Conclusion

Theorizing the Practice
of Occasional Autobiography

*Ici commence l'œuvre de ténèbres...*

It is one thing to make a practice of occasional autobiography, as Rousseau surely did with increasing frequency and self-consciousness during the years 1752–62. And it is something else again to conceptualize autobiography per se as the written record of a past life governed in its entirety and entirely explainable by a neo-Malebranchean interplay of general and occasional causes. This latter move was hinted at, haltingly and improvisationally, in the *Lettres à Malesherbes*. But it was fully realized, tautly formulated, and properly named only in a discarded draft of the *Confessions* themselves. Getting from the side of practice to the other side of theory poses a problem of some difficulty and present urgency. Barring a leap of faith in metaphor, there are existential and/or conceptual gaps to be closed between this “occasional” and that one.

The “Ebauches” do not, strictly speaking, offer an ex post facto theoretical accounting for the autobiographical adventure that began in the margins of *Narcisse* and continued episodically, intermittently, more or less clandestinely, even past the point of preliminary work on the *Confessions*. Nowhere does Rousseau think to extrapolate and expose the overall goals and methods of *that* adventure. Nor does he formally reassemble an occasional corpus on the basis of whose persistent features and impulses and in spite of whose apparent heterogeneity such gener-
alities could be made. Nor, finally, does he take even the half-step toward theory that would have produced an autobiography of the autobiographer or narrative account of autobiographical activities predating the *Confessions*. Rather, what the "Ebauches" propose, in lieu of a theory of occasional autobiography, is a theory of autobiographical realism in which occasional causes figure prominently but not exclusively, and to the precise extent that they will have figured throughout the life to be recorded.

Some sort of pathway needs, therefore, to be traced between these two instances of the "occasional" in Rousseau, lest the term itself be suspected of bearing the full weight of an only nominal commonality. It might well be, for example, that "autobiography" is the really operative term whose place "the occasional" would be charged with holding down, metonymically and provisionally, only until such time as the better name unavailable to Rousseau could be coined. The "Ebauches" and the *Confessions* themselves, in the episode of encounter with Mme de Warens, may have trotted out the *causes occasionnelles* of Malebranche's metaphysics as a mildly satisfying, uninsistent afterthought. The "why" of it all might really be a matter of "why not." Momentary recourse to the ready-made formula may be less of a theoretical necessity than a vaguely formalistic gesture of solidarity with whatever else in Rousseau's corpus has "something to do" with occasions. This apparent confessing to connectedness nonetheless falls short of articulating connections; parallel metonymies run the risk of never meeting at any one point.

The conclusions we can derive from our readings of the occasional autobiographies will lead us in the general direction of a more substantive connection. Rousseau's punctual acts of seizing occasions for self-inscription do inform his eventual vision of a parallel universe where the sum total of empirical subjects and events would function as the no less than absolutely essential occasions of transcendent selfhood. There is something to go on already: both descriptions, mine of his praxis and his of the planet, proceed by suspenseful indirection to a surprise of self that literary history has since managed to render thoroughly unsurprising. The word is out; shoulders are shrugged. Even in the eyes of knowing nonreaders, the *Confessions* alone provide proof enough of Rousseau's quasireligious commitment to the Word and Word-Made-Flesh of selfhood, as sometimes reduced to the case-clinching lowest common de-
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nominator of his abandoned offspring. Rousseau is rightly fabled and frequently faulted for this commitment, which nonetheless continues to leave a mark and exercise a magnetic attraction on even the self-proclaimed skeptics and would-be heretics among us.

Rousseau remains the personification of choice of whatever excesses of now orthodox self-worship are deemed, at the moment, to be in need of pruning. *Un certain Rousseau* has been pressed into service as the simple-minded bogeyman of deconstruction's joining forces with a sadly wiser Rousseau to expose human self-identity and selfsameness in general as perennially wish-fulfilling myths of Western civilization. The specter of Rousseau likewise haunts feminists' recent moves to remap the corpus of autobiography and open its "I" to an otherness that would nonetheless steer clear of reversion to pre-Rousseauist self-irradiation. It is against everything that Rousseau can be made to stand for that feminist readings of autobiography have countervalorized the reality and recording of interpersonal relations, as left by the *Confessions* in a state of considerable and dangerously normative neglect. Indeed, the impulse to illustrate his theoretical splitting of the "I" into occasional and general instances does lead, in the *Confessions* and wherever else they are taken as a model, to the elaboration of a primary, sometimes exclusionary relationship between *moi* and *soi*, subject and self.

We know, however, from the clumsy gestures of texts like the *Préface de Julie*, that Rousseau did not give up without a fight on finding some accommodation between preeminent selfhood and genuine intersubjectivity. As amply demonstrated by the *Préface*, the dedication to Geneva, and *Le Levite d'Ephraim*, he simply lacked the tools to conclude his well-intentioned forays into intersubjectivity otherwise than by sacrificing the others in his life to the precarious cause of self-identity. All the more reason not to dignify the deficiencies of the *Confessions* as quintessentially autobiographical. We are certainly not required to make a virtue for all times and places of what was, in part, one man's pathological necessity—and, even by his standards, a particularly aggressive-defensive espousal of that necessity.

But the legend has outstripped and obscured the textual bases of Rousseau's multiple comings to a place of selfhood from which we now have the option and the luxury of wanting to strike out in new directions. What our review of the protohistory to the *Confessions* will allow us to put into perspective is the constancy of his solitary cult, its essential
component of adaptability to varying sites and changing circumstances, and its gradual evolution in the years just prior to his spelling out the articles of what became in consequence a universally accessible faith. The hypothesis I want to hazard is that Rousseau’s theory of autobiography in the “Ebauches” is not so much an explanation as an extension, a further instance, one more case of his inveterate practice. The intuitive lessons of his experience count for something, even if he does not say so. Rather than explain or take exception to what he has been doing all along, the Rousseau of the “Ebauches” keeps on doing it, this time, as it happens and for cause, by theorizing. Once we have abstracted the history and theory of occasional autobiography he never wrote from the corpus of occasional texts he never regrouped as such, we will be positioned at least to appreciate the poetic justice of an eventual recourse to theory.

