

*The International Library of Sociology*

# A HISTORY OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN ANTIQUITY

PART TWO



*Founded by KARL MANNHEIM*

*The International Library of Sociology*

---

A HISTORY OF  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN ANTIQUITY

PART TWO



---

*Founded by KARL MANNHEIM*

*The International Library of Sociology*

---

HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY  
In 9 Volumes

- |      |  |                    |
|------|--|--------------------|
| I    | America: Ideal and Reality                                   | <i>Stark</i>       |
| II   | British Social Work in the 19th Century                      | <i>Young et al</i> |
| III  | Farewell to European History                                 | <i>Weber</i>       |
| IV   | A History of Autobiography in Antiquity<br>Part One          | <i>Misch</i>       |
| V    | A History of Autobiography in Antiquity<br>Part Two          | <i>Misch</i>       |
| VI   | Men of Letters and the English Public<br>in the 18th Century | <i>Beljame</i>     |
| VII  | New Trends in Education in<br>the 18th Century               | <i>Hans</i>        |
| VIII | Peasant Renaissance in Yugoslavia<br>1900 - 1950             | <i>Trouton</i>     |
| IX   | Sociology of the Renaissance                                 | <i>Von Martin</i>  |

A HISTORY OF  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN  
ANTIQUITY

Part Two

by

GEORG MISCH

Translated in collaboration with the author by  
E. W. DICKES



First published in England, 1950 by  
Routledge

Reprinted in 1998, 2000  
Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Transferred to Digital Printing 2007

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

© 1950 Georg Misch  
© 1950 Translation E. W. Dickes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The publishers have made every effort to contact authors/copyright holders of the works reprinted in *The International Library of Sociology*. This has not been possible in every case, however, and we would welcome correspondence from those individuals/companies we have been unable to trace.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library

A History of Autobiography in Antiquity - Part Two  
ISBN 0-415-17609-3  
Historical Sociology: 9 Volumes  
ISBN 0-415-17825-8  
The International Library of Sociology: 274 Volumes  
ISBN 0-415-17838-X

**Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

## CONTENTS OF VOLUME II

### *Part II (continued)*

CHAP.	PAGE
III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE PHILOSOPHIC AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT . . . . .	355
I. The Disclosure of Personality in Cicero's Letters . . . . .	357
II. Self-portrayal in Realistic Literature : Lucian .	371
III. The Portrayal of Individuality in Philosophic Self-scrutiny . . . . .	404
Seneca. Epictetus. Marcus Aurelius.	
IV. Religious Self-portrayal and the Life-Story of the Soul . . . . .	486
(1) The Hellenistic type of Stories of Conversion . . . . .	487
(2) States of ecstasy and dreams as a literary theme : the "Sacred Discourses" of Aelius Aristides . . . . .	495
(3) The History of the Soul in Hellenistic Mysticism . . . . .	510
(4) The Influence of Christianity and its Historic Background . . . . .	526

### *Part III*

#### THE FLOWERING OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	539
CHAP.	
I. GENERAL TENDENCIES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY NEAR THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY . . . . .	554
I. The Autobiography of the rhetorician Libanius .	554
II. Self-portrayal of Christian Prelates in the ecclesiastical controversies and struggles for power : Priscillian, Nestorius . . . . .	563

CHAP.	PAGE
III. Ascetic Literature and Public Confession : the Transition from confessional practices to the Literary Form of Confessions . . . . .	574
IV. Neoplatonic self-communion and the Christian religion . . . . .	584
II. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEMS OF GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS . . . . .	600
I. The prelate's autobiography . . . . .	607
II. The Neoplatonic Christian's metaphysical and religious poetry . . . . .	617
III. THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE . . . . .	625
I. The self-scrutiny of the new convert in the " Soliloquies " . . . . .	626
II. The metaphysical and religious interpretation of the story of Augustine's life in the " Confessions " . . . . .	633
III. The construction of the " Confessions " . . . . .	646
IV. LATE PRODUCTIONS OF ANCIENT AUTOBIOGRAPHY . . . . .	668
I. The spread of the Literature of Confessions in the fifth Century : Ennodius, Paulinus of Pella, Patrick . . . . .	670
II. The deepening of Writers' Autobiography in Augustine's " Retractations " . . . . .	681
III. The Wisdom of the Ancients in the chang- ing World : Boethius' " Consolation of Philosophy " . . . . .	689
NOTES . . . . .	693
INDEX . . . . .	700

*PART II (continued)*

*AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE HELLENISTIC AND  
GRECO-ROMAN WORLD*

**This page intentionally left blank**

### CHAPTER III

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE PHILOSOPHIC AND RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

The spiritual movement that changed the character of ancient autobiography will now become our more immediate concern. Our attention will be focused on the relations of the idea of personality to the ultimate problems of life as revealed in the philosophic meditation, the criticism of society, and the religious impulses that found their way into literature. No autobiographies in the proper sense of the word are available here—if we had a continuous sequence of them, how much clearer a view could we gain of the complicated development of moral and religious life at the outset of the Christian era! For that development does indeed form the living background of the political forms of organization both in the Hellenistic states and in the Roman empire, even though in the latter its forces were temporarily prevented from attaining full growth by the Augustan Restoration.

In Hellenistic literature there were a number of literary *genres* in which an individual attitude to life could find adequate expression. The various forms of the diatribe, the moral and philosophical discourse, the Roman satire, the epistle, even the prelude (*prolalia*) which served as introduction to didactic lectures, took over that function, side by side, as we shall see, with other *genres* of a more strongly marked rhetorical character. But literary distinctions must here give place to the historical and psychological interest: we are trying to understand, as items of a coherent development, the inner multiplicity, the transitions, the germ-like forms which the individual's reflection on his own self assumed. The available material gives us scope for such an attempt. For there is a definite starting-point: Cicero, especially in his letters, is a fully authoritative witness to the level which individual consciousness of the self and the world had attained in his time, at the decisive turning-point of the period marked by the downfall of the Roman Republic. And there is a unifying feature that connects the various directions in which autobiographical introspection proceeded. It became increasingly clear

with the chronological process of history. We might characterize it as the transition from the age of science to a new religious epoch ; but this could not cover the whole field. The comprehensive movement then going on aimed at opening new paths of experience to satisfy the new spiritual needs of men.

In those centuries philosophy still remained the leading spiritual force, but took a new turn : it was in the very heyday of the natural science derived from philosophy that philosophic thought, stimulated by the growing sceptical tendencies, produced a critical realization of the limits set to scientific investigation and the vastness of what remains beyond its reach. Life itself could not but gain in profundity when man's confidence in scientific and technical civilization was shattered by the destruction of the security of life in the national political order.\* In face of the press and turmoil of that world, increasing reflection, together with the intercourse between individuals who had to live under manifold forms of political and spiritual anxiety, must have made it unmistakably plain to all men of clear vision that, in spite of all that reason and logic could do, the fundamental mystery of human existence would remain. Thus the search began for an immediate hold on life—a hold that should enable man to elicit a response to the needs of the mind from the universe, the enigmatic character of which had become apparent. Man was trying to get into touch with the inner life-springs of the world, in order to free himself from the pressure of physical necessity, and to regain the harmony and inner tranquillity of his existence. Knowledge was still the catchword for this liberating contact; but the meaning of the words "knowledge" and "reason" was changing : man's actual personal experience became their driving-power, and it led to an insight into those deep layers of human existence in which passion and suffering and the feeling for the infinite obtained the character of positive values.

Objectively considered, this change, which we may regard as a deepening of the spiritual life of the ancients, had, it is true, another side : the characteristic self-confidence of the Hellenic man † was finally lost in those depths, and the liberation of the spiritual self could, it seemed, no longer be effected entirely from within, but needed help from above, through the power of the godhead. Accordingly philosophy, instead of maintaining itself

\* Cf. especially Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, 90, attacking Posidonius, who after turning to religion did not cease to accept that intellectual type of civilization.

