practice. However, as we shall see in the following section, Barthes is not permitted to bask for long in this self-created comfort, for the insulation and pleasure his playing with the *imaginaire* gives him is severely disrupted by a new challenge posed by the image, a challenge to which his writing in *La Chambre Claire* is his last response.

5) The challenge of the photographic image in *La Chambre Claire*

Barthes's last work, *La Chambre Claire* (1980), has proved difficult for critics to assimilate in a view of Barthes's 'oeuvre'. Ostensibly a work on the nature of photography, this work differs radically in form, style and tone from any of Barthes's other writings. This text, although still written in numbered fragments, has a noticeable continuity of narrative, and almost 'tells a story' of Barthes's progress in his exploration into the essence of photography: it also significantly lacks humour and contains a large amount of extremely personal material.

Whilst extensive analysis of these features of the text itself will be postponed to Chapter Six, we may inquire into the reasons for such a dramatic change in Barthes's approach to writing: it is this inquiry which will yield the nature of the challenge of the image which arises for Barthes towards the end of his life, forcing a change of approach to 'subjectivity', and to which the considerable changes in autobiographical writing in *La Chambre Claire* can be seen as a response.

There have been a variety of explanations offered by critics as to the dramatic changes which takes place in Barthes's writing practice in this final published work before his death. It has been said that in Barthes's later works the problem of being torn between the theoretical and the personal/autobiographical comes to the fore, and that in his more personal writings in the last decade of his life, Barthes is forced to reconsider many of his former theoretical positions. This view of Barthes's work has been taken up most notably by J. Gerald Kennedy who writes that: 'Particularly in the work published after *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), one can find a tension between personal confession and implacable theory'.⁴² There have been several explanations given for what has been identified as a growing dissatisfaction with the continued use of his own theoretical language, one of which is that Barthes, as he aged, became more aware of his own mortality and of the 'rupture between his emotional and

⁴² J. Gerald Kennedy, 'Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing', *Georgia Review* 35, (1981), 381-98, (p.381).

mental life',⁴³ making him increasingly conscious of his desire to turn to a more personal mode of writing.

The reasons most often cited for this reconsideration are an increasing intellectual and emotional maturity, and in particular the death of his mother which undoubtedly provoked a re-assessment of his views and led him to focus more strongly on his emotive rather than his intellectual preoccupations. Critics thus see *La Chambre Claire* as following on, to a large extent, from the semi-personal exploration of love in *Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux*⁴⁴ - noticeably not a love story but an analysis of the state a lover is in and, in particular, his relation to society.

The question then poses itself as to whether the turn to autobiography in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, and to even more autobiographical and personal writing in *La Chambre Claire*, can be taken as indication of a shift in Barthes's attitude towards his previous theoretical positions. Barthes himself, on several occasions, talks of being torn between his own theoretical leanings and his wish to write in a more subjective way. For example in 'Préparation du Roman' he writes of wanting to "escape from the prison house of critical metalanguage" and through simpler, more compassionate language, to close the gap between private expression and public discourse'.⁴⁵

Whether or not such explanations of the changes in Barthes's writings are accepted, there is certainly consensus on the fact that a change, of some sort or other, takes place, and that during the period from *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* through to the *Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux* and *La Chambre Claire* to his death, Barthes's writing suggests a definite shift of emphasis towards the possibility of self-disclosure and a more personalised 'writing of the self'.

In his last lectures at the Collège de France he talks of writing a novel which would take Proust as its model: in 'Délibération',⁴⁶ he muses over the idea of writing a diary and produces his own diary fragments: the posthumously published *Incidents*

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.385

⁴⁴ Burke talks of the 'trilogy' of autobiographical works which Barthes wrote towards the end of his life, Burke, p.53. Barthes himself refers to the *Fragments* as an autobiography of a kind in an interview when he says: 'C'est une autobiographie "composée" de plusieurs souvenirs et d'aventures diverses', p.899.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, p.383.

⁴⁶ In Roland Barthes, *Le Bruissement de La Langue* (Essais Critiques IV) Seuil 1984, 399-413.

(1987) contains highly personal pieces of writing and, again, diary entries for the end of 1979. In an interview in *L'Humanité* in March 1978, Barthes seems to confirm this when he says:

En un sens, je considère que, sur le plan 'intellectuel', (théorique, critique, méthodologique), j'ai fait ma tâche; j'ai maintenant envie de dire d'autres choses, d'essayer d'autres formes, en laissant parler plus librement ma subjectivité: cela pourrait prendre l'aspect d'une biographie ou d'un roman et j'y pense (897).

This is all evidence of a considerable change in the subject matter Barthes is most concerned with and in the way he writes, but is it to be inferred from this that Barthes had also abandoned his major theoretical positions of the 'structuralist' era?

This is the conclusion that both Gerald Kennedy and Paul John Eakin, two of the most influential critics on Barthes's later writings, come to. Both see Barthes as taking up positions which seem to go against his previous theoretical ideas, exchanging these for more conventional ideas on self-expression and of an identification between Barthes the man and Barthes the writer of the text,⁴⁷ in the hope of achieving some greater self-expression. Kennedy, for example, writes that following the death of his mother there are 'radical changes in the way Barthes thought about the nature of the self and the purpose of writing'.⁴⁸

Yet if there is a rejection by Barthes of his own ideas, explored in his earlier works such as the highly influential 'La Mort de l'Auteur' essay, the rejection is not such a simple one. As Johnnie Gratton points out in a recent article, if Barthes does turn to ideas of reference and expression, and Gratton is willing to concede that: 'Barthes goes some way towards rehabilitating formerly discredited ideas and values,

⁴⁷ See Kennedy, p.383 and Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp.3-53.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, p.388. Kennedy cites the structure of *La Chambre Claire*, a text written in a more unified, coherent narrative, as evidence of this change in Barthes theoretical ideas on the self, he thus sees Barthes as turning away from a view of the self as fragmented and decentered, to that of a more unified and coherent self.

notably those associated with expressivism, essentialism, and referentialism',⁴⁹ these new ideas are in no way conventional or generally-accepted ones but produce 'a qualified, even threatened referentialism'.⁵⁰

Whilst many of the assessments provided by such commentators are certainly valuable, it is our purpose here to provide a little more focus to the discussion, by highlighting an aspect of Barthes's understanding which may go a long way to explaining the differences in both form and content which distinguish *La Chambre Claire* from Barthes's earlier works. In his analysis of photographs in this work, Barthes identifies two aspects of the photograph; the *studium* and the *punctum*. We shall argue, in the following section, that it is to Barthes's recognition of the *punctum* and the subsequent upheavals this sets in motion, that the alterations in writing style and content which are witnessed by the reader of *La Chambre Claire* are largely to be attributed.

6) Barthes's fascination with the photograph.

That Barthes has a particular interest in, and affection for, photography, comes as no surprise to anyone who has read, or even glanced at *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, for the opening section of this book is devoted to the presentation of over forty photographs. At first, this feature of the text seems to be highly conventional, for so many modern autobiographies include photographs of this type, portraits of family members, buildings and places which have been inhabited, and pictures of Roland Barthes himself.

Yet, for readers familiar with Barthes's work alarm bells soon begin to ring, for, as is proved by the written text of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, conventionality was never one of Barthes's strong points. In fact the inclusion of the photographs at the beginning of his autobiography is exceptional in a number of ways. Firstly, whereas it is true that many autobiographies include photographs, these

⁴⁹ J.Gratton, 'Text, Image, Reference in Roland Barthes's *La Chambre Claire*', *Modern Language Review* 91 (1996), 355-364, (p.355).

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.356.

photographs are usually inserted within the work, usually as plates in the middle of the written text, or distributed evenly amongst the writing, acting as a supplement to the material in the text; they almost never appear at the beginning in this way, and they certainly do not appear *all* at once in what seems to be almost a separate book.

The narrator's explanation for this idiosyncratic presentation of photographs is that they are offered as a 'treat' to the author for finishing the book. There is an obvious pleasure derived from the photograph for the narrator of the text. Yet, the appearance of the photographs at the beginning of the work is not the only exceptional feature. The photographs are presented in chronological order, starting from Barthes's ancestors and moving on to portraits of his parents, his brother, and finally several photographs of himself, again in chronological order. They seem to 'tell a story' in a way which the text itself adamantly refuses, with its fragmentation and alphabetical ordering - features of the writing we shall discuss in depth in Chapter Six. Furthermore, the inclusion of photographs of Roland Barthes himself is startling, given that the written text itself not only resists all 'imagery', all direct identification of author and narrator, but actively fights against it.

It is clear that the 'identity' the narrator sees between the photograph and its referent is of a different order from that of the writing. The photograph, reminiscent of the reflection of Valéry's Narcisse, is almost brutal in its presentation of the subject as object, so that the narrator talks, in his captions to the photographs of the 'fissure du sujet' which is so unnervingly and bluntly apparent from the photograph and the exclamation 'mais je n'ai jamais ressemblé à cela!', which is often the first reaction when looking at photographs depicting oneself. The photograph presents the body as object, presents us as we are seen by others and not how we feel ourselves to be. In *La Chambre Claire*, Barthes again picks up this interest in the notion that the photograph transforms the subject into an object and describes the changes which take place when he is photographed:

Or, dès que je me sens regardé par l'objectif, tout change: je me constitue en train de 'poser', je me fabrique instantanément un autre corps, je me métamorphose à l'avance en image. Cette transformation est active: je

sens que la Photographie crée mon corps ou le mortifie selon son bon plaisir(1115).

The photograph transforms the subject into an object, and at this point there occurs a kind of mini-death, for in no way is the subject able to retain his/her individuality, but ends up trying to form a pose which will 'resemble' him/herself and will also be acceptable to others.⁵¹ Along with the click of the camera's shutter Barthes says 'je vis alors une micro-expérience de la mort'(1117).

The photograph gives a direct presentation of some 'reality' in a way which is undeniable, and yet which seems to have so little to do with the 'subject' of the photograph. That this aspect of photography holds a fascination for Barthes is evident from the opening pages of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Referring to the pleasure these photographs afford him, he says that 'ce plaisir est de fascination[...] Je n'ai retenu que les images qui me sidèrent',⁵² and yet he is unable to say why they fascinate him so 'cette ignorance est le propre de la fascination'. The term recurs with frequency, for example in the caption beneath the photograph of one of his ancestors, behind whom, in a doorway, the figure of a maid can just be made out, Barthes writes: 'me fascine, au fond, la bonne'.

The fact that the photograph is undeniable in its presentation of a past reality, that it is literally 'une émanation du référent',⁵³ is both unnerving and exciting for Barthes. In this way, the photograph seems to present reality in a way which language can never achieve, for it appears brute and unmediated. Yet, there is a suspicion by Barthes of this direct relation of referent and image - for if the photograph 'says' something about reality - surely it says so little as to become derisory. The photograph is both singular, unique in its recording of reality and yet ultimately banal and almost suffocating in its contingency.

⁵¹ Paul Jay likens this entire process to the writing of autobiography in his essay 'Posing: Autobiography and the Subject of Photography', in *Postmodernism and Autobiography* eds., Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore and Gerald Peters, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press) 1994), 191-211, (p.194).

⁵² *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, photographic section. The pages in this section are not numbered, and as such form a separate part of the work. No page references can therefore be given to quotations from this section of the work.