But it is from somewhere on the near side of absolute certainty, without having managed to produce either a seamless narrative or a mathematical proof, that we will turn back one last time to the *Confessions* and put our nagging question of the two “occasionals” to Rousseau himself. His answer is waiting and, significantly, wanting. In the celebrated opening lines of Book 12, he sets out his own assessment of what can and cannot be done about rationalizing autobiography’s essential connections among text, life, and self. Those connections are revealed to have been as intuitively sound and intellectually fragile for him as they remain for us. A hauntingly eloquent text of paranoid projection exposes the limits of Rousseau’s ability to theorize and barely disguises the insights and anxieties of a frustrated meta-autobiographer. “Je me perds . . . ,” he writes; go on without me. We readers are treated to the excruciatingly painful spectacle of a momentarily impotent pedagogue.

That spectacle looks all the more perversely self-revelatory when we consider how profoundly pedagogical is the impulse that drives all of Rousseau’s occasional autobiographies except the first. By this, I do not mean only or primarily that the author poses as a teacher, recruits a pupil or pupils, and indulges in explicit pedantry, although after the “Préface” to *Narcisse* that is invariably the case. Whenever the potential for a specifically teacher-student coupling is inherent in the rhetorical frame, it is exploited: the Genevans will be taught to know and love their lot, Malesherbes will learn to know and esteem the real Rousseau. Absent an extant coupling, the text invents one. Co-prefacer N has barely arrived on
the scene when he is being instructed by R on the right and wrong ways to read a novel. And, in what becomes a striking incursion on the immediacy of a dream text, the narrator or teacher-turned-high-priest of *Le Lévite d'Éphraïm* resorts early and often to his right of apostrophe, sermonizing right and left and dispensing all manner of sanctimonious, doom-laden advice to encoded readers and characters alike.

Only the prefacer to *Narcisse* passes up the opportunity to sit some textually encoded pupils down and set them straight about something or other. Not incidentally, the journey of self-discovery on which that prefacer embarks following his formal retreat from rhetorical relations is the most daringly open-ended and perilous to the self-concept of any undertaken in Rousseau's occasional autobiographies. But our only means to confirming this has been to tag along in the guise of uninvited guests or unofficial auditors. Epistemological sophistication holds sway, but only for the moment, over pedagogical demonstration. That is not to say that the two are mutually exclusive, or that the "Préface" to *Narcisse* marks the beginning and the end of Rousseau's stretching to learn new and different things through occasional autobiography. But the subsequent parade of teachers-in-the-text attests symptomatically to Rousseau's having learned selectively from prefacing *Narcisse* to divert his occasional writing toward a primarily pedagogical vocation. He seems to have been more struck by the prefacer's tour de force of self-centering and takeover of liminary space for the self than by any intellectual challenges the text had gone on to pose to his intuitive sense of self-identity. Or perhaps it was his need to silence those very challenges that dictated a shift in emphasis. Teaching came to be of the essence, and a matter of externalizing the bases of inner assent to selfhood. Whatever the specific curriculum of the hour, the general lesson to be learned and relearned remedially as often as necessary was this: the self exists—still ubiquitous, still resilient, still transcendentally intact, and still incapable of not making a difference or leaving a mark.

Each of Rousseau's comings to autobiography thus rehearses a reconquest of the cogito: part of me is here, therefore I am. Regardless of where "here" happens to be, demonstration entails staging one or more surprises of self at the level of manifest content. In the "Préface" to *Narcisse*, "moi-même" bursts onto the scene all but unannounced. Likewise, the first person of the dedication to Geneva immediately shrugs off reductive identification as the author of the Second Discourse and lays claim to
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thirty years of unswerving lived (not literary) dedication. And, in a later incarnation, he ostentatiously yields to the temptation of solipsistic reminiscence on the Genevans’ time. The two closely related, mutually reinforcing metamessages are these: there is more me here than you or I expected, and there is more to the me we expected to find here than meets the eye (or pronominal I). As a further case in point, consider the courtroom melodrama of R’s falling slowly but surely, rejoinder-by-tense-rejoinder, for defiant autonomination as “Jean-Jacques Rousseau, en toutes lettres.” Under the circumstances, pleading the fifth would have been a perfectly normal, honorable, and understandable response to N’s relentless cross-examination. Once again, more me than anticipated intrudes on surroundings clearly earmarked as inhospitable or ill-equipped to accommodate more than a shadow of the writer’s self.

Sometimes the good news of the surprise of self is not broadcast in so many words. It may be reserved for the author himself, pending the ability of some wider audience to reconstruct the context of unfavorable circumstances. At the prompting of this or that fresh attack of anxiety, the autodidacte in selfhood was well prepared to counter with refresher courses designed primarily for his own benefit. The self that would be submitted to the Censor in lieu of a mere manuscript rose to meet the challenges of imminent death and a mutilated Emile. The traps of patronage were narrowly averted by a self that through dedication not to Louis XV knew itself to be beyond the contingency of class distinctions. And the one of its skins that was under threat of a prise de corps was shed by a self for whose life as Benjamin thousands, including his own mother, would gladly lay down their lives.

Rousseau never wavered in keeping his third-person distance from Benjamin and from the Levite. But that was only the last and most emphatic of his stands against confirming unmistakable resemblances to textual alter egos as hard-and-fast identities. In Le Lévite, a dream-aided fuzziness of identification comes to epitomize a career of in figura self-portraiture that also stands the message of selfhood in good stead. Rousseau’s version of in figura self-portraiture functions as a necessary corrective to unwanted appearances of irreversible incarnation. It guards against the possibility of misreading the surprise of self to go hand in hand with a cutting down to size or threat to transcendence. In this complementary encoding, the subliminal cogito reads: whatever you may just
have been led to believe, I am because I am *not* Narcissus—or, for that matter, Echo or Socrates or Brutus or Lucretia or Saint-Preux or Julie or a mere "faiseur de livres." I am all of the above rolled into one, and then some. Each of these figures captures and conveys some of who I am or may be at any given moment. But I am beyond the powers of any one of them to pin my whole self down to earth. As proof of that last point, Rousseau could invoke the record of a singular capacity for virtually simultaneous identification with each (Narcissus and Echo) or all (Lucretia, Brutus, Sextus, Collatinus) of the known antagonists of whatever classical drama his Olympian self had been moved to revisit. Nor, arguably, would he dare linger so long in the mirrors of antiheroism and villainy if that were tantamount to forfeiting his right of pulling back into transcendence. On the contrary, he is perfectly capable of demonstrating the difference between strategic self-images and bona fide selves.

