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WHY DOES LIFE WRITING TALK ABOUT SCIENCE?

FOUCAULT, ROUSSEAU, AND THE EARLY *JOURNAL INTIME*

SAM FERGUSON

Among all the discourses that practitioners of life writing adopt—from fiction, poetry, journalism, politics, and historiography, to mention just a few—the use of discourses from the natural sciences poses a particular problem for the reader. It is easy to appreciate the direct application to life writing of psychology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, or other fields that possess their own conception of the self and its place in the world, but when an author employs terms from biology or meteorology or optics, we are necessarily faced with a more metaphorical use of language. Should this writing strategy be considered a superficial matter of presentation, perhaps as an attempt to garner some of the prestige of the natural sciences for genres of writing that have often been treated with suspicion? Or do these discourses have the potential to provide their own insights and methodological tools for the writer of, for example, autobiography or the diary? And does the particular choice of a scientific discipline merely reflect changing fashions (just as genetics and cognitive science have most recently attained a wide public awareness), or do these different discourses have their own distinct implications for the nature of the self? In an attempt to answer these questions, I shall focus on the use of scientific models over the period when autobiography emerged as a literary genre in France with the publication of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* in 1782, and when the particular diary form of the *journal intime* gradually came into being.¹ I shall argue that an affinity between life writing and scientific discourses has persisted because the emergence of literary life writing was originally connected to a deep, “archaeological” shift (to borrow Michel Foucault's term) in the foundations of human knowledge. Furthermore, the two genres of autobiography and the *journal intime* can be seen to occupy a privileged position among the many forms of life writing, in that they represent two diametrically opposed approaches to an epistemology of the self.

My analysis will be based on readings of autobiographical texts by Rousseau and others who subsequently wrote in this same tradition, followed by an inquiry into the disparate influences that Pierre Maine de Biran reconciles in the *journal intime* he wrote between 1811 and 1824. However, I will first outline two different perspectives on the historical transformations of the late eighteenth century that contributed to a rapid growth in forms of life writing at this time. The first is Foucault's contention, set out in the 1966 work *The Order of Things*, that history is punctuated by certain shifts in a society's *episteme*, or the fundamental epistemological system that makes knowledge (and specific disciplines and discourses of knowledge) possible at any particular time. Foucault identifies "two great discontinuities in the *episteme* of Western culture: the first inaugurates the Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the modern age" (xxiv). It is the second epistemological shift that is of immediate interest for the question of the relation between life writing and scientific discourses. According to Foucault, whereas the *episteme* of the Classical age was dominated by a theory of representation and by systems of atemporal classifications, in our modernity "a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things, isolates and defines them in their own coherence, imposes upon them the forms of order implied by the continuity of time" (xxv). This modernity is also marked by the emergence of man, or the person, at the center of the field of knowledge, and the concomitant rise of "all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical" (xxv).

The emergent forms of life writing at this time can easily be considered as examples of this "half-empirical, half-philosophical" reflection, but it is also important to remember that this inquiry is concerned with *literary* life writing: however difficult it might be to define the term "literature," it is the fact of belonging to this distinct cultural field that makes life writing's use of scientific discourses both unexpected and problematic. Yet to make matters more complex, the very concept of literature seems to be implicated in the same historical transformation. Ann Jefferson examines this problem in depth in her 2007 work, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (the second of the two historical perspectives mentioned above), which takes as its starting point "the simple historical fact that in French, as in all other major European languages, the terms 'literature' and 'biography' share a common birthdate in the eighteenth century" (1). Jefferson traces the tangled history of these two historically relative concepts, in which "literature" appears principally as a form of self-questioning about its own nature, which has been

revived repeatedly through contact with the diverse forms of biography (the term “biography” is used here in a broad sense that can largely be equated with “life writing”). She attributes particular importance to Rousseau’s *Confessions* as the first manifestation of literature in the modern sense of the word, and in this respect she echoes the much earlier conviction of Maurice Blanchot, who wrote in 1958 that Rousseau “helps literature to become aware of itself by disengaging itself from old conventions and forming, through argumentation and contradiction, a new rectitude” (41).

