Introduction

On the Occasional

. . . j'écrit moins l'histoire de ces événements en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon âme, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés. Or, les âmes ne sont plus ou moins illustres que selon qu'elles ont des sentiments plus ou moins grands et nobles, des idées plus ou moins vives et nombreuses. Les faits ne sont ici que des causes occasionnelles.

Rousseau, "Ebauches des Confessions"

Sans ces causes occasionnelles un homme né très sensible ne sentirait rien, et mourrait sans avoir connu son être.

Rousseau, Confessions

Between 1765 and 1770, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote the Confessions, which, published posthumously in the two volumes of 1782 and 1789, have been widely credited with "inaugurating the genre [of autobiography] in its modern form." Of these events in publishing history, literary historians after Rousseau's own heart have consented to make a more or less unprecedented and precedent-setting grande occasion. The tendency to commemorate Rousseau's would-be first of a kind "portrait d'homme" as a pivotal turning point in the evolution of Western letters is, understandably, most pronounced in the French tradition. Georges May, for example, takes a turn at celebrating an "occasion" already named in the pioneering work of Georges Gusdorf: "Tout indique . . . que le succès du livre [les Confessions] fut l'occasion de la première vraie prise de conscience collective de l'existence littéraire de l'autobiographie. Comme l'écrit G. Gusdorf: 'De cette occasion mémorable datent les lettres de noblesse de l'autobiographie en France et dans les principales cultures européennes.'" But the dossier does not lack for influential Anglo-Saxon voices of corroboration. Francis R. Hart's "Notes for an Anatomy of Modern Autobiography," the critical text in English most often cited with Gusdorf's as having decisively rekindled interest in autobiographical studies, also gives the nod, albeit less categorically, to
Rousseau: “On the . . . controversial assumption that modern autobiograp­hy began two centuries ago, I shall limit these applications to Rousseau and his successors.”4 By “Rousseau,” Hart means, first and foremost, the Confessions and, to a lesser degree, their successors in Rousseau’s posthumous corpus. The later Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques and unfinished Rêveries are texts generally esteemed to have extended Rousseau’s remarkably obsessive, even Sisyphean5 preoccupation with self-inscription virtually up until the moment of his death in 1778.

My aim in this book is to extend the period of that preoccupation in the opposite direction. I want to reconceptualize the Confessions as several and by no means the first in a series of occasional autobiographies that Rousseau began writing as early as 1752. Within Rousseau’s own œuvre, there is a protohistory to autobiography that readers persuaded or put off by the Confessions’ emphatic claims to absolute originality have found easy to ignore or leave latent. The enterprise of bringing that protohistory into sharper relief is favored at this time by a critical climate of skepticism where historically fetishized beginnings and honorifics like “father of autobiography” are concerned. And the reconfiguration of Rousseau’s corpus to accommodate the protohistory poses no real challenge to the Confessions’ unquestioned literary value, or even to their standing as a particularly rich repository of autobiographical thinking. On the contrary, I will argue that acknowledging the parameters and durable pertinence of Rousseau’s earlier comings to write about himself can only enhance the intelligibility and interest of the Confessions, especially the relatively underread and underappreciated second volume.

But I will first clarify my use of the term “occasional” to epitomize the autobiographical adventure in Rousseau, and I will start by taking a look at the current state of autobiographical studies. How better, in fact, to begin to rewrite the beginning than nourished by a discourse that is now positioned self-consciously at the “beginning of the end” of auto­biography. What has been shown by felicitous pairings like that of Diderot’s Jacques le fataliste with the nouveau roman holds for autobiography as well: the contours of a given genre emerge less clearly in the heyday of enthusiastic proliferation than at the two mutually il­luminating extremes when the genre either has not yet acceded to the status of a second nature or has evolved to the point where that status becomes, once again, open to suspicion.

Of the genre—modern autobiography—that the Confessions are
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widely reputed to have launched, Elizabeth Bruss writes almost retro-
spectively: "We have grown so accustomed to this kind of introspective
activity that it is difficult for us to appreciate its fragility." For Bruss,
facing up to fragility and to the eventual demise and essential premises of
autobiography is a matter of acknowledging the ways in which "auto-
bio graphical" cinema does not and cannot conform to any time-honored
scriptural model. Critics may disagree as to how quickly, inevitably, or
irretrievably that model is receding into obsolescence; they may have
ideological reasons for speeding the process along or, alternatively,
downplaying its scope and significance; and they may be more or less
interested in squaring a flurry of theoretical postmortems with a flourish-
ing practice of life writing that still goes, however insouciantly or inno-
vatively, by the name of autobiography. But few would dismiss Bruss's
basic finding in "Eye for I" that autobiography narrowly enough defined
to be replicable, discussable, and valued is looking more and more un-
mistakably like a historically contingent phenomenon. In the era and aura
of poststructuralism, there has been a sizable outpouring of agreement
when it comes to describing and assigning root causes to that contingen-
cy. A persistent pattern of cultural imbrication has emerged, from which
it is increasingly difficult to want to abstract autobiography as such, in
and of itself, or for all times. The autobiographical activity of the past two
centuries is specifically recognized to go hand in hand with a collective
commitment to proceeding as though there were some a priori basis
in fact to the cultural and linguistic constructs of self (autos) and life (bios).

