

I THE PEOPLE:
AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION

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Why do so many political thinkers in the American tradition turn to autobiography? What, if any, is the relationship between autobiography and democratic politics? To answer these questions, I consider four texts: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, *The Education of Henry Adams*, and Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*. Each of these authors wrote his or her life story as a response to an issue of political authority: Franklin built autonomy out of a rejection of paternalism, Douglass looked for justice wherein people of all races may judge, Adams sought civic education at the end of American republicanism, and Goldman motivated the people to consciousness without coercion or violence. To solve these problems, each author turns to autobiography to appeal to popular authority, distinguishing the genre from other appeals in democratic theory such as the invocation of law, reason, deliberation, or morality. More than a claim to readers' consciences, preferences, or intellects, autobiography analyzes an injustice's cause and effect in historical, personal experience. Each author I study appeals to popular authority by engaging readers in the interpretation of personal experience: Franklin provides a model of citizenship for readers to imitate, Douglass indicts readers for complicity within the injustices of slavery, Adams encourages readers to their own self-inquiry in modern times, and Goldman raises readers' social consciousness by capturing broad politics networks and her experiences as a radical. Political thinkers in the American tradition turn to autobiography to satisfy an essential need in democratic politics: how to make private experience a shared social reality. By reading autobiography as a democratic genre of self-examination, political theory can better understand historical trends in how Americans have interrogated issues of political authority through declarations of personal experience.

Biographical Sketch

Nolan Bennett is broadly interested in the history of American political thought and the mutual influence of democratic politics and literature in the United States and elsewhere. Having received his doctorate from Cornell University, he is currently a postdoctoral fellow and the Manley Visiting Assistant Professor at Duke University's Program in American Values and Institutions. Before Cornell, Nolan pursued undergraduate research at the University of California, Los Angeles, and attended high school in the California Bay Area.

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Introduction

The People's Author: American Politics and Autobiography

Few genres appear as frequently in the American political tradition as autobiography. From Benjamin Franklin to Barack Obama, we could write a history of American political thought from autobiography alone, full of moments like these:

In a pamphlet written to preface his 1829 autobiography, William Apess offered “The Experiences of Five Christian Indians,” which briefly detailed how he and they “had met with great misfortunes” at the hands of white Americans: “When you read this,” he told his audience, “ask yourselves if ever you had such trials.”¹

After spending two years alone in the woods of Massachusetts (having left on Independence Day), the critic of nineteenth-century industrial modernization, Henry David Thoreau, wrote his 1854 *Walden*, therein proposing for readers an autobiography not “to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.”²

When she was just twenty-eight, only a few years after her arrest and prison sentence, Angela Davis wrote what she later described as a “political autobiography.”

¹ William Apess, “The Experiences of Five Christian Indians,” in *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot*, ed. Barry O’Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 119. According to Barry O’Connell, Apess likely wrote the pamphlet before his 1829 autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, though he would publish the pamphlet after *Forest* in 1833. See Barry O’Connell, “Introduction,” in *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot*, by William Apess, ed. Barry O’Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), xiv.

² Henry David Thoreau, “Walden,” in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, [1854] 1982), 337.

Looking back on her 1974 text, she reflected on why she had been moved to autobiography at the time of her incarceration:

I knew that my potential as an autobiographical subject was created by the massive global movement that successfully achieved my freedom. So the question was how to write an autobiography that would be attentive to this community of collective struggle. I did not want to write a conventional autobiography in which the heroic subject offers lessons to readers. I decided that I would write a political autobiography exploring the ways in which I had been shaped by movements and campaigns in communities of struggle.³

More than merely individualist and self-aggrandizing, Davis wrote, her autobiography could “demystify the usual notion that history is the product of unique individuals possessing inherent qualities of greatness.”⁴

Though separated by decades and distinct political contexts, and though producing drastically different forms of narrative, these authors share a refrain: in times of injustice, an account of personal experience can never encourage the writer’s introspection alone. The readers, and the people to whom they belong, must in some way see themselves in that intimate, printed history.

Why do so many political thinkers in the American tradition turn to autobiography? What, if any, is the relationship between autobiography and democratic politics? To answer these questions, I consider four texts: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*, *The Education of Henry Adams*, and Emma Goldman’s *Living My Life*.

³ Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 17.

⁴ Angela Y. Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers Co., [1974] 2008), viii.

Each of these authors wrote his or her life story in response to a crisis of authority: Franklin built autonomy out of a rejection of paternalism, Douglass looked for justice wherein people of all races may judge, Adams sought civic education at the end of American republicanism, and Goldman motivated the people to consciousness without coercion or violence. An autobiographer's most basic goal is to supplant competing authorities – father, god, state or king – with one formed through experience, an autonomy rooted in mastery over the author's past and identity. This is an idea of authority borne from the Enlightenment: to make the self anew in overcoming history.

Autobiography is thus an appeal to authority grounded in the author's experience, distinct from other forms of textual authority such as law, fact, or scripture.⁵ It is a genre in which an author can be truly autonomous, can truly dictate the themes and narratives that frame her life. But autobiography does more than build its author's authority. It addresses a fundamental need in democratic politics: how to make experience a shared social reality. For an autobiographer's goal is not to replace authority with his own, nor, as Thoreau wrote, to seclude oneself. If that were the end, she would turn to biography or diary. As a published medium, autobiography makes experience public, and in doing so, it submits that experience to the reader's own interpretation. Whatever claim the author makes, whether on the injustice of slavery or the perils of modernity, the reader has the very evidence that warrants those claims.

⁵ Drawing on David Walker's *Appeal... to the Colored Citizens of the World*, Melvin Rogers argues that to appeal is "a bidirectional rhetorical practice that affirms the political standing of the claimant and the one to whom the appeal is directed." Although my use of appeal shares this bidirectional status, I argue that an autobiography's appeal does not affirm but rather opens the channel for readers to interpret the evidence and claims of its author. Melvin L. Rogers, "David Walker and the Political Power of the Appeal," *Political Theory*, March 12, 2014, 2.

Whereas in testimony or confession the audience interprets the author's experience according to the rules of state or religion, autobiography asks only of the reader's empathy. Every autobiography echoes the crisis of authority played out in the Declaration of Independence. For in writing that letter to the king, its signers likely thought, they were not creating "the people" out of thin air or in line with legal precedent, but from a shared colonial experience, whose participants would then decide whether this new collectivity and its allegedly-shared history would define them or not. Just as those following the founding fathers would argue that the people signing the Declaration and prefacing the Constitution were not self-evident but rather a contested site of political identity, these autobiographies proposed the author and her place among the demos as not a given but the subject of self-examination.⁶

To write an autobiography is to do something that's quintessentially democratic: to ground claims in everyday or extraordinary experiences, to ask that others rest their judgments in these intimate experiences. It is, then, the genre of self-inquiry best fit for democratic politics, and for students of democracy it provides an intimate perspective on early American confrontations with political authority.

In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how Franklin, Douglass, Adams, and Goldman each took up autobiography's democratic potential. In the rest of the introduction, I argue for the significance of storytelling and autobiography to American political thought, critically compare autobiography to previous genres, and define autobiography as an appeal to popular authority rooted in personal experience.

⁶ See Jason A. Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Stories of American Political Thought

An autobiography is, first and foremost, an author's attempt to craft a story from history. It is never *simply* history, *simply* an objective account of an individual's life, no more than the Declaration of Independence represented simply its signers, or as Lincoln wrote, claimed that all men were already, actually equal.⁷ An autobiographer takes personal experience as his medium, yet attempts to create from that something of use for others. Like many forms of literature, autobiography is an attempt to represent something greater than its constituent parts.

American political thinkers have long been interested in these stories, in the literary forms through which authors wrestle with issues of democratic authority. Those who shoulder, who study or suffer the American experience have often looked to literature as a way to represent politics. One of the first texts to analyze "America" as an emerging identity, Crèvecoeur's 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, offered its eyewitness narrative to ask: "What then is the American, this new man?"⁸ In the 1930s, Black Elk of the Ogala Sioux prefaced his life story to John Neihardt:

My friend, I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like a heavy snow? So many other men have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills.⁹

⁷ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision at Springfield, Illinois," in *Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Gore Vidal (New York: Library of America, 2009), 120.

⁸ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43–44.

⁹ Black Elk and John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1932] 2014), 1.

There is an idea coursing through these claims, that storytelling and experience can do more than validate the speaker before an audience, but can say something general about his listeners, about their identity or the experiences that perhaps they've shared.

Many authors throughout American history have asked what forms of literature best represent American politics, if any can at all. After his own experiences traveling the fledgling nation, Alexis de Tocqueville lamented that “strictly speaking, the inhabitants of the United States have not yet gained a literature”: Tocqueville recognized only the “journalists, who are not great writers but speak the language of the country and make themselves understood.”¹⁰ More hopeful and many years later, Walt Whitman urged in *Democratic Vistas* that “democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists.”¹¹ Literature will represent “the average, the bodily, the concrete, the democratic, the popular.”¹² Before Whitman, Herman Melville looked “to the stories that Americans tell themselves about themselves” to consider and critique American identity.¹³ Thus the stories that emerge from American experiences need not be exceptionalist: figures like Whitman and Melville observed how a multitude of perspectives in American democracy could engender vastly different stories and politics. Consider the broad range of literary genres to emerge from different American moments: John Winthrop’s prophetic oratorship, the slave

¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald Bevan (London: Penguin Classics, [1835, 1840] 2003), 544–545.

¹¹ Walt Whitman, “*Democratic Vistas*,” in *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), 931.

¹² *Ibid.*, 994.

¹³ See Jason A. Frank, “Introduction,” in *A Political Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. Jason A. Frank (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 4.

narratives of ante- and postbellum America, the novels of Horatio Alger, Charlotte Perkin Gilman's utopian *Herland*, or jazz poetry in the Harlem Renaissance. Not all American political thought can be told through literature, and yet even the great historians of American politics often fall back on literary modes of storytelling: charting America through tragic downfall or the prophetic realization of its ideals, with heroes made of ancestral figures like John Locke or Niccolò Machiavelli.¹⁴ Book titles like Judith Shklar's *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* and Eric Foner's *The Story of American Freedom* emphasize the continuing appeal to frame American political history as an unfolding narrative.¹⁵

In the second half of the twentieth century, students of American political thought have prolonged the legacies of Whitman, Melville and others in looking to

¹⁴ On early historians that portrayed American development as a decline, see Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America* (New York: C. Scribner's, 1889); Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History* (New York: Vintage Books, [1895] 1955); Frederick Jackson Turner, "On the Significance of the Frontier," in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 11–30. In the twentieth century, an influential group of historians debated the influence of Locke and Machiavelli on the American founding, laying out a "liberal consensus" and competing "republican synthesis." On the liberal consensus, see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (Orlando: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., [1955] 1991); Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On the republican synthesis, see John Greville Agard Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1975] 2003); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969). For other commentary on the liberal/republican traditions debate, see Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 549–66; James P. Young, *Reconsidering American Liberalism: The Troubled Odyssey of the Liberal Idea* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

¹⁵ See Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

literature as a workshop for American democracy.¹⁶ In 1979's "The Uses of Literature for the Study of Politics," John Schaar argued that literature turns the theorist's view away from the conceptual and abstract to the complex and particular: Schaar looked to Melville not for a "specific political doctrine" but as a reflection on consent and authority.¹⁷ The turn to literature in American political thought recovered political figures left out in earlier histories: not only Whitman and Melville themselves, but essayists like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, or great orators and novelists like Frederick Douglass and James Baldwin. In the past two decades alone, writings on American political thought by Jane Bennett, George Shulman, Thomas Dumm, Lawrie Balfour, Jason Frank, Melvin Rogers, Jack Turner, Robert Gooding-Williams, Michael Shapiro, and Nick Bromell have all broadened the constituent voices of American political history by turning to literature.¹⁸ In his study of prophecy

¹⁶ This turn to literature was partially inspired by literature studies' own turn to figures like Whitman and Melville, particularly through F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* in 1941. See Francis Otto Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).

¹⁷ John H. Schaar, "The Uses of Literature for the Study of Politics: The Case of Melville's *Benito Cereno*," in *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, [1979] 1981), 56–57.

¹⁸ See Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994); George M. Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Thomas Dumm, "Thoreau's Solitude," in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 326–38; Katharine Lawrence Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 4; Frank, *Constituent Moments*, chap. 5–7; Melvin L. Rogers, "The People, Rhetoric, and Affect: On the Political Force of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 188–203; Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), chap. 5; Michael J. Shapiro, *Deforming American Political Thought: Ethnicity, Facticity, and Genre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Nicholas Knowles Bromell, *By the Sweat of the Brow: Literature and Labor in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). See also the earlier, but still important, Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). These works accompany a general interest in literature throughout political theory, particularly those studying ancient literature. See J. Peter Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken*

and the jeremiad, Shulman argues for literature's alternative perspective on American political thought, that "literary art is the return of the repressed; it makes visible what is made absent by a discourse of contractual relations."¹⁹ To understand American democracy requires scholars heed Melville's inquiry: that we don't simply write American stories, but read those that citizens write of themselves.

Though autobiography is not an exceptionally American genre, American authors have consistently turned to the genre to narrate broader stories of the nation. As I explore in the next section, modern autobiography and American democracy develop with similar inheritances from the Enlightenment and similar complications in the nineteenth century. And yet despite the appeal of storytelling in American politics, relatively little attention has been paid to autobiography as a genre. There are exceptions, particularly among those political theorists interested in the history of black American thought.²⁰ In the only book-length treatment of autobiography and American political thought, Philip Abbott argues for a "sermonic" tradition of American political thought locked within autobiography.²¹ But Abbott's goal is to contrast this tradition with liberalism, to explore its didacticism, to see the sermonic as moving beyond autobiography to other genres.²² He provides an excellent overview of

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 196.

²⁰ See Kenneth Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Balfour, *Democracy's Reconstruction*, chap. 4; Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, chap. 5.

²¹ Philip Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom: Autobiography and American Political Thought* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

many autobiographies, yet does not tell us whether *anything* is unique of the genre, nor whether and why political theorists may want to read autobiography.

To appreciate the relationship between autobiography and American democracy requires we consider how authors have interrogated the latter through intimate, first-person narratives that provoke readers' empathy and involvement in those stories. In her 1990 address as president of the American Political Science Association, "Redeeming American Political Theory," Judith Shklar told her audience that "all the social sciences are submerged biographies of the silent majority of humanity: the peasant, the artisan, the immigrant, the slave, women, and (in our case) that basic irreducible unit of representative politics, the voter."²³ Before we tell the lives of these political actors, we should look to those who have told their own.

Autobiography and the Authority of the People

This dissertation proposes autobiography as a democratic genre of political theory, and, more specifically, as an appeal to popular authority that looks to make personal experience a shared social reality. This proposition rests on three claims, which I explore below: (1) that autobiography and modern democracy both constitute a popular, autonomous subject, (2) that it is politically salient to distinguish autobiography from other genres and forms of political appeal, and (3) that we can build a definition of autobiography attuned to these ideas and that facilitates our better understanding of how the genre enables democratic politics.

²³ Judith N. Shklar, "Redeeming American Political Theory," in *Redeeming American Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 93.

For all its roots in antiquity – the Greeks’ personal notebooks or Augustine’s *Confessions* – the autobiography as a literary genre of self-inquiry does not flourish till just after the Enlightenment.²⁴ Although *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* is arguably the first major autobiography, the term did not exist before Franklin died, and he originally called his memoirs the “History of My Life”: only later would editors add the new genre’s name to the book.²⁵ Franklin’s was a pioneering text amid a wide variety of experiments in self-inquiry, including myriad attempts to reproduce the self in written correspondence that borrowed from previous genres of the confession, novel, memoir, and biography.²⁶ While revolutionaries debated national independence and what genre of constitution or declaration would represent them, American authors were similarly seeking new modes of representation. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the term “autobiography” that emerged in 1797 and gained popularity in the early nineteenth century prioritized “the concept of the self-interested individual of property who was intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement.”²⁷ This, of course, described Franklin better than any.