Clearly, various critical perspectives, besides Foucault’s, have been used to examine the radical social, cultural, and historical changes that took place over this same period. For example, Alain Girard’s work of 1963, *Le Journal intime*, focuses on the changing notion of the “person,” building on the sociological work of Marcel Mauss.² However, Foucault’s concept of the *episteme* is particularly useful for addressing the question at hand, not only because it directly concerns the epistemological basis that connects life writing and the natural sciences, but also because it provides a framework for distinguishing between the “archaeological” conditions for knowledge and the more proximate causes for the forms and discourses employed in an individual text (such as changing intellectual fashions or the individual experiences of the author). I shall therefore proceed by exploring the epistemological foundations of autobiographies, then of *journaux intimes*, and in both cases I shall provide some brief examples from the later history of these forms to demonstrate the continuities that exist on the “archaeological” level, despite the considerable variation in these forms over time. These two forms can be seen to espouse two diametrically opposed and yet complementary conceptions of a project for scientific knowledge of the self (however much their realization might diverge from the ideal). These two attitudes contribute to an essential ambivalence in life writing in general, and to the great capacity of life writing for re-inventing its various genres and practices.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

To understand the epistemological underpinning of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, we must first appreciate its specificity as the founding work of the modern autobiographical tradition in France. To this end, it will be useful to refer to the working definition of autobiography that Philippe Lejeune establishes in his 1971 work *L’Autobiographie en France*: “Let us call autobiography the retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (10, translation mine). Several aspects of this definition distinguish autobiography from the forms that preceded it (and continued to be

produced). In memoirs, an author takes on the role of a witness or actor in public affairs, whereas the focus of autobiography is on the inner life and personality of the author (this is consistent with the new focus on the person as an object of knowledge in itself). Autobiography is not a written self-portrait since it depicts the self in its gradual formation over time (which again reflects the new understanding that an object of knowledge is defined by its historicity). Finally, the act of producing a narrative account of one's own existence is not merely a process of responding to an established questionnaire or applying a code that would be equally relevant to any given individual, but rather it is necessary for every individual to invent the form and writing project that is appropriate to their own experience. With astonishing frequency, authors of autobiographies set out the specific aims and methods of their project and their commitment to relate to the reader their own specific conception of the truth, in passages that Lejeune terms "autobiographical pacts."³ My inquiry will therefore be concerned principally with the terms of these autobiographical pacts without pursuing the question of whether their aims are in fact achieved in the project's execution.

The opening words of the definitive text of the *Confessions* are well known, above all for their ambition, or even arrogance: "I am forming an undertaking which has no precedent, and the execution of which will have no imitator whatsoever. I wish to show my fellows a man in all the truth of nature; and this man will be myself" (5).⁴ The aim to depict an (implicitly representative) man in "all the truth of nature" is certainly in keeping with the epistemological shift described above, but the nature of Rousseau's project is explained more clearly and in more explicitly scientific terms in an autobiographical pact that appears in the earlier "Neuchâtel manuscript" but was not included in the first published editions:

I have often remarked that, even among those who pride themselves the most for knowing men, each hardly knows anyone but himself, if it is even true that anyone knows himself; for how can a being be defined by means of the relationships that are inside itself alone, without being compared with anything? Nevertheless, this imperfect knowledge that one has of oneself is the only means one uses for knowing others. . . .

Based on these considerations, I have resolved to cause my readers to make an additional step in the knowledge of men by pulling them away, if possible, from that unique and faulty rule of always judging someone else's heart by means of their own; whereas, on the contrary, even to know one's own it would often be necessary to begin by reading in someone else's. In order for one to learn to evaluate oneself, I want to attempt to provide at least one item for comparison, so that each can know himself and one other, and this other will be myself. (585)