The brunt of that last demonstration nevertheless falls on the *Confessions*. Most notably, Book 8's virtuoso variations on the theme of Lucretia go to expose *auto-avilissement* as a contingent possibility and strategic compromise with modern mores to which the self does not, however, give its full, unqualified assent. This self-serving disengagement stands in sharp contrast to the more myopic, self-embroiling intuitions of the unfinished occasional tragedy *La Mort de Lucrece*. There, Rousseau seems convinced of his utter inability to get beyond or transcend a no longer optional *auto-avilissement* at the very core of his being. The usual reserves of self appear to have been thoroughly depleted; Rousseau cannot stage a reversal of *auto-avilissement* but can only abandon the play after two acts. For the interminable moment when baseness resonates in his characters' every word and suffocates the voice of virtue, he knows himself to be irredeemably tainted by the abject. That he is provides small consolation, given the demonstrated monstrosity of what he is.

In insisting on transcendent selfhood as the pedagogical bottom line of Rousseau's in figura self-portraiture, I do not mean to cheat these relatively unguarded moments of rediscovered vulnerability out of their intermediate epistemological values. Knowing who he is and keeping up to date with the *quality* of his self do matter, always and desperately, to Rousseau. And it is never too late to supplement or touch up the static official portrait compiled by scholarship on the sole basis of the major works. We owe it to Rousseau and to ourselves to let the specific cen-
trifugal forces of each occasional text lead us to new and unexpected qualities. I have been surprised, for instance, to discover the dyed-in-the-wool homme de lettres whom Rousseau does not normally embrace as part of his public persona. The liminary texts betray an acute, well-informed sensitivity to the exploitable nuances of literary convention; the *Lettres* and other letters to Malesherbes reveal an imagination that has been not merely touched but profoundly shaped by the reality of eighteenth-century publishing practices. Shock better describes my reaction to being introduced in *Le Lévite* to a Rousseau who had it in him (and not just in his biblical source) to blow the lid right off his family romance and off the *locus amoenus* of the patriarchal Golden Age.

To be sure, the austere Genevan’s version of giving in to the impulse of the literary moment rarely comes close to approximating Montaigne’s pose of devil-may-care drunkenness; hence, Rousseau’s expressions of wonder at the ease with which the First Discourse and letters to Malesherbes “wrote themselves.” His counter-impulse to self-control and airtight coherence of corpus were not born with the *Confessions*. Even the “Préface” to *Narcisse* remembers to reinvest the here and now of exploratory writing in the possibility of long-term gains for self-identity. But livening up the autobiographer’s model by acknowledging its capacity for change is precisely what is called for by an early “Enigme” that Rousseau wrote as though at the behest of “le portrait”:

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Enfant de l’Art, Enfant de la Nature,
Sans prolonger les jours j’empêche de mourir:
Plus je suis vrai, plus je fais d’imposture,
Et je deviens trop jeune à force de vieillir (2:1133).
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By no stretch of the imagination will the imposters of Rousseau’s occasional self-portraits ever become too young to be true—or intellectually engaging. With the portraits as a point of departure, we can work backwards to add to our firsthand knowledge of biblical and Classical topos, sideways to gain a more realistic view of the eighteenth-century literary scene, and ahead to the psychoanalytical theories that Rousseau seems, uncannily, to anticipate. Paradoxically, the portraits’ having grown old gracelessly enough to keep us interested derives in part from the fact of there being so much more to them than mere me alone, and so many other foreign places embedded in the ones Rousseau appropriates for the
In fact, Rousseau himself appears to have grasped the irony of how fundamentally his project of full-scale *Confessions* was advantaged by his already proven ability, as an original thinker, to stimulate and captivate the thoughts of others. Whereas he starts out in the “Ebauches” to justify the autobiographical project by recommending the qualities of his pre-Romantic thinking *and* feeling soul, he ends up all but imperceptibly reverting to a neo-Cartesian equation of soul and mind: “Dans quelque obscurité que j’aye pu vivre, si j’ai pensé plus et mieux que les Rois, l’histoire de mon âme est plus intéressante que celle des leurs” (1:1150). The prediction, as borne out by subsequent literary history, is that the lure of intellectual adventure will cover a multitude of sins, foremost among them the excrescence of presumptuous selfhood or Idea behind the ideas to which all who set foot in the *Confessions* will necessarily be exposed.

Indeed, the experience of sheer, unmitigated excrescence had been a further key to conversion of the doubters since the earliest occasional autobiographies. Rousseau’s twofold boast of thinking “plus et mieux” says it all: quantity of soul counted no less than quality at a historical moment when it was still as much a question of postulating and promoting the self as of defining or refining it. Above and beyond their respective contributions to qualifying the subject of their self-portraiture, Rousseau’s occasional texts go en masse to show an irrepressible surfeit of what (we are encouraged to assume) can only be the self. The pedagogical impulse is not content with staging punctual incarnations and escapes from incarnation. Rather, it shows up unflaingly in the form of sheer numerical excess and overabundant textuality. Liminary texts that have no business being so long clearly overshoot the mark. But so too do the four letters of response to Malesherbes’s one and a second preface (with a second prefacer) to *Julie* that, unless it is really more than a preface, has no reason for being in the public domain. The *épîtres dédicatoires* overdo it just by being. Rousseau seems to have misheard the *philosophes*’ warnings against any dedication whatsoever to mean that there is no use dedicating to any single citizen when there is an entire republic out there just waiting to be harangued. And, for the Bible’s three chapters, the “paraphraser” who has more to say on the subject than God Himself substitutes four cantos.