† See above, p. 173.

as the free interpreter of life, was put on a level with religious revelation, indeed with theological dogma, so that it very soon became its servant. But this was a result of the conditions of the times in which the typical process of the inward turning of the mind took place; the limitations of the scientific spirit of the ancients and of their consciousness of reality, which had to be overcome,\* intensified the tendency toward transcendentalism. In fact, a new metaphysical feeling for life was in the making, and this is the point to which we must direct our attention: it is in metaphysical experience that the new, in a sense "modern", type of autobiography had its roots—autobiography that dared to portray a soul in its journey through life.

The question now is, to what extent could the new enterprise of spiritual autobiography succeed even within the ancient forms of self-scrutiny, especially those of the Stoic school of thought, which was moving toward Neoplatonic religion? and where, within the religious movements themselves, were the forces that intensified the tendency towards autobiography? The great work of Saint Augustine was the complex product of an over-ripe civilization, and in the first centuries of the Christian era the scope of autobiography was even wider than that work might seem to suggest.

#### I. THE DISCLOSURE OF PERSONALITY IN CICERO'S LETTERS

At various turning-points in the development of autobiography in the Greco-Roman world we have come again and again upon Cicero. Often he is simply a witness to the existence in his time of branches of literature of which we no longer have any specimen; often his words are mere vanity and self-praise, which give no indication of personality and were intended merely to make up for his lack of blue blood. Thus in his public speeches as elsewhere he speaks of himself at every opportunity, exaggerating his services, making much of his claims to moral and political worth, and also giving anecdotes from his career: it proved possible to compile from his autobiographical passages a *Vita Ciceronis* that runs to six hundred pages.<sup>1</sup> The very multiplicity of the forms of his self-portrayals—epic, *hypomnema*, political missive, story of his career, story of his writings, story of his development—shows an analytical consciousness of personality; we find this sort of independent portrayal of various sides of a career elsewhere only

\* See above, pp. 191 *sqq.*, and below, introduction to Part III.

in the Italian Renaissance, in Cardano, who, indeed, came in the end to a profound and comprehensive self-analysis. And at important points we saw Cicero, who also resuscitated the old Roman autobiographies, go beyond the typical literary forms used by the autobiographers before him. His attempt to have his deeds recorded by a historian, with their emotional significance as details of a human life brought out; his embarking on an analytical explanation of his art of oratory, are enterprises such as we know of in no one else among the ancients. They point at the same time to the main directions in which his more intimate reflection upon himself moved. These first become apparent in the attitude he adopted in his philosophical writings. In the conversational setting of these works he liked to revive the historic time in which he had lived in imagination, the great period of the Scipios; in doing so he did not set his actual ego in the foreground, but the ideals in which he could see the perfection at which he had aimed in his endeavours; by recalling the experiences of his moral efforts he brought himself into a personal relationship with the Greek philosophy of those great days of Rome, a philosophy which he wanted to make his own and his nation's own. Thus he made the morally educative force of philosophy shine through his theoretical expositions as the *magistra vite*.

This influence of philosophy on life and purpose, which was the basis of the power of Cicero's writings over Christian ethics from Ambrose to Petrarch and from Petrarch to Luther and Melancthon, was mentioned by Cicero himself, in a work devoted to the subject, as an influence he himself felt. In his sorrow at the death of his daughter Tullia (46 B.C.), the deepest emotion, he himself said, of his whole life, he withdrew into complete isolation, occupied only with his own work and seeking consolation only in the study of Philosophy; and he found comfort in the writing of a *Consolatio*; this he dedicated to himself; in the midst of his grief he pointed out that this was something that no one had done before him.\* This book<sup>2</sup> has not come down to us; nor has his other religiously tinged exhortation to guidance by philosophy, the *Hortensius*, which also probably fully reflected his deeper personal life; we can only note the effect these two works of Cicero had down to the last days of the

\* Cicero, *ad Atticum*, XII, 14, 3: *Omnem consolationem vincit dolor. Quin etiam feci quod profecto ante me nemo, ut ipse me per litteras consolaretur* ("My grief is beyond any *consolatio*. Why, I have even done what surely no one has ever done before, tried to write one for myself!").

ancient world, when spiritual autobiography came to birth from philosophical and religious self-communion. In the *Hortensius* Cicero copied a work of Aristotle,<sup>3</sup> so that it shows the influence of the Socratic and Platonic movement in philosophy ; it roused the young Augustine to a higher life, and even after his conversion, in Cassiciacum, the saint philosophized in Ciceronian forms ; and the idea of procuring for oneself the "consolation of philosophy" was taken up again by Boethius in his work with that title, the last important self-portrayal of any eminent personality of ancient times.

We do, however, possess the most inestimable document in evidence of Cicero's capacity for revealing his personality—the letters to his intimate friend T. Pomponius Atticus. It is thanks to these that we are able to see how far a fundamentally genuine and intellectually eminent man, who had absorbed the culture of his age, was able to go in that age in self-disclosure.<sup>4</sup>

Private letters cannot, of course, be accepted uncritically as the expression of a man's personality. While in our groping for reality we try to draw as near as possible to the rough material of life, even the life of the soul being sought by preference in diaries and letters, our modern striving for the vividly presented leads us into an unfruitful intimacy as soon as we fasten on the small incidental human details in order to discover the actual reality of a life. The historian who sets out to give vividly the true content of a historic human life is fortunate in not being burdened with particulars which time has swept away, and in being able to throw aside the petty and all too ordinary details if he has had to investigate them. Such an ethical attitude to the story of a life was ensured by Goethe and Hegel ; and not only Burckhardt but Taine, in reaction against the modern vice, forbade any publication of intimate private letters of his : "Above all," wrote Taine, "I desire that my ego, the living person with his tone of voice, his gestures, his household effects, shall escape from the public."\*

Cicero is the first person, and the only one in ancient times, from whom we have an account of his intimate life in a correspondence which, published against his will and without discrimination, brought to light the really important in day-to-day association with his weak sides, his vanities, his social and political gossip, and his family troubles—so that in his case the

\* *Vie et correspondance*, I, p. 2. "Je souhaite avant tout que le moi, la personne vivante avec son ton de voix, ses gestes, ses meubles, échappe au public."

process could set in that gives access to the character by way of trivialities and, if sufficient material could be got together, would degrade most men to the common level and allow only a few to stand out from their age as great figures. It is strange that Cicero of all men, who did everything he could to lay emphasis, in accordance with his Roman ideal, on the commendable things in his life, in pursuit of immortality, should have had to come down to posterity with all the miscellaneous episodic and psychological details of his existence. And yet the editors, with all their lack of respect, must be thanked for the preservation of these letters. For Cicero had more to offer than mere stuff for the curious. He gave no form, it is true, to this essential contribution. But this formlessness of the material was due mainly to a general limitation that was characteristic also of the position of autobiography in that transition period—to the discrepancy between the individualized sense of the self that had developed in Hellenistic spirituality, and the traditional conceptions of ideal worth with which a self-portrayal had to appear. In Cicero the differentiated content of mental life out of which autobiography was to renew itself was present in such a degree that it made a continual extensive expression of personal reactions to men and events a necessity to him, and he was able to draw the means for this from colloquial language ; but as it was not yet recognized as material of permanent value, its highly personal content was not so set out as to develop forms of its own and so to find its way into literature.