It is worth following the logic of this passage in detail. First, Rousseau begins from the premise that there exists a true self, which is “the hidden and often very complicated internal cause” of the external appearances of human behavior (586, translation modified). It is difficult to understand the sum of internal relationships that make up one’s own self, but even if one were to succeed in comprehending this system, it would be a mistake to assume that the same system governs and explains the self of other individuals. Rousseau’s project therefore aims to provide a second specimen for our understanding, which will allow us to extrapolate a broader system, a knowledge of the functioning of the self in general, which could in turn be used to understand the individual case. Rousseau continues by saying that an individual self can only be understood in its totality, by following “what chain of secret affections have made it the way it is” (586). He finds that Montaigne—who might otherwise be viewed as a possible model for Rousseau’s project—was “falsely sincere” since he portrayed himself incompletely, “in a good likeness but in profile” (586, translation mine). In contrast to this partial and therefore false sincerity, he insists, “if I keep silent about something one will not know me at all, so much does everything depend on everything else, so much is everything one in my character, and so much does this bizarre and peculiar assemblage need all the circumstances of my life to be well unveiled” (589, translation modified). It goes without saying that Rousseau’s *Confessions* constitutes a secular examination of conscience (in contrast to the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine, to which Rousseau’s title alludes), and that his effort to create a portrait of his soul is not for the benefit of God or of his confessor, but for the delayed judgment of posterity.⁵

We can characterize this attitude as a gesture of totalization, which is always present in an autobiographical project to a certain degree, even if it is evoked only as a utopian ideal. I shall provide two examples of later autobiographers who adopt this totalizing gesture, and who do so in an explicitly scientific language. As mentioned earlier, the connection with these later texts exists primarily on the “archaeological” level, while the more immediate causes for their use of a scientific discourse may be very different. The first example is taken from Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne (1734–1806), who worked as a printer until, from 1767, he began to publish prolifically in numerous genres, including the novel (particularly erotic fiction and observations of social mores), theater, and essays on social reform and pedagogy. He began the composition of his major autobiographical work, *Monsieur Nicolas ou le cœur-humain dévoilé* (Monsieur Nicolas, or, The Human Heart Laid Bare), in 1783 (the first part of Rousseau’s *Confessions* was published in 1782) and it was first put on sale between 1794 and 1797. *Monsieur Nicolas* clearly

owes a large debt to Rousseau's *Confessions*, but it is also far more novelistic both in its style and its liberty with factual details, especially in its extensive accounts of Restif's sexual exploits. Nonetheless, the autobiographical pact of this work makes a virtue of being more scientific in its approach than Rousseau had been:

For my own project, precision and sincerity are absolutely essential, since I must dissect the human heart according to my own consciousness, and plumb the depths of the *self*. I am not undertaking my own *Confessions*; I am *revealing* the *Mechanics of the Human Heart*. Let Nicolas-Edme disappear from view, so that Man alone will remain! . . .

Dear reader . . . I ask only that you should not judge me at every instant, but only after reading everything in its entirety. I am presenting you with a Book of natural history, which places me above Buffon. (4–8, translation mine)

We can see clearly some of the same principles that were found in Rousseau's *Confessions*: the individual case is examined with a view to a broader understanding of humanity, and a given self must be understood in its totality. However, instead of Rousseau, Restif de la Bretonne identifies himself with George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, a writer and researcher of broad scientific interests, translator of Stephen Hales and Isaac Newton, and who published his own *Histoire Naturelle* between 1749 and 1789, a vast and, indeed, totalizing project to gather knowledge spanning all fields of the natural sciences.

A second example, much closer to our own age, is the writer and philosopher Julien Benda, best known for his essay of 1927 *Trahison des clercs* (Betrayal of the Intellectuals), in which he argues for a role of *clerc* (intellectual) as an upholder of universal values such as justice, truth, and above all, reason. His autobiography, *La Jeunesse d'un clerc* (Childhood of an Intellectual), claims to relate how Benda became an intellectual of this sort and presents his autobiographical project as follows:

I believe that, in a certain human family that runs throughout all of history and has played some role within it—let us call this family, schematically, the proponents of an absolute idealism—I am just about a perfect case. I have been impelled to write this book by the desire to offer the psychologist a slightly exaggerated description of this specimen. It is an exercise in erudition. I would like to deposit in the annals of the science of Man a thorough account of a certain human type. I am bequeathing my skull to the museum, with notes on its structure. (7, translation mine)