⁵³ O.C., p.1166

The uneasiness surrounding the photograph's relation to its referent is not explored in the photographic section of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, but is present nonetheless. Barthes dispels this discomfort in two ways in his autobiography; he includes a written text beneath each photograph, thereby indicating, the way in which the photograph is to be 'read', encoding it in his own fashion, and he also resorts to humour. The inclusion of a humorous caption, the 'de génération en génération, le thé, indice bourgeois et charme certain', which conjoins two photographs, from different historical periods, of himself and his ancestors having tea, for example, or the two silent grandfathers so similar and yet juxtaposed on facing pages 'lui non plus ne tenait aucun discours'!

7) The Photograph's relation to its referent

Part of the fascination with photography for Barthes is bound up with the special referential relationship which exists between the photograph and the object which is photographed. The 'pure denotation' which appears to exist in the photograph poses problems for Barthes, the theoretician, for such a denotation points towards a reality, which like the Lacanian *réel*, lies beyond the scope of words. Barthes's attempts to theorise the denotation in photography and to explore the relation between the photograph and referent are a recurring feature of several of his earlier essays, and yet such theorisation proves unsatisfactory to him. Brown writes of Barthes that: 'He repetitively attempts to master a denotation that itself seems to resist being integrated entirely into any systematic theoretical approach'.⁵⁴

Barthes oscillates between a rejection of photography's ability to represent reality in a pure form, and a fascination with this as a possibility. This is exemplified in Barthes's essay, 'Le Message Photographique', in which he seems at first to side with Bruner and Piaget's theory according to which there can be no observation prior to linguistic identification, and yet goes on to make reference to Cohn-Séat, who had allowed for the possibility of a gap between observation and verbalisation. If this gap

⁵⁴ Brown, p.266

arises, Barthes writes 'il y a un désordre de la perception, interrogation, angoisse du sujet, traumatisme'.⁵⁵

Barthes finds it difficult to formulate a satisfactory view of the possibility of pure denotation in the photograph and continues to return to it. This repetition of ideas, the returning to them, formulating and reformulating them in a slightly different context is also, as we shall show, a feature of the writing in *La Chambre Claire*. One of the ideas that recurs in this way throughout Barthes's writings on photography is the association between the photograph and the 'trauma'.

In 'Le Message Photographique', Barthes concludes that pure denotation exists in traumatic photos, that is, not those which are meant to be traumatic, which are coded as shocking, but those which are 'proprement traumatiques' - 'le trauma, c'est précisément ce qui suspend le langage et bloque la signification'.⁵⁶ Truly traumatic photos are rare because there is usually some rhetorical mediation, a cultural code across which they are filtered. The idea of the 'traumatic' quality of the photograph is raised again in *La Chambre Claire*, and it becomes obvious from Barthes's initial formulation of the distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum* of photography, that it is the *punctum* which is the 'traumatic' element of the photograph for him.

8) The punctum as 'traumatic'

It is in the first part of *La Chambre Claire* that Barthes distinguishes two elements in the photographs he presents and discusses in the text, and states that the existence of the photograph is dependent on the fact that these two elements are to be found in them. The first, the *studium*, is the type of cultural and historical interest we have in observing photos. This interest may focus on, for example, the modes of dress, the types of landscape depicted, or the activities of the individuals photographed, all of which give us some insight into the cultural situation involved:

⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *L'Obvie et L'Obtus Essais Critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 21. Quoted in Brown, p.271.

⁵⁶ Barthes, *L'Obvie et L'Obtus* p. 23

Des milliers de photos sont faites de ce champ, et pour ces photos je puis, certes, éprouver une sorte d'intérêt général, parfois ému, mais dont l'émotion passe par le relais raisonnable d'une culture morale et politique (1126).

This element of the photograph does not provoke a strong reaction in the observer, but invokes more of a passing interest:

Le *studium* est de l'ordre du *to like*, et non du *to love*; il mobilise un demi-désir, un demi-vouloir; c'est la même sorte d'intérêt vague, lisse, irresponsable, qu'on a pour des gens, des spectacles, des vêtements, des livres qu'on trouve 'bien' (1126-7).

Barthes stresses repeatedly the culturally-coded nature of the *studium*: recognition of this element is based on a shared cultural understanding of both what the photographer is doing and of the effect s/he wants to produce. Appreciation of this element can therefore be a result of training as the observer invests the *studium* with a cultural background:

Reconnaître le *studium*, c'est fatalement rencontrer les intentions du photographe, entrer en harmonie avec elles, les approuver, les désapprouver, mais toujours les comprendre, les discuter en moi-même, car la culture (dont relève le *studium*) est un contrat passé entre les créateurs et les consommateurs (1127).

The second element of these photographs Barthes distinguishes is the *punctum*, which is some aspect of the photograph which leaps from the photograph, immediately capturing the observer's attention and causing him/her to be both moved and fascinated by it:

Le second élément vient casser (ou scander) le *studium*. Cette fois ce n'est pas moi qui vais le chercher (comme j'investis de ma conscience souveraine le champ du *studium*), c'est lui qui part de la scène, comme une flèche, et vient me percer. Un mot existe en latin pour désigner cette blessure, cette piqûre, cette marque fait par un objet pointu[...]Ce second élément qui vient déranger le *studium*, je l'appellerai donc *punctum*; car *punctum* c'est aussi: piqûre, petit trou, petite tache, petite coupure - et aussi coup de dès. Le *punctum* d'une photo, c'est ce hasard qui, en elle, me point (mais aussi me meurtrit, me poigne) (1126).

Very often, the *punctum* is a detail in the photograph - a bandage on the finger, the size of a collar, the shoe lying next to a body. In contrast to the *studium*, there is no cultural-coding of the *punctum*, it has no clear cultural significance: 'Le *studium* est en définitive toujours codé, le *punctum* ne l'est pas[...]Il est aigu et étouffé, il crie en silence' (1144).

The recognition of the *punctum* is therefore a subjective response: the *punctum* of particular photographs will vary according to the observer, and for some observers there may well be no *punctum* at all, although in most cases there will be some generally agreed upon *studium*. There is no strict or universal relation between the two elements Barthes distinguishes, they simply exist together in the photograph 'il s'agit d'une co-présence'(1137).

It is clear from *La Chambre Claire* that for Barthes it is only the *punctum* which moves away from cultural codes and which is able to convey what he describes as 'l'Intraitable'(1176) to the observer. It is the *punctum* which is the traumatic aspect of the photograph, for the *studium* can easily be commented on and in fact invites discussion, whereas the *punctum* resists becoming the object of any discourse.

Barthes's discussion of the *punctum* here invites correlation with his analysis of certain aspects of language and writing which could equally be called 'traumatic', in that they are features which seem to resist any coding or meaning, and of which it is

difficult to say anything. In fact, the recognition of such features and the pattern of their recurrence is a significant aspect of Barthes's work.⁵⁷

Andrew Brown points out that 'the *punctum* thus joins the list of those many Barthesian sites where language's representational capacities seems to reach a limit',⁵⁸ and goes on to list these sites: Barthes's notion of the 'texte *recevable*', his fascination with the Japanese haiku, his reference to textual 'jouissance', and his concept of 'style' are all features of writing and language which resemble the *punctum* of photography, for they all arrest language and resist symbolic integration.⁵⁹

Barthes talks of the 'wounding' capacity of the *punctum*, in terms of it piercing, disrupting, breaking, and thus in terms very similar to the meaning of 'trauma'.⁶⁰ In Freud's treatment of trauma,⁶¹ the predominant feature is that the trauma refuses all narrative integration, verbalisation and the conferring of meaning. The existence of the trauma leads the subject to repetitive and obsessional behaviour.

Our discussion thus links the *punctum* of photography strongly with the notion of the trauma. It is due to its traumatic quality that the *punctum* becomes the (obsessional) focus of *La Chambre Claire*, and, we shall argue, furthermore, that it is Barthes's continued attempts to explore, analyse, explain, illustrate and ultimately to try to come to terms with that which resists all translation or integration into language, which is the root cause of the alterations in form, content and style which are highly apparent in Barthes's *La Chambre Claire*. It is only in this final work that Barthes confronts this difficulty head on, leading him to new and painful exposure of his emotional responses to photography, and as we shall see, to one photograph in particular.

La Chambre Claire differs from many of Barthes's earlier works in that, from the outset, there is a commitment to undertake a 'personalised' study of photography. Having found other attempts to theorise photography inadequate, Barthes makes the

⁵⁷ Andrew Brown discusses this aspect of Barthes's work in detail in the final chapter of his book, and I am indebted to his insights here.

⁵⁸ Brown, p.279.

⁵⁹ See Brown, pp.258-9. Barthes refers to the 'texte *recevable*', for example, in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* as 'l'illisible qui accroche, le texte brûlant' p.185.

⁶⁰ The Greek origin of the word 'trauma' is wound.

⁶¹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887-1902* ed., Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris, transl. Eris Mosbacher and James Strachey (London: Imago, 1954)

decision to start from his own subjective response to photographs and to attempt to universalise a theory on the essence of photography from these responses: 'j'ai décidé de prendre pour guide la conscience de mon émoi'(1115).

There is also, in the exploration of photography, a commitment to privilege a language which is 'expressif' over one which is 'critique'(1114).⁶² In the first section of the book Barthes looks at photography from a deliberately naive and uninformed perspective, generalising from his own reactions to certain photographs. The distinction between the *punctum* and the *studium* is subtle and in many ways, persuasive. Barthes goes on to outline, in the various photographs he inserts in the text, the *punctum* of each one.

The refusal of the *punctum* to be integrated into language thus does not prevent Barthes from writing around, if not about it and, in this sense, he appears to perform classical Freudian repetition. He moves from a recognition of the *punctum* as an aspect of the photo to illustration of the *punctum* of some of the photos he has selected.

Nonetheless, Barthes finds, in *La Chambre Claire*, that isolation of the *punctum* of each of the photographs does not help him either on a theoretical or personal level: it does not seem to push his search for the essence of photography any further on, for the identification of the *punctum* in each of his photographs, although it may be of interest to the reader, does not achieve any real insight into the nature of the *punctum*, nor does it explain the fascination of the *punctum* and its power to disrupt. Barthes strives to say something about the 'Intratable' - that which lies both beyond the social assimilation of language and its codes and beyond the 'ça-a-été' which he points to as the essence, the *noeme*, of the photograph - yet, towards the end of the first part of the book there is a definite frustration at being unable to theorise further.

The challenge to theorisation, its limitation, comes, as we have seen, in the form of the *punctum*, which appears to be the main stumbling block for Barthes's narrative upon photography. As Brown writes: 'The trauma is a limit to meaning and a challenge to theory'.⁶³ Having already taken a more 'personalised' approach in his

⁶² Barthes describes himself as a 'sujet balloté'(p.1114) between these two types of language. This distinction arises repeatedly in Barthes's book and is a major feature of the writing practice, as we shall argue in the following chapter.

⁶³ Brown, p.243

opening discussion of photography, Barthes is forced into the uncomfortable situation of having, increasingly, to look deeper into himself. What he gradually becomes aware of, as the narrative unfolds, is that the *punctum* says less about photograph in general and more about the observer's (i.e. his own) personal reaction to it, and that further exploration into this reaction will involve greater exposure of his emotive states.