It is just on this, however, that is based our interest in these private letters : in them we have before us a sort of intimate diary in which a famous man, a historic personality of the highest order, gives us a direct revelation of himself, free from all artificiality—an unusual thing in any man of antiquity, and unexampled in a politician who was a master of oratory. The letters are full of the same political atmosphere which we found in the autobiographies of the last period of the Roman Republic ; the atmosphere is so unmistakable that a modern commentator, who was both a poet and a historian, found the chief significance of this human document in the fact that in it we

recognize all the frightful material of high political life—the acting against conviction, the leaguings with the powerful, the self-reproach, the self-indicting irony, the vain efforts to construct a philosophy out of all this inconsistency and deception—the bitterness, outward and inward, the awareness of being on the wrong path and unable to leave it, the bad conscience, the humiliations, the change of course too late and in vain . . .

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who gives this picture of the impression which Cicero's correspondence with his friend made on him,\* thus sums up his judgment on the much-discussed man :

He was a man of letters, a philosopher, an orator, plunged into an epoch of the utmost violence. His destiny involved him in fearful things, and he was not equal to them : his epoch hurled him to and fro like an ill-rigged ship in a storm—and he passed out of it with immense fame. His fame lived after him ; his association with such great events, with the last convulsions of such an institution as the Roman Republic, brought him immortality. The *Senatus populusque Romanus*, the lictors, the blare of the trumpets, the vast territories whose governorships were distributed after a banquet, the association with such figures as Cæsar, Pompey, Antony, Cleopatra, all this throws on his memory shafts of fiery light. Whether we are personally concerned or not remains uncertain, but we follow the course of his life, fascinated by the stage on which his figure moves to and fro, by the gigantic and true dimensions of that age and none since it.

We are not concerned here with the great stage and the world-shaking actions, in which Cicero played a highly ambiguous part, but with his statements to his trusted friend in the midst of that insecurity of existence, statements that reveal him unmasked as the man he was. Instead of the rhetorical elaboration of which prose speech made use, even in autobiography, for the sake of artistic formation of sentences, and which found its way even into the actually unliterary *genre of hypomnemata*, these letters have a directness and truthfulness in which the words are the simple expression of intimate things. Thus we find in these private letters for the first time the attitude to the actual ego that is the first condition for a more intimate treatment of autobiography ; this found its way only painfully and at a late period into literary self-portrayal, where it had to struggle up through the rhetoric. And Cicero shows the gift, so rare in men, of speaking his mind freely and without restraint in letters. The thing we see exemplified before Cicero's time only in the finest art of Hellenistic poetry, in the epigram<sup>5</sup> (apart from the letters of Epicurus, of which we have too little to be able to judge), the capacity for reflecting the intimate, for full self-expression in a sudden flash, appears here in the natural flow of speech, spread over the whole succession of matters great and small, through twenty years of life, from the end of his thirties (68 B.C.).

Friendship between men, the element in which personal touch,

\* Hugo v. Hofmannsthal in an article, "Biographie", in the *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, December, 25, 1926.

in intellectual comradeship, was most naturally found in ancient times, here removes the insincerities with which social conventions cover the true nature of the individual, and permits a self-disclosure which was later to be effected amid deeper stirring of the spirit by the soul's intercourse with God. The more intimate, at times almost sentimental, quality which the ancients' cult of friendship assumes in Cicero remains, it is true, bound up with his intercourse with his friend Atticus, and is not accorded elevation to the ethical ideal of friendship as envisaged and actually pictured by Cicero. The picture he gave in the *Lælius*,\* a year before his death, as a fitting testimony to his bond with Atticus, a picture originating in a modified form of the Stoic philosophy, shows the main outlines of a friendship between outstanding men of Scipio's day,† rulers of the imperial republic, who were distinguished by their sincerity.

In contrast with this lofty ideal is the sort of friendship which Cicero actually enjoyed in his intercourse with Atticus: characteristic of it was his need to talk to a sympathetic hearer. To this he gives expression in one of the letters to his friend (I, 18). The letter dates from the time when Cæsar, together with Crassus, joined Pompey in the so-called First Triumvirate, a coalition of despots that represented to Cicero the end of his hopes of the preservation and stabilization of the old Republic. He wrote at this time (January, 60 B.C.):

Believe me, there is nothing I want so much at the present time as a person with whom I can share anything that causes me the least anxiety, a man who likes me, who *understands*, to whom I can speak without affectation, reserve, or concealment . . . and you whose conversation and advice have so often lightened my load of care and anxiety, who have aided me in my political life, been my confidant in my family affairs, and shared my conversations and projects—where are you? †

He describes to his friend the desolation he feels when he finds among the crowd who wait for him daily and accompany him to the Forum no one to whom "an informal jest or a confidential

\* Cicero, *Lælius, de amicitia*, I, 4.

† Note especially the treatment of the sentence "in amicitia nil fictum nil simulatum", *ibid.*, VIII, 26; XVIII, 66; XXV, 92, 97 (the reference to unity and constancy of character, etc.); also the criticism of the *desiderium absentis amici*, "the longing for the absent friend", as sign of a human being who is *infirmus mollisque natura et ob eam causam in amicitia parum justus* ("weak and soft by nature, and for that reason not quite just in friendship"), XX, 75; on the need for communication only generalizations, *ibid.*, XXIII.

sigh" can be tendered, no relief from eternal political ambition and social formality, nothing of more than surface significance. So he exclaims to his Atticus that if they could have just one stroll together he would "be able to pour out to you all the things that disturb and oppress me". The Stoic rule was that the true friend should be a second self, and here a subjective need for constantly pouring out his true feelings attached his actual self to his friend, so that the letter could fulfil the function of a monologue: *ego tecum tamquam mecum loquor*—"in talking to you I am virtually talking to myself" (VIII, 14). Here and there Cicero himself says that correspondence serves to relieve a man's heart simply by opening it to another person, even if he has nothing particular to say: he excuses himself to his friend, as he made excuse to the Roman world for his occupation with philosophy, by saying that he "began to write without knowing what", without anything that needed writing about or any thoughts worth passing on, simply because writing to his friend made him feel at peace and fairly cheerful.\*

The content of these letters, too, offers a criterion for the development of self-scrutiny. The element that forms the general characteristic in the later examples of the autobiographical *genre*, the description no longer of the objective existence, to be captured in facts or types of character, but of the subjective reflection of events in the feelings, makes an early appearance here. A consciousness of this is found again in Cicero: he expresses it with significant particularity at the beginning of a letter from Rome (IV, 3; November, 57 B.C.): "I am sure you are wanting to know what is going on here, and to know it from me too, not that there is any more certainty about events which take place before the eyes of the whole world, if I write to you about them, than if others either write or tell you of them; but in order that you may see from my letters how I am taking events and what are my feelings and how I am getting on."

This implies that the traditional rigid conception of man's character as an ideal, unchangeable element in him, was no longer true to life, and that the individual had to take a larger view in the search for his own self. In Cicero we see the conflict of the opposed conceptions, the monumental and the dynamic idea of the true self; hence his unrest. The world-wide political upheavals amid which, without the needed portion of iron in his

\* Cicero, *ad Atticum*, IX, 10, 1; VIII, 14, 1; cf. IX, 4, 1; XII, 38, 3; and elsewhere.

spirit, he tried to assert his independent personality, had such an effect on him that self-scrutiny, far from resulting in the desired composure, revealed the vacillations of a shaken self-confidence, with outlines and shadows enlarged out of proportion. His soul had been filled by the national history with an ideal of personality that associated the true greatness to which he aspired with statesmanship, and at the same time with simple moral firmness of character, such as had been possible in the sound established order of the Republic. Thus he based his self-esteem on an illusion, so that it turned into vainglory, and the inner freedom of an independent mind which he really possessed was not appreciated by him as what it was, the fulfilment of his individual existence. But the basic sense which he always had of his personal significance was genuine ; he was too fond of regarding himself as the representative of the old Roman traditions to admit himself openly and deliberately to be the individual living person Cicero. His true self lies open to view in his letters, the living and sensitive human being that can be seen not only in high spirits but in perplexity, impotence, and despair. *Ex epistularum mearum inconstantia puto te mentis meae motum videre* ("From these inconsequent letters of mine I think you will see my disturbed state of mind")—these are his own words (III, 8 ; written in exile in Thessalonica, May, 58 B.C.).