It is not surprising in itself that Benda, who views scientific rationality and rigor as ideals for all intellectual work, would describe his project in scientific terms, but it is more striking that the basic epistemological model remains largely unchanged from Rousseau and Restif. We can see the same logic here

by which a full account of the individual, which the autobiographer supposedly provides, will contribute to a more universal understanding of the self or of humanity in general. The words *un peu poussée* (slightly exaggerated) suggest a degree of irony toward these scientific aims, which might seem all the more naïve since the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis (which casts doubt on the knowability of the unconscious), but Benda nonetheless insists on his hope “to be read by certain men of science, even if they have no affection for me” (7). The point is not just that discourses from the natural sciences continued to be used in autobiographical texts—there are of course many examples that do not use these discourses⁶—but that there remains a connection on an “archaeological” level with the epistemology of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, and which is distinct (as we shall see) from that of the *journal intime*.

THE JOURNAL INTIME

The *journal intime* undoubtedly owes its emergence to some of the same factors that gave rise to the earliest works of autobiography, including the shift toward the modern *episteme*, yet its use of scientific models is very different. Whereas autobiography is associated with an attempt to know the self in its entirety, in its gradual constitution over time, the *journal intime* is characterized instead by a process of observing the self in its endless variation and instability, a process that renounces any totalizing synthesis. However, in seeking to compare autobiography and the *journal intime* from this era, we are faced with the problem that the origins of the latter are considerably more obscure.⁷ By its very nature, the *journal intime* was generally written and kept in private, and it was only in the nineteenth century that a practice gradually became established of publishing an author’s *journaux intimes* after their death. My own approach to this problem is to examine one of the earliest examples of a full-fledged *journal intime* that reflects at length on its own literary heritage: the diary of the philosopher and mathematician Pierre Maine de Biran, written briefly in 1794 and 1795, then far more consistently between 1811 and 1825, and first published in 1857.⁸ This text is particularly useful for the matter at hand, since Maine de Biran comments on two very different influences, each of them conceived in scientific terms, which he manages to reconcile within his writing project: on the one hand, the plans that Rousseau adumbrated—but never executed in his lifetime—for a process of writing the self that would be far more fragmentary than his autobiographical texts; and on the other hand, the incredibly complex system set out by Marc-Antoine Jullien for maintaining an *emploi du temps* (agenda), a system that aims to bring forth and control a new, more efficient citizen for the new Republic in the wake of the French Revolution.

Maine de Biran refers repeatedly in his *journal intime* to a project conceived but then abandoned by Rousseau, which he had described in his *Confessions*, and to which he gave the title “*Sensitive Morality, or The Wise Man’s Materialism*” (344, translation modified). According to Maine de Biran, “it concerns the variations that men experience in the course of their existence and which often make them so dissimilar to themselves that they seem to be transformed into different men” (qtd. in Girard 60, translation mine). Not only is the self endlessly variable, but it is also considered to be a part of the physical world, and so Rousseau undertook to study the relationship between the state of his soul and its material circumstances. He describes the principle as follows in the *Confessions*:

Climates, seasons, sounds, colors, darkness, light, the elements, food, noise, silence, motion, rest, all act on our machine and consequently on our soul; all offer us a thousand almost guaranteed holds for governing in their origin the feelings by which we let ourselves be dominated. (343)

This observation allows us to glimpse a possible writing project consisting of a regular notation of the self, modeled above all on the science of meteorology (since the self, or soul, is imagined as being essentially vaporous or cloudy),⁹ with the intention of producing a greater mastery of ourselves. But for a more practical description of a daily writing practice, we should look to *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, which Rousseau presented as an appendix to his *Confessions*. In the first “reverie,” Rousseau finds himself “alone on earth” (3), entirely cut off from society and the outside world, and in this unusual degree of isolation he proposes to examine his own self by the following means:

These pages will, properly speaking, be only a shapeless diary of my reveries. There will be much concerning me in them, because a solitary person who reflects is necessarily greatly preoccupied with himself. Moreover, all the foreign ideas which pass through my head while I am walking will also find their place in them. I will say what I have thought just as it came to me and with as little connection as the ideas of the day before ordinarily have with those of the following day. But a new understanding of my natural temperament and disposition will come from that all the same by means of a new understanding of the feelings and thoughts which constitute the daily fodder of my mind in the strange state I am in. . . .