The recognition of the *studium* and *punctum* has therefore provided some form of analysis of the photographs, but Barthes feels he is little closer to the real nature of photography:

Cheminant ainsi de photo en photo (à vrai dire toutes publiques jusqu'à présent), j'avais peut-être appris comment marchait mon désir, mais je n'avais pas découvert la nature (l'*eidōs*) de la photographie (1148).

His discussion, in terms of an analysis of the pleasure produced for him by certain photographs, is not going to be sufficient to provide the kind of 'essence' of photography he is searching for, but a far more personal (and painful) approach is called for to really answer his questions: he decides to try to 'reconnaître l'universel' by an intense examination of his own deeply subjective responses:

Je devais descendre davantage en moi-même pour trouver l'évidence de la Photographie, cette chose qui est vue par quiconque regarde une photo, et qui la distingue à ses yeux de toute autre image (1151).

The recognition of the *punctum* of photography and the attempts by Barthes to discuss and explain it act as a trigger to a new form of writing and a new approach to the 'self' in *La Chambre Claire*. Much of the second part of the book discusses a photograph Barthes finds of his mother at the age of five in a Winter Garden, which is truly traumatic for him. What is fascinating about the photograph, for Barthes, is precisely what it says about himself, and yet, there is a timidity and trepidation in exploring this subjectivity and the personal and hugely painful responses to the photograph. *La Chambre Claire* never quite delivers all it had promised at the end of

the first 'Act', for even when confronting his own reactions to the emotive picture of his mother, Barthes, as we shall illustrate in the following chapter, continually falls back upon theoretical analyses which are at once familiar and protective.

The *punctum*, like Proust's 'mémoire involontaire' seems to force a confrontation not only with past reality, but also with himself, in a way which provides a new challenge to Barthes, the writer and theoretician. As one commentator has written 'Barthes sets up the book's equation: pursuit of the *punctum* means pursuit of self-knowledge'.⁶⁴ The photograph for Barthes, just as the portraits for Rousseau, play a critical role, disturbing the self-apprehension in place and demanding a re-assessment of his own being in response.

When he writes that the Winter Garden photo offers not 'juste une image, but une image juste' (1158), Barthes, concedes that there is an aspect of the photograph which reaches beyond all codification, presenting him with the 'essence' of his mother as 'elle-même'. Here there is not only past reality conveyed to the *Spectator*, but truth, 'la vérité du visage aimé' (1157), albeit 'la vérité pour moi' (1186), not a universal or objective truth, but one which reaches deep into him and finds the response he yearns for. As we shall demonstrate in Chapter Six, the vocabulary and tone of the work which differs so startlingly from his earlier writings, indicate Barthes's response to the self-apprehension the *punctum* forces, as the writing practice reflects the subjective and emotional wounding he undergoes.

Barthes's writing in *La Chambre Claire* thus flirts with a new apprehension of the subject, beyond the objectivity of theory and the coded nature of language, beyond the *imaginaire*. However, when faced with this possibility of going beyond the imagery of both language and photographs, Barthes noticeably shies away from an exploration of the 'self' his recognition of the *punctum* hints at. His writing in *La Chambre Claire* conveys the feeling that although Barthes is aware of the limitations of the *imaginaire*, and of the traps it sets, bringing about the false identification between image and selfhood, when faced with 'l'Intrahable' reality, Barthes backs off, seeking refuge in the safety of his own, highly cultivated theoretical discourse. He does not fully take up the challenge the *punctum* of photography offers him - to go

⁶⁴ Eilene Hoft-March, 'Barthes's Real Mother: The Legacy of *La Chambre Claire*' *French Forum* 17 (1982), 61-76, (p.62).

beyond the *imaginaire* to a reality from which language insulates us, and to incur the 'risque de transcendance' (167) he talked of in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

CHAPTER SIX.

Barthes's writing practice in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *La Chambre Claire*.

In this chapter, we look at Barthes's writing practice in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *La Chambre Claire* and explore the attitude to subjectivity and selfhood these two works appear to demonstrate. It will be argued in this chapter, as we outlined in the previous chapter, that Roland Barthes's writing practice in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and the tactics he employs to prevent the *imaginaire* from falling into any fixed or determinate image, permit his own sense of self to emerge as a shadowy figure in the background of this work. We shall argue that it is precisely by using the writing tactics he does, thus because of and despite his performance of the *imaginaire*, through his highlighting of the traps autobiographical writing has so often fallen prey to, and through the original character of his work, that indications of Roland Barthes himself are able to seep through the spaces he leaves in the writing. It will thus be our task in this chapter to outline the approach to self-writing Barthes takes and the features of writing he manipulates to serve this end. Only having done this, will we be able to indicate the gaps in which his selfhood can be seen to come through.

In the second part of this chapter, we focus on the challenge to Barthes proffered by the photograph and the changes in self-writing which arise as an attempt to meet this challenge. By outlining the features of writing in *La Chambre Claire*, we will argue that, following his recognition of the *punctum* of the photograph, Barthes is forced into an uncomfortable confrontation with aspects of his own selfhood. We shall show the ways in which the text reflects this discomfort and argue that it is Barthes's difficulty in reconciling his wish to provide universally acceptable insights into the nature of photography with the very personal grief the *punctum* brings out for him, that account for the oscillations and changes in tone and content within the work. We

shall further argue that Barthes's preoccupation with the effect of the *punctum* leads him to an impasse, in which he is unable to express himself either in personal or theoretical terms, and will demonstrate the manner in which the text increasingly conveys the repetitions associated with the existence of a trauma.

The works of Roland Barthes we are concerned with here thus exemplify to a large extent the themes we have focused on throughout this thesis. As for both Rousseau and Valéry, the recognition of certain features of the image lead to a transformation in attitude to selfhood and the possibilities of self-writing. In Barthes the challenges we outline are twofold: in the first instance, it is the refusal to be 'constituted', to present an image for others, along with the fear surrounding the idea of being an object for others in an alienating way, which provokes his attention to the *imaginaire* and the attitude to self-writing Barthes takes up in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*.

The writing practice adopted by Barthes can thus be seen as a way of ensuring that he does not end up in the position Rousseau found himself in: Rousseau provided an account of himself in the *Confessions* precisely to correct the false images being circulated in the portraits, but in doing so, only 'constituted' himself into another image for others and invited further (mis)interpretation of his character. The features of writing Barthes employs, we shall show, all aim to keep the writing circulating, to prevent the writing being associated in this way with a single voice which would be identified with the living author of the text. In this way, Barthes follows the path of Valéry in his refusal to be identified with any particular image.

Barthes, like Valéry, is all too aware of the artifices and assumptions of autobiographical writing, of the alienating capacity of the image, and of the created 'subject' of the autobiographical text, referentially divorced from the writer. Yet, paradoxically, we shall argue, it is precisely through his highly self-conscious dealings with this material which demonstrate this awareness, that a form of selfhood apparently resisted by Barthes, is in fact implied.

The second challenge to Barthes, as has been outlined, comes about as a result of his attraction to certain photographs and from his desire to explore in writing, and draw theoretical conclusions from, his own reaction to certain photos. It is not until

Barthes is able to isolate the *punctum* of photography, however, that he is really aware of the traumatic nature of this element of the photograph to him. As the text reveals, the *punctum* is closely associated with his mother's death, and through the piercing of his defences achieved by the *punctum*, in this highly personal setting, a re-assessment of his own selfhood is provoked and Barthes is drawn into new and painful forms of self-writing in *La Chambre Claire*. We will demonstrate here the changes in self-writing which take place in this text, and argue that it is Barthes's inability to confront his own grief in the very personal and subjective way his recognition of the *punctum* invites him to do, which account for the features of writing we outlined above and for the increasing gravity of tone, frustration and claustrophobia which emerge as this work progresses.

1) Features of self-writing in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*

As we showed in Chapter Five, the writing practice of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is directed by the desire to prevent an 'image' of the narrator, which, true to autobiographical tradition, would inevitably also be seen as corresponding to the living author, from forming. The text is, as has been pointed out, a highly stage-managed performance of what Barthes terms the *imaginaire*. The narrator of the work is seen to be continually on the look-out for the points at which the imaginary will be most likely to intervene and, by keeping the text in constant movement, is able to stop it from 'sticking', from it presenting a stagnant or unified image of the 'subject':

Telle une cuisinière vigilante, il s'affaire, veille à ce que le langage ne s'épaississe pas, à ce qu'il n'attache pas. (219)

The success of the performance involves many factors as we shall see, and a number of these are incorporated into the form and content of the text. The features of the writing which contribute to this performance are the writing in fragment form and the alphabetical ordering of these fragments, the interchange of personal pronouns within

the text, the variety of topics and discourses, the avoidance of adjectives and the use of a large number of typographic features which mark the writing. It will be our purpose in the following section to look at these features individually, to explore their function within the text and to assess their contribution to the overall self-writing Barthes both seeks and actually achieves.

The alphabetical arrangement of the paragraphs in the text is the first feature of the work which strikes the reader.¹ The paragraphs are all given a heading of one to several words. These paragraphs are then organised in roughly alphabetical order according to the title of the fragment; for example, the paragraph entitled 'Français' follows immediately on from 'La Fraissette'. However, the alphabetical order is not adhered to in with any consistency; 'Amphibologies', for example is placed after 'La Papillonne'.

The quasi-alphabetical arrangement of the text is not merely a quirky invention by the narrator to get away from the more commonly encountered, and recently much criticised chronological narrative, found in a great many autobiographical works,² but is an important aspect of the narrator's attempt to 'stage' the *imaginaire* and to reduce its involvement in the work. The arrangement of the text in this way means that it can be picked up and read starting from any point, for it is difficult to tell which fragment was written first, and even the narrator himself claims to have forgotten this 'il ne s'en souvient plus. L'ordre alphabétique efface tout, refoule toute origine'(208). The alphabetical order is a familiar one, but one which does not impose any particular meaning on the text, and avoids the construction of a narrative 'thread' which the reader would follow.³ It is in particular this lack of narrative meaning and order which the existence of the alphabet helps to preserve:

¹ In fact, the presentation of a text in fragments, and indeed of an alphabetical arrangement, is a characteristic of many of Barthes's previous works and is also found, for example, in *Le Plaisir du Texte* (1973) and *Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux* (1977).

² For consideration of the chronological order see Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, and for more recent criticism of the limited nature of such an approach to narrative see John Sturrock 'The New Model Autobiographer', *New Literary History* 9 (1977), 51-63.

³ The alphabetical narrative also helps get away from the idea that a chronological narrative is 'natural', see Johnnie Gratton, 'Du Seigneur à la Chasse au Seigneur Chassé: Lecture d'un Fragment Barthesien', in *Ecritures Autobiographiques et Romanesques* ed., Catherine Henry (Dublin: University College, 1992), 1-18, (p.4), on this point.

Peut-être, par endroits, certains fragments ont l'air de se suivre par affinité; mais l'important, c'est que ces petits réseaux ne soient pas raccordés, c'est qu'ils ne glissent pas à un seul et grand réseau qui serait la structure du livre, son sens. C'est pour arrêter, dévier, diviser cette descente du discours vers un destin du sujet, qu'à certains moments l'alphabet vous rappelle à l'ordre (du désordre) et vous dit: *Coupez! Reprenez l'histoire d'une autre manière* (208).

Even the fragments ordered alphabetically can become predictable and interpreted in a certain way, rendering a certain meaning, so that the alphabet itself has to be cut up and prevented from following a determinate thread, to abolish any notions of progression or development in the work 'mais aussi, parfois, pour la même raison, il faut casser l'alphabet' (208).