Those writing at the transitional stage of autobiography inherited the fruits of the Enlightenment. Drawing on Charles Taylor, Stephen Arch argues that the genre

²⁴ On the Greek *hupomnēmata*, see Michel Foucault, “Self Writing,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 209. My review of autobiography is heavily indebted to the careful history provided by Smith and Watson here and elsewhere. See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 193–234.

²⁵ See Stephen Carl Arch, *After Franklin: The Emergence of Autobiography in Post-Revolutionary America 1780-1830* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire, 2001), 10. Joyce Appleby explains that autobiography took on “a kind of cultural capital” in the nineteenth century, particularly as it accompanied the rhetoric of industry, self-improvement, and savings during the industrial revolution. Joyce Oldham Appleby, “Introduction,” in *Recollections of the Early Republic: Selected Autobiographies*, ed. Joyce Oldham Appleby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), xx.

²⁶ See Arch, *After Franklin*, 20.

²⁷ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2.

required at least three philosophical tenets: a sense of inwardness, the elevation of ordinary life, and the affirmation of the “natural” self.²⁸ To write an autobiography required a concept of the individual, defined not through God or state but an autonomous practice of introspection. Autobiography drew from the Enlightenment the idea that personal experience could ground claims about the individual and, through it, the world. Long before Franklin, Michel de Montaigne had pioneered the essay genre as a similar attempt in self-exploration.²⁹ Making use of the ambiguous French *expérience* as both “experiment” and “experience,” Montaigne introduced his *Essays* imploring “I myself am the subject of my book.”³⁰ According to Montaigne, and autobiographers long after him, through writing on experience one could literally and literarily create the self. Franklin’s “project for moral perfection,” provided in part two of his *Autobiography*, is a modern equivalent: Franklin experiments with a series of virtues in his daily life, drawing from these practices both a sense of his individual character and norms for readers and posterity. And again, just eight years before Franklin wrote part two, revolutionaries like Thomas Paine invoked similar language, turning readers of *Common Sense* not simply to the principles of government that condemned Britain but the experiences of the colony, describing the fledgling nation as an adolescent teenager under the heel of a tyrannical father. “Time,” Paine argued,

²⁸ Arch, *After Franklin*, 35.

²⁹ See Thomas Mathien and D.G. Wright, “Introduction,” in *Autobiography as Philosophy: The Philosophical Uses of Self-Presentation*, ed. Thomas Mathien and D.G. Wright (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

³⁰ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 2.

“makes more converts than reason.”³¹ Experience grounded the identities in question, and provided evidence whereby readers could interpret the author’s claims.

But the reliance on experience does not alone distinguish autobiography: Montaigne was writing in the essay genre, and surely older forms of the confession and memoir similarly drew from the author’s experience. What separates autobiography from these genres is not simply that experience has the authority to ground an author’s claims, but *who* has authority over that experience: the authority to interpret it, to say it matters to society or history. Particularly in the American context, autobiography emerged alongside and often in tension with other genres of personal narrative, including not only the memoir but conversion, captivity, and slave narratives.³² These genres relied on distinct sources of authority. In chapter two, I’ll demonstrate how Frederick Douglass wrote his 1855 autobiography to intervene on an abolitionist politics of slave narrative in which authors deferred authority over experience to abolitionist interpreters. The subject that emerges from self-inquiry depends entirely on where its authority is invested, and thus any of these genres must necessarily first confront or conform to a specific authority, one that will give traction to the author’s experiential claims and help to identify that author.

What makes autobiography unique among these other genres is that it appeals to popular authority in validating the claims that an author bases in experience. To

³¹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, [1776] 1995), xi.

³² On the relation between American autobiography and other genres, see Jay Parini, “Introduction,” in *The Norton Book of American Autobiography*, ed. Jay Parini (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 11–20. On the development of autobiography in the early nineteenth century, see Arch, *After Franklin*. For an exploration of its development in the English context beforehand, see Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

clarify this relationship between authority and experience, it may be useful to briefly reproduce the goals and audiences of three major texts in the history of autobiography: Augustine's 398 *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1782 *Confessions*, and the aforementioned *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, first published in 1791.

Each of these texts built on what Taylor writes as Augustine's original turning within: "in the inward man dwells truth," Augustine wrote.³³ But Augustine's audience is unequivocally God: introducing his narrative, he writes "let me enter my appeal before your mercy" and "not before a fellow man, who might well mock me."³⁴ As I explore at greater lengths in chapter three, Augustine's confession both *narrates* his conversion in the garden to God as well as *performs* that conversion, by illustrating his life literally in dialogue with that authority. Although Augustine relies on experience in writing the *Confessions*, it produces a subject authorized by an external, objective authority. Anyone else (including his readers) to "overhear my testimony" is simply an eavesdropper, a non-participant in this process.³⁵

Rousseau turns to face his readers, introducing his *Confessions*: "My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself. Simply myself."³⁶ As he describes of the young Emile elsewhere, Rousseau appeals first to nature, and only second to society. Continuing, he insists on his unique individuality, no "better" but "different" than fellow men. Thus while Rousseau is still insistent on grounding his experience in the appeal to "Nature,"

³³ Quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 129.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

³⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin, [1782] 1981), 17.

he acknowledges his audience as participants in the book: “Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question which can be only resolved after reading of my book,” not after its writing. There’s a sense in which his *Confessions* will produce a subject that is partially legitimized through readers’ evaluations. Rousseau doesn’t clarify how readers will participate: whether through empathy, imitation or rejection. But what makes Rousseau’s book a transitional text is that he appeals to his readers *before* appealing “before my Sovereign Judge” in the next paragraph. Though insistent on his ultimate authority to self-examine, Rousseau recognizes the reader’s role in interpreting and engaging his narrative.

In no text is autobiography’s eventual turn to popular authority as clear as in the first paragraph of Franklin’s *Autobiography*-né-“History”:

Having emerg’d from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far tho’ Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.³⁷

This is a text explicitly focused on Franklin’s own experience as a young man in a young America, and yet God and the reader here have exchanged the roles they occupied in Augustine’s *Confessions*: the story is directed toward the reader, encouraging his empathy and imitation, with God a mere bystander to the story. As I’ll argue in the next chapter, this is complicated by the fact that part one of Franklin’s autobiography begins as a memoir to his son, wherein letters from Franklin’s colleagues, included before part two, will encourage Franklin to turn his audience

³⁷ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1791] 2003), 43.

from progeny to all posterity. Franklin's authority is dramatized within and through the narrative: the book captures his youthful rebellion against his father, but also creates Franklin as an historical figure, a literary citizen of the young nation. Of course, his text is not an unambiguous endorsement of popular authority, for readers will only participate in Franklin's story through imitating and reprinting it: later autobiographers will greatly expand readers' involvement. But Franklin's text is one of the first to recognize autonomy as more than inward- or upward-looking.

What distinguishes these examples of self-inquiry – Augustine to Rousseau to Franklin – is the audience that validates and identifies the author against his experience and claims. Even if a published confession has readers who aren't God, its penitence defines the author by confirming His authority. Court testimony is perhaps a better example for political theorists: the citizen who testifies, be he witness or defendant, is identified not simply through what he tells the court but how the court decides the admissibility of his experience. Like in Franz Kafka's parable, the subject forever stands before the law. As I recount in chapter four, American anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century consistently confronted this problem. For every effort defendant Alexander Berkman makes to offer his background and politics – "I address myself to the People" – the judge silences or redirects his testimony to the laws in question.³⁸ The authority of testimony will always be the state, its subject a legal citizen. Distinguishing between these genres is grammatically similar to how we might determine a government's subject through what authority legitimizes that system.

³⁸ Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York: New York Review of Books, [1912] 1999), 89.

Both autobiography as a genre, and democracy as a regime, are parallel in demanding that “the people” be that authority. And in the same way that democratic theorists have envisioned multiple forms of appeal through which a specific or expansive people are invoked, autobiographies may differ in how they choose to engage readers as a vision of the people.³⁹ Franklin asks readers to engage through imitation, and other authors will demand drastically different engagements, indicting readers for complicity within the injustices of personal narrative, imploring readers to pursue their own self-inquiry, or revealing broad political networks and experiences to raise readers’ social consciousness. As I’ll explore in the following chapters, each of these styles may invoke a different sense of the people, some more restrictive than others. My claim is not that autobiography is necessarily the most *inclusive* genre, but that autobiography is the genre most interested in the democratic question of *who* constitutes popular authority. What we get from reading autobiography as political theory, then, is a set of reflections on authority that are both captured in a personal narrative as well as performed in how the author encourages the reader’s participation in the very process of self-examination and authorization.⁴⁰

³⁹ See Frank, *Constituent Moments*; Rogers, “The People, Rhetoric, and Affect.”

⁴⁰ Note that by authority I do not mean “authenticity,” though this is often how literature studies consider the term. Claims of inauthenticity surrounding autobiography generally mask judgments about the author’s group or ideological membership: for example, Douglass’s eloquence in his slave narrative earned many skeptical sentiments over whether a black ex-slave could truly write this way. For an account of American autobiography that studies authority as authenticity, see G. Thomas Couser, *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). As Couser points out there, the benefit of the genre for the construction of authority in early America is that autobiography “is seen not as *produced by* a preexistent self but as *producing* a provisional and contingent one. Indeed, that self is seen as bound and (pre)determined by the constraints of the linguistic resources and narrative tropes available to the ‘author’” (19).

Although no scholar has framed autobiography and democracy as parallel appeals to popular authority, my argument continues major trends in autobiography studies that have striven to define the genre while complicating its role in American history. Despite its popularity following Franklin, scholars were slow to treat autobiography as a literary genre. Although early studies in the twentieth century by Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch argued for the pedagogical potential of autobiography to guide readers' self-improvement (hearkening back to mid-nineteenth-century debates over the biographies of great men among figures like Thomas Carlyle and Emerson), for much of the century scholars read autobiography as merely a set of marginalia to authors' other writings.⁴¹ As I show in the third chapter, this likely followed critiques of biography that rejected the nineteenth-century "great lives" didacticism in favor of more empirical, objective accounts.⁴² In the second half of the twentieth century, works by Georges Gusdorf in 1956 and Francis R. Hart in 1970 renewed interest in autobiography by challenging what had earlier been the assumed "unified selfhood" of the Enlightenment.⁴³ On the heels of Marxist, Freudian, and Saussurian critiques of the modern subject, new studies in autobiography focused more on its art of self-representation: what had once been works with premier access to individual truth became, like other literature, subject to various social, economic, or

⁴¹ On Dilthey and Misch, see Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 194–196. On biography in the nineteenth century, see chapter three.

⁴² On changes in biography studies from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, see Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography & Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 319.

⁴³ See Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 199–200.

political influences.⁴⁴ This would finally confirm autobiography as not only a subject of interest, but a literary genre of its own.

Scholars in the 1970s began to define autobiography according to how it authorized its subject and engaged readers.⁴⁵ One of the more influential essays, Pierre Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact," argued in 1971 that readers distinguish autobiography from genres such as biography or the novel through textual elements that establish an informal contract of authenticity with the reader: these parts might include a promissory note in the preface, identity between narrator and protagonist, or simply that the book's title includes "autobiography."⁴⁶ As a result, Lejeune (like many, inspired by Roland Barthes's 1968 "Death of the Author"⁴⁷) emphasized the reader's engagement with autobiography over the author's intentions. In Paul de Man's 1979 deconstructionist critique of Lejeune, he pushed this idea to the point where autobiography ceased to be a genre: on the contrary, de Man argued, all texts include some degree of an "autobiographical moment," a point at which the author and

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 201.

⁴⁵ Although the texts mentioned below represent continental philosophy's primary engagements with autobiography in the late twentieth century, Michel Foucault's later work also reveals an increasing interest in writing practices as they relate to politics or ethics. Though Foucault's focus is on the ancient Greeks, there is a clear connection between these explorations and his earlier interest in the "micro-physics of power" and, later, in governmentality. On writing, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 95–139; Foucault, "Self Writing"; Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 223–52. On power and its relation to governmentality, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 26; Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 300.

⁴⁶ Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," in *On Autobiography*, trans. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1973] 1989), 3–30.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text: Essays* (London: Fontana, [1968] 1977), 142–47.

reader constitute each other as subjects.⁴⁸ These theoretical approaches thus paid particularly close attention to autobiography as a text beyond its narrative content.⁴⁹ Other influential studies of autobiography considered the genre as a performative act, in line with speech act theory inherited from the linguistic turn and particularly J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*.⁵⁰ Elizabeth Bruss took up Austin's definition of the "illocutionary" force of language to distinguish between an autobiography's form and function: in *Autobiographical Acts*, she sought to study the conditions and context in which autobiography is "felicitous" (to use Austin's term), through which readers understand the text *as* an autobiography.⁵¹ Although I don't frequently invoke Lejeune, de Man, or Bruss throughout the following chapters, the impact of their work on my argument is clear: in the same way that Austin and the linguistic turn in philosophy influenced a wide variety of scholars writing on political theory, my

⁴⁸ Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," *Mln* 94, no. 5 (1979): 921. As Smith and Watson point out, de Man's attempt to render autobiography theoretically unappraisable is suspiciously convenient (or at least, ironic) given his own shrouded past (208). It should also be noted that while de Man's argument captures a deconstructionist approach to autobiography, his critique of Lejeune is fairly ungenerous. In the same way that many critics of J.L. Austin (including another deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida) overlooked Austin's comments on the insufficiency or failure of his categories, Lejeune also in "The Autobiographical Pact" had expressed dissatisfaction with his study, an anxiety corroborated by his continued revision of this theory of autobiography (Lejeune, 30). For another critique of Lejeune, see Michael Ryan, "Self-Evidence," *Diacritics* 10, no. 2 (1980): 2–16.

⁴⁹ For another deconstructionist approach to autobiography, see Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions*, trans. Christie McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

⁵⁰ John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. James Opie Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1962] 1975).

⁵¹ Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 1–18. Like many influenced by the linguistic turn, Bruss also mentions John Searle and Ludwig Wittgenstein in her analysis. For another approach to autobiography that draws on Austin, see Lead D. Hewitt, "Getting into the (Speech) Act: Autobiography as Theory and Performance," *SubStance* 16, no. 1 (1987): 32–44. Though more focused on the performance of literature than its historicism, Bruss's argument shares a similar turn to context inspired by Austin found much earlier in Quentin Skinner's approach to political theory. See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53. For a comparison of the Cambridge school's and poststructuralism's uptake of the linguistic turn, see David Harlan, "Intellectual History and the Return of Literature," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (1989): 581–609.

definition of autobiography similarly insists on the forms of writing that involve readers in making sense of the text.⁵²

In light of this argument and these inheritances, I propose that political theorists take up the following definition of autobiography, albeit with some hesitations. No definition of a genre can fully capture the gamut of texts we consider autobiography, much like no abstract account of power or justice includes every instance of either: in that sense, as de Man had argued, it is theoretically impossible to fully capture the concept in an abstract definition.⁵³ But as political theorists inspired by the similar observations of Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein have shown, admitting the fluidity of any set of criteria can lead to a more capacious exploration of how these concepts are used politically.⁵⁴ As Irving Howe wrote in his 1957 *Politics and the Novel*, my goal is not to rigidly categorize autobiography here, but to argue for a definition that allows us to better see how the genre complements democratic politics.⁵⁵ I define autobiography as follows:

a personal account of life development in which the author's experience is the primary source of evidence for claims-making, the account of which implies or addresses a popular authority beyond the author by way of the book's

⁵² See, for example, Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Routledge, 1997); Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (Stanford University Press, 1983); Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas"; Frank, *Constituent Moments*.