Only at its most naively wishful would autobiography pretend not to
be emboldened at the outset by the availability of these constructs or
enabling in turn of "historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of
our storytelling." Even in the disruptive process of bringing to light some
traditionally female alternatives to mainstream autobiography, Sidonie
Smith does not deny her women writers a sense of self or preclude them
from plotting the course of a life. Rather, she reads their texts for signs of
discomfiture with a particular "hegemonic conception of selfhood" and
for instances of deviation from prevailing plotlines. But, whether re-
placed by the camera or displaced through a countervalorized "connect-
tedness," the old imperial "I" of autobiography runs a similar risk of
exposure as only one option among others. These new uncertainties as to
"what," among other things, the self might be are compounded by even
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deep-seated suspicions as to the “how” or preconditions of its being anything at all. The stress of autobiographical studies has come to fall more exclusively than ever before on the problematical third term of graphē, or writing. Self and life, however conceived, are in consequence dislodged from the realm of aprioristic, immediately accessible, and universally valid referential certainties or “independent sovereignties.” It is only as ends or belated by-products that, thus humbled, autos and bios are granted readmission to a newly dominant interplay between prescriptions writ large and impersonal and the writing read as specifically constitutive of this or that “take” on autobiography.

“The self, then, is a fiction and so is the life,” concludes James Olney, his matter-of-factness belying the enormity of the implications were we to espouse them wholeheartedly and unflinchingly. To these two, he might have proceeded to add a third fictional assumption on which autobiography has traditionally rested and relied. An essential connection has been assumed to exist between autos and bios and to be likewise uncontaminated or not necessarily contaminated by any prior act of writing. In this scheme of things, self and life are held to be mutually influencing, affirming, and informing. The life provides a suitable arena for the progressive unfolding and coming to consciousness of a self at least partially responsible for whatever direction that life will have taken or imprint it will have left. But the relationship has proven to be not quite symmetrical: the practice of modern autobiography has tended to privilege the more exorbitant and deeply cherished of the two fictions, the self, in whose name and service life stories most often purport or turn out to have been told. Gusdorf makes the point: “[Autobiography’s] deepest intentions . . . are directed toward a kind of apologetics or theodicy of the individual being.” And Olney confirms it by releasing the notion of bios from any absolute obligation to the potentially digressive or distracting diachrony with which bios is most often and automatically associated. When the concept of bios is expanded to connote not only the usual “course of a life seen as a process rather than a stable entity” but “the unique psychic configuration that is this life and no other,” life moves from being merely and potentially embraceable by the ideology of selfhood into that ideology’s direct embrace.

The priorities Gusdorf and Olney spell out are, however, already implicit in one of life writing’s perennial, remarkably resilient linguistic tics. I am thinking of how inevitably life writers—biographers and auto-
biographers alike—slip into the habit of converting selected events of
their subject's lived experience into so many "occasions" of individual
character. Implicit in this discreet reconceptualization is the assumption
that selfhood reveals itself—what and that it is—most unmistakably
through the nominal subject's responses to specific situations in which
other subjects, including the reader, might have reacted differently. Mere
events alone could not convey this double sense of "self" as universal,
aprioristic virtuality and as an unquestioned birthright or entitlement of
the particular subjects at hand. On the contrary, left to other devices of
writing, events might easily fall into a configuration of causes and effects
so airtight as to squeeze the self entirely out of the picture. Nor does the
democratic ideology of modern selfhood wish to be misrepresented as
holding the most "eventful" life or life lived in greatest proximity to in­
controvertibly earthshaking events to be, sui generis, the most interest­
ing or illuminating. It must all come down to whatever the self manages
to make of whatever occasions the life writer arranges to throw the sub­
ject's way.