I will perform on myself, to a certain extent, the measurements natural scientists perform on the air in order to know its daily condition. I will apply the barometer to my soul, and these measurements, carefully executed and repeated over a long period of time, may furnish me results as certain as theirs. But I do not extend my enterprise that far. I will be content to keep a record of the measurements without seeking to reduce them to a system. (7–8)

In fact, rather than a process of examination, it would be more accurate to say that Rousseau aims for a transcription of his own thoughts, without selection or interpretation. In practice, this transcription of the self is not possible in any absolute sense, and, what is more, there is a serious contradiction between the act of renouncing interpretation and the hope that a new knowledge of the self will emerge from these daily records. It is not surprising that the *Reveries*, in their realization, do not in fact resemble a *journal intime*, but as a certain ideal of fragmentary, objective writing about the self it nonetheless persists as an influence on Maine de Biran's *journal intime*.

The interests of Marc-Antoine Jullien (1775–1848), the second major influence on Maine de Biran's writing project, are very different from Rousseau's enthusiasm for introspection and demonstrate yet another aspect of the far-reaching epistemological shift taking place over these decades.¹⁰ At a young age, between 1793 and 1794, Jullien played an important role in the Revolutionary government, was then arrested after the death of Robespierre, and later accompanied Napoleon's campaigns in Italy (1796) and Egypt (1798–1801). Despite this recovery in Jullien's fortunes and his marginal role in subsequent historical developments, Lejeune's assessment of him is as a man of the Revolution who failed in his political ambitions and dedicated himself instead to the pedagogical problem of educating and controlling a new breed of citizen for a modern, democratic, rapidly industrializing country ("Marc-Antoine Jullien" 104–05). The result of this work was published in 1808 as *Essai sur la méthode qui a pour objet l'emploi du temps, meilleur moyen d'être heureux* (Essay on a Method Aiming at Improving the Use of Time, The Best Way to Be Happy), and from 1813 one could purchase booklets to be filled in while applying Jullien's system to one's own life. While the system undoubtedly borrows a great deal from scientific practices of observation and analysis, Jullien also makes a concerted effort to take on the prestige of the most important fields of scientific and technological endeavor at this time. For example, he claims that an individual who applies his system will have at his disposal a "moral thermometer," a "moral watch," a "moral compass," a "moral spring," and a "moral panorama" (qtd. in Lejeune, "Marc-Antoine Jullien" 120–21). The thermometer recalls Rousseau's allusions to meteorology (and this is a recurrent theme in subsequent *journaux intimes*), but the watch and the compass should bring to mind that the thriving maritime trade and exploration of the colonial powers had been given an even greater impetus by the invention of the marine chronometer by John Harrison in 1773. This invention was itself made possible by the rapid developments in mechanical science, to which the "moral spring" alludes. The panorama refers to a quasi-photographic process of painting that aims to create a precise

and comprehensive 360-degree reproduction of a landscape (the word “panorama” is first attested in French in 1799, which was the year in which Pierre Prévost displayed the first panoramas seen in France).

The system can be summarized as follows: one must maintain three forms of diary at the same time. The *Mémorial analytique, ou Journal des faits et observations* (Analytical Memorial, or Journal of Facts and Observations) is the closest to a *journal intime*, allowing a reflection on any subject, accompanied by a system for indexing these entries. The second diary, an *Agenda général, ou Livret pratique d'emploi du temps* (General Diary, or Practical Record of the Use of Time), comprises a detailed account of the occupations and events of each day, and five columns in which to keep a register of information such as finances, correspondence, and reading. The third diary, the *Biomètre, ou Mémorial horaire* (Biometer, or Hourly Memorial), provides a concise summary of a fortnight at a time, with its own system of notation and evaluation. The fact that the templates for this diary-writing system were put on sale proves that there was at least some public appetite for putting Jullien's system into practice, but we might also doubt, as does Lejeune (“Marc-Antoine Jullien” 113), whether it was even possible to maintain such a demanding system for more than a few days.