⁵³ Many scholars have argued that autobiography in particular is resistant to theorizing, given the genre's emphasis on the intimate particularities of private lives. See John Sturrock, "Theory Versus Autobiography," in *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation*, ed. Robert Folkenflik (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 21–37. Linda Anderson describes genre categorization in autobiography studies as a "paradox," in the sense that studies want the genre to remain as "irreducible as the self it figures" yet struggle nonetheless to establish delimiting criteria. Linda R. Anderson, *Autobiography* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011), 5.

⁵⁴ See, most notably, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice: On the Significance of Ludwig Wittgenstein for Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵⁵ Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 16.

publication, and for which the relation between the author and her experience, or the author and her audience, often provides the central object(s) of inquiry or the work's narrative structure.

We can diagram this definition to match the claims I've already made. The content of an autobiography will always be the author's personal experience over a period of time, be that the brief window of Thoreau's *Walden* or the full life of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. While some autobiography can appear in third person (such as Adams's), its emphasis on personal experience distinguishes autobiography from biography. Authors rely on experience as evidence to support personal or political claims, be it Douglass's analysis of the plantation or Goldman's critiques of women's prisons. But autobiographers do not treat their pasts as immediately self-evident, nor do they entreat readers to believe claims simply because the author has endured or witnessed an injustice. As Joan Scott criticized of historical studies, social observation should not uncritically rely on experience as evidence, but interrogate the structures and ideas that validate experience.⁵⁶ Though imperfect, autobiographers take a critical orientation to their own experiences, using personal narrative not simply to analyze social problems but the author's own identity and place in that society.⁵⁷ For example, Adams's *Education* will thematize his alienation from his own experiences as an aristocratic American in democratic modernity, which identifies him as out of joint with the coming society. Finally, this critical approach to experience as

⁵⁶ See Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.

⁵⁷ Something I do not discuss in detail throughout the dissertation is the psychological or philosophical construction of the "self" in early American thought, though its development is of serious importance to autobiography. For a general text on the self in modernity, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. For specific works on the American self, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Arch, *After Franklin*.

the grounds for claims-making resolves autobiography as always an appeal to popular authority. For in order to convince readers that slavery is unjust, Douglass must not only narrate his experiences under the lash, but implicate readers both in the conditions of society he critiques *and* the very practice of interpreting these claims through personal experience. Douglass also reveals that “the people” invoked by autobiography need not be the readers themselves. Though a book set on expanding American citizenship beyond whites, *My Bondage and My Freedom* would have been seldom read by the thousands of slaves it set out to incorporate. In order to make personal experience a shared social reality, autobiographers must develop ways of invoking popular authority as they construct their own in narrative and in mastery over a history of other political engagements.⁵⁸

Like any genre or abstract concept, this definition is far from airtight. A useful definition of a genre should provide a loose categorical abstraction for comparing unlike samples, while historically approximating what readers would have anticipated in picking up a text labeled or implied as a particular form of literature.⁵⁹ The following authors will borrow and blend between genres – as well as among the various tropes associated with autobiography – in order to invoke drastically different

⁵⁸ In this way, autobiography enacts a subject as it is read: a literary citizen, in the same way Derrida described the Declaration of Independence: “But this people does not exist. They do *not* exist as an entity, it does *not* exist, *before* this declaration, not *as such*. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer.” Jacques Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” trans. Thomas Pepper and Thomas Keenan, *New Political Science* 7, no. 1 (1986): 10.

⁵⁹ Herbert Simons and Aram Aghazarian define genre as “a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic.” For more on genre and its study throughout history, see Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian, “Introduction,” in *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, ed. Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 7; Robert J. Connors, “Genre Theory in Literature,” in *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, ed. Herbert W. Simons and Aram A. Aghazarian (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986).

conceptions of popular authority. Goldman, for example, will take up the common critique of paternalism in *Living My Life* not simply to criticize her father but the gendered authority of anarchist leaders. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “personal narrative” to speak generally of autobiography and related genres such as the confession, memoirs, and slave narrative, retaining “autobiography” for my definition or how the author or readers would have defined the genre historically.⁶⁰

Before summarizing the following chapters, I should flag what I do *not* hope to do in arguing for autobiography as a democratic genre of self-inquiry. Again, my point is not that autobiography is the most inclusive, but rather that it is the genre of self-inquiry most attuned to the issue of popular authority as it relates to claims of personal experience. As in other appeals to democracy, then, autobiographies can be (and are) written by those who have a limited view of who the people are. And, consistent with the broader study of political theory, democracy and its practices are far from the only tools available those seeking emancipation or inclusion.

This is important to point out, for many important literary studies have argued against autobiography’s narrow construction as a genre for Western, primarily white, Protestant male authors, and the correspondent need to widen the study to include

⁶⁰ Smith and Watson use the terms “life writing” and “life narrative” to more broadly describe autobiographical texts. My use of “personal narrative” is primarily stylistic; I also employ “self-writing” from time to time, to the same effect. See Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 4. It also bears emphasis that by delineating and studying autobiography, I am *not* attempting to elevate it as more important (or even more political) than other genres of personal narrative. As I summarize below, the expansion of literary interests into autobiography and other genres of personal narrative has facilitated entry of many marginalized peoples and authors into canons of literature. By specifically reading autobiographies, two of which are by white men, I do not mean to prioritize those as worthier of study than other genres.

underrepresented authors and genres.⁶¹ In particular, feminist scholars have endeavored a rich recovery of women's writing and expanded autobiography studies to consider diaries, journals, and other marginalized genres.⁶² Studies in autobiography have also proven invaluable for reclaiming the rich history of black American literature.⁶³ As is the case in many studies emergent from marginalized subjects or authors, writing on autobiography in the past decades exhibits a clear political edge. Several studies look to trace concepts familiar to political theorists through the history of autobiography, including liberalism, independence, authenticity, conversion, race, and the will.⁶⁴ This is in addition to many works that look beyond autobiography at the use of similar genres in political contexts ranging from nineteenth-century American abolitionist lecture circuits to contemporary human rights claims.⁶⁵ More recent

⁶¹ See, for example, Julie Rak, *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), ix. On the use of post- and decolonial thought for autobiography, see Philip Holden, *Autobiography and Decolonization: Modernity, Masculinity, and the Nation-State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

⁶² On women's autobiography, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986). For more on feminism and autobiography, see chapter four.

⁶³ On the significance of autobiography for studies in black American literature, see James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 15–17. See also writings by John W. Blassingame, and William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black Words, Signs, and the Racial Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). For more on black American political thought and autobiography, see chapter two.

⁶⁴ See, respectively, Malini Johar Schueller, *The Politics of Voice: Liberalism and Social Criticism from Franklin to Kingston* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); Susan Clair Imbarrato, *Declarations of Independency in Eighteenth-Century American Autobiography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Couser, *Altered Egos*; Peter A. Dorsey, *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics*; Richard Freadman, *Threads of Life: Autobiography and the Will* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁶⁵ See Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). If we widen our

writing on American autobiography in particular has moved away from earlier studies that emphasized it as an exceptionally-American genre. Whereas innovative works like Robert Sayre's *The Examined Self* (which in 1964 was the first critical study of American autobiography) focused on authors such as Franklin, Adams, and Henry James, more recent studies in American autobiography have embarked on what Rachael McLennan calls a "transnational" approach, given the genre's intellectual inheritances outside of America and its authors' often-observed connections to colonial enterprises.⁶⁶ Similar to contemporary studies on American political thought or history, McLennan suggests scholars not ignore but critique American exceptionalism as it's influenced the genre and canon.

By arguing that autobiography is a democratic genre of self-inquiry, then, I do not mean to prioritize it above other forms of personal narrative nor even as the sole genre of appeal in democratic or American politics. As I explore in the conclusion, the apparent egalitarian orientation of autobiography that I've provided in my definition and chapters is worth further investigation, particularly considering autobiography's conservative uptake by not only Adams but William F. Buckley and Whittaker Chambers in the mid-twentieth century. For now, my goal is to persuade readers that

criteria beyond autobiography to related topics such as testimony, witnessing, or storytelling, readers can find an incredible wealth of studies interested in the use of first-person claims in political history and contemporary movements. See, for example, Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁶⁶ Robert F. Sayre, *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, [1964] 1988), ix; Rachael McLennan, *American Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 31. Another early, major work on American autobiography is Daniel B. Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

autobiography is an essential genre for understanding the history of American democracy, particularly as its authors engage with issues of authority and experience.

Four Autobiographical Appeals

In the following chapters, I review four autobiographers whose narratives attempt the democratic project of making personal experience a shared social reality: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, *The Education of Henry Adams*, and Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*.

This selection satisfies at least two purposes. By beginning with Franklin and ending with Goldman, these chapters capture an extended period of American thought in which authority was of consistent intellectual and political debate. Between their lives and publication dates, these authors will cover the colonial experience, debates over slavery (between the North and South, between abolitionists, and among diplomats in London), the failures of Reconstruction and the perils of the Gilded Age, debates in immigration and the rise of political economy and patronage politics, and the American entry into World War I. This is also a period in which questions of authority are almost-inextricably bound up with questions of who "the people" are: from Franklin on meritocracy, to Lincoln and Douglass on *Dred Scott*, to the radical networks of immigrant New York, each author dabbled in debates or social movements that questioned the definition and limits of popular authority in America. The postrevolutionary period of America staged countless experiments in democratic representation and popular politics. As Thomas Gustafson has argued, early nineteenth-century American political culture prompted crises in how both politics and

the word could represent life: these concerns converged in the written, representative Constitution.⁶⁷ What results from each autobiography is not simply a skirmish with existing forms of authority, but an innovation in new ways to represent the people outside of state testimony, congressional debates, or even the Constitution itself.⁶⁸

By examining these political moments through a different media, political theorists can better understand how thinkers have dealt with issues of democratic authority. In each of the texts that I examine, the author writes a personal narrative to intervene in what he or she sees as a crisis in authority. For Franklin, the colonial citizen is caught between two models of authority: the tyranny of paternalism and tradition, and the groundlessness of radical self-making. Douglass will write an autobiography ten years after his slave narrative to address issues of leadership among the abolitionist movement, in particular as some abolitionists maintained the authority of race in their strategies for change. According to Adams, political modernity will wash away previous forms of republican authority that had once provided citizens imitable ideals. Goldman, finally, will critique violence as an arbitrary authority equally alienating of the people as patriarchy and the state. Autobiographies don't simply capture these crises in new lights, but offer different solutions. In each case, authors will use autobiography not simply to narrate a life contending with these authorities, but to implicate readers within this interpretation of experience. Each of

⁶⁷ Thomas Gustafson, *Representative Words: Politics, Literature, and the American Language, 1776-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21.

⁶⁸ I use "representation" as a varied term appealing to what Hannah Pitkin defined as "the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact." Like Pitkin, the object of inquiry is to figure out how each author uses autobiography to represent others in unique ways. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, 8, 10–11.

the following autobiographies will look to engage the people through different forms of discourse: Franklin will provide his life story as an inherited model for citizenship, Douglass as a mode of dissent that implicates readers within the structures of injustice, Adams as a resignation for new Americans to replace an old guard of aristocrats, and Goldman as a model for social consciousness-raising.⁶⁹

In addition to this selection's historical coverage, the four authors I've chosen provide some variety in political ideology. Although Franklin is arguably a classic Lockean liberal, Douglass's and Goldman's radical politics afterward will greatly expand the limited popular authority Franklin invokes in his autobiography. Though I complicate Adams's place on the ideological spectrum, he considered himself a "conservative christian anarchist," and shares much of his critique with thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, and Alexis de Tocqueville, who similarly mourned the loss of great men in democratic times. Though I do not claim that these four thinkers saturate the ideological map of American political thought, what they do provide are four examples of how autobiography can envision distinct concepts of the people, visions that are tied to how each author narrates his life story. What they share, then, is the ability to use a backward-looking genre for forward-looking practices: for

⁶⁹ Other scholars have similarly drawn from autobiography particular forms of inquiry. For example, Thomas Mathien explores five philosophical aims in autobiography: moral instruction, consolation, apology, confession, and inquiry into human nature. See Thomas Mathien, "Philosophers' Autobiographies," in *Autobiography as Philosophy: The Philosophical Uses of Self-Presentation*, ed. Thomas Mathien and D.G. Wright (London: Routledge, 2006), 20. In one of the more creative philosophical appropriations of autobiography, Stanley Cavell argues in the semi-autobiographical *A Pitch of Philosophy* for self-examination as finding the "perfect pitch" or his "autobiographical voice": "I feel the need to recount what I have so far written, to add it up again – as if in the very achievements in which I take some pride I have kept things unsaid unnecessarily, which hence press to be said." Cavell emphasizes the productive overlap of ordinary language philosophy and a genre that reconstitutes the mundane and quotidian elements of life. Stanley Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 47, 6.

each author implies that “the people” surrounding his readership will be of great importance in taking up the legacy and future actions of his political struggle.

I do not intend Franklin, Douglass, Adams, and Goldman to be the definitive examples of American autobiography as it relates to democracy; indeed, there are many others I could have chosen. In the long nineteenth century, I might have looked at works by Andrew Carnegie, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jane Addams, Henry David Thoreau, or Booker T. Washington. If I were to move into the mid-twentieth century, I might look at Caryl Chessman’s *Cell 2455 Death Row*, Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, or the autobiographies of Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, George Jackson, Abbie Hoffman, and Malcolm X. Beyond the American context, I might consider texts like Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*, the autobiographies of Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, or, with more attention paid than I do here, the confessions of Augustine and Rousseau. In addition to the historical and political reasons I’ve offered above, I’ve in part chosen these four authors due to their varied prominence in the narratives of American political thought. Franklin is easily the most widely-read political thinker of these, whereas Douglass has only in the past several decades become a primary foundation in American political thought: recently, both have benefitted from a surge of scholarship.⁷⁰ Adams and Goldman, on the other hand, are

⁷⁰ For recent work on Franklin, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Alan Craig Houston, *Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2013). On Douglass, see Peter C. Myers, *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). See also Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, chap. 5; Turner, *Awakening to Race*, chap. 3.

only rarely the subjects of political theory monographs or edited collections.⁷¹ An implicit goal of my selection is to suggest that autobiography introduces new figures to political theory while diversifying what we know of better-canonized figures.

I begin with *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, first published in a pirated French copy in 1791 and throughout the nineteenth century in various editions till all four parts are finally published in 1868. Although Franklin began his narrative first as a letter to his son and in the second half as a memoir, scholars often consider it the archetype of autobiography, second only to Rousseau's 1782 *Confessions*. Franklin's autobiography answers a problem in early American thought: if liberal democracy presupposes an autogenetic, revolutionary individual and community, how can the people affirm some national inheritance or tradition of citizenship? How can we have a liberal form of individuality that is auto-genetic, "up by your bootstraps," or against paternal authority, yet that retains an understanding of virtue, genealogy, and some way of being "American"? Similar to early arguments over popular will and constitutionalism found in the Federalist debates or those between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, Franklin attempts a form of literary citizenship that popularizes his means of political virtue without limiting posterity's own self-creation. Franklin hopes to establish through autobiography what James Madison called the

⁷¹ Recent work on Adams includes James P. Young, *Henry Adams: The Historian as Political Theorist* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Garry Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005); Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, ed., *A Political Companion to Henry Adams* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010). Recent work on Goldman includes Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Kathy E. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

“practicable sphere” of politics under the Constitution.⁷² Franklin does this by using autobiography to establish his authority through inheritance: by constructing his character in the *Autobiography* as an arrangement of social values and types already available within prevailing conceptions of American morality and virtue, and by emphasizing citizenship as a public, representational identification. I refer to this mode of inheritance as “contractual authority,” such that passing on his politics requires readers to maintain the legacy of his name. Unlike the chapters that follow, Franklin represents himself not through other citizens but letters, virtues, and principles (in fact, Franklin emphasizes his self-creation *despite* others). More than simply a story of Franklin’s self-making, the *Autobiography* retains Franklin’s authority past death by providing a citizen’s guidebook modeled after his life. Readers are anticipated to imitate his life by appealing to similar virtues and practices.