But in order to sustain attention and suspend disbelief, the "self"
must be furnished with some probable cause for intervention, some occa­
sion requiring nothing less than a further gesture of self-actualization.
Multiplying such occasions over the course of an entire life means that,
for the time it takes to write or read the record of that life, doubts as to
the self's empirical existence and to the essential goodness of its existing
can be held in abeyance. The trick lies both in getting the life into line
with the self and in getting the dynamics of the relationship just right.
Ideally, the gap between autos and bios is closed in ways that naturalize
and domesticate the narrative mode of self-inscription, but serve ulti­
mately to put the self not so much on permanent display as in the more
noteworthy position of responding, and deigning to respond, to repeated
solicitations. Such are the aims and the compelling advantages of what we
might overemphatically call, considering how routinely it has been de­
ployed, the "occasional strategy" of autobiography.

Among the life writers who have come to celebrate the occasions of
their selfhood, Giambattista Vico is one whose candidacy for the title of
first modern autobiographer has been suggested by Michael Sprinker as a
possible alternative to Rousseau's. Rehears ing the early failures of his
third-person "I" to make a mark in conventional academic circles, Vico
nonetheless hastens to add: "He however blessed all these adversities as
so many occasions for withdrawing to his desk, as to his high impregnable citadel, to meditate and to write further works." Questions as to who really got there first aside, the coupling of Vico's project with Rousseau's remains doubly pertinent. Vico's intuition or inscription of a self characteristically prone to opportunistic writing is, as we shall see, one that the author of the *Confessions* might easily have seconded, were it not for the overwhelming resistance to any such thought that lies revealingly at the heart of Rousseau's greater, and lesser, modernity. But Vico's *Life* is no match for the *Confessions* when it comes to self-consciously singling and spelling out the occasional strategy per se as the global principle of its own—and, by extension, any autobiography's—composition.

The entirety of my theoretical addendum to Olney can, in fact, be coaxed out of the tension between the two epigraphs to this introduction. "[J]e crains moins l'histoire de ces événements en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon âme, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés." On the one hand, the "Ébauches" lead with a devaluing of "événements en eux-mêmes," which turns emphatically to the advantage of the essential self or "âme" identified as the upcoming story's real protagonist (1:1150). The writer in pursuit of a fuller accounting than that of conventional memoirs vows not to misrepresent the events of his life as an unbroken, self-sustaining continuum of causes and effects. He will instead render selected events as so many opportunities for renewed involvement by his surplus of self in what becomes in consequence a two-tiered "histoire." Yet, the "faits" unmasked here as nothing but "causes occasionnelles" come back to haunt the actual text in progress of the *Confessions*, at the juncture of Jean-Jacques's paradigmatically fortuitous encounter with Mme de Warens: "Sans ces causes occasionnelles un homme ne très sensible ne sentirait rien, et mourroit sans avoir connu son être" (1:104). Madeleine Anjubault Simons's is an eloquent distillation of the formula that underwrites a host of further episodes in the *Confessions*: "Une latence du cœur, une rencontre d'apparence fortuite." Having become doubly restrictive, our cumulative proposition now reads: *but for the only occasional, were it not for the only occasional,* the self would remain unknowable in its specificity, but also and more intolerably "unfelt" or insusceptible of empirical verification through inner assent.

What makes the two halves of the proposition not quite compatible is the disappearance from the *Confessions* proper of the "I" that the
“Ebauches” will have caught (“j’écris moins l’histoire de ces événements en eux-mêmes . . . “) in the act of writing. The question thus arises as to what difference, if any, the act of inscription will have made in Rousseau’s ability to “know his being.” Rescuing the antiphonal passage of the “Ebauches” from the cutting-room floor allows us to see how arbitrarily the Confessions relegate the interplay between autos and bios to a past history—now simply, passively recorded—where self-actualization needed only and especially for the subject Jean-Jacques to have known Mme de Warens. We can appreciate how tightly, in the Confessions as written, the occasional strategy adheres to a system of beliefs where mere words are adjudged to be less of a factor than they might have been (and even less of a factor than “faits”), and where the meeting grounds of autos and bios in occasions of character are willfully presumed to belong to the order of things.