The fragment is a favourite way of writing for the narrator, who rejoices in being continually able, with each fragment, to begin anew, so that the fragment yields 'une jouissance immédiate'(166):

Aimant à trouver, à écrire des *débuts*, il tend à multiplier ce plaisir: voilà pourquoi il écrit des fragments: autant de fragments, autant de débuts, autant de plaisirs (166).⁴

The fragment is also a way of writing associated with short passages for dictation left over from the narrator's boyhood experience, '*lambeau de la rédaction scolaire*'(129), and perhaps more importantly it provides an arrangement of the text which confounds meaning rather than producing artificial meanings, as the narrator

⁴ Gratton *ibid.*, pp.11-12, suggests that the fragment also satisfies a childish desire for immediate gratification. It is important to note that, for Barthes, fragment-writing is by no means a haphazard way of writing, but the fragments are deliberately constructed and undergo constant re-workings. Thus Barthes talks of, 'production de mes fragments. Contemplation de mes fragments (correction, polissage etc.)', p.167.

quotes from Gide, 'parce que l'incohérence est préférable à l'ordre qui déforme' (166).⁵

The presence of the fragment means there is no definitive end-point in the text, no teleological progression through the work, and as the existence of the fragments ensures that there is no continuity of the text, the reader is prevented from being involved in one way of reading the text or in a single interpretation of it: this arrangement also supports the idea we discussed in Chapter Five, that there *is* only fragmentation, and questions whether there is anything or anyone to be found at the core.

This approach goes some way to preventing the appearance of the imaginary, but it would be a mistake to think that it is altogether eradicated with the use of such a technique, as the narrator himself comes to realise:

J'ai l'illusion de croire qu'en brisant mon discours, je cesse de discourir imaginairement sur moi-même, j'atténue le risque de transcendance; mais comme le fragment[...]est *finalement* un genre rhétorique et que la rhétorique est cette couche-là du langage qui s'offre le mieux à l'interprétation, en croyant me disperser, je ne fais que regagner sagement le lit de l'imaginaire(167).

As well as the text being presented in a fragmented form, in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, there is also constant fragmentation of the language of the text. There are many ways in which this fragmentation is achieved, one of the primary ones being that there is no consistency in the personal pronouns employed throughout the text: for the use of the first person pronoun 'je', as Barthes wrote in an earlier text, is a presentation of oneself and immediately involves the *imaginaire*: 'dire je, c'est entrer dans l'imaginaire'.⁶

Thus there are paragraphs written in the first person, the third person, combinations of both of these (sometimes within the same paragraph), and even use of

⁵ Valéry wrote in fragments in the *Cahiers* for similar reasons. For Valéry, the fragment measures the mind's cognitive efficacy. Valéry believed we understand in fragments and to systematise is therefore to falsify.

⁶ Roland Barthes, *L'Aventure Sémiologique* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p.339, quoted in Moriarty, p.172.

the second person and the neutral 'on'. The purpose of this interchange of pronouns is, again, to prevent the narration of the text from falling within any determinate image-system. Throughout *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, the refusal to have the text identified with a certain person/speaker beyond the text itself is of the utmost concern: the ideal would be to have fragments which conveyed a voice, but where the origin of the voice could never be detected, so that the question of who the speaker is would never in fact be answered.

This alternation of pronouns from first to third person, for Barthes, produces 'un *je sans personne*'.⁷ In referring to the narrator in these different ways, the trap of presenting a certain well-formed image of oneself in the text, of constituting oneself in the imaginary, is avoided - or at least the risk is attenuated. But the fact is that the personal pronouns remain, they can not be escaped from entirely:

Pronoms dit personnels: tout se joue ici, je suis enfermé à jamais dans la lice pronominale: 'je' mobilise l'imaginaire, 'vous' et 'il' la paranoïa[...] *Je parle de moi comme d'un peu mort* (223).

The narrator, as well as moving between personal pronouns, also prevents any continuity of interpretation by changing subject matter in every fragment and also between fragments. There is little progression of ideas in the text, although there are inevitably recurring themes which the reader picks out and perhaps draws together in the reading. Thus, the text discusses subjects ranging from typing to homosexuality, from History to the tram car of the narrator's childhood. The language, the tone and vocabularies also shift in talking of these distinct topics, so that there are constant surprises, moving from familiar to more formal language, and a continual interchange of discourses, for example from the psychoanalytic, to the structuralist and Marxist.⁸

Not only do the subject matter and tone of address vary constantly throughout the text, but it is also littered with a great many variations in typography. Thus there

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Sollers Ecrivain*, (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p.22, quoted in Moriarty, p.171.

⁸ This interchange of discourses is a constant feature of Barthes's writing. In *La Chambre Claire*, Barthes describes his movement from one language to another in the following way: 'Car chaque fois qu'y ayant un peu recouru, je sentais un langage consister, et de la sorte glisser à la réduction et à la réprimande, je le quittais doucement et je cherchais ailleurs', p.1114.

are passages or words in italics, in inverted commas, words which are given capital letters, use of brackets, questions, and quotations. The effect is to disrupt the text, to introduce a variety of voices and elements of self-irony, so that it is difficult to know to whom the views being put forward are to be attributed, indeed if they are to be attributed to anyone at all. However, such tactics may not always work for, as Andrew Brown points out, 'one needs to do rather more than scatter punctuational marks around to overcome the potential arrogance of one's text'.⁹

It may even be the case that this tactic furthers precisely the end it was designed to prevent, for as Brown comments: 'we hear the writer's voice, paradoxically, in and through the written marks of silent punctuation, which seem to tell us with what emphasis or tone the words are to be pronounced'.¹⁰ The use of capital letters or italics for certain words shows, for example, a particular appropriation or expression of the term by the narrator, and serves only to personalise that which the text aims in other ways to depersonalise. So the attempted dissemination of voices actually reinforces a single voice, acting as stage-manager of the text.

The cutting up of the text in these various ways are therefore attempts at reducing the influence of the *imaginaire*. These typographic features punctuate the text and refuse to let it be pigeon-holed within a certain 'type' of writing or associated with a certain speaker. This approach would succeed if one could flag up the points at which the *imaginaire* were most active in the text, but unfortunately, matters are not so simple:

Si l'imaginaire constituait un morceau bien tranché, dont le *gêne* serait toujours sûre, il suffirait d'annoncer à chaque fois ce morceau par quelque opérateur métalinguistique, pour se dédouaner de l'avoir écrit. C'est ce qu'on a pu faire ici pour quelques fragments (*guillemets, parenthèses, dictée, scène, redan etc.*): le sujet, dédoublé (ou s'*imaginant* tel), parvient parfois à signer son imaginaire. Mais ce n'est pas là une pratique sûre[...]Bien souvent, l'imaginaire vient à pas de loup, patinant

⁹ Brown, pp.88-9.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.78.

en douceur sur un passé simple, un pronom, un souvenir, bref tout ce qui peut se rassembler sous la devise même du Miroir et de son Image: *Moi, je* (175-6).

However, there *are* aspects of writing which more obviously engender the entry of the imaginary into the text, and for these the narrator of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is constantly on the look-out. The greatest conveyor of the imaginary is the *adjective*, for in the use of adjectives, the subject inevitably becomes entrapped in a fixed perspective and description. The fact of naming someone, of describing them in a particular way, immediately excludes other ways of presenting them and roots them into a rigidity and solidity of identity which the narrator goes to great lengths to avoid in this work.

The ideal sought is an elimination of all adjectives 'abolir entre soi, de l'un à l'autre, les *adjectifs*; un rapport qui s'adjective est du côté de l'image, du côté de la domination, de la mort (127). This fixing of the subject by the adjective is tantamount to a death, even though the adjective may well be employed in a context in which the principal aim is to 'bring the subject to life':

De là à comprendre ce qu'est la *description*: elle s'épuise à rendre le propre mortel de l'objet, en feignant (illusion par renversement) de le croire, de le vouloir vivant: 'faire vivant' veut dire 'voir mort; quoi qu'il dise, par sa seule qualité descriptive, l'adjectif est funèbre (146).

To keep the text from providing a dominant image, or even a dominating discourse, the text is kept uncertain, 'trembling'; one language is quickly superseded by another, and the movement is retained. This the narrator likens to a game which he used to play 'aux barres', in which those who were caught were kept prisoner and those still free could either try to challenge the adversary or release the prisoners. The narrator describes the way he liked to do the latter, keeping the game flowing, and compares this to his 'playing' with language in the text:

Dans le grand jeu des pouvoirs de parole, on joue aussi aux barres: un langage n'a barre sur l'autre que temporairement; il suffit qu'un troisième surgisse du rang, pour que l'assaillant soit contraint à la retraite[...] Comme aux barres, *langage sur langage*, à l'infini (133).

The narrator seeks to keep the language in circulation, to prevent it from becoming fixed and predictable, to retain a measure of uncertainty, but there is also self-mockery at the attempts made:

Quel remède dérisoire, tout le monde devrait en convenir, que d'ajouter à chaque phrase quelque clause d'incertitude, comme si quoi que ce soit venu du langage pouvait faire trembler le langage (131).

The difficulty becomes one of finding a way of using language which manages to retain a certain flexibility, a modesty, which does not fall into a tone of assertiveness or finality associated with the *imaginaire* 'dans son degré plein, l'Imaginaire s'éprouve ainsi: tout ce que j'ai envie d'écrire de moi et qu'il me gêne *finalement* d'écrire' (176).

This finality comes to the fore, in particular, in talking about oneself, which, as we have seen, is an area where the imaginary is most likely to come into play. The narrator has to resist the agenda set out by many autobiographers, following in the footsteps of Rousseau, to give a definitive version of themselves and their lives. As we pointed out in Chapter Five, Barthes believes there is no '*dernier mot*' (187) or true version of the subject.

To refuse the final word, to preserve a trembling and uncertainty in the language, the narrator also avoids any 'definition' of the terms he uses, leaving them loose and open 'd'autre part il n'explicite jamais (il ne définit jamais) les notions qui semblent lui être le plus nécessaires et dont il se sert toujours' (151). This is because there is never a single definition to be given, for one definition is always replaceable by another. This lack of definition means that there is no one way in which the text should be read, there is an avoidance of the imposition of a particular 'meaning' upon

the reader; in fact, the narrator's ideal would be one in which all such conferred 'meanings' would be eradicated:

Visiblement il songe à un monde qui serait *exempté de sens*[...] Il faut traverser, comme le long d'un chemin initiatique, tout le sens, pour pouvoir l'exténuer, l'exempter(161).

Thus when Roland Barthes is asked for his own criticism of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, he replies (noticeably in the third person) 'comment pourrait-il accepter de donner un sens à un livre qui est tout entier refus du sens, qui semble n'avoir été écrit que pour refuser le sens?' (253).

In a section of the text entitled, 'Pause: Anamnèses', the narrator seems to be striving at passages which attain this complete eradication of meaning, resembling the Japanese *haiku* which Barthes so admired: this fragment is made up of very brief passages, typed in italics, and written in short, direct sentences, with each passage 'showing' a different scene. The effect is thus almost like looking through a photo album at snapshots of a life, and as the narrator comments at the end of the fragment (in mainly normal type) 'ces quelques anamnèses sont plus ou moins *mates* (insignifiantes: exemptées de sens) (178). There is no description here, no indication of the way in which these 'snapshots' should be read, but this is a deliberate move by the narrator, again to resist the intervention of the *imaginaire* 'mieux on parvient à les rendre mates, et mieux ils échappent à l'imaginaire'(178).