As a result, Franklin’s autobiography establishes several tropes of authority and experience that later authors will take up and complicate: the use of self-improvement as narrative structure, critiques of paternal authority and the acquisition of property as grounding self-improvement, the encouragement of readers to imitate or emulate the author, and the distinction between the narrating author and protagonist as the past subject of inquiry. Douglass and Goldman in particular will take up these literary elements to indirectly critique the race, gender, and class dimensions that gird Franklin’s seemingly-universal concept of citizenship.

⁷² Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist: With Letters of Brutus*, ed. Terence Ball (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59.

In the second chapter, I examine and compare the first two personal narratives of Frederick Douglass: the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* of 1845, and *My Bondage and My Freedom* of 1855. Douglass wrote each narrative at opposite ends of his transition from the abolitionist politics of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips to his developing defense of political action and the Constitution as anti-slavery. Whereas Douglass writes his first text in the genre of slave narrative, his second text as autobiography responds to a problem prompted by the first: if both the plantation and abolitionists presuppose some racial distinction in the role and identity of whites and blacks, how can one represent injustice and individuality beyond those roles? Whereas in the first chapter I read autobiography as a mode of inheritance, here I explore it as dissent. Placing the two texts alongside Douglass's distinction "to narrate wrongs" and "denouncing them," I argue that that Douglass writes *My Bondage and My Freedom* as "denunciation": an autobiographical critique of injustice that balances analysis of collective oppression with advocacy for communal emancipation. Although Douglass's first narrative recounts his enslavement and escape, abolitionist use of slave narrative and "slavery on trial" rhetoric frames *Narrative* within a racial hierarchy of black testimony and white advocacy. Whereas to narrate wrongs encouraged readers to judge Douglass's story alongside popular criteria of justice, to denounce wrongs in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is to implicate readers within the structures that create antebellum subjects on and off the plantation, by revealing the coercions and conditionings of society that make not simply slaves but slaveowners, sympathizers, and abolitionists. Put differently, Douglass's slave

narrative considered “the people” as they were under slavery, whereas his autobiography looks to what they may become.

In the third chapter, I read *The Education of Henry Adams* as a reflection on political authority at the end of the nineteenth century. Publishing it privately in 1907 and posthumously in 1918, Adams wrote his autobiography to respond to what he envisioned as irreversible changes in citizenship and leadership in the wake of *fin-de-siècle* modernity. According to Adams, the turn of the century threatened the political and epistemic foundations that had grounded the American founding and Franklin’s autobiography, ushered in with the rise of industrial capitalism, revolution in the physical and biological sciences, America’s affirmation as an imperial and immigrant nation, and the rise of machine politics. Adams, an intellectual both great-grandson and grandson to American presidents, wrote *The Education of Henry Adams* to outline, mourn and recover the concept of authority allegedly lost to American constituents and statesmen amid these national changes. As Adams argued, economic, demographic, and scientific developments rendered obsolete a republican form of authority through which statesmen once educated citizens as ideal heroes and great men. I read the *Education* as a diagnosis of the lost individual in democratic times and as Adams’s attempt to herald the coming of what he saw as the “new American.” Although Adams aligns himself with other skeptics of democracy (including Thomas Carlyle, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill), I argue that Adams uses the *Education* to parallel what Emerson had written in his recovery of great men for democratic times: that great individuals must educate by leading through example and, most importantly, by stepping down. Whereas previous Americans had constructed or

contested authority through autobiography, Adams modifies the genre to diminish his own authority in favor of whatever new citizen will fit modernity. While the *Education's* content outlines Adams's diagnosis of democracy, its form recuses Adams from the people to come in the twentieth century and beyond.

In the final chapter, I study Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* as an autobiography poised to resolve a fundamental issue in radical and anarchist politics: how might radical actors move the people to emancipation without coercion? Published in 1931, *Living My Life* places Goldman between two approaches to action: the revolutionary violence that motivated her early participation in Alexander Berkman's *attentat* on Henry Clay Frick, and the consciousness-raising of second-wave feminism that would welcome her autobiography's reissue in 1970. In the first approach and in anarchism more broadly, radicals adopt a variety of political practices in order to bring the people from under the heel of the state without replacing its authority with their own. Goldman and anarchists before her needed a mode of action that allowed the people's self-authorization without elevating anarchists as new tyrants. Goldman's autobiography responds to this problem by constructing her authority through the raising of social consciousness *in* the text and *through* the text by documenting the vast radical networks and sufferings of which she was part. Like Douglass before her, Goldman uses autobiography as a form of dissent, here emphasizing the raising of social consciousness in readers, turning them to emancipation without impressing Goldman's authority over them. As Douglass used the construction of authority through autobiography to combat racial injustice, Goldman draws on the genre to combine anarchist and feminist critiques of authority.

In the conclusion, I briefly return to the relation between autobiography and democratic politics, reflecting broadly on autobiography through the history of political thought and in the twenty-first century. I consider several trends that run throughout these four approaches to autobiography and authority, and I reflect on why autobiography should be of interest to political theorists today. In closing, I offer a few thoughts on contemporary moves in political memoir.

*Chapter I***To Be Franklin:****Inheritance and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin***

That Felicity, when I reflected on it, has induc'd me sometimes to say, that were it offer'd to my Choice I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first.

- Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*¹

In the opening lines of the letter that would become his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin suggested to his son that he read his included memoirs as a “second Edition” of the sender’s life, implying that perhaps the recipient or some “Author” could “correct some Faults of the first.” To this day, historians don’t know who first took up Franklin’s request: who, in 1791, sent French publisher Jacques Buisson the manuscript that would become the first published (albeit translated) copy of the *Autobiography*.² Franklin had written the manuscript over the course of nearly two decades, spanning the American war for independence. He wrote part one of the text in 1771 while in Twyford, England, part two just months after the treaty with Great Britain in 1784, and the third in 1788.³ At eighty three years old, as Franklin’s health deteriorated and he grew too infirm to put pen to paper, he sent copies of his memoirs by letter to four men. Franklin admonished readers’ safekeeping: he told Louis Guillaume Le Veillard that he should not “suffer any copy to be taken of them,

¹ Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 43. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (AB, #).

² See Edmund S. Morgan, “Introduction,” in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, by Benjamin Franklin, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 26–31.

³ See Leonard W. Labaree et al., “Franklin Chronology,” in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, by Benjamin Franklin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 311, 320–321.

or of any part of them, on any account whatever.”⁴ Plans to publish what was then called the *History of My Life* were left to William Temple Franklin, Benjamin’s grandson and inheritor of the original manuscripts. Something convinced Buisson’s contributor to ignore Franklin’s request. Within two years of the French edition, retranslations in English appeared. In the next seventy years, publishers released over 150 editions of the book, each “Repetition of the same Life” with new faults corrected. Even Temple’s edition in 1817 presented his own edited version of his grandfather’s life. What was it that motivated so many to publish Franklin’s second edition, to get it right with each revision? Perhaps publishers were compelled by Franklin’s narrating his youthful reading of the *Spectator*, rewriting the paper by hand, revising his faults (AB, 62). Maybe they sought to imitate his apprenticeship as a printer, when he wrote “I mention this Industry... that those of my Posterity who shall read it, may know the Use of that Virtue” (119). Or it’s possible publishers thought the book would bring Franklin back to libraries he’d begun (130). For a man who made his means on a consistent reputation and a self-made citizenship, his autobiography’s afterlife grew only as readers and publishers inherited and circulated this second edition of Franklin.

Long before his death in 1790, Franklin had been an inventor, author, politician, scientist, and brief military man. Born in Boston in 1706, he apprenticed at a young age in his brother’s printshop, running away to Philadelphia when seventeen

⁴ Benjamin Franklin, “Franklin to Louis Guillaume Le Veillard, Philadelphia, 13 November 1789,” in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. John Bigelow, vol. 12 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 159.

to seek further work as a printer among new patrons in town.⁵ He published frequently, his first anonymous article in 1722 quickly followed by a series of letters on morals by “Silence Dogood”; his popular *Poor Richard: An Almanack* first emerged in 1732.⁶ Franklin remains the consummate American Enlightenment thinker, helping to found the American Philosophical Society, experimenting with electricity, and involving himself with the school that would become the University of Pennsylvania.⁷ He acted in the French and Indian War in 1755, served in several missions to England in the lead-up to revolution, and would work as minister in France during the conflict with Britain.⁸ On September 17, 1787, Franklin delivered the closing speech to the Federal Constitutional Convention as the Pennsylvania delegate.⁹ Above all, Franklin was a writer, or, more often, a printer and an editor. Along with John Adams, Franklin would correct Thomas Jefferson’s rough draft of the Declaration of Independence, the original copy of which would retain “all, or nearly all, the corrections, additions, and erasures made between the day on which Jefferson submitted it to Franklin and Adams and the 4 of July when Congress adopted the Declaration in its final form,” Carl Becker writes, the so-called original document lost and obscured under the weight of Franklin et al.’s corrections.¹⁰ For Franklin, there was something political about editing and printing: written text represented its author, and a printed text could do so to a greater audience than a handwritten letter or

⁵ See Labaree et al., “Franklin Chronology,” 303.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 303–304.

⁷ See *ibid.*, 305.

⁸ See *ibid.*, 306, 307, 309, 315.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 321.

¹⁰ Carl L. Becker, *Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Vintage, [1922] 1958), 138.

declaration. But with this loss of intimacy came the danger of others' misinterpretation. The *Autobiography's* eventual multiplicitous publications may have been Jefferson's karmic revenge: just like the people constituted and usurped Jefferson's writing the Declaration, so would they take up Franklin's memoirs.¹¹

In the history of American political thought, Franklin reigns as either America's original political genius or a shrewd bricoleur of early modernist influences in Protestantism, capitalism, and democratic politics. In his recovery of the liberal tradition, Louis Hartz calls Franklin "a great American bourgeois thinker."¹² For Max Weber, Franklin is the prototypical ethicist of disenchantment in the age of modern industry: Franklin endorsed a utilitarian morality, "not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic" whose infractions were treated not as "foolishness but as forgetfulness of duty."¹³ Franklin appears frequently throughout American letters, in the autobiographies of both Henry Adams and Thomas Mellon, and in Mark Twain's late 1870 eulogy. Recent monographs on Franklin have drawn from his writings thematic approaches to modern rationalism or self-improvement.¹⁴

Common among approaches to Franklin, however, is a shared interest in the *Autobiography*, which can be read as the culmination of Franklin's multifarious

¹¹ "Apparently [Jefferson] suffered because he clung to his text," Jacques Derrida writes: "It was very hard for him to see it, to see *himself* corrected, emended, 'improved,' shortened, especially by his colleagues. A feeling of wounding and of mutilation should be inconceivable for someone who knows not to write in his own name, his proper name, but *simply by representation* and in place of another. If the wound does not efface itself in the delegation, that is because things aren't so simple, neither the structure of the representation nor the procurement of the signature. Someone, let's call him Jefferson (but why not God?), desired that the institution of the American people should be, by the same coup, the erection of his proper name. A name of State." Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," 12.

¹² Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 51.

¹³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2007), 17.

¹⁴ See Lorraine Smith Pangle, *The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2007); Houston, *The Politics of Improvement*.

professions and positions. In 1956, the World Council of Peace celebrated Franklin's 250th birthday by having W.E.B. Du Bois write a short biography of Franklin for young readers. Its primary resource, Du Bois wrote (among a few other secondary sources and Du Bois's own familiarity with Philadelphia), was Franklin's *Autobiography*.¹⁵ And yet despite Franklin's fame as an autobiographer, his book hovers on a boundary between old and new genres. According to Stephen Arch, Franklin's text did not pioneer a new genre as much as it ended another tradition: written first only as a letter to his son in 1771, Franklin first called his memoirs the "History of My Life."¹⁶ The term 'autobiography' did not exist till 1797, and not until the 1830s would it come to any serious public use. Franklin's text, as with his other endeavors, was an experiment in form, combining its epistolary origins with the classic genre of memoirs and the pedagogical "Art of Virtue" included in part two.

What, then, was the political problem of the late eighteenth century for which Franklin sought personal narrative as a solution? What was the problem of the early nineteenth for which others sought to publish his text as autobiography? The birth of the American republic, Thomas Gustafson writes, was fraught with crises over how text and speech would represent citizens.¹⁷ In his later years, Franklin would

¹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Story of Benjamin Franklin* (Vienna: Secretariat of the World Council of Peace, 1956), 4.

¹⁶ Arch, *After Franklin*, x, 10. As Arch persuasively argues, it is only after Franklin that the genre of autobiography emerges alongside a modern conception of Western culture and identity. Later readers have retitled many pre-modern personal narratives as the more modern autobiography, including not only Franklin's but Jefferson's memoirs (11).

¹⁷ "Between the Revolution and the Civil War, language itself – as the means of representation in politics and the material basis of the Constitution – became highly problematic, an instrument that was interrogated, explored, and thematized extensively in the political and legal discourse of the age as well as in its literature and language theory... The very nature and function of government as a representative democracy built upon a written text ruled by the vox populi nourished the fears Americans inherited from their classical and Enlightenment forebears about the cheat of words and the ways texts could be constructed and misconstrued to serve personal and party interests." See Gustafson,

contribute to two potential solutions: the writing of the Declaration, and the ratification of the Constitution. After Franklin's death, Jefferson and Hamilton would continue to argue over the Constitution not simply as it constituted government but as citizens *read* it: in his letter to James Madison, Jefferson wrote, a fresh Constitution every nineteen years would ensure its authentic representation of the authors, that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living."¹⁸ Franklin's autobiography responded to a problem resonant throughout early American political thought: if the Enlightenment and this new sense of revolution grounded authority in ungrounded sources (the undefined people, the autogenesis of self-making), how could a polity establish an inheritable concept of citizenship, of virtue, of politics itself? Franklin's text lay at the heart of what Hannah Arendt in 1963 read as the new meaning of revolution, its bearers eager "to liberate *and* to build a new house where freedom can dwell."¹⁹ Liberalism and republicanism, inherited and intermixed at the American founding, would both stumble in response to this uniquely democratic concern.

Franklin wrote what would become *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* to provide readers an authoritative and imitable conception of citizenship, one whose inheritance would both sponsor posterity's autonomy and freedom while at the same time preserving Franklin's legacy. The nascent genre of autobiography offered Franklin a mode of inheritance in an age of politics' increasingly turning away from

Representative Words, 21. According to Gustafson, this problem resolves itself not in autobiography but the novel (such as those of the American Renaissance or that explore race), which presents a new imagined community alongside ideas of the nation-state (31).

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "Jefferson to James Madison, 6 September 1789," in *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 959.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 35.

history and genealogy. Franklin drafts a personal narrative that does not simply *represent* its author but rather replaces him: the *Autobiography* would provide readers not only an interpretation of Franklin's life (nor the result of his self-examination), but Franklin himself as an immortal, literary citizen. His use of the genre kept with what Weber described as "the surrogate of mere appearance" in early Protestant and capitalist thought, representation "always sufficient when it accomplishes the end in view."²⁰ Like the Declaration and Constitution that preceded Franklin's autobiography, his personal narrative would offer readers a contract: in exchange for drawing lessons from his life and "Art of Virtue," readers would uphold Franklin's name and ownership over the original blueprint of American citizenship. Franklin's autobiography is significant to early American political thought not simply for its content – the narrative ends nearly two decades before Jefferson writes the Declaration – but because the genre's construction of authority and use of representation maps on to debates and popular discourse over the burgeoning category and theory of American democracy and citizenship in the early nineteenth century. Though flawed and incomplete, Franklin's personal history is an attempt to tell a story of America.