Expression is given to a surprising variety of feelings in these letters ; the range seems small only when the misleading measure of modernity is applied to it. Cicero can gossip and jest uninteruptedly, make himself understood by means of allusions or between the lines, put his report on everyday matters and public events into the form of the conversation of a man of the world ; never does he become boring or long-winded ; often he is sarcastic ; he lets himself go so naturally, with such attractive because unusual freshness, that no fear of dropping into triviality disturbs or destroys his simplicity and genuineness. Keen thumbnail sketches sum up the political personages at work and the situations ; in conflicts or disagreements the feelings of friends are discussed with an eye to their character, and the attitude of persons spying on him is calculated. The points made in Greek so scintillate that one seems to breathe the air of humanism ; in thanking Atticus for his letters he wittily praises his friend's epistolary style. The literary man's existence finds expression in varying pictures : his Tusculum with the Greek statues is "my Academy" ; the library, more precious to him than all

other treasures, is what really gives his home "a soul"; work as a sedative, the satisfaction of productiveness, the not unmixed comfort of giving vent with the stilus to repressed political passion, the pleasure in his own writings, with something to say about the place of each in his life—these and other things find expression.

But above all come the outpourings of his heart, especially in times of depression. Pompey's alliance with Cæsar had made Cicero's position in Rome untenable; he found himself isolated, and exposed to the attacks of his enemies, and escaped persecution by flight from Rome (58 B.C.). In the letters written in exile his lamentations are altogether unrestrained; there is talk of tears as in the sentimentality of the eighteenth century. Hopes rise and fall; he rails against the thankless world, against false friends, against himself; he thinks how different all might have been; he justifies his complainings on the ground of his immeasurable sufferings—"don't try to console me, above all don't reproach me, now when I so miss your love and your sympathy!" (III, 11). So he writes in short notes, written more and more erratically, often with declarations that he is tired of life; the sententiousness is gone and all is spontaneous and self-revealing; constantly he plays with the thought of suicide: "O that the day may come when I shall feel able to thank you for making me go on living. At present I am truly sorry to have to" (III, 3). Then the political mood returns: "Be idle and flee to the haven of leisure—might not that tempt? It would do so in vain. No! into the fight, on to the field!" He writes hotly in hatred or contempt or indignation; now in confidence, now tortured by anxiety. In whole passages of daily outpourings we may observe his alternations of view in critical times, his indecision, his search for any indications of change in the political constellation, his attention to gossip, his expressions of feeling in the midst of weighing chances or considering duties. He thinks things over but reaches no conclusion, and at times he has no patience with reflections or theories; he wants only facts and news from his friend. Or he watches himself: even the longing with which he awaits letters from Atticus becomes less marked.

Different from all the rest is the expression of emotion in the letters of the year in which his daughter died; this one emotion reduces all the rest to a uniform undercurrent. Here Cicero lives through his sorrow with the consciousness of justification, whereas at other times when he gives way to a mood he feels that he is lacking in self-control; the feeling for children is in his view,

as he wrote to his friend on one occasion (VI, 2, 2), the deepest of natural emotions, the denial of which would mean the collapse of the whole system of human morality. He asks himself whether it is not wrong for him to seek relief in philosophical sources of consolation ; sometimes it seems wrong to him when he ceases to do so ; he talks of the solitude that he loves best after his friend, and mentions that he plunges from early morning to evening into "the thickly overgrown forest" ; the country house by the sea to which he has retired "is in harmony with my grief" ; we can see the passion subside, as he mentions it perhaps twenty times in gradually changing mood, speaking of the acuteness and the extent of the pain, its effect on his appearance, the healing influence of peaceful natural surroundings and of literary production—until he can note that he is once more master of his emotions but has lost his cheerfulness for ever. He cannot conceive what quarrel the world can have with his behaviour ; he plunges into the irrational, "*ἄλογως fortasse*", and he dwells on the idea of an "apotheosis" of his daughter, for whom he has vowed to endow an eternal sanctuary, a chapel in a great park.

Into this mixture of self-observation and surrender to the impulse of the moment there then enters philosophical self-communion. In all the changing conditions Cicero seeks to sustain his moral consciousness ; this, together with his conceptions of his political destiny and the greatness involved in it, is always present in his mind as the criterion for his self-judgment. This is so instructive here because in these genuinely private letters the writer's actual experiences are discussed, so that in the midst of them their moral implication is reflected upon, unlike the forms of Stoic self-study, in which the moral ideas form the basic element, with which the things experienced are harmonized. Thus we are able to observe in Cicero's confessions various attitudes to moral reflection. The key-words are predominantly Greek, just as the most intimate elements and also the emphasis are expressed in Greek : similarly the emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his soliloquies in Greek. So long as his position was unshaken, Cicero was able simply to declare his "greatness of soul" to his friend as in his public speeches—a greatness due to the "immortal fame" of his consulate, and he can be convinced by the simple statement of his present political measures that in them he makes visible "a more or less definite indication of my way of thinking and living". He states that the supreme law of his activity is the establishment of the value of his personality beyond any

question : he will always have to maintain such a standard that his deeds in the past cannot be regarded as chance achievements.\* To be true to himself, or, as he also expresses it, *se tueri*, to watch himself, remains his standard, dictating matters of conscience, which he places before himself and answers not with "yes" or "no" but according to the political situation at the time. This may be exemplified by a statement on his attitude at the turning-point in his political career in the period following his consulate. In 60 B.C. Cæsar invited him to join the coalition, but he declined the invitation—a refusal that was followed by the creation of the Triumvirate, with all its evil consequences for the supporter of the Republican ideals.

Now I come to my political attitude ; and I shall follow the fashion of the Socratic schools in giving both sides of the question, ending, however, as they do, with the one I prefer. It really is a point that requires much consideration. For either I have got to resist the agrarian measure† strongly, which would mean something of a fight, though I should gain prestige by it ; or I must hold my peace, which is equivalent to retiring to Solonium or Antium ; or else I must assist the measure, and that is what they say Cæsar expects me to do beyond doubt. For Cornelius paid me a visit—I mean Balbus, Cæsar's great friend. He assured me that Cæsar will take my own and Pompey's opinion on everything, and that he will make an effort to reconcile Pompey and Crassus. On this side of the sheet may be placed an intimate connexion with Pompey and, if I like, with Cæsar too, reconciliation with my enemies, peace with the populace, and ease in my old age. But my blood is still stirred by the *finale* I laid down for myself in the third book of my poem : ‡

Meantime the course you chose in youth's first spring,  
And held to, heart and soul, 'mid civic strife,  
Keep still, with growing fame and good report.

Since Calliope herself dictated those verses to me in a book full of passages in lordly vein, I ought not to have the least hesitation in holding

No omen better than to right one's country's wrongs.§

But this point must be reserved for our strolls at the Compitalia (the festival of the country cross-roads).

Even in his complaining letters from exile this purpose may be seen—"I have remained the same : my enemies have taken my possessions, not myself" ; "I miss not only my possessions and my family, but myself". He expresses the same idea in other forms. As he gives literary expression to his ideal in life, he likes

\* Cicero, *ad Atticum*, I, 19, 6, 8 ; 20, 3.

† An agrarian law carried by Cæsar, which provided for the distribution of the rich lands of Campania.

‡ On his consulate.