But assuming Rousseau to be behind all this excess is not something we readers need to do on our own initiative. The task of provoking that assumption falls to the personified textual markers of selfhood that we
have already caught in flagrante delicto of being somewhere that they alone do not belong. Suspicion is thereby cast on the self, which “must be” the prime mover or general cause or only available explanation for unmitigated excrescence in the environs. Wherever we have caught a glimpse of the creator, recognition of its overabundance is prompted by the signs of an overabundant creation. On the basis of the accumulated evidence, teacher and pupil have due cause to reconfirm that there is more to me than (directly) meets the eye, and to speculate that there is a lot more of me where that came from.

Falling short of the mark is a further, if sparingly exercised, option. In the dedication to Duclos, the terse two-line excuse for a main body that is sandwiched between the fulsome formulae of salutation and complimentary closing hints at a disproportionate withholding of self from heartfelt participation in the dedicatory enterprise. But when Rousseau’s stated intentions are factored in, overshooting the mark can just as easily lead to a tell-tale falling short, most dramatically in the flattering overkill-as-suicide of the dedication to Geneva.

What remains constant, through thick texts and thin, is the derisory new meaning lent by Rousseau’s occasional autobiographies to the Classical and neoclassical ideals of rising promptly, smartly, and precisely to the occasion. Rousseau has evidently discerned the threat posed to discernible selfhood by any wholehearted preoccupation with rising just as far and no further than would be required by circumstances or common consent. And, on this score, Rousseau’s ideas have certainly taken hold. If we still share the remnants of the Classical ideal with him, we also share his fear of pursuing it too exclusively or successfully. Meeting only requirements and only as necessary is nowadays assumed to exact a sometimes prohibitive price of self-immolation. Our contemporary, the Rousseau of the occasional autobiographies, went to illuminating extremes to avoid paying that price under any circumstances. Even when it would have been easiest and most excusable to stick to commonplaces or remain silent (e.g., pocket the dedication to Geneva or keep his partly guilty dream of Judges to himself), he established a characteristic pattern of excrescent, all but uncalled-for responses. Repeatedly disrupting and disequilibrating the smooth flow of text, an overdetermined increment of excrescence went a long way toward developing and substantiating the sense of self with which Rousseau came already converted and forearmed to write the *Confessions*. 
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One way of picturing the swerve on the rising to the occasion for which Rousseau is at least partially responsible would be to contrast a pair of icons of the goddess OCCASIO. In the first, that of Ausonius's Classical epigram, a strangely configured head or hysteron-proteron of OCCASIO seems at first to back through the poet's field of vision. She presents no distinct features, no tell-tale signs, but only the unrecognizable aspect of a face covered with hair. It is for hindsight that the epigram reserves the shock of baldness "at the back of thy head." By the time there is something there to see, there is nothing left to seize, except the fact of the poet's having unselfconsciously deployed a second figure where the head of OCCASIO stands for the opposite extreme of the female torso. The figure works subliminally to essentialize her otherness and to model the occasion to which he will have failed to rise on that of a potentially perfect heterosexual coupling.

From a Rousseauist vantage point, however, the slow-witted Ausonius is to some extent well rid of that OCCASIO. For, in what might easily have become the stranglehold of the other's too perfect embrace, the poet stood to lose by losing sight of himself. Interestingly enough, the Encyclopédie makes a point to certify the linguistic accident of OCCASIO's femaleness: "Les Romains en firent une déesse, parce qu'en latin son nom est féminin." Indeed, that femaleness becomes a transparent ruse in more recent versions of the icon. Rather than celebrate unselfconscious fusing with the occasion as an end in itself, these versions domesticate otherness and more nearly approximate the Rousseauist ideal of using the occasion to hold a mirror up to the self. It is far easier for the male subject to see his self in OCCASIO when Ausonius's deceptive pubic thicket is replaced by the single lock ("une longue tresse de cheveux par devant") or hair of the proverbial expression, "L'occasion n'a qu'un cheveu." Replicating the male anatomy as closely as possible, this OCCASIO sometimes brandishes "un rasoir," the better to keep him fully apprised of threats more relevant to his sense of self than to hers. Rousseau's paradigmatic trajectory in the occasional autobiographies consists to a significant degree in forcing and finessing the first OCCASIO into closer conformity with the second. His victories of partial self-mirroring look to be all the more resounding because the territory—whether of a bad play written in a former lifetime or of an anonymous biblical horror story—looked, to begin with, so defiantly alien.

It is as though Rousseau were out to prove that, at least where he is
concerned, there can never be any such thing, strictly speaking, as an occasional text. From the first moment of refusal to do his prefatory duty by Narcisse, he makes a point of declining the eighteenth century's open invitation to do a perfunctory, selfless job of fulfilling the basic requirements for publication. And he later makes a point of extending the same invitation (and possibility of declining) to the freestanding texts he explicitly brands as "occasional." But the presumption of occasionality is invariably a rallying cry in response to which the self shows up in force, the implication being that the self will show up whenever or wherever the writer puts pen to paper. The argument for infinite extendability is supported by the fact that criteria for admission to Rousseau's potentially all-inclusive occasional corpus supersede the usual considerations of genre and manifest content. His ad hoc category of occasional writing gradually moves out of the margins and stretches the envelope of œuvres de circonstance. Cutting across generic boundaries, uniform labeling levels differences between prefaces and dedications, between personal letters and belles lettres, and between liminary and freestanding texts. The lowest common denominator of occasionality comes to herald the highest (and only other) common factor of autobiography, as if to proclaim: part of me is in more places than you ever imagined I could be—here, for instance, and beyond that, who knows?