To study *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* as a mode of inheritance, I lay out the argument in three claims: (1) Franklin's narrated family relations as well as his use of letters in the *Autobiography* dramatize Franklin's notion of "contractual authority": in both the book's narrative as well as its formal structure, Franklin transitions from a mode of paternal authority to one grounded in a consenting inheritance that retains the benefactor's signature. (2) Franklin's work as a printer

²⁰ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 18.

accompanies other anecdotes that contribute to an overall sense of representation as grounded in public reputation and name recognition, the culmination of this concept the very publication of the *Autobiography*. Finally, (3) Franklin's "project for moral perfection" combines his unique concepts of authority and representation by presenting his ethics in public values allegedly universal for a general and diverse readership. By insisting on an ethics that retains his signature while allowing self-discipline and autonomy, Franklin attempts to make of his *Autobiography* a social contract for American citizenship and its inheritors.

Although this chapter is briefer than those that follow, it establishes several precedents: Frederick Douglass, Henry Adams, and Emma Goldman will all in some way engage with Franklin's legacy and mode of inheritance in their autobiographies. In the current study, Franklin's autobiography introduces textual elements such as the use of self-improvement as narrative structure, the early reliance on patriarchal authority as a source of conflict for the author's growth, shared emphases on the acquisition of property and knowledge as constitutive of self-authorization, and the varying degrees of separation between narrator and author throughout the book. As I explain in this chapter's conclusion, the role of Douglass, Adams, and Goldman is both to critique the limits of Franklin's inheritance and to envision alternative audiences and politics of autobiography. Franklin's greatest contribution to the present study is that his combination of politics and autobiography will prioritize popular self-examination while leaving work for future authors to make his citizenship universal.

A Letter for His Son, a Name from His Uncle

The Declaration of Independence begins as a letter to a tyrant father; *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* begins as a letter to a son. Beginning “Dear Son” while writing from Twyford, England, the sixty-five-year-old Franklin tells his story so that William Franklin may know “the Circumstances of [Benjamin’s] Life”:

Having emerg’d from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro’ Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. (AB, 43)

Upon beginning his memoirs in 1771, Franklin seems to mean “Posterity” as his son William; as Michael Warner notes, Franklin wrote part one of the *Autobiography* with no clear intention of its being published.²¹ Composing the letter from England just a few years before Franklin would help edit Jefferson’s letter to King George III suggests a symbolic parallel between the two, and paves the way for Franklin’s transition in audience from part one to part two (and from the epistolary form to autobiography). By presenting part one as a letter to his son that recalls Franklin’s rejecting *his own* father’s authority, Franklin establishes a concept of authority that rejects paternalism in favor of consenting, contractual relations of mutual profit.

Franklin’s letter both adopted and experimented with a contemporary form of pedagogical writing. Jay Fliegelman likens the correspondence to James Burgh’s *Thoughts on Education*, written in 1747, which urged fathers to inculcate virtue by

²¹ Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 75.

letter.²² Early in life, fathers would provide young entrepreneurial sons a record of personal achievement for their imitation or avoidance. Franklin writes to his son in the same manner, providing William a history of their family and the first several decades of Franklin's life. From the outset of the *Autobiography*, Franklin begins his recollection with the fantasy of surviving through others. His letter functions as Burgh's would, as an encouragement for his son to carry Franklin's legacy in exchange for wisdom to imitate. But Franklin writes the first part of his memoirs when William is a successful almost thirty-year-old governor of a province, while the events detailed in part one capture Franklin's age up to twenty-four.²³ Even if we overlook this odd timing, William will shortly thereafter disappoint Franklin upon his remaining loyal to the British crown. Franklin will disown William: he cuts off all communication, leaving him no name or legacy in his will, nothing more than books William already owned.²⁴ Franklin mentions none of this within the *Autobiography*, and yet its preceding the book's publication immediately suggests a fundamental criteria for its appreciation: to benefit from Franklin's life, readers must inherit and uphold his name and politics. Symbolically, his son is the first to fail.

Within the narrative of part one, Franklin will similarly break ties with patriarchal authority, looking for different ways to inherit and pass on his name. Chief among the formative conflicts in part one are Franklin's depictions of his own father. Almost every mention of Josiah Franklin details what he doesn't provide Franklin:

²² Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 21–23.

²³ See Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 414.

²⁴ See Morgan, introduction to *Benjamin*, 6.

education, money, free choice of trade. The letter's first anecdote of Josiah is his forcing Franklin into grammar school, "my Father intending to devote me as the Tithe of his Sons to the Service of the Church" (*AB*, 52). As Benjamin is only one child in a large family, Josiah cannot afford the institution for long and soon sends him to a school for "Writing and Arithmetic," before taking Benjamin home to make candles alongside Josiah (53).²⁵ When Franklin steals away to Philadelphia as a teenager and attracts the attention of patrons such as governor William Keith, his father steps in:

My Father receiv'd the Governor's Letter with some apparent Surprize... Then he wrote a civil Letter to Sir William thanking him for the Patronage he had so kindly offered me, but declining to assist me as yet in Setting up, I being in his Opinion too young to be trusted with the Management of a Business so important, and for which the Preparation must be so expensive. (82)

By focusing on Josiah's slim giving, Franklin not only casts in relief his autonomy and self-making, but the generosity of the present letter to William Franklin (and later to other readers). Other members of Franklin's family similarly appear in the text to contrast with Franklin's independence. Franklin first works as an apprentice to his older, domineering brother James: "I fancy his harsh and tyrannical Treatment of me, might be a means of impressing me with that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has struck to me thro' my whole Life" (69). James's authority, like Josiah's, is arbitrary such that Benjamin is non-consenting as well as unbenefited by it.²⁶ Franklin's narrating arbitrary authority as a foil for his self-authorization will resonate throughout his autobiography and those that follow: Douglass's independence on and off the

²⁵ One of the best things Josiah does for Franklin, however, is to prevent him from becoming a poet at a young age (which will take on more significance in the section below this one) (*AB*, 60).

²⁶ Fliegelman notes that "much of the first part of the *Autobiography*... will be in the service of disproving his father's judgment about the premature character of his entry into the world." Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 110.

plantation, Adams's recognition of his presidential elders, and Goldman's clashing with her father and mentor will adopt the same idioms for exploring authority.

For the most part, Franklin turns to the patronage of men outside his family to succeed. After his father refuses to fund him, Franklin's popularity earns him the help of several Pennsylvanians.²⁷ One family member, however, *will* exert an authority that Franklin admires and respects: Benjamin Franklin, Josiah's brother. Franklin mentions his uncle in part one of the *Autobiography* almost as many times as he does his father, but whereas Josiah is a foil for Franklin's self-reliance, Uncle Ben acts as his benefactor. Franklin's uncle provides him with his first name: not the genealogy of his father's surname, but the name by which acquaintances greet Franklin in person and letter (*AB*, 48). Franklin's first name represents his achievements as an individual, not as a member of his family.²⁸ Uncle Ben offers edification on the condition of carrying on his legacy: he promises young Franklin his collection of sermons if only he will "learn his Character" (53). This offer resembles the format of part one as an epistolary proposal to Franklin's son, offering lessons "fit to be imitated" and thus carried on (43). Between the letter form of part one and its narrated critiques of authority, Franklin wavers between two modes of inheritance: the paternal authority of his father or brother, or the "contractual authority" of Uncle Ben, wherein Ben maintains authority through Franklin's representing him in name and principle. Above all, Uncle Ben emphasizes for Franklin a subjectivity that is rooted in appearances: in public

²⁷ See Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 27.

²⁸ The point here is not that Uncle Ben advises Franklin strike out from his family, rather that he take a more intellectual or strategic orientation to his family. For example, Franklin's uncle is the one who provides him the notes on his family genealogy that Franklin will present William in this very letter (*AB*, 45).

reputation. Josiah had given Benjamin nothing; like his uncle, Franklin offers William a letter of lessons if he will retell them.

Although Franklin is genetically related to the elder Benjamin, this avuncular authority establishes a different orientation to inheritance than the basic passing on of patriarchy. Uncle Ben lives with Franklin's family for several years; it's likely then that he provides his nephew with most of these gifts (48). Even upon his separation from Ben, Franklin upholds the legacy of his uncle's name. Eventually, Franklin will make his own nephew the same offer: later in the autobiography, Franklin takes in his brother James's son and raises the boy as a printer following James's death (170). Franklin's own son, as mentioned before, does not satisfy the similar opportunity granted him as Franklin's heir. The *Autobiography* then, in both form and content, is pulled clean of patriarchal authority, from both Josiah and William Franklin.

Although Franklin writes part one of the *Autobiography* in 1771, he waits till 1784 to write part two, shortly after ratifying peace with Britain and before he finally leaves his post in France.²⁹ Although they aren't part of the original manuscript, the final *Autobiography* includes two letters written in 1782 and 1783 that will secure Franklin's transition from the patriarchal authority of part one to the wide posterity of part two (*AB*, 133n1). Part one began Franklin's memoirs with "Dear Son"; the letters will transition the autobiography to "sons and fathers" (as one letter-writer wrote) (136). Franklin reviews the first part before introducing the letters:

Thus far was written with the Intention express'd in the beginning and therefore contains several little family Anecdotes of no Importance to others.

²⁹ See Labaree et al., "Franklin Chronology," 320.

What follows was written many Years after in compliance with the Advice contain'd in these Letters, and accordingly intended for the Publick. (133)

The function of Franklin's work now changes. The two letters from Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan, both of whom urge Franklin to publish his memoirs after having read part one, further push the audience of Franklin's text from his son to posterity. James provides with his letter an outline of the memoirs that covers part one and the remaining unwritten narrative, hoping Franklin will continue "lest some Printer or busy Body should publish some Part of the Contents and give our Friends Pain and myself Censure" (133-134).³⁰ Vaughan too urges Franklin to print the memoirs before someone else does (135).³¹ They offer to carry his legacy in exchange for his self-authored narrative: Franklin's offer to his son is replaced by one to the reader. As Grantland Rice explains, the *Autobiography* is as an example of replacing "the paternal with the textual."³² Vaughan and James wish Franklin to represent himself in writing, using the same gifts he received from his uncle. Those who read Franklin will know him by name, by the "Art of Virtue" in part two, and by the *Autobiography*: a text in his words. By including the letters of Vaughan and James in the *Autobiography*, Franklin's self-told narrative is authorized just as the younger Franklin self-authorized through the encouragement of his uncle and Pennsylvanian patrons.

³⁰ It's interesting that "Busybody" is the pseudonym that Franklin uses to buy out Samuel Keimer's paper, an anecdote I explore below. See Paul Leicester Ford, *Franklin Bibliography: A List of Books Written By, or Relating to Benjamin Franklin*. (New York: B. Franklin, 1968), xix.

³¹ Vaughan will be one of the men who first retranslate the *Autobiography* from French to English, adding: "There can be no sufficient reason, that what has thus been submitted to the perusal of Europe, should not be made accessible to those to whom Dr. Franklin's language is native." See Morgan, "Introduction," 29.

³² Grantland S. Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 52.

This translates Franklin's subjectivity into text: the book provides the "air of simplicity" that Vaughan attributes to Franklin's lived life (*AB*, 137).

These letters then function in the text like a contract, acting out Franklin's desire to pass on his life's lessons and legacy without the arbitrary authority of patriarchal inheritance. In addition to simulating consent between Vaughan, James, and Franklin, these letters also allow Franklin to dissimulate his own voice into those of others. As will become clearer upon discussing the virtue of *humility* in part two, Franklin's including these letters is a clever move to speak highly of his self-making while maintaining humble appearances. It's not Franklin that wanted to (perhaps vainly) publish his life, but Vaughan and James. In these letters, Franklin introduces a method of authorization that will appear in several of the following chapters, wherein an author takes authority over the text *alongside* others' authorizing its publication.³³

Although the letter format of part one and those letters before part two tell us something about how Franklin will use autobiography as a mode of inheritance, it doesn't indicate much about what he is passing on: what this "character" might be and how it relates to the political leadership he developed in his own life. For the content

³³ Although Arch does not consider Franklin's to be a fully modern autobiography (as I explain below), Franklin's turn from William to posterity remains indicative of a period in which innovation in personal narrative required what Arch calls "new assumptions and new generic conventions: authors had to be able to imagine a secular audience beyond locally known friends and family, a change made possible with the increase in book traffic and literacy levels in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they had to be able to imagine themselves as both private and public individuals and to feel that their experiences in private were worth retelling in public to people whom they did not now, a change made possible with the increase in book traffic and literacy levels in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they had to be able to imagine themselves as both private and public individuals and to feel that their experiences in private were worth retelling in public to people whom they did not now, a change made possible with the invention of the concept of the public sphere in the early eighteenth century." Arch, *After Franklin*, 20–21.

of Franklin's character, we must turn to his experiences as a printer and writer, descriptions of which clarify Franklin's investment in appearances and reputation.

The Sorts of Representation

Americans at the turn of the nineteenth century expressed myriad political concerns, but few loomed in debates and conventions like the issue of misrepresentation. As Gustafson explains, representative politics holds at its core a fundamental paradox: "citizens must place confidence in political representatives to speak for them, and yet they must distrust what they say."³⁴ This tension was only heightened by embodying America's birth in two written, signed and ratified documents. While writers worried over words in writing and representation, authors experimenting in personal narrative also looked for new ways to understand the individual as it related to society. As Arch explains, autobiography emerged in response to three elements of the modern self in embryo at the American founding: a sense of 'inwardness,' the elevation of ordinary life, and the affirmation of the 'natural' self as "an inner moral source."³⁵ In what Franklin himself called the "Age of Experiments," those writing what Arch refers to as "self-biography" essayed new ways to approach and reproduce experience as independent of the individual.³⁶ Thus as Americans worried over how the people would be represented and reproduced in writing, so too were they reading the early narrators' attempts to capture "the

³⁴ Gustafson, *Representative Words*, 24.

³⁵ Arch takes these terms from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. See Arch, *After Franklin*, 8; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

³⁶ Arch, *After Franklin*, 15.

American, this new man.”³⁷ This is what worried readers of the 1798 and 1804 volumes of the *Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*, the story of which focused on its author’s counterfeiting and posing as various personae in American towns.³⁸ “Franklin will be a reminder of what we have been as a young nation in some respects,” Robert Frost wrote in the 1924 preface to Burroughs’s memoirs: “Burroughs comes in reassuringly when there is question of our not unprincipled wickedness, whether we have had enough of it for salt.”³⁹ Character, like the U.S. Constitution, had to be consistent in meaning and resist misrepresentation.

Throughout *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, its protagonist’s actions exemplify this concern for identity and the representative capacity of words. Franklin’s autobiography will be the first in this study to connect self-improvement to economic independence, and particularly to capture this progress in terms of how it represents the author and others. Franklin doesn’t simply make his name through printing, but it’s because of his trade that he’s solvent enough to experiment in occupation and travel the globe.⁴⁰ For Douglass and Goldman, acquiring a trade will bolster not simply their own self-representation but will reveal various structures representative of others’ contributions as well. For Franklin, however, his moving through the ranks of the printing trade perfectly exemplifies his innovating a form of autobiographical authority that represents its author. Franklin’s work as a printer maps on both to the inherited character and authority from his uncle *and* the ethics he’ll

³⁷ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 43–44.

³⁸ For more on Burroughs, see Arch, *After Franklin*, 114–115.

³⁹ Robert Frost, “Preface to the 1924 Edition,” in *Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*, by Stephen Burroughs (Boston: Northeastern University Press, [1924] 1988), vii.

⁴⁰ See Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship*, 114.

propose later in the book. A printer does not *author* text as much as he *makes public* a text: Franklin's obsession with writing is to present it not as self-examination and introspection but rather a making-public of the self. As Warner writes, Franklin does not just "confront or see the texts; he handles them."⁴¹

The work of a printer (as opposed to an author) is exemplified by Franklin's insistence on an ethics of *imitation*, rather than emulation or inspiration. Later in the book, Franklin states that "as those who aim at perfect Writing by imitating the engraved Copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd for Excellence of those Copies, their Hand is mended by the Endeavour, and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible" (*AB*, 156). Franklin's interest in writing is not to imbue originality within the text but to represent perfectly ideas articulated elsewhere. According to Arch, this emphasis on imitation is precisely what disqualifies Franklin's text from being a modern autobiography, a genre that requires not imitation or emulation but *invention*.⁴² But Franklin's is nonetheless an approach to text similar to what Jefferson defends in his reading of constitutions versus Hamilton's: as a work where the author's pen never leaves the page. Franklin's readers shouldn't need to interpret his work, because the force of his authorial intentions has relived the text of any equivocation on its original meaning. As a printer, Franklin picks the wording and typeset of a piece, then signs his name as its benefactor. Franklin's name authorizes

⁴¹ Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 79.