It is thus all the more paradoxical and potentially enlightening to have to trace Rousseau’s key notion of “causes occasionnelles” and its implied other, general causes, to the promptings of an already written source. The notion of the “occasional” had, of course, been around as though forever; it had figured prominently in theories of human behavior at least since the Ancients deified OCCASIO and put her on a par with Pallas and Jove in calculations of the individual’s chances for success. All the mental and physical prowess in the world would go for naught in the absence of opportunities to exercise or test it. So claimed Ausonius, the moral of his epigram on OCCASIO being that wisdom (Pallas) and power (Jove) are thus rightly invested in the seeing and seizing of such occasions—few and far between, difficult to discern, and always already evanescent—as the niggardly goddess deigns to mete out. This practical morality struck a chord with Rousseau’s contemporaries in the philosophical camp. OCCASIO presides understandably over a separate entry in the Encyclopédie, which outfits her, in the best tradition of iconographical overdetermination, with the several accessories of her imminent escape: “un pie en l’air & l’autre sur une roue, . . . un [sic] voile de la main gauche.” The Encyclopedists were beleaguered by the authorities, hypersensitive to their times of less than equal opportunity, and convinced that the spread of enlightenment would depend on their ability to devise effective strategies of opportunistic vulgarization. They had every reason to make a provisional virtue of judiciously picking one’s spots for speech and action, even when the better part of valor—and ego-
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protection—consisted less in rising rashly to the occasion than in knowing enough to flee “l’occasion de faillir.”

For his part, however, and “in spite of his animadversions against the ‘subtleties’ of abstract metaphysics,” Rousseau proved more “sympathetic” than his fellow Encyclopedists “to the broad metaphysical tradition which strove to discover a rational meaning in the structure of reality as a whole.” And his eventual quarrel with the philosophical movement was—to some degree, at least—religious. On these bases, it is easy to see why the pragmatics of occasionality we have just sketched left Rousseau unsatisfied and open to the suggestively totalizing scheme of causality that had been propounded by the eminent neo-Cartesian philosopher and theologian Nicolas de Malebranche (1638–1715). By all accounts, the works of Malebranche figured prominently in the course of remedial reading to which Jean-Jacques applied himself during the Chambéry years of his mid-twenties. Scholarship has confirmed that the “magasin d’idées” stockpiled by Jean-Jacques in the throes of sympathetic reading paid off handsomely for the self-styled autodidacte in a lifetime of easy recall and periodic returns to the sources he names: “la Logique de Port-royal, l’Essai de Locke, Malebranche, Leibnitz, Descartes, etc.” (1:237). The entirety of the “Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard,” Rousseau’s most systematically developed credo, is now commonly assumed to reflect and inflect “la notion, malebranchiste, de l’ordre” (4:1338), even though Rousseau’s text typically makes no absolutely clinching gesture to confirm his indebtedness.

I am convinced that, had Rousseau’s cahiers de lecture survived, they would testify, as the First Discourse does obliquely, to his having been especially taken by Malebranche’s binary scheme of causality. Decades later, with his refrain of the “only occasional,” the autobiographer would echo and appropriate that causal scheme or essential precipitate of “Malebranchisme” down to which the Encyclopédie likewise distilled the eight-hundred-odd pages of Malebranche’s De la recherche de la vérité. The question presumed to have given rise to philosophical occasionality was that of how the body (passive, unthinking extension) and soul (active, unextended thinking) could interact, “correspond without communication” (Rousseau’s wording in the First Discourse), or exert the kind of mutual influences that are readily available to observation in defiance both of Cartesian principles and of orthodox theology (3:118). "If ideas could be produced, caused or in any way brought about by
things (bodies) outside the mind, then that would be an undeniable example of interaction between two created existents." In an effort to bring rationalism into line with faith, Malebranche retorted that what looked misleadingly like interactions were only apparent, the causal connections a mere mirage, the correspondence necessarily mediated at every juncture by the undeniable third term of divine causality.

Italicizing, the Encyclopédie insists: "Selon Malebranche, Dieu est le seul agent; toute action est de lui; les causes secondes ne sont que des occasions qui déterminent l'action de Dieu," and goes on to elaborate: "c'est que le corps ne peut être mu physiquement par l'âme, ni l'âme affectée par le corps; ni un corps par un autre corps; c'est Dieu qui fait tout en tout par une volonté générale." The essentially pejorative term "cause occasionnelle" would thus have been brought into play by Malebranche for the express purpose of putting down the upstarts (body and soul) to which it refers and, by extension, enhancing the ubiquity and prestige of their polar opposite, the general cause. Following Malebranche, the "occasional" can be conceived only as the "only occasional." For without the incessant intervention of general causes, seen as the Creator's perennial prerogative, the dysfunctional composites that are human beings would literally be at a loss to keep body and soul together. Malebranche's cosmic script calls for every movement of mind and matter to give pause, placing the workings of the universe in a state of suspended animation that nothing less than a further act of creation on God's part can rectify or transcend. However, as Leibniz and the Encyclopedists recognized, human free will is only the most obvious casualty of doctrinaire "Malebranchisme"; for the Divinity as well, there is something compromising and demeaning about the circumstance of being always on call, expected to respond at the drop of a hat, knowable primarily through the reliability of services rendered on command to finite substances. Malebranche's God is at once otherworldly, hyper-interventionist, and utterly dependent on worldly, especially human, activity to make His presence known.