The question of how much proof is proof enough is intriguing. Rousseau may have had any number of reasons for limiting his occasional canon by and large to the texts we have read here. The antecedent narcissistic wounds that we have been able to attach to each of these texts may have been the added impetus he needed to do a more pointed and vigilant than usual job of self-enhancement. There was a danger, moreover, in expanding the required reading list beyond these few well chosen, tried-and-true examples: everyone who writes prolifically knows the experience of reading back something that looks utterly perfunctory, something in which they do not at all recognize themselves. The same goes for all the infinite gestures of daily life that, following the democratization of history, are now open for consideration as potential occasions. Since the self cannot possibly be perceived to give its all at all times, the subject has the option (and every reason) to subjectivize as occasions the selected words and events on the basis of which he or she wants the self to be known and judged.

Rousseau's supreme instance of naming and claiming a literary occa-
sion involves *Le Lévite d'Ephraïm*. This version of riveting attention on the occasion is a twofold investment in playing it safe while shooting for the stars. At the very worst, autobiography will out: the self will be discovered, as usual, to figure through partial, prismatic incarnations in the body of the text; Rousseau will be recognized to have lent his fears, fixations, and "fiel" to Levite, Benjamin, and concubine alike. But, better yet, if Rousseau can make us believe that there is no autobiography in *Le Lévite*, the self will overwhelm us by the infinitude and infinite serenity of its absence from the neo-biblical recriminations. That self will exist and preside just as surely as the God of the Old Testament without benefit of incarnation. Having reascended into the stratosphere of uncompromising selfhood, Rousseau's "cœur sans fiel" will appear only but unmistakably in the mind's eye of the true believer.

And yet, in order to feel that absence as extraordinary and explainable only as a function of an extraordinary self, we need first, as Rousseau reminds us, to get a good feel for the occasion. In fact, there can be no moving the doubters to perceive the great beyonds of self without a clearly defined frame of reference, a horizon of expectations, some preconceived notions as to what would amount under the circumstances to a self's perfectly decorous and unremarkable intervention. The illuminating irony of *Le Lévite* is that, all things being relative, making violent reprisals against his enemies would, in this instance, have been the only normal and "decorous" thing for Rousseau to do. In the context of Rousseau's overriding desire to confer absolute value on the perception of selfhood, *Le Lévite* is the apparent exception that proves the methodological rule of relativism and promotes that rule to a new level of abstraction. To the extent that his pedagogy is grounded in spectacular failure to rise only to the occasion, disproportionality and deviation from norms are his indispensable teaching tools.

The disproportionalities in his liminary autobiographies are easy to spot. Any experienced reader knows when a preface or dedication has dragged on too long for the good of the primary text or primary audience—or, conversely, when a suspiciously slapdash job of prefacing has been done (e.g., Mme de Luxembourg's reading of the first preface to *Julie*). On the other hand, the horizon of expectations concerning correspondences was considerably more hazy: real letters might say however much they had to say in tones ranging from ultra-formal to familiar. In writing to Malesherbes, Rousseau thus makes a point of naming his two
transgressions of excessive length and undue familiarity. The pertinent norms of their professional correspondence are invoked through the writer's almost incredulous avowal of deviation from them. And, more generally, whenever deviations risk sneaking by unperceived, Rousseau takes this added precaution of reinscribing the norms. That means, for example, getting N to remind us out loud that eighteenth-century novel prefacers almost always settled, as R eventually will not, for the minimalist in figura incarnation of editor.

Whether this positing of the self by explicit opposition with norms of relative selflessness says anything about the self's existing and being known to exist in a real world outside the realm of occasional autobiographies remains indeterminate. The tacit by-product yielded by the autobiographies' pedagogy of selfhood is not a detailed, generalizable metaphysics, but a fledgling theory of text production. The point, as proven under the controlled conditions of a discrete corpus, is not that there is no such thing as an occasional text, but that there is no such thing as an only occasional text. All texts both are and are not occasional. A confluence of circumstances and expectations solicits the writing self and lays down certain of the parameters of its writing. Circumstances and expectations do not, however, go so far as to determine absolutely the process or end product on which the self in its own right leaves an indelible stamp. It is this mark that, by throwing some of the circumstances into high relief, Rousseau seeks to render even more highly and unmistakably visible. The beauty of putting this plan into action in texts like the "Préface" to Narcisse is that the nonself (i.e., play to be prefaced and conventions of prefacing) is clearly identifiable and distinguishable from what can be calibrated in consequence as an increment or surplus of self.

Through his periodic returns to write at this conjuncture of isolatable occasional and general causes, Rousseau may have hoped to exorcize residual fears concerning the occasional—or only occasional?—text that had launched his career. To be sure, the "Préface" to Narcisse alone addresses the precise challenge of putting more self than Rousseau's critics would grant him into his response to the Dijon Academy. It nonetheless bears recalling with what persistence the First Discourse kept cropping up, like some perennial touchstone or threat of the only occasional, in our discussions of the later autobiographies. It figures, in chapter 2, as his manifesto of Herostratan envy; in chapter 3 as the stakes of Diderot's catastrophic rise to neo-paternalism; and, in chapter 4, as a precedent for
the guilt-free automatic writing (to Malesherbes) in which Rousseau could again indulge once he had assumed himself to be dying. Significantly, Rousseau comes closest to making his peace with the *Discours* in the same *Lettres à Malesherbes* where he most fully embraces what feels, for the moment, less like the sterile bipartite causal mechanism that had been known to require vigilant readjustments than like a miraculously dis-inhibiting fusion of occasional and general inspirations.