⁴² Arch, *After Franklin*, 47. Arch writes that "In his narrative he never imagines the self he describes as itself original. It is precisely *because* he imagines experience to be bounded by imitation and emulation that he insist on the usefulness of his own narrative" (51).

the printing, his rewriting of it maintains his signature; this is why James and Vaughan are intent on Franklin's life as written *by* Franklin.

Franklin's work as a printer accompanies his use of pseudonyms in the first part of the *Autobiography*: both trade and textual practice convey a form of representation that imbues names with an unambiguous character and authority. Franklin draws on pseudonyms not to escape his own identity, but to safeguard it. Franklin first publishes while working at his brother's printshop; fearing James's reproach, he submits his piece anonymously (67). Overhearing praise the next day, Franklin is pleased to note his colleagues' surmising "Men of some Character" as possible authors (68). From here on, Franklin uses pseudonyms to cohere separate opinions to separate names, constructing identities such as Silence Dogood, The Busybody and the well-known Richard Saunders. Throughout his life (though unmentioned in the *Autobiography*), Franklin will use over fifty pseudonyms to publish, his names frequently feminine or metaphoric.⁴³ Though James chastises his brother's deception, Franklin's first pseudonymous writing allows him to better his writing while protecting his inherited name (*AB*, 68). Ironically, James's trouble with the law requires Franklin later to publish his brother's work under Benjamin's name (69). Franklin characterizes this mistake as "one of the first Errata" of his life (70). The error is obvious: Franklin's put his name on something for which he feels no responsibility. As in the anecdotes I explore next, Franklin hands over his name only on the same consenting contract that Uncle Ben gave him his.

⁴³ See Ford, *Franklin Bibliography*, 308–309. Intriguing pseudonyms include "Alice Addertongue," "Anthony Afterwit," "Celia Single," "The Left Hand" and "Twilight."

Franklin's flexibility in occupation throughout life parallels his use of pseudonym. Consider Carl Van Doren's biography, which organizes Franklin's life by occupation: master printer, electrician, and soldier form a short list of the symbolic chapters.⁴⁴ Mitchell Breitwieser describes Franklin's protean character: "the self passing from calling to calling in the *Autobiography*, like the soul passing from body to body, shows its ability to enter into specific identity *and* its unrelinquished independence from complete identification. Its occupations are personae."⁴⁵ Franklin uses pseudonyms in a similar manner to control his public reputation. When his former master Samuel Keimer establishes a newspaper in Philadelphia, Franklin publishes a series of essays in another paper under the moniker "The Busybody."⁴⁶ As the popularity of Franklin's witty writing helps the paper outsell Keimer, the eponymous Franklin steps in to purchase what's left of his business. Franklin wields these personae to remain fluid and free to profit. As Rice has noted, Franklin's skills as a printer provide him the freedom to choose whatever relationships he desires, allowing him mobility of occupation and location.⁴⁷

The one persona that must be protected is that of "Benjamin Franklin." In a few anecdotes involving poetry and Franklin's friend, Ralph James, the author explores early on the limits and use of reputation. From a young age, Franklin experiments with throwing his name to see how his reputation follows it, no matter what it represents. Along with acquaintances Charles Osborne and Joseph Watson,

⁴⁴ Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), xii–xix.

⁴⁵ Mitchell Robert Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 191.

⁴⁶ See Ford, *Franklin Bibliography*, xix.

⁴⁷ Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship*, 61.

Ralph and Benjamin decide to rewrite the Bible's eighteenth psalm to practice imitating it: "As Language and Expression was what we had in View, we excluded all Considerations of Invention" (AB, 90). This is a method Franklin picked up as a boy, rewriting the *Spectator* to discipline his style (62). Ralph is nervous that his other colleagues will anticipate his work as poor, based on his previous contributions. As of Charles's prejudices, Ralph solicits Franklin to present his piece in Franklin's own hand and name (90-91). The dissimulation works: Charles approves of the piece as of Franklin's name, and when the truth is revealed he is "a little laugh at." The content of Ralph's writing matters less than his name. When Franklin prints the piece, friends endorse it. The use of poetry, according to Franklin, is merely "to improve one's Language, but no farther" (90). As a genre of literature, poetry is like the name Ben had inherited from his uncle: something to be imitated and to inform, not to improve nor look to for introspection. The eighteenth psalm reinforces this lesson for Franklin.

It does not, however, for Ralph. At eighteen years old, while working at Palmer's printshop in London, Franklin learns that Ralph has changed his name to Benjamin Franklin upon leaving to work in the countryside (98). Franklin learns this by letter, writing "he chang'd his Name, and did me the Honour to assume mine." Although Franklin appreciates the homage, his imitator's livelihood frustrates him: Ralph's become a poet. Franklin agrees to correct his counterpart's poems, writing letters from Franklin directed to "Mr. Franklin Schoolmaster." But Franklin tries to stifle his doppelganger's creativity: "One of Young's Satires was then just publish'd. I copy'd and sent him a great Part of it, which set in a strong Light the Folly of pursuing the Muses with any Hope of Advancement by them. All was in vain. Sheets of the

Poem continu'd to come by every Post" (98-99).⁴⁸ Ralph's mistake is to think that poetry is for *emulation* rather than *imitation*: that a reader's goal is to create rivalling poetry rather than to replicate what's read. When Ralph takes Franklin's name in the countryside, he is right to want a name that influences others' reception of his work, but he is wrong to spend his efforts on a form of writing merely introspective and creative, rather than informative or referential. Franklin's issue is that poetry exemplifies a particular type of self-expression, of emotion over the rigor of a printer's informing and communicating. Ralph took Franklin's name without consent or contract, unlike Uncle Ben's offer to his nephew years before.

For much of the autobiography, the author's primary object of concern is the name "Benjamin Franklin" and its various identities as statesman, printer, inventor and so on. As in the previous anecdote, Franklin often characterizes his name as property ripe for theft: Rice comments that "the recurring appropriation of Franklin's name by others in the *Autobiography* suggests Franklin's anxiety about losing control of the abstracted self (represented, say, in print or in reputation) circulating independently of the corporeal subject."⁴⁹ This does not prevent but encourages Franklin's crafting other representations through his use of pseudonyms in publishing, and it doesn't keep him from putting his name on other's work. Franklin comments later in life on the difficulty of raising "one's Reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's Neighbours": the *Autobiography's* self-authorship is that effort's pinnacle (*AB*, 143).

⁴⁸ Although Franklin doesn't confirm this, it's possible that his frustration with Ralph is what clears his conscience when, in the next part of the paragraph, he attempts "Familiarities" with Mrs. T, whom Ralph had left under Franklin's care while in Berkshire (*AB*, 99).

⁴⁹ Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship*, 65.

Franklin's careful concern for his name, expressed in his anxiety over its unwilled appropriation and preserved through his use of alternate pseudonyms, ultimately connects the narrative of the *Autobiography* to its form. As it was written, Franklin's *Autobiography* narrates the development of his reputation by his leadership among colleagues, particularly through practices like imitative writing and facilitating discussion (Franklin learns from a friend at a young age to eschew contention, and he forms a reading group to establish "habits of conversation" (118)).⁵⁰ The autobiography itself, however, is the culmination of these lessons: it's a form of self-writing that adopts the style of self-examination typical of the introspective memoir or confessional, yet that innovates a pedagogical orientation to the reader that seeks not to inspire but inform or invoke further imitation. Again, the reader is offered what Uncle Ben gave Franklin: a set of lessons and model for citizenship, if only the beneficiary carries on the name, reputation, and the principles that accompany both.

Benjamin Franklin, the Self-Made Manuscript

Readers would need more than simply Franklin's life to imitate: they would need a guide. Few elements of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* offer such a clear reflection on representation and authority as his "project for moral perfection," included in part two. In his letter to Franklin, Vaughan wrote that Franklin's proposed "Biography and Art of Virtue" would be "worth all Plutarch's Lives put together" (*AB*, 139). Franklin had originally intended to publish this as a separate book, *The Art*

⁵⁰ Elsewhere in the *Autobiography*, Franklin writes that "the chief Ends of Conversation are to *inform*, or to be *informed*, to *please*, or to *persuade*" (65).

of *Virtue*.⁵¹ It isn't clear why Franklin decided to absorb the book into his autobiography; it's possible that by the time he wrote the *Autobiography* he was aware he would not have the chance to publish it separately, or that Vaughan's claim intimated the inseparable nature of Franklin's narrative and ethics (*AB*, 148n5). In any case, Franklin's placement of his moral project in the book binds its narrative of self-development together with the inherited lessons offered through the book's publication. Franklin's list of virtues not only provides a guide for building a reputation like Franklin's, but it operates within the work as a glossary for Franklin's *Autobiography* and its anecdotes. As Uncle Ben promises books of virtue if only Franklin were to adopt his character, so Franklin offers a method of discipline in his book whose value is evident by the time readers complete it.

Franklin's inspiration for the "project for moral perfection" likely originated in his youthful reading of Daniel Defoe's *Essays upon Projects* or Cotton Mather's *Essay Upon the Good*, both offering readers lessons in social and economic self-improvement (58n9).⁵² As for the thirteen virtues that compile the project, Franklin composes a list like a printer would arrange a table of contents for a book or a set of sorts for a page. At a young age, Franklin questions the idea of moral revelation (after reading on it in a book) (113). He instead distills from Christianity only particular maxims and declares himself a Deist: he focuses on the sociability of religion, not the sacred (114). Rather than adopt Christian ethics wholesale or those of authors before

⁵¹ See Ralph Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network: Disseminating Virtue in Early America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 15.

⁵² On Franklin's inheritance from Cotton Mather, see Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*.

him for his moral project, he chooses and rearranges principles, imitating previous authors while leaving his signature by his selection and arrangement of ethics:

In the various Enumerations of the moral Virtues I had met with in my Reading, I found the Catalogue more or less numerous, as different Writers included more or fewer Ideas under the same Name... I propos'd to myself, for the sake of Clearness, to use rather more Names with fewer ideas annex'd to each, than a few Names with more Ideas. (148)

Franklin orders his virtues like he first fashioned sorts at Keimer's printshop, when no American manufacturers existed (110). As in the autobiographies to follow, Franklin retroactively describes his own improvement with an eye toward its performance for the reader. He chooses virtues with some public familiarity both so that his character is inherently social and so that readers find the project easy to understand and follow.⁵³

To chart his progress with each virtue, Franklin lays out a rubric for his project, detailing on one axis the days of the week and the other each virtue (152). For every infraction, Franklin marks the chart. According to Franklin, morality and virtue are the work of rational quantification: the virtuous individual is a statistic. To attain his benchmark, Franklin struggles each week to reach Saturday with a clean template, through means of self-discipline left relatively undiscussed in the book. So that Franklin may reuse the table, he transfers his work "to the Ivory Leaves of a Memorandum Book, on which the Lines were drawn with red Ink that made a durable Stain, and on those Lines I mark'd my Faults with a black Lead Pencil, which Marks I

⁵³ By "social," I mean popular, public, or common, and not necessarily "sociable." As Weber points out, ethics like Franklin's instead boasted an "ascetic tendency" (33) that forbade the idleness of casual social relations: "Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins... Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation... Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work" (104).

could easily wipe out with a wet Sponge” (155). This is important: first, Franklin has rendered moral mistakes not only quantifiable but effaceable. This cleansing is not an expiation nor some inner experience; there seems to be no introspective requirement for his moral improvement. Second, as it is Franklin’s intent to make of this project a “habitude” and impart it to others, we may safely say that moral perfection for the reader leaves one mark upon completion: the “durable stain” of Franklin’s own template (150). Like everything upon which Franklin writes “B. Franklin, Printer” or the virtues themselves, Franklin distances himself from creative authorship but maintains the signature of having chosen and devised the project’s representation. This allows Franklin not only an impersonal calculus for his own self-improvement, but to present it in such a way that others may lift it wholly out of the *Autobiography*, maintaining his presence as the beneficiary of such inheritance.

Franklin’s art of virtue emphasizes the *Autobiography* as wrestling with what it means to be an independent citizen. The autonomous Franklin is one who’s in fact the *least* esoteric, who’s *most* authentically represented by socially-constructed values. This is, again, Franklin’s attempting to rectify the tension between inheritance and innovation: between a concept of freedom as non-domination or public and one that requires ungrounded expressions of the unique self. A clean template indicates a good conscience for Franklin. He seeks to cleanse his self of passion, of “Natural Inclination, Custom, or Company” (148). No motif captures Franklin’s ethics so lucidly in the *Autobiography* as his use of the term *errata*, a printer’s error.⁵⁴ One

⁵⁴ For a contemporary analysis of *errata* as it appears in Franklin’s autobiography, see Christopher S. McClure, “Learning from Franklin’s Mistakes: Self-Interest Rightly Understood in the *Autobiography*,” *The Review of Politics* 76, no. 1 (2014): 69–92.

errata is printing his brother's paper under Franklin's name, and he corrects that by adopting James's son; another is Franklin's attempting "Familiarities" with Ralph's companion Mrs. T (*AB*, 99). Every slip reflects an error in discipline rather than in character. The term *errata* further defines Franklin through his reputation: mistakes concern what others learn of Franklin rather than he of himself. After brashly publishing a tract diminishing God, Franklin emends the errata by burning almost every copy (97). Faced with such a public and shameful error attributed his name, he simply makes that representation of his name no longer legible.

As with Franklin's use of pseudonym and careful manipulation of his name in publishing, his character (as constructed through the art of virtue) promotes his social mobility yet also conceals what might be the greater uniqueness or specificity of his personality. This is how D.H. Lawrence characterized Franklin when lambasting him that "he tries to take away my wholeness and my dark forest, my freedom. For how can any man be free, without an illimitable background?"⁵⁵ In Weber's analysis of Franklin, "the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudæmonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture."⁵⁶ According to Franklin, freedom requires a subject whose qualities are irreducibly social. The Franklin of the *Autobiography* is a smooth, streamlined protagonist with few eccentricities or interior hang-ups to get caught in any element of history or the narrative. Compare this to *The*

⁵⁵ D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 19.

⁵⁶ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 18.

Education of Henry Adams, whose author is so compelled by the introspective character of modern subjectivity that his entire book is described as a failed attempt at achieving what Franklin had accomplished in part one alone: education. As mentioned earlier, Franklin's missing soul in the *Autobiography* is part of what best defines it as a new genre of self-examination, one dislodged from Augustine's appeal to God. As Gordon Wood describes it, Franklin "always seems to be holding something back – he is reticent, detached, not wholly committed. We sense in Franklin the presence of calculated restraint."⁵⁷ Breitwieser dismisses the hunt for Franklin's interiority by explaining that behind Franklin's personae, behind every calculated facet of his character is simply "the universal capacity to take on masks."⁵⁸ The desire for something past Franklin's representation exemplifies what Friedrich Nietzsche called a "seduction of language": readers want to add a "doer" to the deeds he performs.⁵⁹ According to Breitwieser, there is simply no interiority to Franklin past what he writes (in the same way that postmodern critics refuse that authors' intentions govern text). If Franklin envisioned his art of virtue as a guidebook for citizenship, then surely it is a citizenship wherein one's public representation is all there is. As Franklin explains, it would teach the social values of "Truth, Sincerity and Integrity in Dealings between Man and Man": an ethics unconcerned with truth between man and *himself* (*AB*, 114).