The differences between Rousseau's and Jullien's approach are considerable, both in their aims and their methods. Unlike Rousseau's imagined diary-writing project, Jullien's does not aim to expand our knowledge of the self; rather, it is intended as a practical tool for becoming more efficient, productive, and therefore happy, through practices of observation that are explicitly modeled on the natural sciences. Whereas Rousseau's project described in the *Reveries* renounces any synthesis of its observations, Jullien's method involves a meticulous process of notation followed by a secondary process of summary and evaluation, in order to improve one's way of life. Given these differences, it is unsurprising that Maine de Biran does not follow any one of these approaches to the letter. His *journal intime* does not perfectly resemble Rousseau's project for the “*Sensitive Morality, or The Wise Man's Materialism*” (with a focus on the relations between the state of the soul and its material circumstances) nor the transcription of thoughts described in the *Reveries*, and Maine de Biran only briefly and half-heartedly adopts Jullien's system in practice (Lejeune, “Marc-Antoine Jullien” 112). Nonetheless, and in spite of their differences, these two divergent influences from Rousseau and Jullien are repeatedly invoked in Maine de Biran's *journal intime*, and each of them contributes to producing a form of writing that is imagined to be both scientific and introspective, aiming both to gain a greater knowledge of the self and to improve the writer's life.

From this brief foray into the early history of the *journal intime*, matters now appear to be more complicated than I initially suggested. While the *journal intime* involves a fundamentally different epistemological approach from the totalizing gesture of autobiography, the *journal intime* is also divided between two approaches that seem to be incompatible: those represented by Rousseau and Jullien respectively. In practice, these two approaches to the *journal intime* are never realized in their pure form, and their combination in real *journaux intimes* (such as in Maine de Biran's) is more a matter of productive compromise than a logical impasse. It would be possible to trace the relations between these two elements through the later history of the *journal intime*, but for the sake of brevity I shall merely draw attention to a work of fiction that capitalizes on precisely these contradictions between the two ideals: the short novel *Paludes*, published in 1895 by André Gide, who was himself one of the foremost practitioners of the *journal intime*.¹¹

I have argued in "André Gide's *Paludes*: A Diary Novel?" that the first-person narrative in this work functions as a highly stylized parody of the *journal intime*, which contributes to its labyrinthine textual games. Like several other fictional uses of the *journal intime* by Gide and others, this narrative functions more like Rousseau's concept of an uninterpreted transcription of thought (compared with "real," nonfictional *journaux intimes*) and sometimes even approaches the related narrative form of interior monologue.¹² As such, it allows a large degree of narrative irony owing to the narrator/diarist's failure to interpret what he has written and so to perceive that which is obvious to the reader (this is instrumental in much of the novel's comic effect). But one of the strange features of this work is that the protagonist's *journal intime* co-exists awkwardly with another form of diary-writing, a convoluted "agenda" that appears very much like a parody of Jullien's system. In his agenda, the narrator writes a week in advance what he intends to do on a given day, so that he has time to forget what he has written (Gide, *Paludes* 266). When the day arrives, he writes in a second column what he has actually done in reality, then he subtracts the second column from the first column to calculate "the deficit" or "what [he] should have done." He also occasionally falsifies the record in order to reduce his apparent "deficit" (296). What this text demonstrates in a satirical vein is that these two forms of daily writing, here practiced in parallel rather than combined in a single notebook, converge toward a single effect that reflects the experience of many real *journaux intimes* (most notably that of Henri-Frédéric Amiel): the diarist, intending to accomplish some form of action in writing or some improvement in his life, instead finds himself paralyzed in his ineffective habits by the writing practices themselves, which at best make his failures discernible and measurable.