§ Iliad, XII, 243.

to think in proud or hesitant moments of the demands which the attitude of such writings as his epic on his consulate or the work on the State impose on him. And in deciding he puts himself the question what will be the judgment of history on him in centuries to come.\*

We can see a deeper effect on his mind from the philosophic principles that are to give him firmness. After his political débâcle he found himself confined to literary production, but philosophy enabled him to make the best of his resignation, maintaining the attitude of the sage who has seen through the vanity of outward magnificence and can practise "indifference", especially in regard to politics. He compares the conflict he has undergone to the struggle for rank between the practical and the theoretical *bios*, and awards the crown to the latter.

Political activity or literary leisure—out of such fundamental questioning developed again in modern times the self-communion among the humanists, whose activities were directed toward the great field of politics, in association with Roman and Stoic ideas. In those unhappy years in which he found himself thrust out of political action by Cæsar's rise, Cicero declared, with more justification than he was really ready to admit, that he had found in literary and philosophical activity the "life most in tune with my nature".† But he felt himself a philosopher also in the time of the break-up of the Triumvirate, when he was compelled by Pompey to leave Rome for a year in order to govern Cilicia (51 B.C.). From the provincial administration forced on him he drew an inward profit through regarding it as an opportunity to test the moral character formed by philosophy. From the "exile" which he felt his official service in that province of Asia Minor to be, he writes to Atticus :

Your friend Cicero has won all hearts by his justice and self-restraint and clemency . . . You shall marvel at my mental discipline when I safely return home. I have so much practice in that virtue . . . I am not going to tell of continence, a quality connoting resistance to pleasure; for nothing in my life has given me more pleasure than my rectitude. And it is not so much the enhancement of my reputation, though that is important, as the matter itself that delights me. I can tell you my exile has been worth while, for I did not understand myself or realize how far I could go in this direction. I may well be puffed up.‡

\* *Ad Atticum*, II, 4, 2; 24, 4; and elsewhere; II, 18, 3; III, 5; 15, 2; II, 3, 3; V, 3, 4; II, 5, 1; VII, 11, 1; IX, 18.

† *Ibid.*, II, 5, 2; 17, 2; 16, 3; IV, 16, 10 (18, 2).

‡ *Ibid.*, V, 10, 3; 16, 3; 20, 6 (recte *πεφυσίωμαι*, cf. Paul in 1 Cor. iv. 6).

Then, however, we see—and it is the rule—how the continual self-observation and effort at self-justification result in loss of confidence and sweep him off his feet. Watching himself in the light of his moral aspirations, he feels afraid that he may do something unworthy of himself, and finds relief in reflecting on his unblemished character, but is unable to rest content with that reflection. When a decision becomes urgent, he not only burdens himself with advice from his friends but considers every possible person in Roman and Greek history who in a similar situation pursued a path recognized as meritorious or reprehensible. He provides a basis for his unsettled intentions in the form of “political theses”, eleven in number, formulated in Greek: in this way he tries to bring home to himself the range of his duties; and by turning them over and over in Greek or Latin wherever he goes he tries to “become clear as to what must be done”, finding relaxation at the same time in the exercise of his intelligence. Arriving at an impasse, he takes his friend's letters for the last couple of months, looks through each one for the advice it gives, and comes to the conclusion that, having had good occasion for his irresolute behaviour, he can rest satisfied with it: he has done his best to deal justly. He gives the reason himself for his indecision: “I talk with you as I talk with myself; and does not anyone, in settling things of this sort, weigh the pros and cons over and over again?”\*

To this mood belongs self-reproach after the event. In the most varied situations of misfortune, in exile or after the battle of Pharsalus, and just as much after his daughter's misalliance, he suffers mental tortures: “Chance is responsible for nothing that I regret: it has all been my fault.”† So he gives vent to penitence, or to scruples—not moved by religious humility, but nevertheless showing, however much he may throw blame on external influences, the guidance of conscience.

What, then, was the effect of these documents, with their revelation of the life of a man who was regarded by the generations that immediately followed him as the representative of Greco-Roman culture and the perfecter of Latin prose? Such effect as is visible throws a strong light on the general condition of self-portrayal in that period. Again and again we see that only the supremely cultured were capable of expressing the growing inwardness in autobiographical writings, before mediæval

\* *Ibid.*, IX, 10; VIII, 3, 3; 12, 1; IX, 4; 9, 1; VIII, 14, 2.

† *Ibid.*, XI, 9; III, 8, 4; 20, 1 (*cf. Ep. ad Fam.*, XIV, 3); XI, 17, 1; 23, 1; X, 8, 6; IX, 6; and elsewhere.

Christianity made the requisite psychological condition common property, and virtually a component of human nature. In general the attitude to Cicero's self-revelations is similar to that with which we are familiar in ancient autobiography in regard to the things experienced; the formal rhetorical attitude that regards even such intimate letters only superficially, paying attention to their literary art and collecting gems of wisdom, and accordingly preferring, simply for their rhetorical style, the less personal letters *ad familiares*—to his friends,—a collection usable as a model of style.<sup>7</sup> If ever attention is paid to the content, the interest is that of curiosity, as with court memoirs. Thus Cornelius Nepos, who was personally acquainted with Atticus, was permitted to see the holograph letters, and is able to tell us that in them a true history of those days is to be found, with all the changes in the State and with the secret views and the secret vices of the leading persons, all made entirely clear and manifest with acuteness, or, rather, with a prophetic gift.<sup>8</sup> And even Seneca, in mentioning these letters (Ep. 118, 2), dwells only on the political gossip—in order to express, with a gesture of superiority, his contempt for such trifles and to contrast with them the moral content of his own volumes of letters:

I shall not do as the eloquent Cicero bids Atticus do: "Even if nothing enters your head to write about, write nevertheless." For there will always be something for me to write about, even omitting all the kinds of news with which Cicero fills his correspondence: what candidate is in difficulties, who is struggling on borrowed resources and who using his own; who is a candidate relying for the consulship on Cæsar, or on Pompey, or on his own strong-box; what a merciless usurer is Cæcilius, out of whom his friends cannot screw a penny for less than one per cent a month. It is preferable to deal with one's own ills rather than with another's.<sup>9</sup>

Was Seneca, and were others from whom we have no expressions of opinion, really unmoved by the personal element in these documents? When Seneca, a philosophic writer who played an important part in the gradual establishment of the dignity of individuality, can dismiss the content of the letters so casually, it is because of the influence of the attitude of his own Epistles, in which he displayed in his own person the ideal type of man's moral personality with ideal openness. When, at the dawn of a later age, Petrarch made acquaintance with his Cicero as a human being<sup>10</sup> through the rediscovery of the letters (1345), a similar relationship, only more deeply felt, was given expression. For Petrarch the reading of the letters destroyed an illusion: in place

of the ancient sage he found an "eternally restless, eternally worried" being, who "forgot his own salutary teachings"; who, "like a wanderer by night, bears his torch, and plunges into the darkness", himself stumbling as he lights the way for others. It was not to his taste that Cicero's life lacked "the constancy of nature befitting a sage"—and yet he himself had made the subject of his own writings the full life of a human soul amid its changing impulses, and to him the ideal attitude of a sage had been only one of many forms in which he felt his boundlessly excitable self. We first find the modern viewpoint expressed on this, as so often in the attitude to historic figures, by Montaigne. In a chapter of his *Essays* dealing with books and authors he says :

As for Cicero, those of his works that can serve my purpose are the ones that treat of philosophy, especially moral. But, boldly to confess the truth, . . . his style of writing seems tiresome to me . . . I like to look at the epistles *ad Atticum* not only because they contain very ample instruction on the history and the affairs of his time; but still more to discover in them his private humours; for I have a singular curiosity, as I have said elsewhere, to know the soul and the naïve judgments of my authors.<sup>11</sup>

## II. SELF-PORTRAYAL IN REALISTIC LITERATURE

There are two main directions in which the individualization proceeding from intellectual activity can find expression. One is that of the self-scrutiny we have seen developing in the philosophical movement from Socrates and Plato onward. The immersion of the thinking subject in itself enables the increasing value of inner experience to be realized by the individual directly in his feelings: here the moral activity is transferred to a man's own interior; the problem is to find and hold on to one's true self, and in the effort to do so the energy and the wealth of the inner life increase with the degree of the individual's awareness of it. Thus the limits of self-revelation are widened stage by stage. In tracing the intellectual movement that led to this result, we have seen in Cicero the personal sense of life breaking through the ancient barriers as he gave vent to it in his intimate letters, and we shall see in the Stoic works of self-scrutiny how far that sort of analysis of the personality which proceeds from moral philosophy could go in ancient times.