The more ambivalent *Confessions* would brandish the Academy’s flyer as occasional catalyst and culprit of the *Discours*. So too, even those of the occasional autobiographies that are not liminary take at least some of their cues from an immediate and certifiable textual antecedent. Rousseau writes directly back to the Head Censor, and he later paraphrases the Scriptures with more and different help from Gessner than he admits. At its most elegantly schematic, the prevailing economy of text production can thus fill the available slots of general and occasional causality with the self and the already written. Within our texts, however, there is an unobtrusive move afoot to complicate the occasional by removing it from the exclusive purview of the antecedent text or texts. The “Préface” to *Narcisse* fetishizes *Narcisse* and detextualizes the ideas of the First Discourse by removing them to the heart of the preface. The dedication to Geneva likewise evokes the occasion of meditating on the idea of inequality without letting on that this meditation has resulted in a Second Discourse. The value-charged message would seem to be that Rousseau’s self is not moved by text alone. And when the *Préface de Julie* makes its solo flight into publication, that message may be accompanied by a pertinent question: if not *Julie*, then what or who is behind this text? “[C]e qui vient de se passer” is explicitly acknowledged (along with Malesherbes’s Christmas Day letter) to share in responsibility for Rousseau’s response. Events have crept onto the scene as pretenders to occasional causality. And it is precisely the causal role of events that the *Confessions* will go to such lengths to assert vis-à-vis the *Lettres* (The threat of death alone moved me to write) and to deny in the case of *Le Lévite* (The threat of a prise de corps moved me not at all—except, physically, to flee). The always excessively and obligingly literary *Lévite* is, in fact, used to reaffirm the minimalist pre-text/self dyad: a simultaneously maximal indebtedness is proclaimed to influential textual sources and to an absolutely superhuman self.

For the occasional autobiographies themselves, there is no urgency
about settling these disputed claims to occasional causality. To the precise extent that (except for the *Lettres*) the autobiographies are not primarily referential, they are not preoccupied with referential understanding of the way things work out there in the real world. Nor do they articulate a full-blown theory of text production, although they hint that mounting such a theory would be a tall order. For purposes of staging their microcosmic moments of truth, it suffices to introject enough self into the passage from one text to another to preclude misapprehension of a too seamless texte-à-texte.

To summarize, then, the various ways in which we have seen that aim to be fulfilled in the occasional classroom: through its unexpected incarnations in a wide range of venues, the self reveals its ubiquity and ecumenical spirit; through the reversible incarnations of in *figura* self-portraiture, it reveals its transcendence; and through the qualitative and quantitative excesses for which it is the only conceivable accounting, it asserts its claims to be privileged as a general cause or prime mover. Moreover, in this business of simulating the inner assent of Rousseau's clapping heart, quasiscientific proof comes to the aid of faith. Measurable excess and unexpectedness emerge, gradually or instantaneously, against a backdrop of reinscribed norms, circumstances, and expectations. A prior sense of the occasion becomes crucial to engineering an absolute sense of self.

These lessons have all been thoroughly internalized by the Rousseau of the “Ebauches,” who offers the following accounting for the work in progress:

... j'écris moins l'histoire de ces événemens en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon ame, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés. Or les ames 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. Dans quelque obscurité que j'aye pu vivre, si j'ai pensé plus et mieux que les Rois, l'histoire de mon ame est plus intéressante que celle des leurs.”
(1:1150)

Supposing that the fundamental commitment to demonstrable selfhood still holds, we can further assume that successful demonstration hinges on the ability to deliver more self than normally anticipated or required under the circumstances. From Rousseau's dismissal of “événemens en
eux-mêmes" as the least of his concerns, we can infer that the norm that he has mentally re-created and taken for his point of departure is the genre of memoirs. And to the usual strategies of exorbitant selfhood, that norm poses some paradoxically daunting challenges through its very proximity to the enterprise at hand.

Incarnation in the two first persons of narrator and protagonist is entirely consonant with the memoir tradition and, however insistent, cannot necessarily go to prove that there is more me here than you expected. But beyond that, what is to be feared is that a surfeit of incarnation will multiply, normalize, and fetishize the incarnated self to the point of conflating the visible part with the invisible whole. Rather than suggest that there is more here than meets the eye, the memorialist's text may be reduced to implying that what you see is all there is. And the chances of reversing incarnation by the usual means appear slim once Rousseau has endorsed the memoir tradition's referential claims and strict standards of biographical truthfulness. By those standards, the kind of in figura self-portraitist who ignores his contemporaries to go rummaging around in the costume box of Antiquity stands already disqualified from consideration on grounds of mythomania.

As for sheer textual excess, it will be hard to prove and hardly clinching. Some of the longest memoirs on record are also, thanks to their secretarial scrupulosity, the most impersonal. It would appear that, for the time being, Rousseau will have to content himself with thematizing textual excess through the frequent allusions to his "papers" that end up endowing the archives, if not the archivist, with monumental proportions. The really striking moments of self-induced textual excrescence will come later, when it turns out that the Confessions will not have exhausted the autobiographical materials or impulse to autobiography. The Dialogues and Rêveries have since proven to everyone's satisfaction that there is a lot more of me where that came from.

But, in the meantime, the present situation of the "Ebauches" can also be salvaged emblematically. Part of Rousseau's purpose in evoking and poising himself on this precipice of potentially self-defeating memoirs is to set the stage for yet another refresher course in selfhood. I want to suggest, by glossing this one, that such mini-courses proliferate throughout the infinitely divisible Confessions. We need only look beyond the referential cover story's corollary concern for the quality of self to discover some exquisitely discreet variations on the familiar ped-
agogical theme of staging the axiom. Indeed, what makes the passage I have extracted from the “Ebauches” particularly emblematic is its apparent obsession with identifying qualities on the basis of which the past records of selves can be ranked with respect to their fitness for autobiographical treatment.

If we look closely at the passage, we will note that it revolves around a pair of closely related but not entirely synonymous incarnations. Rousseau starts out (“j’écris”) in what becomes the guise of a writer once he has left it behind for the other guise of thinker (“j’ai pensé”). By way of widening the gap, the writer is clearly reinscribed in the reportorial docility of the memorialist as scribe. He is said to be telling the two stories of Jean-Jacques exactly as they happened. For the moment, of course, he is telling nothing at all—a warning of the exorbitant further splitting of the pronominal je for which the predicate of thinking will supply the implied referent of philosopher. The changing of the guard actually occurs as a direct, yet in no way predetermined or predictable, result of the doctrinaire memorialist’s unspoken presupposition that the special circumstance of whole-life writing calls for referential realism or for the holding up of a mirror to real life—whatever that may be. From the in figura writer’s perspective, the requirement of realism is so binding that the consequences of that realism for his writing—“Les faits ne sont ici que des causes occasionnelles”—must follow automatically, with no mediating causal connection, from the “reality” sketched in the preceding lines of text. In the interim, however, what began as a simple description of work in progress has been diverted through a controversial metaphysics that only passes for reality.