CONCLUSION

Having approached the subject of scientific discourses in autobiography and the *journal intime* in broad terms, my conclusions will necessarily be somewhat schematic. First, we can easily observe that a long-standing affinity exists between life writing and the natural sciences, beyond the era of Rousseau and the early *journal intime*, and long after authors had ceased to describe their writing in terms of thermometers, barometers, or biometers. The continuing strength of this connection is demonstrated by much more recent, internationally best-selling works such as Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* in 1975, or Oliver Sacks's accounts of patients suffering from a wide range of neurological disorders (including his 1984 autobiographical work *A Leg to Stand On*). These works go far beyond a superficial use of currently popular scientific terms or even a purely metaphorical use of scientific concepts, and in both cases the author's professional experience (as a chemist and neurologist respectively) profoundly informs their presentation of the self and its relation to the body and material world. Yet I would argue that, beyond their immediate role in any given work, these varied uses of scientific discourses are also rooted in life writing's close relation to a single, fundamental *episteme* that came into being toward the end of the eighteenth century and is still recognizable in contemporary society and culture.

Life writing's rapid development alongside the emergence of this modern *episteme*, and its continuing association with it, is far more than a matter of historical curiosity; rather, it provides insight into the epistemological basis of not only the genres of autobiography and the *journal intime* but all life writing. As my brief readings have shown, this epistemological basis is not a unitary position but offers a vast field of possibilities situated between two diametrically opposed models: on the one hand, the totalizing impulse associated with autobiography, motivated by the desire to create a final meaning for a whole life; on the other hand, the gesture of renunciation that is central to the *journal intime*, the desire to leave fragmentary traces of life in all its contingency and variability, without reducing these traces to a single system. These two models are ideals that are probably unattainable in any pure sense. In practice, every autobiography finds itself having to compromise on its overly ambitious aims, and even Rousseau acknowledges at the end of the fourth book of the *Confessions* that "it is up to [the reader] to assemble these elements and to define the being made up of them; the result ought to be his work" (147). As for the *journal intime*, the very act of undertaking a writing project of this sort presupposes a secondary moment of interpretation by a reader, whether imagined (a textual addressee) or real (upon the text's actual publication), and no real *journal intime* perfectly resembles the project of unreflexive

self-notation that Rousseau describes in the *Reveries*. Furthermore, works of life writing inevitably borrow elements from both these models at the same time. For example, an autobiography such as Michel Leiris's 1939 work *L'Âge d'homme* (Manhood) may foreground the contingent, unforeseeable experience of writing the autobiography itself, while a *journal intime* such as André Gide's *Journal 1889–1939* may be published with the totalizing aim of representing the author's whole life. Evidently, these two epistemological models are not limiting or prescriptive in nature but rather contribute to the proliferation of forms of life writing and their great capacity for renewal.

One final, even broader reflection concerns the relationship between life writing and literature in general. The opposition between the two models I have described invites a parallel with certain conceptual oppositions that have been used to interrogate the nature of literature, its limits, and its ideals. For example, Stéphane Mallarmé structured his pursuit of a literary ideal around an opposition between the "architectural and premeditated" Book (as an impossible, totalizing goal) and the fragmentary Album, whereas Roland Barthes used the terms "readerly" and "writerly" ("lisible"/"scriptible") to distinguish between texts in which a single, determinate meaning is fixed and those in which the reader is free to interpret and "rewrite" the text (the latter is typically the case of a *journal intime*, although this also resembles Rousseau's claim, cited above, from Book Four of the *Confessions*).¹³ One might object that these literary debates concern other objects, such as the desire for a perfectly self-sufficient aesthetic unity (the Mallarméan Book), or the political implications of a text's openness to multiple meanings (the Barthesian writerly text). I shall not engage with how scholars of literary criticism have borrowed from various scientific discourses or the persistent question of the desirability of a "science of literature," and shall merely conclude as follows: given the intertwined history of life writing and the modern conception of literature since the late eighteenth century, it would be strange indeed if the essential self-questioning of literature were not founded, at least partly, on the experimentation of life writing regarding the possibilities and limits of our knowledge of the self.