All of these interpretations require that we unmoor Franklin from his social and intellectual context: there's no good way to decide whether Franklin himself

⁵⁷ Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 13.

⁵⁸ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 233.

⁵⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 45.

believed that the art of virtue most sincerely represented his character or whether some unique individuality lay behind it. What's most important is how Franklin's art of virtue and its reciprocal social mobility enhances Franklin's ability to pass this ethics on to readers, and how it maintains Franklin's authority not by governing future lives but by retaining his signature as the one who drew up the citizenship blueprint. Future citizens who read and take up the art of virtue will be free – because the project of moral perfection guarantees social freedom – but it is a freedom that Franklin himself defined. Whether readers are aware or not, their adopting the art of virtue satisfies the sort of contract Uncle Ben had proposed Franklin: they gain a set of values or virtues, and in practicing them further extend Franklin's legacy through his inheritance.

There's no better means of promoting this inheritance than through the *Autobiography* itself. Franklin's placing his project halfway through the narrative is strategic: by the time the reader arrives at the project, Franklin's retold his youthful life according to the very system of values Franklin proceeds to lay out. Even if the reader has not touched Defoe or Mather, the virtues seem familiar, appropriate to the life in question. They appear to provide the very criteria through which Franklin represents himself in his life. Franklin sets up the *Autobiography* in the same way Defoe and Mather sought texts as waypoints for young development, as Alan Houston explains: "to Defoe and Mather, an essay was also an attempt, a trial, and an experiment. In this sense, Franklin essayed as he read: he put books to the proof."⁶⁰ The reader proceeds through the book, putting Franklin's life to the proof, but Franklin

⁶⁰ Houston, *The Politics of Improvement*, 8.

provides the evidence wedged within his covers. Early in the book, Uncle Ben teaches Franklin his method of shorthand (*AB*, 48-49). Though he forgets it, Franklin corrects this errata by presenting his life in his own shorthand, the art of virtue.

Each virtue corresponds to anecdotes in the *Autobiography* and exemplify character grounded in reputation and profit. Franklin's virtue of *temperance*, to "Eat not to Dulness. Drink not to Elevation" recalls an earlier story in which Franklin offers loans for beer to workmen at Watt's printing house in London (149). When Franklin's colleagues, "great Guzzlers of beer," insist "to drink *strong* Beer... [that they] might be *strong* to labour," he convinces them that "the Bodily Strength afforded by Beer could only be in proportion to the Grain or Flour of the Barley dissolved in the Water of which it was made; that there was more Flour in a Penny-worth of Bread, and therefore if he would eat that with a Pint of Water, it would give him more Strength than a Quart of Beer" (99-100). Franklin doesn't acknowledge the real reason the workmen drink – to get drunk – but instead offers to maximize the workers' allegedly desired output from beer through his own innovative calculus and furthermore through loaning men money to buy beer, collecting interest once a week (101). This anecdote signifies Franklin's approach to representation: he doesn't acknowledge the private, passionate reason for which people drink: instead, he offers the drinkers a (perhaps spurious) system for maximizing "strength" while enjoying a tidy profit.

Other virtues continue to insist on Franklin's representation and character. Franklin exemplifies *silence* – to "speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling conversation" – in not only his concise language but in the tutelary mode of the memoirs. As for *frugality*, to "waste nothing" is for Franklin to appear

modest so as to seem an “industrious thriving young Man” (126). Franklin’s *sincerity* also affects his image, to disavow any “hurtful Deceit”; his *resolution, cleanliness* and *tranquility* each discipline Franklin’s representative self (150). Not only does he use preceding pages to present his successes in each virtue, but Franklin points out where his deficiencies have kept him humble: for example, he errs in *chastity* by troubling Mrs. T. (99). Even this creates a teachable moment for readers: “that a perfect Character might be attended with the Inconvenience of being envied and hated; and that a benevolent Man should allow a few Faults in himself, to keep his Friends in Countenance” (156). The art of virtue manages to teach readers without insisting on Franklin’s didactic authority in at least two ways: its author positions the project after anecdotal proofs, and presents it with a humility that encourages readers’ empathy. It’s ironic that out of his virtues, *order* would trouble Franklin most (155). The placement of Franklin’s virtues, like a printer’s placement of sorts, is key for conveying his character and inheritance in the *Autobiography*.

Finally, Franklin concludes the list of virtues with *humility*, which Franklin admits he only succeeds “with regard to the *Appearance* of it” (159). Even with this low bar of success, Franklin adds that he’s allowed “an extensive Meaning to the Word.” This admission is revealing. The shrewd ethicist only includes humility after a Quaker friend chastises Franklin for his pride. Claiming this as inspiration authorizes Franklin to include the virtue much like James and Vaughan authorize Franklin to publish the entire list alongside his biography. Within the text, Franklin wields these personae like he did “The Busybody” with Keimer; Franklin’s name is left unscathed by an otherwise proud action. Kenneth Dauber suggests that the letters provide a foil

to Franklin's apparent humility, given the "pietism of James, the apocalypticism of Vaughan" contrasted with Franklin's "benignity."⁶¹ Franklin's project invites readers by acknowledging imperfection; however, we trust his aspirations because he uses other voices to claim modesty. Yet Franklin's conclusion with *humility* also further illustrates the entire art of virtue as completely focused on Franklin's reputation: he acts insofar as it appears to others. Pride, one of the seven sins, doesn't trouble Franklin past his friend's impression of him. Compare this anecdote and the ethics drawn to Augustine's entire *Confessions*, an expiatory lament of sin to God that results in a comprehensive, theological worldview..

It's through Franklin's feigned humility that he hopes to pass his name on to readers. Lawrence is right to balk at Franklin's explanation of humility. "The amusing part is the sort of humility [the virtue] displays," Lawrence writes: "'Imitate Jesus and Socrates,' and mind you don't outshine either of these two."⁶² More significant than the seeming contradiction of humbly imitating Jesus and Socrates is what Franklin's choice suggests about the *Autobiography*. Franklin may have meant to imitate less their humility and more how we read both figures. After all, Franklin intends his *Autobiography* to carry on these virtues, and readers can't forget that both Socrates and Jesus, while being the fathers of modern philosophy and Christian morality, are known specifically through others' anecdotal accounts. For Socrates there was first Plato, and for Jesus there was first Paul. The effective tutelage of Franklin's virtues, his careful crafting of representative character, and his signed reiterations all point to

⁶¹ Kenneth Dauber, *The Idea of Authorship in America: Democratic Poetics from Franklin to Melville* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 12.

⁶² Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 13.

the mobility of the man in print. Franklin writes on himself as a biographer would, in a series of social anecdotes penned in a language of public sorts and virtue. According to Rice, this exemplifies Franklin's representation in and through writing the book:

Franklin's narrative is simultaneously the principal means by which Franklin writes his historical self into existence, hence the *Autobiography*, and at the same time it is a means by which he evacuates evidence of his historical contingency, replacing his idiosyncratic life with both a rational methodology – his maxims, habits, and virtues – and a notion of representativeness.⁶³

Franklin essentially splits from his particular self in his writing, in his translation of character to a printed text. The political significance of this writing style is not simply that Franklin hopes others will write on him, but that the art of virtue creates a subject who might be imitated by readers while retaining reference to the original author.

Like the imperfection of “*a speckled Ax*,” Franklin acknowledges that his project is unfinished (*AB*, 156). Its realization still awaits efforts by the “whole of man” (157). The art of virtue could be taught to his contemporaries, but those after his death would require a different vessel for his legacy. The moral project must then target an audience past Franklin's public; as he addresses part one to not only his son but his posterity, his project too must go further.

The Authority and Inheritance of Franklin's Second Edition

As with his transition from the epistolary form of part one to the two letters prefacing part two, Franklin narrates the *Autobiography* as the tale of his increasingly public character. Whereas in part one Franklin spends much of his time working off

⁶³ Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship*, 49.

debts incurred from patrons' support, in parts two and three a solvent Franklin turns to investing money in neighbors and colleagues (86, 196). Franklin's shrewd economizing bolsters profits just as it passes along his legacy: Thomas Bond in 1751 tells Franklin that "there was no such thing as carrying a public Spirited Project through, without [his] being concern'd in it" (199). Once Franklin finally retires from private business, he is interrupted from his "Philosophical Studies and Amusements" by citizens clamoring for his assistance (196). Even though he describes himself in part one using the language of his project for moral perfection, Franklin presents his growth as not simply one of self- but social improvement.

Historians have detailed other methods by which Franklin intended to pass on his legacy. His name would, of course, be carried on in his other writings and publications. He would invest his printing profits in a loan system for young apprentices in Boston and Philadelphia to be paid out over two hundred years.⁶⁴ As his uncle promised him books, Franklin's writings would go mainly to William Temple, his memoirs eventually to the nation. Franklin had already detailed how his art of virtue would be inculcated through his "Society of the *Free and Easy*," explained within the *Autobiography*, to be refined by simply "a good plan" (163). Young men would learn Franklin's virtue in the same way he taught apprenticing printers: if they adopted his types and produced his oeuvres, together they would share the profits.⁶⁵

But it's the *Autobiography* that would truly outlive Franklin, by capturing his character not simply in its biographical specificity but as a mode of representation that

⁶⁴ See Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 762–763.

⁶⁵ See Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network*, 20.

readers could inherit in the fledgling nation. Franklin had worried over the printed word and its influence on readers before writing his memoirs, particularly in observing George Whitefield's visit in Philadelphia in 1739 (*AB*, 175). Although at first resistant to Whitefield's request for help, as Franklin listens to the preacher speak he is moved by the "Stroke of his Oratory" (177). Franklin had been hesitant to contribute to the cause given the two men's logistic disagreement over the construction of an orphanage, but he is won over by the intimate seduction of Whitefield's voice. As with the impassioned desires of his drunk colleagues, Franklin becomes obsessed over the craft of the orator's vocations: how he improves his words through "frequent Repetitions, that every Accent, every Emphasis, every Modulation of Voice, was so perfectly well tun'd and well plac'd, that without being interested in the Subject, one could not help being pleas'd with the Discourse" (180). He calculates and hypothesizes the range of Whitefield's voice (179). And yet Franklin's own medium, the press, diminishes the orator's influence. By the printed word, critics are able to dismantle Whitefield's speeches, removed from the seduction of his tone (180).⁶⁶ Of course, Franklin's pedagogy relied on the written word from his first job: and yet, anecdotes like Franklin's review of Whitefield insist on the idea that the *Autobiography* would need not only to capture a *wide* audience, but captivate them fully: if there was no intention behind the word, no Franklin but the printed *Benjamin Franklin*, then no interpretation could dissolve Franklin's authority over his autobiography or the inheritance he offered its readers.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ On Whitefield, see Rice, *Transformation*, 46.

⁶⁷ As Gustafson points out, Franklin was unique in the nineteenth century as an American who resisted the rise of oratorship to become so important for figures like Emerson, Douglass, and Lincoln, though

It's through the autobiography itself that Franklin envisions posterity to inherit what Warner calls the "fantasy of being-in-print": if Franklin's contemporaries could learn from the man himself, those after would need a textual stand-in.⁶⁸ Franklin was aware of the potential of pedagogy through publishing: upon releasing *Poor Richard's Almanack*, he writes in his memoirs that "I consider'd it as a proper Vehicle for conveying Instruction among the common People, who bought scarce any other Books" (*AB*, 164). It is by publishing that he not only educates but controls his representation. In the 1737 edition of the *Almanack*, he wrote that "he that can compose himself, is wiser than he that composes books."⁶⁹ The *Autobiography* finishes what the *Almanack* started: it is not only a composed book for peers, but a self-composition for posterity. It outlives Franklin by replacing him.

If this isn't clear from Franklin's opening self-description as a "second edition," it's revealed simply in that the *Autobiography* does not end with his death. Breitwieser points out that just as Franklin's project for moral perfection requires the input of his posterity, the narrative of his memoirs is incomplete and open to readers to finish.⁷⁰ One completed story, Van Doren's biography, describes Franklin's failing health as he finishes the memoirs, Franklin's body disintegrating as he transfers himself to the manuscript.⁷¹ His grandson, William Temple, writes as Franklin dictates the remainder of his life. But by his death's omission from the *Autobiography*, the

of course these orators wrote important texts as well (beyond their printed speeches). Gustafson, *Representative Words*, 374.

⁶⁸ Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 74.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Franklin, "Poor Richard's Almanack, 1733-1758," in *Autobiography, Poor Richard, and Later Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1997), 465.

⁷⁰ Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 225.

⁷¹ Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 767-768.

second edition of his life reads with an air of surviving vitality. Breitwieser argues that “Franklin will of course die, but his death will terminate the act of writing the *Autobiography*, rather than concluding the story it tells.”⁷²

And it is by the culmination of every motif thus analyzed that Franklin inscribes his self indelibly into the *Autobiography*. He establishes an intimate exchange for legacy in the letter to his son that carries on to the reader.⁷³ He dissimulates his didacticism in anecdote and narrative, using personae to eschew egoism. He makes of his textual body a contemporary to his posterity, an immortal form to be completed, analyzed and held up for inquiry. By reducing his subjectivity to the purely communicable and readable, he avoids Whitefield’s mistakes by rendering his voice *as* the written, as recasting public virtues as his own. Franklin’s wisdom and life is read still with so much persuasion, with such vivid subjectivity.

As a result, Franklin would be one of the first to craft politics from autobiography in the American tradition. His innovation in genre, the transition from memoirs to autobiography, emerged from a time in intellectual history in which early Americans took seriously the problem of representation, authority, and citizenship as they concerned the written word. In the age of revolutions and popular insurrection, Franklin was not alone in wondering how future Americans would look to their shared history in charting the future, if at all. Nor was Franklin’s *Autobiography* the only text

⁷² Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin*, 261–262.

⁷³ Rice writes that “the opening rhetorical gambit in the *Autobiography*, after all, is the intimate gesture to the possibility of intergenerational continuity.” Rice, *The Transformation of Authorship*, 52.

to exemplify crossroads between America's inherited liberal and republican modes of citizenship and politics. Where Franklin's text stood out was in its reliance upon personal narrative to examine not simply the independent author but those who had contributed to his life before, and those whom his life would represent afterward. Though flawed, Franklin's autobiography will inspire an extended fascination with the use of first-person claims to American authority and experience.

Conclusion: Inherit the Wind

A common motif in early modern thought embodies freedom and providence in the art and economy of seafaring. Though the metaphor has its roots in Plato's *Republic* as the "ship of state" (wherein unruly sailors question the captain's authority), for Daniel Defoe and others, the ship and its inevitable, stranding shipwreck was a test and testament to man's independence and the work of divine fortune, once ships and crew left so-called civilization.

As a child, far from the virtuous citizen of self-discipline and representation he would become, the young Benjamin Franklin too wanted to go to sea.⁷⁴ Merely three years before Defoe would pen *Robinson Crusoe*, Franklin laments that "I dislike'd the [candle-making] Trade and had a strong Inclination for the Sea; but my Father declar'd against it" (*AB*, 53). Rebelling against Josiah's restrictions, Franklin acts out sailing fantasies with other young boys, games which show "an early projecting public Spirit" (53-54). As an adult, the self-made Franklin gains many opportunities to sail,

⁷⁴ This is the same anecdote with which Du Bois chose to begin his *Story of Benjamin Franklin*. See Du Bois, *The Story of Benjamin Franklin*, 7.

and toward the end of *Autobiography* he reflects once more on those aspirations. His youthful passion succumbs to cold, calculating reason. Franklin complains of the “Imperfection in the Art of Shipbuilding,” that a ship’s voyage can be so unpredictable due to its captain’s character (256). What this vessel calls for, in Franklin’s words, is a “philosopher” willing to experiment with the boat’s construction: how to build the best hull, how to trim the sails properly, and so on (257). In “the Age of Experiments,” as Franklin calls it, the philosopher is no longer the captain but the boat’s engineer. Franklin sees himself as that better shipbuilder. No matter the captain, regardless of changes in weather, a properly-built ship could carry Franklin to any nation. Ships didn’t enable exploration of the stars or civilizations, but commerce and diplomacy.