But for the only occasional—these structural tensions of mutual dependency are already implicit in Malebranche and will have survived Rousseau's radical break with the substance of his erstwhile mentor's message. That break may be among the best-kept secrets of the Enlightenment's increasingly insistent secular humanism; it is nonetheless spectacular, even Promethean. Rousseau exploits the letter of Malebranche's
philosophy in order to precisely and perversely defy its spirit. Events and empirical subjects are relegated by Rousseau's theory of autobiography to the respective, mutually inaccessible points of Malebranche's body and soul. Getting from one point to the other becomes a matter of passage through the new general cause of the human self. And it is, in consequence, that self—*his* soul!—that Rousseau promotes to the pinnacle of the causal caret. The terminology, enabling conceptual configuration, and volatile equilibrium of Malebranchism are transplanted intact to the scene of the *Confessions*, but with the crucial difference that Rousseau reassigns to his or any self what had formerly been God's monopoly on general causality.

"Dans le paradis de Jean-Jacques, Dieu lui-même s'effacera discrètement, pour laisser place à Jean-Jacques."22 This admission, which compellingly inflects Pierre Maurice Masson's insistence on the role and sincerity of Rousseau's religious convictions, rings especially true in the light of heretical displacements effected by Rousseau in the formulation of his autobiographical project. By virtue of slipping, under cover of orthodox theocentricity, into a place custom-made for God, individual character accedes to His hypothetical autonomy and basks, inexhaustible, in the afterglow of His prestige and permanence—and becomes subject in turn to the constraints on His (exercise of) omnipotence. What if Jean-Jacques had never happened on Mme de Warens's doorstep? "Quoi que cette sensibilité de cœur qui nous fait vraiment jouir de nous soit l'ouvrage de la nature et peut-être un produit de l'organisation, elle a besoin de situations qui la développent. Sans ces causes occasionnelles..." (1:104). There is room in Rousseau's latter-day occasionalism for fluctuation among a fairly wide range of intellectual and affective responses to the occasional. The positive charge that he attaches to occasions in an immediate context of gratitude for the chance to have known Mme de Warens by no means diminishes his capacity to feel that other occasions may be, at best, necessary nuisances and, at worst, serious threats to the self's independence of action. Interestingly enough, the dangerous new ideology of individual powerlessness that Bruss reads into the present-day cinematic swerve on autobiography23 lies already latent in this potential for occasions to loom too large within the framework established by the founding texts of a full-blown cult of self.

Indeed, Rousseau's deified self becomes vulnerable to eventual de-
motion at the very moment of taking God's place and coming to differ in an important and profoundly humanistic way from the Malebranchean deity. Of the superhuman "simplicity of God's ways," Malebranche had made the most conclusive evidence of His otherworldly wisdom and the most compelling explanation for the apparent limits on His power. Not that He was incapable of creating other, more intrinsically perfect worlds than ours. But the laws of causality governing those worlds would inevitably have exceeded the all-embracing principle of occasionalism in their complexity. As an author of codicils and corollaries, that Creator would have too closely resembled the human soul, whose variability our author risks making it his business to exalt in the "Ebauches." "Or, les ames ne sont plus ou moins illustres que selon qu'elles ont des sentiments plus ou moins grands, des idees plus ou moins vives et nombreuses." Rousseau not only links the value of the individual self directly to the quality and quantity of its ideas, but he takes the further step of projecting countervarized complexity onto the temporal axis: "J'écris moins l'histoire de ces eve[n]mens en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon ame, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés." Thus implicated in an albeit superior history, the self becomes subject to change and to a possible loss of transcendent self-identity.

But Rousseau knows to guard against that possibility. What his text resists—by interposing an “état” or buffer zone between the “histoire” and the “ame” and through the added precaution of singularizing the replacement, “un état,” for a welter of “eve[n]mens”—is the collapse of his essential “I” into interchangeability with any one in particular of the intermediate states through which the grammatical shifter of the first person pronoun will have passed. The autobiographer is evidently preoccupied with keeping the self involved, evolving, and yet off limits to irrecoverable contingency or fragmentation. That preoccupation resurfaces in Rousseau's recourse to plural titles: Confessions, Dialogues, Rêveries. Each imagines plurality to inhere most fundamentally not in the self or even in the life, but in the act of (confessional, or dialogic, or oneiric) writing. Self-inscription is susceptible to infinite multiplication and conceivable in a wide variety of modes. But it must ultimately fail in any one attempt, however well-intentioned at the time, to contain and bring an otherworldly surplus of self down to earth. Seized after the fact as so many discrete and doomed occasions of self-inscription, Rousseau's Confessions and autres écrits autobiographiques combine to further the
cause of protecting the self against demeaning abuses of localizable search and seizure.