But it would be a curtailing of historic reality to regard the formation of personality, bound up, as we have seen, with the

awareness and evaluation of it, as coming simply from these sources. Such changes cannot be reduced to a straight line of development as can the progress in natural science. There is, in a sense, a direct path leading from the Stoic conception of the free personality to Marcus Aurelius' book "To Myself" and to the Neoplatonic life of seclusion, and thence through the Christian experience to Augustine's "Soliloquies", a work of self-scrutiny preceding his "Confessions". But this path, along which the critical turn in ancient autobiography lies, does not exhaust every possibility of its development in ancient times. Even in Augustine's "Confessions" the author is not concerned exclusively with his inner life, but also pays attention to the world man lives in; this tendency seems all the more important since it conflicted with the general attitude of this converted rhetorician in confessing his sins. Saint Augustine would have been able to write a romance of social life.

In ancient literature there was a connexion between autobiography and realistic creative writing. The writer's individuality had become strong enough and self-assured enough to allow him to see the varied and complicated doings of men with his own eyes, so that, without elaboration in accordance with a preconceived ideal, he formed a picture of human life. This kind of picturing of reality by a detached intelligence shows the other tendency by which self-portrayal was guided in the philosophico-literary movement of the Hellenistic epoch.

Once more there is only an isolated and late testimony that gives us information about an autobiographer of this type. In his history of Christian literature entitled "Famous Men", compiled on the Hellenistic model, Saint Jerome mentions a certain Acilius Severus, who died in Spain in 370, and states, as Severus' one title to fame, that he wrote the story of his life in a book partly in prose and partly in verse. This baroque form was characteristic of the realistic or humorous description of life which was created as an independent literary *genre* by Menippus, the eminent Greek writer of Phœnician origin, a follower of the Cynics (about 300 B.C.)—the Menippean satire, as this Hellenistic *genre*, particularly cultivated in the literature of Rome, is generally called: the Latin title *Satura* simply means "Miscellany".

There is nothing much that can be said about that autobiographical work, since we have only the one mention of it; we shall return to it later. But the association of autobiography

with the satirical form of literature, thus indicated to us, is of real importance to us, and we should like to try to show that in Hellenistic-Roman literature autobiographical writings of this type were possible. For here, unlike the so-called Hellenistic love-story, which made use of first-personal narrative only in order to deceive the reader as to the remoteness of the romance from reality, there is an actual inter-relationship with biography, confirmed again and again by the history of the realistic novel in modern times in the great Spanish novelists of the time of the late Renaissance, and, indeed, from the Middle Ages onward. This relationship rests upon an attitude towards existence common to the realistic novel and biography, in which there is a philosophic tendency at work, even though some authors of this school, and not the worst, disclaim philosophy as in their view merely the stuff of schoolbooks.

This attitude to existence, influenced by philosophy, finds expression in a definite way of conceiving reality, which grows, with the growing intellectuality of the sense of self, into a power in literature. Man here faces life as the intelligence, aware of its power, faces an unfamiliar fact in nature ; the intelligence can no longer naively accept the enigmas of this world ; it wants to observe, analyse, and master them. Man here faces life objectively as if it were something unfamiliar to him, like a strange fact in nature. Assured of his power to explain everything, he simply can no longer accept the turmoil of this human world, but wants to master it with his intellect by observing its actualities and dispassionately analysing them. In the judgment of these novelists, the merit of the writer resides, therefore, in his keen eye for human realities, human characters, and typical situations showing the human animal beneath the social conventions. Anxious not to impair the true picture of life as actually lived, he should refrain from completing his work as a whole formed from within ; its artistic unity, as far as it is attained, is transferred from the subject-matter of the narrative to the intellectual activity of the narrator, who introduces himself as a detached observer exhibiting his view of the narrated facts and action.

Presenting himself in this way as he looks at life and the world, he succeeds, owing to his detachment, in conveying to the reader the impression of factual truth while by means of wit and humour he makes even the smallest detail precious in the light of higher standards held against the disenchanting picture of men and manners presented in the novel. These standards

range, according to the intellectual calibre of the writer and the healthiness or over-ripeness of the civilization to which he belongs, from the mother wit of the normal human understanding to the superior scepticism of the man of the world.

To this attitude to reality belongs a sort of biography in the widest sense of the word as the faithful portrait of an individual, or, rather, a typical man in his adventures in life. In the literary carrying out of this conception it makes no substantial difference whether the varied details of adventure, which rebel against any regular form, are obtained from a man's own life, as in autobiography, or from other sources, as in a novel; the field of a man's own experience can only become of more and more importance in proportion as observation becomes psychologically profounder. Biographical treatment is here so natural because the intellect is entirely right in holding that it will never know a man in his "essence" and from within and must therefore try to collect all possible sorts of relationships and situations in life in order to show him in real action; for which a biography or parts of one are admirably suited, like descriptions of travel; and humour and irony, which obviously have their existence only in the artistic pleasure of working up the material, can be directed equally well upon a man's own person and upon the world, because it is not the whole self but its facets and corners that come under the lens.

The type of realistic literature thus outlined is sharply distinguished from other types of description of the varied realities of life with which we also meet in the history of autobiography. When the autobiographer so penetrates with his personality the adventurous episodes of his life of which he tells that his whole self is visible in every scene, a dramatic form, one might say a heroic one, comes into existence: in primitive strength and with the totality-creating plasticity of an artist's imagination, Benvenuto Cellini shows in his *Vita*, and Cardinal de Retz in his political memoirs, in emulation of Corneille and Molière, this form of autobiography, which developed in the Renaissance in various individual portrayals. Of the possibility of such pictures in ancient times we know nothing. There is also no trace of any person having simply narrated his own life-story out of pure joy in the communication of the true details without any ulterior motive. On the other hand, the possibility of an autobiography in the "satirical" style in ancient times is offered by the simple fact that the autobiographer's attitude to his

subject did not differ greatly from that of the heterobiographer, as we have already emphasized.

The realistic novel has a special affinity not only to biography but to the literary form of first-personal narrative. In the *Satyricon* of Petronius (about A.D. 60), a Latin masterpiece of the *genre*, of which at least part has come down to us in considerable fragments, we meet with that form as an established technique. The speaker tells of his own and his companions' adventures in the luxurious towns of southern Italy. We meet with it also in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius (about A.D. 160), or "The Golden Ass", as that Latin collection of stories and its Greek model are generally called, because the main feature is that the young hero goes through all his adventures in the form of an ass. The first-personal narrative of the biographical sort, which came into existence in this humorous type, was not yet an autobiography, but was nearer to it than other applications of this primitive form of story.\* For the narrator is introduced in this sort of story not simply as its hero or a fellow-actor or sufferer, and thus as speaking from his own experience, but also as an observer of himself and of the world. Accordingly his person is so chosen in the type of romance here in question that it is able to live itself and to watch in others the true life of the natural man in every situation, freed from all social and conventional restrictions; thanks, however, to the first-personal narrative the possibility always remains of transition between fiction and actual experience.—These important relationships call here only for mention; they will be dealt with more fully at a later stage.