Whilst the eradication of meaning may remain an ideal, nonetheless it is possible to give the text multiple meanings, to prevent it from being interpreted in any particular way, or from being seen from any unified perspective:

Le sens ira vers sa multiplication, sa dispersion[...] Il ne s'agit plus de retrouver, dans la lecture du monde et du sujet, des oppositions, mais des débordements, des empiètements, des fuites, des glissements, des déplacements, des dérapages (147-8).

The imaginary comes into play the most, as we have indicated, when the subject is talking of him/her self, when s/he is involved in the production of a particular self-representational image. What the narrator ideally seeks to produce is a 'neutral' subject without promoting a specific face of that subject, or preferably no face at all:

Figures du Neutre [...] La vacance de la 'personne', sinon annulée, du moins rendue irréparable - l'absence d'*imago* - la suspension de jugement, de procès - le déplacement - (le refus de 'se donner une contenance' (196).

Again, this is an attempt to minimise the intervention of the imaginary. By not endorsing a particular view or interpretation of oneself the role of the imaginary in the text may be reduced. The narrator thus attempts to keep the subject at a 'superficial' level, to write many versions of it, none of which can be seen as final or complete, but all of which can substitute for another and be involved in a continual interchange:

Me commenter? Quel ennui! Je n'avais d'autre solution que de me *re-écrire* - de loin, de très loin - de maintenant: ajouter aux livres, aux thèmes, aux souvenirs, aux textes, une autre énonciation[...] Loin d'approfondir, je reste à la surface (203).

However, Barthes's entire project stands or falls with the reader of the text who either takes on board and enlarges upon the tactics set out by the work, or rejects these tactics and returns to the autobiographical 'assumptions' through which autobiography is more usually both read and written. Indeed, the narrator of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* often seems to envisage an avowedly 'utopian' or 'ideal' reader who would continue along the lines set out by the text, contributing to the further unsettling of the *imaginaire* and the prevention of any image-formation by participating in the rejection of certainty or fixity in the language:

Une troisième vision se profile alors: celle des langages infiniment échelonnés, des parenthèses, jamais fermées: vision utopique en ce qu'elle suppose un lecteur mobile, pluriel, qui met et enlève les guillemets d'une façon prestre: qui se met à écrire avec moi (219).

As one commentator has put it, it often seems as though Barthes 'sets standards of vigilance which the reader in his role as collaborator finds himself invited to follow'.¹¹ Yet, what if the reader either refuses this role or is critical of the tactics s/he is asked to indulge in? The narrator is well aware of the vulnerability of the text, when placed in uncompliant hands. The success of the arrangement of the text in fragments whose purpose is to ward off the influence of the *imaginaire* thus, for example, depends on the 'complaisance du lecteur', who must also refuse the conferring of a teleological progression, categories, and meanings upon the fragments, thereby joining the narrator in his enterprise; but of course the opposite is always a possibility 'or, à chaque lecteur sa complaisance; de là, pour peu qu'on puisse classer ces complaisances, il devient possible de classer les fragments eux-mêmes(176).

Interestingly, in a text which appears to promote the reader's freedom, it is difficult to read the initial hand-written statement, 'tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman' as anything other than a command.¹² However, even if the reader is, to a large extent, willing to engage in the tactics signalled by the writing practice, it is inevitable that themes and continuities will be found in the fragments and discourses, that the writing will become in some sense predictable, and that a feeling of a 'character' will begin to emerge from it. As Ellis writes 'despite all the reader's efforts in one direction therefore, it is hard for him to prevent a destiny taking shape in another. The fluidity of the text begins at certain moments to answer to a "character" whose behaviour can be anticipated'.¹³ Even the consistent rejection of the stereotype itself sets up its own stereotypical image, and the reader may move from being both impressed and confounded by the writing practice

¹¹ David Ellis, 'Barthes and Autobiography', *Cambridge Quarterly* 7 (1977), 252-66 (p.261).

¹² Brown writes on this point 'what is more authoritarian than to tell us to read a particular work as a fiction?', p.123.

¹³ Ellis, p.264

and the tactics employed, to being a critical judge of these same tactics. Thus, Ellis continues:

From relaxed participation, where the writer has been a porte-parole through whom the world is discovered in a new light, the reader shifts to observation and criticism. He is brought back (that is), as Barthes predicted he would be, to the situation he was invited (and meant) to avoid. It is as if, having shared the excitement of movement on the ground, he has been lifted away and shown from above that such a patterned repetition of response constituted a kind of immobility nonetheless.¹⁴

As has been shown, it is when the subject talks of himself that the text is most vulnerable to the intervention of the imaginary, in constituting himself in the way he thinks others see him:¹⁵ but there is another imaginary in operation here, one over which the narrator has no control - this is the way in which he is seen or interpreted by others, for this imaginary, in the end, is in the hands of the reader, and it is the reader who produces the final image.¹⁶ Barthes recognises that which Rousseau and Valéry also came to recognise, that the image-formation is relational and that whatever the efforts of the author/narrator, the formation of an image derived from the text is almost unavoidable, because ultimately this image is in the control of the other:

C'est en effet lorsque je divulgue mon *privé* que je m'expose le plus: non par risque du 'scandale', mais parce que, alors, je présente mon imaginaire dans sa consistance la plus forte; et l'imaginaire c'est cela sur lequel les autres ont barre (157).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.265.

¹⁵ In an interview with Jacques Chancel, Barthes says 'exactement, c'est l'imaginaire, le moment où l'on produit une idée, une phrase en collant à l'image qu'on croit que les autres vont avoir de cette idée ou de cette phrase une fois qu'il vont la lire', p.349.

¹⁶ On the reader's involvement, Barthes says: 'je lui offre un certain nombre de propositions, d'apparence, de fiction d'analyse, mais c'est évidemment à lui de le compléter, à entraîner ses propositions dans sa lecture, et donc à trouver lui-même les adjectifs qu'il veut, en quelque sorte, poser sur le livre', p.348.

Having exposed the variety of tactics at work in the text of *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and the involvement of the reader in the success or otherwise of these tactics, how different, in the end, is Barthes's autobiographical work from other more 'traditional' autobiographies? It could be argued that all the writing practices employed here can easily be translated into more traditional autobiographical terms. Thus, as we have already outlined, and as we have seen Barthes already acknowledge, the reader may extract a teleology or narrative continuity from the work despite the fragments and alphabetical ordering which exist in the text. In the same way, as Burke demonstrates, both the use of reported speech and the interchange of personal pronouns have limited success, for the reader is able to substitute reported for direct speech and 'I' for 'he' in the reading, thus undermining the variation and confusion of voices this interchange sought to achieve.¹⁷

Barthes's text is unique in the sense that it does take issue with the commonplace assumptions of autobiographical writing and raise their profile, so that the text is seen as both critical of much traditional autobiography, whilst at the same time still falling, as we have shown, in the end, within this genre. As Brown comments, 'although he manages to loosen our preconceptions about the genre, it is not clear he destroys them: rather he transgresses them'.¹⁸ The text also follows much traditional autobiography in that an idea, if not an image, of the living author emerges from the work due precisely to the text's originality, the obvious pleasure derived through the 'playing' with the text in this way and to the specific idiosyncrasies enacted and suggested by the writing practice.¹⁹ It is precisely the case in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* that the space of subjectivity, as we quoted earlier from Michael Sheringham, is seen as theatrical, and that impressions of selfhood beyond the text inevitably, and perhaps deliberately, emerge.

¹⁷ Taking a passage from *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* in which there are a variety of different personal pronouns, Seán Burke writes: 'yet, were we to convert reported speech into direct speech, the above fragment would read quite simply as an autobiographical meditation distinguished mainly by its author's acuity and gift for self-analysis', p.54.

¹⁸ Brown, p.122.

¹⁹ Barthes keeps the 'discours des autres' at a distance, as Brown points out, but in doing this, he also 'is creating a space for himself', p.92.

2) *La Chambre Claire* - Barthes's confrontation with 'l'Intrahable'.

La Chambre Claire, as we outlined in the final section of the previous chapter, breaks substantially in form and content from Barthes's other works. In the last chapter, we put forward an explanation for this change in the way in which the *punctum* pierces Barthes's preferred involvement with writing practices aimed at stalling the intervention of the *imaginaire*, as demonstrated in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, leading to a new approach to selfhood and new writing practices which emerge in this final work.

In this section we seek to outline the features of *La Chambre Claire* which distinguish it most noticeably from Barthes's other works. In the first instance we focus on the narrative construction in this text, along with the striking oscillation and tension the text demonstrates between theoretical and personal discourses. Following this, we point to the repetitious elements within the text and the changes which occur in the tone, style and vocabulary as the text progresses. Our argument in Chapter Five highlighted Barthes's recognition of the *punctum* as a traumatic element of the photograph for him, and we shall show, in this section, how the differences between *La Chambre Claire* and Barthes's other works, the changes which take place within the text itself, the shifting of discourses and the repetitions we highlight, can all be attributed to the challenge to selfhood provoked by the *punctum* of the image, causing changes in the author's attitude which becomes increasingly painful and uncomfortable as the narrative unfolds.

La Chambre Claire does not dispense with the fragment form of writing altogether: in fact the work is divided into two sections of an equal number of entries, the first comprising of numbered fragments from 1-24, whilst in the second are fragments 25-48. However, despite appearances of similarity of this form with many of Barthes's other works, the discontinuity between fragments specifically employed, as we saw, in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* to ward off any sense of narrative continuity or teleology, is not a feature of this later work. In fact, *La Chambre Claire* sets out very much to tell a story, as is exemplified by the opening lines of each of the

two sections: 'un jour, il y a bien longtemps, je tombai sur une photographie du dernier frère de Napoléon' (1111); and 'or, un soir de novembre, peu de temps après la mort de ma mère, je rangeais des photos' (1155), respectively.

Rare in fact, in this work, are the occasions upon which the numbered fragments do not appear to follow on from each other and contribute to the furthering of the storyline. When the narrator jumps ahead of himself, to aspects of the story not yet introduced or recounted, this is signalled in the text,²⁰ so that there is suspense created whilst also avoiding disruption of the narrative thread. That Barthes wants to convey an atmosphere of suspense in the work is evident both from the text itself, such as the dramatic final sentence of the first section 'je devais faire ma palinodie' (1151), which establishes a classic 'cliffhanger' ending, and in comments Barthes made about his book. In an interview for *Le Photographe*, for example, Barthes refuses to divulge the exact progression of his work, explaining 'mais je ne veux pas entrer dans le détail parce que mon livre se présente un peu comme un suspense intellectif et je ne veux pas trahir le suspense' (1238).²¹

La Chambre Claire also distinguishes itself greatly from Barthes's previous works in its highly personal tone and indulgence in material concerning his own life, present from the very beginning in a way unfamiliar to Barthes's readers, and which grows as the text develops. Yet this personal approach is noticeably blended throughout with a desire for theoretical conclusions concerning photography as a whole. It is this slightly odd mixture of personal and theoretical discourses which we hope to critically explore, explaining Barthes's approach as he presents it within the work, whilst also arguing that Barthes's foothold on theory becomes an ever-growing obstacle to the subjective confrontation the *punctum* of the photograph provokes for him, and that, in the end, this avowed attempt to intertwine the personal and theoretical loses its credibility in the eyes of the reader.