But Rousseau came more extensively and literally prepared than has thus far been acknowledged to his sense of self and to mindfulness of the need to prevent his self from falling into the traps of occasionality. The *Confessions’* scenario of selfhood derives and deviates not only from textbook Malebranchism but also from Rousseau’s firsthand experience as an inveterate and increasingly self-conscious author of “occasional” texts. The texts we will read in chronological order here all belong to the middle years of his literary career, 1750–62. That period, which Clément calls “la plus féconde de sa vie,” is most often plotted as Rousseau’s triumphant disengagement from mainstream eighteenth-century intellectualism and discovery of his own philosophical voice. Robert Ellrich elaborates: “During the middle period, starting with the momentous publication of the First Discourse and ending with the condemnation of *Emile*, Rousseau wrote and published the great discursive works on which his international reputation was to rest.” But Ellrich proceeds from this commonplace to the darker side of Rousseau’s success, as evidenced by “self-protective fantasies of androgyny” that keep cropping up in lesser-known minor works from the same period. There is some incidental, even significant overlapping between Ellrich’s chosen corpus and the one I think it important to reconstitute here. The difference is that Ellrich’s criteria for inclusion are essentially thematic. My readings address those works and only those to which the epithet “occasional” incontrovertibly applies, either automatically and on the basis of standardized literary usage or because Rousseau himself made a point of invoking it.

To qualify for consideration here, a text does not need to stand alone. I begin, in the margins of some minor and major works, with a pair of prefaces (to *Narcisse* and to *Julie*) and a pair of dedications (to *Le Devin du village* and to the Second Discourse). Each of these texts exemplifies what is referred to in English usage as “occasional” writing and what French calls *œuvres de circonstance*. In each instance, we will be dealing with a text written, in greater or lesser conformity with a reconstructible general consensus as to how such occasions were to be handled, on the occasion of another (primary) text’s accession to print. The liminary exercises of prefacing and dedicating may well have become perfunctory in the minds and practice of Rousseau’s contemporaries.
These versions of occasional writing could, however, take a stand vis-à-vis a lingering tradition of using œuvres de circonstance only or primarily to immortalize the anniversaries and exploits of the high and mighty. The potential existed for prefacers and dedicators to commemorate the occasions of their own careers by way of significant and self-conscious departure from that tradition. Rousseau did exercise this option, most pointedly by twice declining to write a dedication to the French king, whose patronage might have consigned him to a lifetime of exalting the other. But he did not stop at this tacit, more or less traceless disruption of the cause-effect connection between primary texts and their inevitable ancillaries. Rather, he went on to compound and complicate the vague hubris of self-validation by arranging for the most conventionally other-directed (dedication) and object-centered (preface) of discourses to accommodate that nearest and dearest of subjects, himself. At some point occasional writing became synonymous and interchangeable in Rousseau with self-inscription: autobiography (according to Olney's broader definition of bios) gravitated predictably to œuvres de circonstance and became just as predictably identifiable as the dominant impulse or outcome of whatever œuvres de circonstance Rousseau came to write.

Not that any member of this first, liminary subset of Rousseau's occasional autobiographies leaps headlong and heedless of what it is supposed to be doing into its preoccupation with self. The prefaxes do preface, and the dedications dedicate. Generic specificity, that impersonal place from which the prefatory or dedicatory discourse comes, enables (the perception of) such self-revelatory deviations from standard practice as the dialogism of the Préface de Julie. But generic specificity also encodes the enterprise of self-portraiture in the terms of the occasion as inherited. We might ask, When is a preface to Narcisse not a preface to Narcisse? and answer, with Rousseau, When it is not simply a portrait of the artist, but a portrait of the artist as non-narcissistic prefacer of the First Discourse. Rather than shut the door behind his self, the apprentice autobiographer keeps working on, against, with, and through the givens of threshold discourses in ways that are as productive of eventual meaning as of immediate tensions. Far from making tabulae rasae of titles and topoi, Rousseau's in situ self-portraits reveal him to have a greater sensitivity to the heuristic function of commonplaces than is sometimes thought compatible with his legendary iconoclasm. The move to self-inscription is never made once and for all; rather, it is perennially rewritten to and from
the literary moment. My readings will savor the diversity of these liminal
texts but also highlight their commonality as pressure points of give and
take between the occasional and the transcendent, and as precedents for
further autobiographical activity along the same lines.