In spite of all research, the origin of this realistic art<sup>12</sup> in Hellenistic-Roman literature, an art that had received so different an outlook from that of the classical forms, lies in almost unbroken obscurity, as does, indeed, in modern times the origin of the realistic novel or novel of manners in Spain. The philosophic spirit that guided it cannot be confined to a definite school, though the philosophic tendency of the Cynics predominates, with its contempt of social conventions, its break with the aristocratic social order, and its ideal of the return to nature. After all, the distinctions so sharply drawn in the schools had to disappear when life became the thinker's problem. It was not a question of a first discovery of the substance of reality, which had a firm traditional place outside literature in the mimic shows alike of the Italian people and of the highly-civilized Hellenistic

\* Cf. Introduction, pp. 46 *sqq.*

society,<sup>13</sup> but of the coming into existence of a mental outlook that sought to extract from such material the truth of the world of men: thus this process necessarily ran parallel with the deepening of the consciousness of personality.

In this epoch of radical transformations in the broad field of general civilization, it was the task of philosophy to maintain the leadership, and so to influence large numbers of people. Out of this task literary forms came into prominence in Hellenism in which the description of life was practised in short and vivid sketches with a moral tendency. Consequently, with the other literature concerning man and his moods and duties (a literature rooted in self-communion), these forms preceded the realistic novel, just as in seventeenth-century France the literary forms of maxims and character-studies preceded the adaptation of picaresque romance by Lesage, or a century later the moralizing weekly journals preceded Fielding and Sterne. In the ancient world those literary forms received characteristic shape through the public demonstration and the predominance of speech-making, as is evident in the principal form of these works of popular philosophy, the diatribe.<sup>14</sup> Here the exposition does not give a clear and finished statement of the thoughts, but aims at creating the impression of a process of thought going on in the narrator's mind, a process partly determined by the assumed opinions of the public: the speaker or writer interrupts himself with objections and doubts of his own, which seem to be forced on him at the moment by the matter itself. We find the diatribe defined in this sense by the famous Greek treatise on style, or, as its title reads, "On Great Writing",\* in which the unknown author (about A.D. 50), like a modern romanticist, advocates a creative art liberated from the fetters of traditional rules. He deals with that form of writing in a separate chapter,<sup>15</sup> and contends that a vivid and impressive effect, and above all the stamp of sincerity so essential for every subjective narrative, is thus secured. Similarly the other, even looser form, which came into autobiography from this popular philosophical literature, the mixture of verse and prose (and verse not merely by way of digression or quotation but as a part of the story, serving like the prose to carry it on), may have appeared then to the realistic writers as natural or true to life because an irrationally mixed reality was reflected in this mixed, or rather formless, literary form.

\* This is the more accurate rendering of the title *Περὶ ὑψους*, usually translated "On the Sublime". See E. E. Sykes, *The Greek view of Poetry*, 1931, p. 209.

While these works came from the Cynics with their downright contempt for all conventions, there was nevertheless room here for a more positive interpretation of life, which a philosophical writer aiming at popularization set out to provide for the crowd in free personal narrative, unhampered by theoretical ballast. We know of a popular satirical poetry produced by the Stoics, and in the earlier *Sermones* (satires) of Horace we see the diatribe turned into an elegant and flexible medium for his description of the Epicurean art of living.<sup>16</sup> In any case, it was not the disintegrating elements of parody and wit but a consistent and comprehensive view of the world that was at work when the attempt could be made to disclose the authentic self, if only in part.

We may also, perhaps, safely assume that the sceptical way of thinking represented since the third century B.C. by the Platonic Academy (which, in spite of all its struggle against dogmas as well as against the deceptiveness of perception by the senses, always had a positive mainstay in the idea of truth) had an important share in this as well as in the gradual revelation of inner experience. In one of Plutarch's essays there is a remark about mankind, drawn from that sphere, which plainly expresses a fundamental sense of this realism, which we have already seen in Polybius. Plutarch there develops the phrase of Heraclitus, "universal flux", in a sense similar to that given to it in Plato's *Theaetetus* by Protagoras, the leader of the original Sophist movement, with reference to human life. The view of an unstable, manifold, irrational nature of the individual, never leading on to firm soil, appears here as a popular philosophical teaching in opposition to the conception of the unity of the person, and this teaching serves as a springboard for the ascent to the idea of absolute existence, indicated by the address to the godhead, "Thou art":<sup>17</sup>

The man in his prime passes away when the old man comes into existence; the young man passes away into the man in his prime; the child into the young man, and the babe into the child. Dead is the man of yesterday, for he has passed into the man of today; and the man of today is dying as he passes into the man of tomorrow. Nobody remains what he is, nobody is one person; but we become many persons, even as matter is drawn about some one semblance and common mould with imperceptible movement. Else how is it that, if we remain in the same persons, we take delight in some things now, whereas earlier we took delight in different things; that we love or hate opposite things, and so too with our admirations and

our disapprovals, and that we use other words and feel other emotions and have no longer the same personal appearance, the same personal form, or the same purposes in mind? For without change it is not reasonable that a person should have different experiences and emotions; and if he changes, he is not the same person; and if he is not the same person, he has no permanent being, but changes his very nature as one person in him succeeds to another . . . In fact, each of us may be regarded, in view of the thousands of changes suffered, as a mixed heap of humanity such as assembles at festivals.

The sceptical spirit that befits a man of the world was present in Lucilius (*c.* 150–103 B.C.), the first great satirist of Italian blood, who impressed on the *genre* with its Latin name the peculiar Roman stamp. At the centre of Hellenistic-Roman civilization, in the company of the younger Scipio, he was able to acquire the Greek freedom and mobility of the personality, and at that turning-point of Roman intellectual life he stood, with the aggressiveness Archilochus had shown in the past, in the midst of the political movement—the movement that led to the revolution brought about by the Gracchi. Like Archilochus he stood ready to observe without restraint, and to pillory within the limits set to his art, all that called for rough handling by the new spirit, or was actively hostile to it, together with the eternally present meannesses and stupidities of everyday life.

It was the type of personal poetry that was the product of an intelligence that dominated the imagination; Horace, who must have been the best qualified to appreciate these descriptions of life (lost to us), because he himself pursued the same path, and went farther along it, as an artist, characterized them from points of view akin to autobiography:

ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim  
credebat libris, neque si male cesserat, usquam  
decurrans alio, neque si bene; quo fit ut omnis  
votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella  
vita senis.\*

“As if painted on a votive tablet”—meticulously, with every detail, as in the painted descriptions, put up in a temple under an endowment, of some dangerous situation in life from which there had been a fortunate escape.<sup>18</sup>

\* He in olden days would trust his secrets to his books,  
as if to faithful friends, never turning elsewhere  
for resource, whether things went well with him or ill.  
So it comes that the old poet's whole life is open to view,  
as if painted on a votive tablet.

—Horace, Satires, II, 1, 30. Translated by H. R. Fairclough (as also is the following quotation), in the Loeb Classical Library.