From the outset of this work, the reader is told that Barthes's interest in photography started with personal reaction to, and fascination with photographs.

²⁰ As, for example when Barthes inserts in parentheses 'je ne savais pas encore que de cet entêtement du Référent à être toujours là, allait surgir l'essence que je recherchais', p.1113.

²¹ Interview for *Le Photographe*, February 1980.

However, as nobody seemed to understand this 'étonnement' he resorted to other types of discussion of photography:

Je parlais parfois de cet étonnement, mais comme personne ne semblait le partager, ni même le comprendre (la vie est ainsi faite à coups de petites solitudes), je l'oubliai. Mon intérêt pour la photographie prit un tour plus culturel(1111).

The shift between a personal response to the photograph, which he attempts to communicate, and a more theoretical and culturally universal view of photography, is a feature of *La Chambre Claire* as a whole. Indeed Barthes sets out his project in the book as being one of reconciling these disparate ways of approaching photography. Dissatisfied with the manner in which photography is usually discussed and the categories into which it is has commonly been divided, Barthes sets out to achieve an understanding of the essence of photography, discovering, in this way, what it is that distinguishes the photograph from other forms of representation. Barthes presents himself as an explorer travelling into unknown territory, searching for clues 'qui pouvait me guider?'(1111) and in an interview says he places himself in this work 'dans la situation d'un homme naïf, non culturel, un peu sauvage, qui ne cesserait de s'étonner de la photographie'(1238).

It is Barthes's often expressed 'étonnement'²² at the photograph which is to form the basis of his investigation in *La Chambre Claire*. Deliberately rejecting all previous theorisations of photography, he is to be 'sans culture'(1113), in an attempt to provide universal insights into the nature of photography from his own personal reactions to certain selected photographs, 'celles qui me donnent plaisir ou émotion' (1113).

Barthes thus strives to find a happy medium between two voices he recognises himself as having always been 'un sujet ballotté' between - a critical voice on the one hand, and an expressive voice on the other. His first choice is to be of the personal over the theoretical, so he is to start his investigation "scientifiquement" seul et

²² Barthes employs this reaction to the photograph on numerous occasions in the work - see for example, p.1116, p.1167, p.1174, and in interviews, see p.1237.

démuni'(1113) but this adoption of a personal perspective, it is important to underline, is not for its own sake, but is seen as a means to a further end, namely to provide universally valid conclusions surrounding the nature of photography as a visual medium, whilst also avoiding the kind of 'reductive' treatment of photography he has become disenchanted with,²³ 'je tenterais de formuler, à partir de quelques mouvements personnels, le trait fondamental, l'universel, sans lequel il n'y aurait pas de Photographie'(1114).

Where Barthes might well have previously shifted to a different type of theoretical discourse to assuage his discomfort with the one he was operating with, in this case he declares his desire to 'une bonne fois pour toutes, retourner ma protestation de singularité en raison'(1114).²⁴ His decision to proceed in his investigation from certain photos which exist *for him* but which have nothing to do with a pre-existing corpus or theory is introduced with the pun 'rien à voir avec un corpus: seulement quelques corps'(1114).

It is an important decision Barthes makes here, and one which both distinguishes this from his other works and which causes him immense problems, as we shall see, as the text progresses. The interlinking of the personal and theoretical is a plausible target and yet, to a certain extent, also puzzling. If Barthes is really concerned with his own reaction and fascination with certain photos, why not simply produce a book in which he divulges, in a highly personal way, the effects of these photos upon him, along with, perhaps, possible reasons for or explanations of these effects? Or if, on the other hand, Barthes's major preoccupation is theoretical, surely the bringing in of his own, highly subjective reactions, with their background in the observer's personal experiences can only serve to hinder such a theoretical exploration, rather than preventing it from becoming too reductive?

It is obvious from what Barthes writes, however, that he believes that theory can be deduced, in a highly scientific way, from the data provided by his own interest in certain photographs. Thus in an interview Barthes refers to *La Chambre Claire* as

²³ Barthes talks of his 'résistance éperdue à toute système réducteur', p.1114.

²⁴ Brown writes that Barthes, in *Le Bruissement de La Langue*, p.325 'has alerted us to the fact that his own view of science involves taking seriously the investments of the subject', p.81.

'une phénoménologie de la photographie'(1237), whilst at the same time declaring, from the outset, an investigative procedure which is avowedly subjective:

La méthode que j'ai suivie pour cette réflexion est entièrement subjective[...] J'ai essayé de savoir pourquoi certaines photographies me touchaient, m'intriguaient, me plaisaient, me concernaient, et pourquoi d'autres non[...] J'ai essayé d'analyser en quoi certaines photos me concernaient, c'est-à-dire, faisaient 'tilt' produisaient une sorte de choc sur moi qui n'était pas forcément le choc du sujet représenté (1238).

Photography is to be explored, not through the eyes of theory 'non comme une question (un thème) , mais comme une blessure'(1122) moving from 'individualité'(1119) to 'une science du sujet'(1119) to a theory which does not stifle his individuality, but which respects it instead.

Barthes turns first to his feelings then, to the way he feels when being photographed, outlining the fear which accompanies the transformation of subject into object in the first instance, and then to the fascination he feels, and the way in which he is moved by selected photographs which he reproduces in the work. Arising from these discussions is Barthes's valuable separation of the photograph into two distinct elements, the *studium* and the *punctum*, along with his analysis of the referent of photography, which he sees as being closely associated with the photograph in a way which distinguishes it from other representational media.

However, it is in the second part of the book, when Barthes seeks to say something about the Winter Garden photograph of his mother which he comes across whilst going through old photographs of her after her death, and the *punctum* which exists for him in this photograph, that the intertwining of the personal and theoretical becomes increasingly tenuous. When Barthes seeks to establish a theory of photography upon his reaction to the only photograph which truly exists 'for him', the reader's acceptance of Barthes's project begins to be questioned and the recourse to theory seems more and more to be avoidance of that which the *punctum* of this

photograph evokes in him - namely his grieving and personal loss at his mother's death.

This delving into his highly painful and moving subjective response in order to satisfy a theoretical desire, expressed in an interview in the following way 'c'est en réfléchissant sur une certaine photographie de ma mère que j'ai pu avancer dans une certaine philosophie de la photographie'(1238) strikes the reader as either perverse or as a way in which a theoretician goes about coping with the plenitude of emotions Barthes is experiencing. The photograph itself seems to advance the theory of photography little, and soon after Barthes, defending his refusal to insert it amongst the other photos in the work, declares 'elle ne peut en rien constituer l'objet visible d'une science; elle ne peut fonder une objectivité, au sens positif du terme'(1161).

The reader begins to see Barthes's reliance on theory as an excuse for the need to grieve over this photo and the death it evokes for him, to make sense of it in the only way he knows. Barthes himself appears to come to the same conclusion in that he talks of the Winter Garden photograph achieving '*la science impossible de l'être unique*'(1160) but in a utopian way, and only for him. He realises that at this point the conjunction of the personal and the theoretical is in the realms of fantasy. *La Chambre Claire* thus reaches, at this point, a limit to theory and appears to give way to the grieving Barthes has hitherto kept at bay. Yet, even at this point, Barthes is able to salvage an element of theory from this grief. The essence of photography, Barthes states, is not only the fact that the referent must have existed, but that it is a past reality. The theoretical claim made here seems hardly to require such painfully evocative writing.

Our discussion goes some way to explaining the oscillation which exists in *La Chambre Claire* between theoretical and personal material, the one contributing to the other until it seems that the former becomes almost an excuse for treatment of the latter. What Barthes appears loath to confront is the way in which the Winter Garden photograph affects him and his own emotions surrounding the loss of his mother. Whilst he is able to acknowledge that the photographer is a witness in the sense that he is 'témoin de sa propre subjectivité, c'est-à-dire de la façon dont il se pose, lui, comme sujet en face d'un objet'(1237), Barthes is unable to apply the same view to

himself as observer of the photograph and to fully face the aspects of himself the *punctum* of his mother's photograph brings into focus, falling back continually as he does upon the need to draw theoretically valid conclusions, even when these seem to be placed in a wholly inappropriate context.

The *punctum* of the photograph, and of the Winter Garden photo in particular, we have argued, is traumatic to Barthes and the highly noticeable repetition of material which characterises the writing in *La Chambre Claire* can be seen as symptomatic of the existence of such a trauma. Thus it will be argued that the repetition of both personal reactions to photographs and the theoretical conclusions concerning photography which are drawn from these, can be seen as confirmation of the fact that Barthes is in a state of trauma and thus unable to speak of that which needs most to be expressed. We go on to argue further that all these types of repetition come to an end in the closing stages of the narrative, in which there is a noticeable change in both vocabulary and tone. These signify Barthes's attempt to write and express that which has remained only in the background, namely the influence of his mother's death upon him, and the re-evaluation of his own subjectivity it provokes, leading him to the limits of discourse and to the tone of frustration and claustrophobia which dominate the final pages of *La Chambre Claire*.

In the first section of *La Chambre Claire*, the reader is unaware of the recent death of Barthes's mother, and what Barthes has to say concerning photography is taken at face value, with the reader following him in his attempts to draw universally valid ideas on the photograph from his own particular experiences. There is a certain amount of circling around the subject which appears to take place in the early stages of the work, but the reader is largely tolerant of the fairly mundane conclusions Barthes begins to draw about photography. The somewhat self-evident ideas which emerge such as the photograph being contingent and having a special relation to the referent, in which it can never be denied that the object photographed ever existed, are taken by the reader to be indicative of Barthes's wish to provide a 'naive' view of photography and one which breaks with previous over-theoretical discussions of photographic techniques. The repetition of such ideas in the first few sections of *La*

Chambre Claire are thus attributed to the author's attempts to view the photograph from these new and different perspectives.

However, the over-insistence on the relation of photography to its referent is a remarkable feature of the work as a whole, and particularly of the early section of the work. Thus having already posited that photography has this unique relation to the referent of the photograph, Barthes goes on to repeat that 'on dirait que la Photographie emporte toujours son référent avec elle' (1112), that 'le référent adhère' (1113), and later that the photograph can be seen as literally 'une émanation du référent' (1166) and further, 'une émanation du *réel passé*' (1170) that 'toute photographie est un certificat de présence' (1169), and that it is connected to the object like an umbilical cord.²⁵

Similar repetition can be found surrounding Barthes's highlighting of the contingency of the photograph and of the fact that although what it represents only happened once existentially, it can be mechanically reproduced ad infinitum, introducing an almost banal element into the photo: thus the photo, Barthes insists, is characterised by its 'contingence, singularité' (1122), repeating also, 'la photographie est contingence pure et ne peut être que cela' (1127), and 'puisque toute photo est contingente' (1131). The photo is also described as 'le Particulier absolu, la contingence souveraine, mate et comme bête' (1112). The phrases employed to convey these qualities of the photograph such as the 'ça-a-été' (1165) the '*ce qui a été*' (1169), the 'Tuché[...] Le Réel' (1112), '*la chose a été là*' (1163) like the child pointing to something and saying '*Ta, Da, Ça*' (1112) also appear to add little to what is already known about the photo.