Indeed, from these margins of other texts, we will follow Rousseau’s
practice of self-inscription—one foot in, one foot out, the practically
freestanding Préface de Julie shows the way—to the heart of two autono­
mous works, the Lettres à Malesherbes and Le Lévite d’Éphraïm. We
could easily find our own reasons for putting a stamp of “occasionality”
on the four personal Lettres Rousseau wrote in direct response to cues
furnished by his addressee, or on the biblical paraphrase he purportedly
wrote to pass the time of a carriage ride into exile following the condem­
nation of Émile. More significantly, however, the writer insists on the
“occasional” nature of both texts, apologizing as follows to Malesherbes:
“Quoi que j’aime trop à parler de moi, je n’aime pas en parler avec tout le
monde, c’est ce qui me fait abuser de l’occasion quand je l’ai et qu’elle
me plait” (1:1142). The eventual reader of Le Lévite is enjoined in turn to
give careful consideration to “l’occasion dans laquelle elle [cette
bagatelle] a été faite” (2:1207). The Lettres and Le Lévite share with the
earlier, more narrowly occasional texts an acute awareness of how inhib­
it­ing and enabling the specifications of genre can be in the positing and
particularizing of a self. The epistolary context makes all the difference to
one version, the in-betweenness of a self-styled “poème en prose” to the
other. What nonetheless sets these two relative latecomers to Rousseau’s
occasional corpus apart is the fact that they postdate the momentous
decision to mount some full-scale memoirs, the eventual Confessions. A
life story already in the works had the effect of shifting the burden of
content and occasional causality as conceptualized by Rousseau from
textual to existential antecedents. Both works are thought to owe their
existence to specific threats of natural (the Lettres) or unnatural (Le
Lévite) death. Both allude less incidentally or obliquely than their prede­
cessors to the facts of Rousseau’s biography—however much the
Confessions may protest that, except in its inception, Le Lévite has noth­
ing whatsoever to do with Jean-Jacques. And their role of makeshift re­
placements for memoirs that, under the circumstances, might never get
written makes a difference: the Lettres and especially Le Lévite reprivilege
the narrative mode of self-portraiture, which the preface to Narcisse had
explicitly renounced ten years earlier.
One beneficial outcome of reconstituting the set of Rousseau's occasional autobiographies and including the *Confessions* has thus to do with heightening our sensitivity to the arbitrariness of the "whole life" approach espoused within the pages of the authorized autobiography. We will also be positioned to appreciate the lengths to which the author and his successors would go to hide that arbitrariness, and the other unpursued possibilities, from view. In Rousseau's case, however, that amounts to camouflaging possibilities already pursued in the texts of our protohistory. The *Confessions'* second volume does mention these occasional sketches, but only referentially and as unrelated items in an accruing, parsimoniously annotated bibliography of "other works by the same author." Vague symptoms of a closer, intertextual connection and of the *Confessions'* deeper indebtedness to occasional antecedents are there for the discerning. Remarkably, for example, the *Confessions* have nothing but nice things, although almost never the "right" nice things, to say about each of the occasional texts we will read, even those of most dubious literary value (*Le Levite*) or rhetorical effectiveness (the dedication to Geneva). Each preface or dedication is moreover considered on its own merits, independently of the primary text whose margins it usually inhabits. Carried to extremes, this practice has meant that a mere dedicatory epistle (but one that turns out to have happened upon the crucial autobiographical strategy of *auto-avilissement*) can receive ten times more coverage in the *Confessions* than its earthshaking enclosure, the *Discourse on Inequality*. In short, Rousseau hovers time and again on the brink of acknowledging the tokenism involved in his conferring pre-autobiographical status only on the *Lettres à Malesherbes*. For to single out the *Lettres* is to ignore their belonging to an impressive body of likewise "personal" writings. Knowing this, we do not have to look to other authors or models of autobiography for challenges to the *Confessions'* claims to absolute originality or paradigmatic status.

This body of occasional texts could not, however, be acknowledged as such, much less read autobiographically, by the *Confessions* because it posed an obstacle to their investment in direct apprehension of a living, breathing somebody named Jean-Jacques. The author's self-image was further invested for the short term in denial that who this Jean-Jacques really was had much of anything to do with his having happened for a time to write books. "Not that he was ever a 'professional' writer," claims Ronald Grimsley, playing along. But of course, notwithstanding all
his posturing as an “occasional” writer, Rousseau remains a man whose life story might easily have been as specifically and unhesitatingly centered as Vico’s on his “particular development as a man of letters.”

Therein lies the best reason to overlook Rousseau’s hesitations and take a second look, through the prism of occasional self-portraiture, at the relatively “disappointing” second volume of the *Confessions*.