NOTES

1. According to Philippe Lejeune, writing in *L'Autobiographie en France* in 1971, Rousseau cannot be considered to have invented the genre of autobiography, owing to the convergence of many contributing factors at this time, but he nonetheless produced its first recognizable, and highly influential, example (44). Alain Girard's 1963 work *Le Journal intime* dates the emergence of this genre to the turn of the nineteenth century (ix–x), but Lejeune's recent collection, *Aux Origines du journal personnel*, examines the gradual transformations in diary-writing practices from as early as 1750.

2. Lynn Hunt provides an overview of critical perspectives on the changing concepts of society and the individual at this time in chapter three of *Writing History in the Global Era*, titled "Rethinking Society and the Self."
3. Lejeune introduces the term "autobiographical pact" in *L'Autobiographie en France*, and considerably expands and revises the concept in the 1975 work *Le Pacte autobiographique*. It seems appropriate to attribute these autobiographical pacts to the "author" rather than a "narrator," since these passages are specifically concerned with the text's relation to the author's self as a reality (of some sort) existing outside the text.
4. The concept of a "definitive text" is somewhat complicated, as the first, abridged publications of the first two parts used only the so-called Geneva manuscript, whereas the complete edition of 1798 supplemented this text with material from the Paris manuscript. I am referring here to the text as it appeared in the first publications rather than the earlier text of the "Neuchâtel manuscript," which I discuss below.
5. This does not mean, however, that Rousseau had confidence in the equanimity or justice of posterity's judgment, and the dialogues that make up *Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques* (written between 1772 and 1776) are partly an attempt to dramatize and therefore influence the process of this judgment.
6. Among many possible examples, Michel Leiris's 1939 text *L'Âge d'homme* (Manhood) and Jean-Paul Sartre's 1964 text *Les Mots* (Words) predominantly use a psychoanalytic and an existentialist discourse respectively.
7. This difficulty is addressed in detail in Lejeune's *Aux Origines du journal intime*, which brings to light a large number of previously unknown or neglected diaristic texts (not all of which can be classed as *journaux intimes*) from the 1750s onward.
8. Lejeune discusses the scientific aims of Maine de Biran's diary-writing to ascertain whether the *journal intime* contributed practically to the nascent science of psychology (his conclusion: not to any significant extent). See the chapter "Vers la science?" in *Aux Origines du journal personnel* (125–35, and especially 128–30). Maine de Biran's *journal intime* is also attributed great importance as an early example of the genre in Girard's work *Le Journal intime*.
9. Pierre Pachet noted the frequent tendency in diaries "to consider the soul as being atmospheric, cloudy, in some way 'Nordic,'" which also accounts for the title of his historical study of the *journal intime*, *Les Baromètres de l'âme: naissance du journal intime* (38, translation mine). He also traces this tendency back to Pascal, who wrote among the fragments of the *Pensées* (composed around the middle of the seventeenth century), "I have my own fogs and fair weather inside of me" (qtd. in Pachet 37, translation mine).
10. The importance of Jullien for Maine de Biran's *Journal intime* is discussed in Girard's *Le Journal intime* (171–73), but I have particularly drawn on Lejeune's chapter on Jullien, "Marc-Antoine Jullien: Controlling Time."
11. Gide used the form of the *journal intime* in a large number of his fictions, and also published extensively from his own lifelong *journal intime*. Among many possible works on this subject, see "Le Journal fictif dans l'œuvre d'André Gide" by David Keypour, and *Le "Journal" de Gide et les problèmes du moi (1889–1925)*, by Daniel Moutote.
12. The ironic, metaphorical blindness of the narrator/diarist is strongly thematised in Gide's *La Symphonie pastorale*, where it is juxtaposed with the physiological blindness

of the character Gertrude. The use of the *journal intime* as a narrative device resembling the interior monologue is apparent from as early as 1829 in Victor Hugo's short story *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (The Last Day of a Condemned Man).

13. Mallarmé's concepts of the Book and the Album are usefully discussed in Roland Barthes's lectures on *The Preparation of the Novel*, which I have cited here (182–85). Barthes uses the terms “readerly” and “writerly” most extensively in his 1970 work titled *S/Z* (see 4).

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