It is certainly significant, in terms of enhancing the illusion of reality, that what follows the “or” of imprecisely oriented digression skips over the possibility of backing up to posit the self. Instead, Rousseau proceeds directly to the politico-textual ramifications of selfhood’s quasi-religious universal accessibility. But this telling of selfhood as a fait accompli is doubled and, indeed, overshadowed by a showing. One of the helpful suggestions of the Malebranchean subtext is, in fact, that there can be no depositing the “ame” in a textual body without precautionarily testing its capacity for an afterlife of release from bondage.

And so, before our eyes, that soul takes flight. The tell-tale markers of the thinker in the text and the quotation from Malebranche point to excrecent new heights of philosophy from which some je above and
beyond the indentured slave of past reality and realistic writing practices must be responsible. The narrator who intends (and pretends) to subscribe and even the protagonist who, for purposes of demonstration, has been limited to thinking "better and more" are left in the dust of incarnation by a transcendentally disincarnate philosopher. Even as the first "I" writes, the philosopher thinks daringly, systematically, and all but inconceivably to reorder God's universe.

And in this he is only following the lead of the occasional autobiographers. The trajectory of upward displacement to the "thinking big" of philosophy had already been traced—to an extraordinary degree, given their limited maneuverability—by the prefachers of Narcisse and Julie. The latter-day metaphysician has something else in common with them, with the correspondent who erected a makeshift confessional in the midst of a professional correspondence, and with the paraphraser who moved Genesis into the midst of Judges. Like all the occasional autobiographers, Rousseau remains committed to the project (or implied necessity) of reconfiguring and personalizing whatever "ici" the self is obliged to call home for the moment. Only now, that place happens to be a simulacrum of reality or single-story house of external events to which, for purposes of accommodating his self, Rousseau thinks to add a second story. From somewhere above and beyond the lèse majesté of the encoded philosopher's taunting comparisons with "les Rois," the text retransmits the first lesson of Rousseau's occasional pedagogy: the subject is also a self.

What the "Ebauches" do not provide, however, is a satisfactory answer to our question of the two occasionals. Their theory of autobiography wants to be a metaphysics to which writing would be tacked on for good measure and without changing anything. We are left with that applied metaphysics, on the one hand, and, on the other, with the vaguely suggestive theory of text production that can be abstracted from the occasional corpus. Between the two systems, there is agreement about the end product of an autobiographical text and about the notion of self as general cause. It may well have been his prior experience that prompted Rousseau to formalize his declaration of selfhood along with his formal declaration of autobiographical intent. But whereas the rule of thumb of occasional practice inevitably gave priority in filling the place of occasional causality to prior texts, the Confessions will have unhesitantly reassigned that priority to "facts" and "events."
We have already noted how, in the general spirit of logocentrism's low regard for writing, the occasional texts made some momentary passes at supplementing their textual with existential antecedents. In this, they anticipate the *Confessions*’ more emphatic desiring for transparent referentiality. But we have also seen to what degree the eventual shape and substance of the occasional autobiographies remain text-dependent. The hypotheticals are mind-boggling. What if Rousseau had had a play by some other name than *Narcisse* not to preface? What if he and Diderot had not corresponded about *Julie* and traded barbs in *Le Fils naturel* and the *Lettre à d’Alembert*? What if Malesherbes had seconded the diagnosis of the *philosophes* or failed to hazard any diagnosis whatsoever? What if Rousseau had read only Gessner’s *Idylles* and not his *Death of Abel*?

There is no escaping the answer: other texts of self-inscription could have been penned in response to other solicitations of the self, but not the selfsame autobiographies of Rousseau’s occasional corpus. The most haunting legacy of that corpus in the *Confessions* may, in fact, be a united front of resistance to letting the would-be autobiographer-as-applied-metaphysician close his mind or his text to the nagging question of text production. To the discarded draft’s wishfully simple understanding of things and words, the occasional autobiographies oppose not only their own example of unmistakable text-dependency, but the further thoughts that occur by extension. For significant stretches of Volume 2 of the *Confessions*, memories of one or the other of the occasional autobiographies may be standing between Rousseau and Jean-Jacques. And, for those same stretches, the muffled cries by which the autobiographies urge Rousseau on to allegory and meta-autobiography may be the “only occasional” stimuli standing between the *Confessions* that are and the Memoirs that might have been. Even if Rousseau does not recognize these thoughts for what they are, a censored version of them eventually breaks into the consciousness of the *Confessions*. Leaving behind the existential “obscurité” in which the draft’s Jean-Jacques “may have lived,” let us then venture into the theoretical darkness or “effrayante obscurité” (1:598) of the exordium to Book 12: “Ici commence l’oeuvre de tenebres dans lequel depuis huit ans je me trouve enseveli, sans que de quelque façon que je m’y sois pu prendre il m’ait été possible d’en percer l’effrayante obscurité.”

The “reference” is, of course, to the ongoing “complot,” as would
quickly become evident even if the *Confessions* were opened at random to this page. Rousseau imagines himself to be buried in an impenetrable crypt of darkness, tortured by blows of unknown origin, and accused of crying out (from his broken heart) for no good reason. He goes on for more than a page to create the atmosphere of unremitting existential and epistemological terror that we have since learned to call Kafkaesque. But a dire new twist would seem to have provoked this particularly extended and evocative update. In the interval since Rousseau’s last bulletin, his enemies have gone public with their version of his life and character and somehow managed to be met with unquestioning acceptance: “les auteurs de ma ruine ont trouvé l’art inconcevable de rendre le public complice de leur complot sans qu’il s’en doute lui-même et sans qu’il en apperçoive l’effet.” The three vertices of “œuvre,” “auteurs,” and “public” alert us to the fact that the brunt of this latest assault will necessarily fall on the *Confessions* themselves. Either as intended victims or as innocent bystanders, they have been preempted, perhaps irrevocably. No wonder that Rousseau hesitates to resume his real story: it may be too late; it may be no use.