In chronicling the adult, literary life of Jean-Jacques, Rousseau has seemed to many readers to retreat from the essentially modern and richly suggestive stance of Volume 1 into that of an uninspiring memorialist or one-dimensionally paranoid apologist. As landmark events proliferate and conspire with everyday occurrences to configure a universal “plot” against Jean-Jacques, the *Confessions* do an increasingly sporadic job of inviting us to plumb psychological depths. But, as my readings will show, the unconscious dimension is neither absent from Volume 2, nor all that simple, nor meant simply to be carried over intact from the extensive auto-analyses of Volume 1’s formative years. It is, rather, the case that the unconscious dimension is no longer uniquely traceable to the psyche of a civilian. The depths are, to a significant degree, given over to the already written occasional self-portraiture against which the *Confessions* shape up self-protectively (and without whose muffled promptings they would have shaped up differently). We need to take as seriously as he does Rousseau’s claiming not to have any personal memory of anything he has once committed to paper (1:351). For, recalling imperfectly both what really happened and what he wrote at the time about what happened, the *Confessions* commemorate both, in incessant testimony to the inherent forgetfulness of self-inscription. Whatever Rousseau writes in praise of this or that occasional antecedent turns out to be only the tip of an iceberg and the surest warning sign to be on the lookout for yet another version of the returning repressed. Each occasional text in turn comes back to haunt, leaving the imprint of its situation-specific anxieties and insights on whichever region of the *Confessions* will have dropped its name.

The result is a patchwork of intertextualities, which the *Confessions*’ apparently seamless global narrative covers imperfectly, but to the eventual advantage of “autobiographical intentionality per se.” In his forceful argument against a mimetic explanation for stylistic pluralism in the *Confessions*, Louis A. Renza has proposed that this pluralism is more likely Rousseau’s way of “guarding . . . his self-identity, from slipping into
whatever norms of self-reference he is aware of, however subliminally, at the time of writing." But the later *Confessions* are exempted from straining so visibly and virtuosically after stylistic diversity, and for the very reason that there are at least as many bad approximations of Rousseau already available for the self to engage and transcend in Volume 2 as opportunities for clandestine *texte-à-texte* with "only occasional" alter egos. In this respect, the *Confessions* continue and compound Rousseau's long-standing proclivity for painting himself in figura. This self-portraiture of the in figura variety takes off from the positing of hypothetical resemblances to famous others with whom there can, however, be no absolute identification. It had been a staple of Rousseau's occasional writing from the moment of his first choosing, in the "Préface" to *Narcisse*, to toss himself back and forth from the clutches of Narcissus to the more welcome embraces of Socrates and, surprisingly, Echo. Other more or less astounding avatars, from the Roman Lucretia to the biblical Benjamin, had followed at irregular intervals, no two alike and no one enough like Rousseau's essential self to close down the process of self-inscription.

It is thus by releasing the *Confessions* from the impossible obligation to tell all that we can best do justice not only by their heretofore neglected sources, but by a newly compelling composite of the adult Jean-Jacques as author of an entire gallery of in figura self-portraits. Moreover, by following up on the autobiographer's vague hints at intertextuality, we can also know the strength of Rousseau's abiding commitment to situating the self always just beyond the reach of (this or that) writing. In the aftermath of failed *Confessions*, felicitous failure would be written just as indelibly into the *Dialogues*. Those anxiety-ridden sequels to autobiography are, like the *Réveries*, beyond the scope of this book. They nonetheless suggest that Rousseau may have anticipated my rereading of the *Confessions* as less scrupulous than they might have been in footnoting their sources. Making a major offense of plagiarism and misattribution, the *Dialogues* also place the reluctant "man of letters" on an equal footing with the "real man" and play them off against each other as rival claimants to the name of Jean-Jacques. Failure nonetheless comes as an afterthought to the *Confessions* and *Dialogues*, both of which follow to the bittersweet end from an equal and opposite commitment to the more straightforward rhetorical success of getting the self written right and exhaustively once and for all. The *Réveries* tend, by contrast, toward put-
ting this conflict of interests behind them. What attunes them more closely to the earlier, less self-consciously ambitious instances of occasional autobiography is the *Réveries*’ rediscovery of satisfaction and value in writing wholeheartedly to, and away from, particular moments. How fittingly the tenth promenade trails off, to be continued, with a reminiscence on the fiftieth anniversary of Rousseau’s first meeting with Mme de Warens. For, with a final relaxation of extraneous tensions accumulated en route, Rousseau’s autobiographical project returns, as to a matrix of infinite rebeginnings, to that most characteristic, inspiring, and volatile of tensions, between the universal transcendent and the only occasional.