The repetitive quality of Barthes's discussion could be put down here to the simplicity and transparency of the photograph and the difficulty this presents to saying anything very profound about it: 'une photo ne peut être transformée (dite) philosophiquement, elle est toute entière lestée de la contingence dont elle est l'enveloppe transparente et légère' (1112). There is already something claustrophobic and frustrating about this lack of possible addition or interpretation: 'l'image photographique est pleine, bondée: pas de place, on ne peut rien y ajouter' (1172).

²⁵ For other points at which Barthes makes similar comments about the relation between the photograph and its referent see p.1113, p.1122, p.1163, p.1169, p.1170.

What is seen as a failure of theory to transform it into anything else will later flow into a frustration of language to say anything about certain photos: 'elle ne sait *dire* ce qu'elle donne à voir'(1179).

Barthes's obvious fascination with the fact that the photograph seems to provide pure and unmediated access to the past referent could also be attributed to the fact that Barthes had spent much of his working life arguing against the possibility of unmediated reference either in language or photography. For someone who has devoted such attention to pointing out the complexities of referentiality, as we saw in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, this conclusion about the photo is a bit of a stumbling block. The photo is seen as 'Intraitable'(1176), for in Photography, "une pipe y est toujours une pipe'(1112). The representation and referent seem to be stuck together in an 'immobilité amoureuse ou funèbre'(1112).

Although these are both plausible explanations for Barthes's repetitive treatment of these features of the photograph, they are not the only such features, as we shall show below, and there is, we believe, a far more significant explanation to be given, and one which links all the aspects of the writing Barthes repeats to the *punctum* of the photograph of his mother, and thus with his mother's death. We shall thus continue outlining the recurrent aspects of Barthes's writing, before setting out this explanation.

Not only are the issues surrounding the relation between photos and their referent a recurrent theme of the writing, but the same could be said of the relation posited by Barthes between the photograph and death. As we mentioned before, Barthes sees the click of the camera shutter as signalling the death of the subject, which now becomes transformed into an object. In the subject of the photograph, Barthes sees 'le retour du mort'(1114),²⁶ and describes the photo as 'l'image vivante d'une chose morte'(1164).²⁷ Again, it is not unreasonable to view photography in this way, as involving the death of the subject as s/he feels him/her self to be, and particularly in the light of the fact that a great many photographs involve subjects who are in fact now dead. However, given the context in which *La Chambre Claire* is

²⁶ p.1114. For other similar references see also p.1117, p.1118, p.1129, p.1237 where Barthes refers to the photo as 'fascinante and funèbre'.

²⁷ For further references to the link between photography and death see p.1173, p.1175, p.1237.

written, it would not be presumptive to suggest that Barthes's preoccupation with death stems from his own recent experiences.

Another idea which recurs in the writing is that of finding an 'essence'. In the first place, this is envisaged by Barthes as his quest to uncover the 'essence' of photography, or, as he puts it, what distinguishes the photograph from the 'communauté des images' (1111). This search for the essence of the photograph appears, in fact, to be the motivating force behind the writing project.²⁸ Yet, as the narrative progresses it is not the 'essence' of photography which Barthes first comes across, but the essence of his mother in the Winter Garden photograph taken when she was only 5 years old, in which Barthes sees her '*telle qu'en elle-même*' (1160) and his wish then becomes one of deriving the essence of photography on the basis of this single photo. His investigation thus takes a dramatic turn, from seeing photos as giving pleasure, to seeing them in terms of '*ce qu'on appellerait romantiquement l'amour et la mort*' (1161).

The final repetitive feature we would like to draw attention to, and one which in fact, from the moment it is recognised as an aspect of the photo dominates the writing, is the *punctum*. Barthes, early on in *La Chambre Claire*, as we have seen, pin-points the distinction between the *studium* and *punctum* of the photograph. Whilst the *studium* is explained in an unexciting and largely monotonous way, as soon as Barthes comes to talk of the *punctum*, there is an increase in the tempo of the writing, and it is clear that the almost triumphant recognition of this aspect of the photo stimulates Barthes to new heights of expressivity. There is an energy conveyed both by the rapidity of tone, the increased use of italics, and the attempts at adequate description '*cette blessure, cette piqûre, cette marque faite par un instrument pointu*' (1126).

The *punctum* thus becomes the focus of much of the subsequent narration. Barthes proceeds to illustrate the *punctum* in each of the photographs he has chosen.²⁹ Yet in doing so, Barthes adds little to the reader's understanding of the nature of the *punctum*, for, as he readily acknowledges, the *punctum* is a highly personal reaction to a photo and the *punctum* in a photo may be different for each observer, or indeed there

²⁸ For other points at which Barthes expresses this idea see p.1121, p.1122, p.1148.

²⁹ For discussion of the *punctum* and the attempted description of the *punctum* in the photographs Barthes has chosen see especially pp.1126-1151.

will be many photos in which there is no *punctum* at all for an observer. It is a paradoxical feature of Barthes's work that he devotes such a great deal of narrative energy writing about the *punctum* which ultimately refuses to be talked or written about. It is precisely the absence of all possible description or transformation into language which marks the existence of the *punctum* for any given observer 'ce que je peut nommer ne peut réellement me poindre. L'impuissance à nommer est un bon symptôme de trouble'(1144).

However, despite Barthes's attempted assimilation of the *punctum* he recognises into a theory of the photograph, when faced with the photograph of his own mother in the Winter Garden, the noticeably repetitive elements of the text appear to be arrested, and Barthes is forced into a new form of writing which is both uncomfortable and painful to him precisely because he is forced to confront aspects of his own feelings concerning his mother's death and thus to look within himself. The features of the writing we have highlighted, the repetition of the relation of photography to its referent, the association of the photo with death, the talk of finding an essence, the insistence on the *punctum*, thus all come together at the end of *La Chambre Claire*, when the reader discovers that all these elements are connected to the *punctum* of the Winter Garden photo. It is in this photo that Barthes sees his mother undeniably, that he touches her essence, that he also sees inscribed here both her death and his own future death:

L'horreur c'est ceci: rien à dire de la mort de qui j'aime le plus, rien à dire de sa photo, que je contemple sans jamais pouvoir l'approfondir, la transformer. La seule 'pensée' que je puisse avoir, c'est qu'au bout de cette première mort, ma propre mort est inscrite; entre les deux, plus rien qu'attendre (1174).

Although the *punctum* forces recognition of these elements seen together, it is the book's tragedy that there is also nothing to say about this 'emphase déchirante'(1175). The narrative, at this point becomes particularly painful and private, as Barthes, the writer, strives to say something about that which cries in

silence, being forced to acknowledge at this point that 'la subjectivité absolue ne s'atteint que dans un état, un effort de silence' (1147). The effect of this personal trauma is precisely the 'impuissance à nommer' (1144) he has associated with the *punctum*.

The narrative does not cease with Barthes's discovery of the Winter Garden photo, but at this point there is a dramatic change in both tone and vocabulary of *La Chambre Claire*, which obliterates all humour and turns to a profoundly moving evocation of his grief and of what the death of his mother means to him. An atmosphere of bleak claustrophobia envelops the writing, as Barthes grapples with the fact that the photo seems to bring him so close to his mother and yet this fails to comfort him. To find his mother in this way would be to resurrect her and thus to eliminate his grief. But even when he has found her in the photo, the grief still remains, and is in fact increased by this realisation, 'devant la Photo du Jardin d'Hiver, je suis un mauvais rêveur qui tend vainement les bras vers la possession de l'image' (1178).

Barthes has reached the end of repetition and analysis: 'je ne puis transformer mon chagrin' (1172). Yet, he suggests, it was his 'chagrin' which led him to the Winter Garden photo and its *punctum*: 'Mon chagrin voulait une image juste' rather than 'juste une image' (1158). It is his grief which has brought about his recognition of his mother in the Winter Garden photo, and with it he has to confront what this photo says about himself. It is this subjective recognition which brings about the distinct changes in vocabulary of the final part of *La Chambre Claire*.

Thus it is that Barthes is able to talk of 'le brûlant, le blessé' (1178), of seeing his mother's essence, her being, 'tel qu'en lui-même' (1183), that he is able to refer to his own suffering,³⁰ and that, in the end, he talks of finding the truth of his mother, whilst at the same time recognising the personal quality of this truth, so that it is a 'vérité pour moi' (1186). There is also the acknowledgement of what Barthes refers to as the 'Intraitable' (1174), or the 'noyau rayonnant, irréductible' (1162) of his mother,

³⁰ See especially pp.1155-1158, p.1172, pp.1178-9.

by which he appears to mean that there is a core of being or selfhood which resists any further reduction or analysis.³¹

Barthes's seeing of his mother's 'âme' in the Winter Garden photo, is his own personal resurrection of her and as such borders on hallucination and madness - a madness reflected in the gradual unravelling of Barthes's reasoned narrative as the work reaches its final stages, giving way to the questions, italics and short sentences which mark the attempt to say something, when there is nothing more to be said. Barthes struggles to avoid the aphasia he fears so greatly, because when he reaches the limits of language he will be forced into feeling and consideration of himself 'je suis obsédé par [...] La peur de l'aphasie, la peur de n'avoir plus rien à dire' (900).

The word 'folie' recurs with frequency at the end of *La Chambre Claire*. Barthes's recognition of his mother's essence in the photo is thus seen as a 'vérité folle' (1188), his desire to find her having been a 'désir fou' (1184), and photography itself is linked with madness, because it can reach the depths of the subject in the way Barthes himself has experienced and has to be tamed by society which works 'à tempérer la folie qui menace sans cesse d'exploser au visage de qui la regarde' (1190). As if to prove this point, the final fragment erupts into an energetic torrent of ways in which society works to prevent precisely the kind of hysterical reaction to the photo Barthes's writing conveys:

L'autre moyen d'assagir la Photographie, c'est de la généraliser, de la grégariser, de la banaliser, au point qu'il n'y ait plus en face d'elle aucune autre image par rapport à laquelle elle puisse se marquer, affirmer sa spécialité, son scandale, sa folie (1191).

³¹ For further references to an irreducibility or uniqueness which cannot be analysed or described, see, p.1163, p.1176, p.1184.

3) Conclusion

Barthes, drawing from many of Valéry's ideas, takes the suspicion of the image which we saw led to the radically reflexive position Valéry held, and the disjunction between self and image Valéry had perceived, to new extremes in his siding with the image in apparent rejection of the subject itself.

However, we have argued that Barthes, despite the structuralist-inspired claims which appear (albeit in ambiguous fashion) in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, does not convince us that there is no 'self' which acts as referent of this work. Instead, the writing itself, as we have shown, implies just such a 'self' and the elaborate strategies Barthes enacts in the 'staging' of the *imaginaire* can be interpreted not as symptoms of the self's demise, but rather of the desire to take up his own 'challenge of the image' and to protect this intuition of the self from the naive assumptions which have come to characterise many of the discussions within autobiography.

The interpretation we give of this in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* is supported by the approach to photography Barthes takes in *La Chambre Claire*. The *punctum* of the Winter Garden photograph, we have shown, pierces Barthes's theoretical predilections and defences, forcing him into a confrontation with a new realm of self-apprehension and leading to new forms of expression.