Horace and Varro then show us various sorts of the humorous attitude to the self, which is of importance to the realistic branch of autobiography. Marcus Varro, whose intellectual stature was probably not particularly exalted, took as the subject of one of his many lively satires, which he wrote in a mixed style, a direct account of his intellectual and probably also his soldierly adventures: the title itself (*Sesculixes*—"Ulysses and a half") suggests the excessively robust pleasure in self-caricature, observable also in the fragments in parody of the scholar and the moralist and in many lapses from respectability. This comic story has been claimed as a "model for the further development of the Menippean Satire into the first-personal novel."<sup>19</sup> It may also be that in another satire, the "Double Marcus" (*Bimarcus*), Marcus Varro made humorous use of the incompatibilities of various sides of his character in order to illustrate, in a burlesque monologue, the variegated nature of his bright writing.<sup>20</sup>

In Horace, on the contrary, there is a harmonious outlook on the world, the refined culture of an aristocratic society of the Augustan monarchy; the poet's artistic taste tones down the glaring colours generally used in the description of realities, and what he says of himself and of others comes as if from a world of his own. The liveliness has turned here from the superficiality of the diatribe style to the sense of personality, through which, amid all the inherited stock of literary figures and philosophic rules for the conduct of life, he places trust only in his own conscience, and accordingly possesses a cheerful sureness, which dismisses with lofty unconcern his own share of human weaknesses or conceals the satisfaction of his personal peculiarities beneath an ironical phrase. As one such idiosyncrasy he mentions the autobiographical element of his satires; the verses just quoted, in which he mentioned this element in Lucilius, he wants to be understood as referring also to himself:

quot capitem vivunt, totidem studiorum  
milia: me pedibus delectat claudere verba  
Lucili ritu . . .  
Sequitur hunc, Lucanus an Apulus anceps . . .  
Ne longum faciam: seu me tranquilla senectus  
expectat seu mors atris circumvolat alis,  
dives, inops, Romæ, seu fors ita iusserit, exsul,  
quisquis erit vitæ scribam color.\*

The genuinely personal poetry he wrote is a work *sui generis*,

\* See next page, 380

giving a complete picture of life. From a modern point of view it may be regarded as the revelation of the poet's subjective existence, and may accordingly be described, in the words of classical scholars, as fragments of autobiography or of a "general confession" <sup>21</sup>—a confession, it is true, without penitence.

The development of a true autobiography in this variable style, satirical or realistic, is full of problems. An eminent student of Hellenistic literature speaks, with reference to the stories of marvels then fashionable, of the "intermingling and exchanging of the experiencing and the writing ego".<sup>22</sup> This also holds true of the humorous story-telling or "romance of manners" that reveals a realistic quality in contrast with that fictional *genre*. In spite of this contrast, the two different kinds of novel agree in the use of first-personal narrative. This agreement is very reminiscent of what we observed in the ancient Egyptian art of story-telling.† One may surmise, therefore, that oriental influences may have promoted the mingling of fiction and actuality in popular Hellenistic writings. Whatever may have been the case in regard to this, in genuine Latin literature we have a definite historical indication in the masterly satirical romance of Petronius, of which at least one substantial fragment is extant, "Trimalchio's Feast". When, in the frivolity-laden air of the court of Nero, Petronius with his magic wand rounded up the figures from the street and the tavern, Rome's pleasures and her semi-Greek cosmopolitanism, into a human comedy, and his supreme genius found scope in an æsthetic treatment of existence, with satire which cut so deep that, without moralizing, it dissected and painted the true human animal with unemotional exactitude—then a work of art was created which made visible to all men the importance of such fields of experience to the realization of what life is. That was capable of encouraging others to disclose similar episodes of their own lives, as, in seventeenth-century Spain, after the creation of the *novela picaresca* many an autobiographer introduced himself as a new Lazarillo de Tormes.

\* Satires, II, 1, 27-9, 34, 57-9.

“For every thousand living souls there are a thousand tastes.

My own delight is to shut up words in feet, as did

Lucilius . . .

He it is that I follow, I, a Lucanian or an Apulian, I know not which . . .

To be brief—whether peaceful age awaits me, or Death hovers round with sable wings,

rich or poor, in Rome, or, if chance so bid, in exile,  
whatever the colour of my life, write I must.”

† See above, Introduction, pp. 46-7, 55-6.

The social sphere in which the moral adventurousness of living necessary for this sort of autobiography was combined with intellectual interests seems to have lain mainly in the field of the rhetoric saturated with religious excitement and the imagination of the abnormal—or of the “Sophists”, as the *literati* working through the spoken word were called after the so-called second sophistic movement in the Augustan epoch—a school of thought filled with the love of self-revelation, from which we shall see other autobiographical writings come. Naturalism was able to ally itself with a religiosity which, like it, did not shape man from within; this is shown not only by the Spanish art of the baroque period but by the development of not a few modern French writers.

An indication is given by the way *Apuleius* made use of autobiography in his romance of manners, the “*Metamorphoses*”. Lucius Apuleius, who was born in Madaura, in Numidia, represents for us the Hellenistic type of “Sophist” among the Latin writers of the middle of the second century after Christ. The “*Metamorphoses*”, stories translated by him from Greek, as he himself states, “of the forms and fortunes of men transformed into different shapes, and then restored again in due sequence back into their own persons”, show in the virtuosity of the highly-coloured literary expression, with the marked African dialect, the use of the naturalistic style in the full splendour of the baroque.

The autobiographical element has its place here at the beginning and the end of the work. At the beginning the narrator, before he presents himself in the form of an ass, introduces himself as the author of the marvellous stories, with wittily invented data : <sup>23</sup>

Hymettus of Athens, the Isthmus of Corinth, Taenarus of Sparta, being famous lands . . . be places where my ancient progeny and lineage did sometime flourish : there when I was young I went first to school and learned the Attic speech. Soon after (as a stranger) I arrived at Rome, where by great industry, and without any school-master, I arrived at the full perfection of the Latin tongue : behold, I first crave and beg your pardon, lest I should happen to displease or offend any of you by the rude and rustic utterance of this strange and foreign language. And verily this change of speech doth correspond to the enterprise and matter whereof I purpose to treat.

In this foreward there is little of note beyond the pleasure in literary parody, while the author's introduction of himself is a simple following of a convention. Similarly in one of the “Sophist” romances of that period we find a bit of the author's

own life-story inserted in the middle of the work.\* The first Italian translator of the "Metamorphoses" was able in the sixteenth century to make use of that self-introduction to incorporate his own autobiography, expanding the ten lines to a page and a half.†

The other autobiographical passage put at the end of the romance allows us to see into the attitude of mind underlying the self-portrayal and its characteristic style. At the end of the adventures, when the ass, not merely a comic figure but one that pictures the amoral attitude of the hero of a comic romance, has returned to human shape, Apuleius does really bring himself into the story, departing from his Greek exemplar<sup>24</sup> in order to confess in a loud voice his own religious awakening, like a picaresque turned monk. This final section of the romance (Book XI) begins with a long rhetorical prayer which the ass, awakening suddenly at midnight from a sweet, sound sleep on the bosom of the sand at a secret place on the sea-shore, addresses joyfully, though in tears, to the goddess who will redeem him :

O blessed queen of heaven, whether thou be the Dame Ceres . . . or the celestial Venus . . . or the terrible Proserpine . . . : by whatsoever name or fashion or shape it is lawful to call upon thee, I pray thee to end my great travail and misery and raise up my fallen hopes, and deliver me from the wretched fortune which so long time pursued me. Grant peace and rest to my adversities, for I have endured enough labour and peril. Remove from me the hateful shape of mine ass, and render me to my kindred and to mine own self Lucius : and if I have offended in any point thy divine majesty, let me rather die if I may not live.<sup>25</sup>

There follows a vision that gives the rhetorician the opportunity to display all his art in the description of the divine semblance of the redeemer Isis. After his prayer the ass is restored to human shape by her high priest during a solemn procession of the initiates, and ultimately he himself becomes a priest in her service. The main part of this section is occupied by his initiation into the mysteries of Isis. To this we shall return later, in connexion with religious self-portrayal and soul-history.‡

\* In Iamblichus' *Babyloniaca*, in connexion with a digression on magic. Cf. Rohde, *Der griechische Roman*, pp. 361 and 371. More or less comparable is Cervantes' introduction into "Don Quixote" of an account of his own captivity in Africa.

† Agnoli Firenzuola (born 1493), *L'Asino d'Oro* (Venezia, 1550). Lorenzo Scala states in the dedication that the translator did here what he had done in no other book, *fare memoria della vita sua*, "made a memoir of his own life". Reprinted in *Bibliotheca rara*, XXIV (Milano, 1863).

‡ See below, pp. 520-1.