But on these same grounds of metaphorical exchangeability between his book and their plot, we can also appreciate that a reversal of paranoid projection would catch the *Confessions* trying and failing to make sense not of the “complot” but of themselves. “Here beginneth the work of gloom . . .” It is, after all, the tell-tale “ici” of self-portraiture’s preoccupation with the textual here and now that launches the discourse and lingers on, even after a belated anchoring in time (“depuis huit ans”) has partially rescued the text for referential narration. Recognizing where we are in the *Confessions* remains at least as important as situating ourselves on the timeline of a past life, which has, in any event, become indissociable from the present of narration. And where we are is at the precise point where, having brought Book 11 to the ceremonial endpoint of sacrificing *Le Levite*, the *Confessions* suddenly find themselves to be at loose ends. Having depleted their stock of occasional interlocutors, they are left to fend for themselves. Old dependencies do not die easily; addicts whose support systems have been cut off invariably panic.

Indeed, it is with enormous trepidation that the autobiographer faces up to a prospect he can name only as that of being reduced to countering his enemies’ best-selling masterplot with the isolated and imperfectly understood facts of their plotting. But there is another way of naming the
profoundly disarming prospect of having nothing to tell, nothing on his 
side but "tout ce qui m'est arrivé." It is precisely now that his auto­ 
biographical sources have dried up that he will, for the first time since 
Book 7, have to go it alone, with nothing but the recalcitrant "faits" of 
Jean-Jacques's biography or "evenemens qui me regardent." Looking 
those events straight in the eye rather than through the magic prism of 
regenerative prior writing strikes Rousseau with a panic fear of the un­ 
known. It is, literally speaking, not even he who does the looking, but 
they, all of them, that stare him down, from somewhere outside himself, 
into a state of helpless victimization. In this place of sudden deprivation, 
the Confessions come closest to acknowledging the decisive role of oc­ 
casional mediation in some of their encounters with Jean-Jacques. And 
they further hint at the bad faith and undesirability of identifying "facts" 
and "events" as the only only occasional causes of Rousseau's new brand 
of life writing.

It would be tempting to conclude that, despite himself, the Rousseau 
of the Confessions ends up seeing the light of the occasional autobiogra­ 
phies' theory of text production. But that would be to shut out the deeper, 
more unspeakable darkness of this text's challenge even to the dream 
of demonstrable selfhood that the theory of text production shares with 
the autobiography-as-applied-metaphysics of the "Ebauches." For the 
benefit of any "generous" readers who might still think to give the 
Confessions a chance, the disadvantaged Rousseau of nothing but facts 
provides whatever hints he can to help offset his enemies' head start and 
monopoly on plotting. Rereading of the earlier Confessions is recom­ 
mended, insofar as all the data necessary for recreating the "complot" as 
coherent system, all the interlocking parts of the philosophical war ma­ 
chine, are said to have been exposed "dans les trois precedens livres."
The fact that these are also the books of the Confessions' intermittent 
texte-à-texte with occasional autobiographies reinforces the suggestion 
that what the reader is really being invited to devise in the author's stead 
is a theory of autobiography as text production or systematic way of 
accounting for the way those books came to be.

For some sort of tacit promotion of occasional text to occasional 
cause, we might, on this basis, have been prepared. But it is otherwise 
disconcerting to see our champion of selfhood go on to name whatever it 
is—plot elements or elements of autobiography—that lurks in the laten­ 
cy of Books 8–11 as "[c]auses primitives" (emphasis added). Of course,
the cover story takes "primitives" to refer simply to the earliest in date of the plotters' machinations. In terms of our alternative reading, however, the epithet resonates with intuitions of a specifically textual unconscious and with doubts concerning the metaphysical hegemony of the self as first or general cause.

The complexities of an "other" plot protect Rousseau against knowing this irony of the occasional texts' belated challenges to preeminent selfhood and to the enabling simplicity of Malebranche's bipartite scheme. But the plot does not prevent a confession of pedagogical impotence or momentary inability to mount one of Rousseau's patented demonstrations of selfhood. Inner assent is not lacking; what is lacking is a plan for bringing readers all the way through a newly complex and chaotic welter of causes to the source of sources behind it all: "qu'ils remon­tent d'intrigue en intrigue et d'agent en agent jusqu'aux prémiers moteurs de tout, je sais certainement à quel terme aboutiront leurs recherches, mais je me perds dans la route obscure et tortueuse des souter­rains qui les y conduiront" (1:588–89). Nor can the plot explain away the even more overwhelming loss of self that is not simply told but shown and played out by the page of text that appropriates his autoreferentiality to tell its story and symptomatically encodes the "com­plot" (and all the world) as text.

It is a measure of the text's despairing that it emphatically blocks the familiar pathways of escape from incarnation into the demonstrable transcendence of philosophy. The supreme torture or cosmic retribution conceived with an eye to Rousseau's former exploitation of those pathways is the perceived reduction of the erstwhile meta-autobiographer to the status of mere fact-obsessed memorialist. What the text proclaims loud and clear is that there is something that can be known about Rousseau's life story that Rousseau himself cannot know. The business of separating out and putting back together the various roles of text, event, and self in the production of an autobiography turns out to be more of a mystery than he bargained for. And it is precisely on that mystery or "core of darkness at the center"* that I have shed some light by extend­ing my reading of Rousseau's occasional autobiographies into his Confessions. This is of necessity and by design a different book than the systematic "history and theory of my Confessions" that Rousseau's "gen­erous readers" would have written. Beyond a certain point, my readings give up on diagramming the profuse vitality and overdetermined inter-
connectedness of his autobiographical corpus. But they also give the last word to the surprise of self that Rousseau manages to engineer from the depths of a darkness that puts the whole of Books 8–11 into the new perspective of transcendable contingency. The failed philosopher-in-the-text emblematizes an escape from the lure and prestige of philosophy into pantheistic suffusion of a literary creation too vast and varied to know except firsthand. Perhaps that is why, when it came time to name what Rousseau had wrought, the three terms of *autos*, *bios*, and *graphe* were simply laid out end to end.