In the end, Barthes can only characterise what he has said about the photograph and its ability to reach some hidden and unknown subjectivity as 'folie', for he has no categories, apart from out-moded Cartesian essentialism to deal with this new apprehension. Yet, it is not only madness that Barthes reflects here in his analysis of photography, but a form of imagery which is not alienating or objectifying, but rather which reaches down and draws him close in his grief-stricken state, providing comfort and a new mode of access to the 'self'.

CONCLUSION

Under the theme of the challenge of the image, we have presented the increasing problematisation which has been witnessed over the past three centuries between the self and its representations, leading to the contemporary crisis within the field of autobiographical criticism, a crisis which has threatened the existence and plausibility of the genre itself. The three authors who provide the focus for our discussion, Rousseau, Valéry and Barthes have all contributed to and experienced the complexity of this relation and have, in their own unique ways, been actors in this unfolding crisis.

Rousseau, with whom our discussion started, responds, when challenged with the portraits and reproductions of him which he considered to be portraying him falsely, by attempting to present his own true portrait in writing. The aim of his writings in the *Confessions* is thus purely corrective - the true image of himself that only he has access to must be substituted for the false image others have presented of him.

Rousseau's naive faith in his ability to know himself fully and to be able to communicate this self successfully to others in writing, is undermined by the unrecognised complexity of the task he sets himself. It is only through the failure of his writing in the *Confessions*, however, that Rousseau is able to re-assess his ideas on the self and to attempt a more modest but also more credible and successful presentation of himself in the much neglected *Dialogues*. In this text, it is not his true self he seeks to present, but rather he convinces his audience that the man he believes himself to be is a more plausible character than the one who is being publicly maligned.

Rousseau's own challenge of the image led him to inaugurate an exploration of ideas on the self in auto(bio)graphical writing which profoundly affected the theory and practice of autobiography over the succeeding centuries. Indeed, had it not for Rousseau as precursor and target, it is doubtful that either Valéry or Barthes would have turned to the question of the self and image in the way we have seen them do.

Valéry's writing, to a large extent, is motivated by a rejection of precisely those assumptions concerning auto(bio)graphical writing of which Rousseau had shown himself initially unaware. His attacks on traditional forms of autobiography in his play *Lust* have been echoed, in various guises by many autobiographical critics since. Valéry, early in his adult life, under the influence of his own personal image-challenge in the form of the image of Mme de R., and the realisation of the power of the imaginaire generally, rejects the notion that the self and image could in any way be coincident, as Rousseau had supposed in the writing of his *Confessions*. In taking the highly influential radically reflexive step he does, and by turning consciousness upon itself, Valéry moves from concern with the image to concern with the genesis of all images and with the pure mirroring faculty that both provides the locus of imagery and acts as intuition of 'pure' or 'universal' selfhood.

Valéry's early aims of providing an all-encompassing view of the self by going beyond images themselves and analysing the structure of the mind in a rigorously analytical project, symbolised by the figure of Teste, and presented in his writings in the *Cahiers*, however come unstuck under the challenge of a second image - the 'figure voilée' which we described in Chapter Three and which opened up new avenues of self-exploration in *La Jeune Parque* and the two later plays of *Lust* and *Le Solitaire*. Valéry moves, as we saw, from a reductive and schematic view of self to a far more complex view, which encompasses the bodily and sensuous aspects of personal identity, and which increasingly seeks fulfilment in the encounter with the Other.

Yet 'the self', for Valéry, remains ultimately elusive, as it also proved to be for Rousseau in the end. Valéry does not seek to know and represent the self in the straightforward way envisaged by Rousseau, but instead, he follows the clues he falls upon, and which arise through his own attempts at self-writing, and by inscribing and exploring these, is able to sketch out the barest, but most valuable outline of the self and to develop his understanding of the complex but haunting enigma of the 'Mystérieuse Moi'.

Valéry, in his criticism of the type of autobiographical writing both Rousseau undertook in the *Confessions* and his friend Gide presented in his *Journal*, inaugurates

the acute scepticism surrounding the image which is now the hallmark of contemporary autobiographical criticism. Once the disjunction between a central sense of self and representational image has been achieved in the way Valéry does, the stage is set for a multitude of interrogations concerning the often-simplified relationship between the subject within autobiography and the referent to which it is said to refer.

The self-writing of Roland Barthes picks up the unfolding crisis at precisely this point. Barthes, influenced by the structuralist age in which he was working, develops an approach to auto(bio)graphy which seems to dispense entirely with the notion of a self as referent of the auto(bio)graphical text. We have discussed Barthes's auto(bio)graphical work *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* within this perspective, focusing our attention on Barthes's many ploys to prevent the intervention of the *imaginaire* within his self-writing, and yet have also argued that the referent of the work, however much Barthes theoretically resists it, is in fact, paradoxically implied within the writing itself.

Barthes's resistance to any form of 'self' (conceived in essentialist terms only), however, appears to break down in the face of a further challenge presented to him by the *punctum* of the photograph, which he describes in detail in *La Chambre Claire*. The *punctum*, we maintained, is traumatic to Barthes in the context of his mother's recent death, precisely because it pierces the theoretician and challenges him to a more emotional and subjective view of himself. It is this inscription of the 'self' which emerges from the writing of this his final work.

Throughout this thesis, both in its structure and content, the reciprocal nature of the relation between ideas and intuitions on the self and their exploration in the field of auto(bio)graphical writing has been placed at the fore. When faced with the challenge of the image in their own lives, each of our three authors turns to auto(bio)graphical writing in order to both represent and further their own understanding of the self. The writings are not theoretical treatises on the self, but have been discussed here in terms of their *creative* nature. Creative self-writing, it has been shown, is a fruitful arena for the exploration and development of ideas on the self. Intuitions, which may not be accessible in theoretical terms, can be sketched out

in whatever form and style of writing seems best suited to their apprehension and projection.

The challenge of the image is therefore one in which there is something which responds to the image in a negative way - which cries out - 'No! - that is not me' and begs the question of what light can be shed upon the 'I' which reacts in such a vehement way and what form and features it can be given. The response in auto(bio)graphy in the three authors we have discussed is the attempt to give this 'self' which responds to the challenge of the image a form, and yet, in doing so, the features of the auto(bio)graphical writings themselves demonstrate and imply new ideas and perspectives on the self and, in turn, lead to further renewed attempts to provide some insight into the mystery which surrounds it.

There is therefore both a positive and a negative dynamic at work here. The negative aspect is the rejection of all images of the self and the refusal to identify one's sense of 'self' with any single image or set of images. On the other hand, the fact that some representations of the self seem to provide insight into the nature or sense of the self and to convey fleeting glimpses of that which remains elusive, acts as the spur for further and multiple attempts.

As we have witnessed in the presentation of both the ideas and writing of each of our authors, this self-exploration is not undertaken lightly, but becomes the focus for enormous and exhausting projects in all three. Once the challenge of the image has been recognised, the task of positing a satisfactory understanding of the relation between self and image appears to be endless.

Not only do the auto(bio)graphical projects consume large amounts of time and energy, but they also involve, as we have seen, deeply emotional investments. Rousseau's self-writing is a desperate attempt to salvage his moral reputation and takes place under the most extreme circumstances of emotional, physical and financial suffering. Valéry's writings in the *Cahiers* alone, undertaken in the early hours of the morning throughout his lifetime, attest to a determination that is unprecedented in the realm of auto(bio)graphical exploration, but it must be remembered that the trigger for this self-exploration itself comes in the form of an emotional adolescent crisis during which Valéry, on several occasions, considered taking his own life. For Barthes, the

deeply moving writing in *La Chambre Claire*, shows the emotional cost of this work and the painful self-confrontation which he seeks to present and understand.

A fruitful explanation of the persistence of an intuition or sense of the self, which we have seen respond to the challenge of the image and motivate the numerous writing projects we have presented, can be offered by highlighting the similarities which appear to exist between some of the ideas put forward in the recent work of Paul Ricoeur and our own conclusions at the end of this thesis.

As the title of his recent book, *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), suggests, Ricoeur rejects any simplistic mode of self-apprehension or essentialist positing of a 'true self' which Cartesian thought has handed down, but instead presents the self as the 'other within', as an enigmatic and unrepresentable 'self' which cannot be apprehended directly but which we nonetheless attempt to reach indirectly through our own forms of representation. Ricoeur terms this 'self', the *ipse*, from the Latin meaning 'the very one' and distinguishes this view of selfhood from the *idem* apprehension of identity, in which identity is constituted in terms of sameness - this is the same as that.

Ricoeur does not attempt to theorise the *ipse* in his book, precisely because this self-apprehension forms a '*blindspot*' for knowledge, is not susceptible to knowledge in our existing forms of understanding. Yet this notion seems to answer in a particularly apt way our search for that which responds to the challenge of the image. Following Ricoeur, it would be the unrepresentable sense of the *ipse*, distinguished from any ideas of an essential or immutable self: 'Notre thèse constante sera que l'identité au sens d'*ipse* n'implique aucune assertion concernant un prétendu noyau non-changeant de la personnalité',¹ which responds, in Rousseau, Valéry and Barthes to the images they are presented with, and which provides the trigger not only for their initial auto(bio)graphic attempts, but also for all their ceaseless efforts to understand and to formulate some idea of the self in writing.

Ricoeur's distinction between the *idem* and *ipse* forms of identity also provides an account of both the positive and negative dynamic which results from the challenge of self-representation, for the *ipse* cannot be wholly represented or

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-Même comme un Autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p.13.

apprehended in a direct way but can only be explored through mediation. The representational image, therefore, whilst providing some insight into this sense of *ipseity* can never be fully identified or coincident with the unique *ipse*, so that the search for ever more complex and integrative forms of representation which approach this central intuition continues and is stimulated by precisely this negative impulse.

The idea that there is some form of 'self' which responds to the challenge of the image, the intuition of which leads to attempts to explore the relation between the self and its representation appears to go against the grain of much contemporary thought on the subject, in which the subject/self seems to have been deconstructed and dismissed from so many areas.

However, Ricoeur has not been alone in arguing for what might be considered a highly unfashionable thesis. Other writers, noticeably Seán Burke, Johnnie Gratton, and Stanley Corngold, have gone back to re-examine influential texts of the structuralist era and have argued that many of the arguments presented within these works were either ill-founded or misinterpreted by over-enthusiastic converts. The unanimous conclusion of these authors is that the time is ripe for a re-emergence of the subject, but under a new guise. Thus Gratton talks not only of the 'de-substantialisation' of the self which was the result of structuralist criticism, but of a 're-configuration' of a now self-aware and reflexive subject, which is now taking place, challenging the defunct Cartesian unified self and yet, on the other hand refusing to dispense completely with the notion of some remaining, fundamental form of selfhood.² It is to this idea of a new form of the subject/self that our three authors have led us, for without this, there would be no challenge of the image and no auto(bio)graphic writing.

Rousseau, Valéry and Barthes, despite their searching and revealing contestation of over-simple notions of selfhood underlying traditional autobiography, do not dispel, but rather their works serve to explore and deepen the central intuition of ipseity which is provoked by the challenge. The 'self' may remain both an elusive

² See J. Gratton's essay, 'Return of the Subject' in P. Gifford and J. Gratton, eds., *Subject Matters: Self and Subject in Modern French Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1999), forthcoming.

and allusive reality, but the complex and fascinating auto(bio)graphical writings the search has engendered are more than consolation.

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Section One

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Section Two: Paul Valéry

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