This is how Franklin thought the *Autobiography* would sail to us today. Its travel would be worldly, tied to no geographic location but the sea itself. It may only skim the coasts of land, merely the image of a nation and not its internal landscapes. But whether by trade or exploration, it might proliferate profit and ideals worldwide. Franklin had spent his life becoming a captain of men in Philadelphia, America and Europe. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* would deliver Franklin’s theory of citizenship and representation to a far wider posterity.

But like Robinson’s Friday and the unmentioned colonial enterprise that motivated seafaring and supported the shipwrecked survivor’s supposed independence, Franklin’s *Autobiography* concealed a host of unrepresented peoples. This aligns the text with those early Americans who relied on black chattelhood not simply for economic sustenance but to provide the very experience of unfreedom and its best rhetorical articulations, rebels crying “We are *Free-men* – British subjects –

Not Born Slaves.”⁷⁵ Franklin’s freedom and the universal appeal of his posterity were limited. As Burke told the English in March of 1775, the colonists in Virginia and the Carolinas saw freedom as “a kind of rank and privilege” above the multitude of slaves surrounding them.⁷⁶ As we’ll see in the next chapter, Frederick Douglass too in his personal narratives sits on the shore, envious of boats going by: but he, of course, would be prevented from embarking by a slaveowner, not his father. The point is not that Franklin’s own politics set shackles on the availability of his autobiography. As much as early Americans ever did, Franklin opposed the slave trade.⁷⁷ And though a time where immigrants were mostly welcomed, Franklin expressed his work ethic in an open immigration plea, writing in 1784 that in America “people do not enquire concerning a Stranger, *What is HE?* but, *What can he DO?*”⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the autobiographies that follow Franklin’s in this dissertation and in history will both reveal those invisible among his posterity and gradually widen the politics of autobiography. From Franklin, Douglass, Adams, and Goldman will adopt major metaphors and motifs crucial to the genre: the critique of paternalism, interpretations of authority in early life, and the use of personal narrative to represent those beyond the author, to name a few. But their adoption will be, even if unintended,

⁷⁵ Quoted in Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 7. On the relationship between slavery and freedom in early America, see *ibid.*, chap. 1, 2.

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke, “Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., On Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies, March 22nd 1775,” in *Burke: Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Ian Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 224.

⁷⁷ Franklin’s critique of the slave trade reflected his general view on citizenship and inheritance. In one article, he lamented that “*hundreds of thousands* are dragged into a slavery that can scarce be said to end with their lives, since it is entailed on their posterity!” Benjamin Franklin, “The Somersett Case and the Slave Trade,” in *Franklin: The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 294.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Franklin, “Information to Those Who Would Remove to America,” in *Franklin: The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 342.

in the interest of making autobiography something truly radical: a genre that may honestly represent the people to come beyond the individual who was.

Among those people left invisible in *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* was the author's own sister. In her recent *Book of Ages*, Jill Lepore recovers the diary of Jane Franklin, whom Ben never mentions in the *Autobiography*. If Ben thought of his book as a "second edition," Jane, Lepore writes, thought of Ben as her "Second Self."⁷⁹ The difference between the two Franklins, though, was stark:

He ran away from home when he was seventeen. She never left. He taught himself to write with wit and force and style; she never learned how to spell. The day he turned twenty-one, he wrote her a letter – she was fourteen – beginning a correspondence that would last until his death sixty-three years later. He became a printer, a philosopher, and a statesman. She became a wife, a mother, and a widow. He signed the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Paris, and the Constitution. She strained to form the letters of her name. He loved no one longer. She loved no one better. He wrote more letters to her than he wrote to anyone. All her life, she wrote back: letter after letter filled with news and recipes and gossip and, when she was truly, sorely vexed, and only then, with her blistering opinions about politics.

Jane's diary, the sixteen-page "Book of Ages," recorded the births and deaths of her children.⁸⁰ As I'll explore in the final chapter, up to the end of the nineteenth century, genres like the diary or journal were largely considered feminine and private, irrelevant to popular interest just in the way that Jane only spoke of politics with hesitation. Here, already, was a voice unrepresented by autobiography. While Ben is "Everyman," Lepore explains, Jane "is everyone else."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Lepore, *Book of Ages*, xi.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, xii.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, xiii.

When Franklin disowned his son and adopted America, he turned from William as the address of his *Autobiography* to posterity. Who that posterity could be – who an autobiography's readers might be – would be up to others to better argue.

Chapter II

To Narrate and Denounce: Frederick Douglass and the Dissent of Personal Narrative

“Tell your story, Frederick,” would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs; I felt like denouncing them.

- Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*¹

Four years after escaping slavery in Maryland, Frederick Douglass wrote the 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in the genre of slave narrative, with the help of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Over the next decade, it would sell thirty thousand copies in twenty-one editions, translated and sold in America and Europe.² One of these copies Douglass sent to his legal owner, challenging Thomas Auld to refute its representation of slavery; Auld defended himself in a southern newspaper.³ By the time Douglass wrote Auld another letter in 1848 (pledging “to make use of you as a weapon with which to assail the system of slavery”), Douglass had begun drifting from Garrison and Phillips.⁴ Their use of moral suasion and calls for disunion clashed with Douglass’s strengthening defense of

¹ Frederick Douglass, “*My Bondage and My Freedom*,” in *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, [1855] 1994), 367. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (*MB*, #).

² See John W. Blassingame, “Introduction to Volume One,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 1, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, by Frederick Douglass, ed. John R. McKivigan, Peter P. Hinks, and John W. Blassingame, Series Two: Autobiographical Writings (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), xxxii.

³ See *ibid.*, xxi.

⁴ “Frederick Douglass to Thomas Auld, Rochester, [N.Y.] 8 September 1848,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 1, 1842-1852*, ed. John R. McKivigan, Series Three: Correspondence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 315.

political action and the Constitution as anti-slavery.⁵ In the period before 1855, the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act would polarize national conversation, and Douglass would find new interlocutors in Gerrit Smith, James McCune Smith, Martin Delany and others.⁶ This was a period in which Douglass vacillated between “hope and gloom,” David Blight notes, between his “American jubilee” and pessimism over national compromises and abolitionists’ lingering racism.⁷ Rather than abandon southern slaves and absolve northern citizens, Douglass wanted to refound the nation. To this effort, Douglass wrote his 1855 autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which would soon sell twenty thousand copies there and abroad.⁸ Unlike *Narrative* and slave narratives before it, *Bondage* did not end its story at its author’s freedom.⁹ And yet while *Bondage* is nearly triple the length of *Narrative*, little more than a tenth of the book recalls events past the end of the 1845 text. Compare this to Douglass’s third personal narrative, *Life and Times* of 1881 and 1892, a text twice the length of *Bondage* yet more than half dedicated to Douglass’s

⁵ See Waldo E. Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 31.

⁶ On Douglass’s relationship with other leaders, see Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁷ David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 12.

⁸ See Blassingame, “Introduction to Volume One,” xxxii.

⁹ John Stauffer connects Douglass’s generic innovations in *Bondage* to his political project for freedom: “Part of Douglass’s problem was that there was no precedent for representing oneself as a free man while embracing immediate emancipation and a sharp break from the past. Douglass had no one to turn to for help, and in writing *My Bondage*, he created a new genre that follows the form previously reserved for white men: a narrative that describes a life in freedom, rather than ending at the moment of freedom, as all previous slave narratives had done.” John Stauffer, “Frederick Douglass’s Self-Fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 212.

life after 1855.¹⁰ This second book did not capture more, but a different Douglass. Garrison disliked this new self-made man: he censured a positive review of the book, after which Douglass asked that Garrison point to “the offensive portions” of the book, such that readers “may read and judge for themselves.”¹¹ Garrison did not respond.

Born into slavery in Maryland sometime in 1818, Douglass would witness America first from the chains of chattelhood, through the fratricide of the Civil War and the trials of Reconstruction. Around February of 1839, less than half a year after he’d escaped slavery in Baltimore via train, steamboat, and ferry, Douglass first encountered Garrison through a copy of *The Liberator*.¹² After a few years working with an antislavery group of free blacks in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Douglass began working with Garrison upon first hearing him speak in August, 1841.¹³ Beyond that break and his work with Gerrit Smith, Douglass influenced or worked alongside countless figures in the ante- and postbellum nation. He sympathized with John Brown and would briefly leave the country under allegations of involvement with Harpers Ferry; he conferred intellectually with both Sojourner Truth and Harriet Beecher Stowe.¹⁴ In a scene indicative of what ills would pursue the nation past the Civil War,

¹⁰ I do not comment on *Life and Times* here, primarily due to my focus on Douglass’s antebellum years and also due to the relevant unpopularity of the last book’s first publication: in its first seven years it only sold a paltry 463 copies. That said, there is much to be mined in placing that text alongside Douglass’s others or those of contemporaries Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. On the book’s sales, William L. Andrews, “Introduction,” in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991), 5.

¹¹ See Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 2, My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, Series Two: Autobiographical Writings (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 431.

¹² See Martin, *Frederick Douglass*, 15, 20.

¹³ See *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ See Frederick Douglass, “*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*,” in *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, [1881, 1892] 1994), 750, 719, 726.

policemen refused Douglass entry to a party celebrating Lincoln's second inauguration, though he had served as close counsel to the president on black conscription and other affairs.¹⁵ He fought unilaterally against discrimination throughout life: Douglass attended the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and defended women's suffrage, and he would later work alongside Ida B. Wells in a campaign against lynching.¹⁶ Late in life, Douglass would lecture on black Americans' need for self-reliance and the state's need to guarantee their opportunity, though others would critique his standing by the Republicans through 1877 and after.¹⁷ He served briefly as a minister to Haiti under Benjamin Harrison in 1889, dying years later in 1895.¹⁸

In the Gilded Age and after his death, new political thinkers on the race problem would claim the legacy and life of Douglass. In his 1903 *Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois would call Douglass "the greatest of American Negro leaders."¹⁹ Booker T. Washington's 1899 *Up from Slavery* showed clear inspiration from Douglass's narratives, and Washington published a biography of Douglass in 1906. There he wrote that "the life of Frederick Douglass is the history of American slavery epitomized in a single human experience. He saw it all, lived it all, and overcame it all."²⁰ Essential to Douglass's legacy are his three personal narratives, which

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, 803.

¹⁶ On Douglass's work with Stanton and Wells, see Martin, *Frederick Douglass*, 136, 77.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 69, 81. For a careful analysis of Douglass's concept of self-reliance, see Turner, *Awakening to Race*, chap. 3.

¹⁸ See Douglass, "Life and Times," 1023.

¹⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Dell, [1903] 2005), 36.

²⁰ Booker T. Washington, *Frederick Douglass* (Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Company, 1906), 15. The rest of that quote, albeit somewhat deflating, fits nicely with Washington's attempt to claim Douglass for his own political motivations: "What he saw and lived and suffered was not too much to pay, however, for a great career."

contemporary scholars often consider to capture what Du Bois called Douglass's "self-assertion"; political theory looks to what Eric Sundquist describes as the ex-slave's embodiment of non-dominated independence, at a time of uncertainty for the Revolution's legacy.²¹ In recent years, political theory monographs on Douglass have drawn on his narratives to supplement letters or speeches with biography.²² Other theorists treat Douglass's fight with the slavebreaker Edward Covey (a scene featured in all three narratives) as a model for self-authorization, as in Herbert Marcuse's letter to Angela Davis or in recent studies of honor and dignity.²³

My Bondage and My Freedom was more than a vessel for Douglass's views: it was a form of dissent.²⁴ Whereas Franklin wrote his autobiography near death with an eye to posterity's inheriting what he'd spent his life building, Douglass writes his autobiography at a time where he had but half his life still to live, the country's own future in halves. This chapter considers the political relevance of Douglass's personal narratives by drawing on his distinction between *narrating* and *denouncing* wrongs. Like scholars before, I read Douglass's first text as slave narrative, his second as autobiography.²⁵ I argue that Douglass writes *My Bondage and My Freedom* as a

²¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 37; Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 86.

²² See Myers, *Frederick Douglass*; Buccola, *Frederick Douglass*. On biographies of Douglass published before the 1990s, see Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black Words, Signs, and the Racial Self*, chap. 4.

²³ See Herbert Marcuse, "Dear Angela," *Ramparts*, February 1971; Sharon R. Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), chap. 5; Nicholas Knowles Bromell, "Democratic Indignation: Black American Thought and the Politics of Dignity," *Political Theory* 41, no. 2 (2013): 285–311.

²⁴ Robert Gooding-Williams has compellingly portrayed the "declarations of independence" in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, whereas I read each narrative as its own declaration. Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, 168.

²⁵ Although I clarify the stakes of this distinction below, I should note that there is debate over whether slave narrative constitutes autobiography, and where Douglass's *Narrative* fits. I side with James Olney, who argues that the author's purely historical relation to experience in slave narrative distinguishes it from the creative self-fashioning of autobiography. See James Olney, "'I Was Born':

mode of *denunciation*: an autobiographical critique of injustice that balances analysis of collective oppression with advocacy for communal emancipation. Although Douglass's first narrative recounts his enslavement and escape, abolitionist publication of slave narrative and "slavery on trial" rhetoric framed *Narrative* within a racial hierarchy of black testimony and white advocacy. *Narrative* critiqued slavery but not the racism that underwrote both the institution and abolitionists' lingering prejudice. Whereas to narrate wrongs encouraged readers to judge Douglass's story alongside popular criteria of justice, to denounce wrongs in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is to implicate readers within the structures that create antebellum subjects on and off the plantation, by revealing the coercions and conditionings of society that make not simply slaves but slaveowners, sympathizers, and abolitionists.²⁶

Thus Douglass's self-making in *Bondage* fits his developing politics, one that rejected moral suasion or disunion and that looked to expansive conceptions of "the people," such as those marshalled in response to *Dred Scott v. Sandford* or Independence Day celebrations. In his autobiography, Douglass provides both a systemic analysis of antebellum peoplehood and a series of practices that produce a new self and people. Denunciation hovers on a line between what a people were and

Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," in *The Slave's Narrative*, ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 151. For more on this debate, see John Sekora, "'Mr. Editor, If You Please': Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and the End of the Abolitionist Imprint," *Callaloo* 17, no. 2 (1994): 608–26; Stepto, *From behind the Veil*; Robert Levine, "The Slave Narrative and the Revolutionary Tradition of American Autobiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99–101.

²⁶ To lay out the politics of Douglass's narratives, it may be useful to place denunciation between what Melvin Rogers has recently distinguished as the "descriptive" and "aspirational" invocations of "the people," the former an account of the individuals that a constitution or institutions specifically represent, and the latter an emancipatory claim to a future, unbounded constituency. Denunciation answers Rogers's "how do you move the people so that they will embrace an expanded view of themselves?" Rogers, "The People, Rhetoric, and Affect," 188, 194.

who they can be. This may seem counter-intuitive, given the genre's focus not on a people who will be but an individual who was. But Douglass's multiple narratives insist that the self-evident "I" of published experience is not a given. In the same way that Douglass would later contest the self-evidence of the Declaration of Independence or the Preamble to the Constitution's "We," so too were his personal narratives at the intersection of various political, historical, and economic manifestations of the people.²⁷ If slavery were – as Orlando Patterson would say – Douglass's social death, his autobiography would be his and the people's rebirth.²⁸

At the same time, Douglass would take up themes of authority and representation relevant to *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, while subverting autobiography as not a mode of inheritance but critique. Toward the end of the dissertation, we'll find a similar use of autobiography in Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*, where she'll likewise build authority around the readers' inclusion in a joint political identity. Like Franklin, Douglass too attempts self-authorization through autobiography, but he begins from lower conditions than Franklin and with a wider

²⁷ See Frank, *Constituent Moments*.

²⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). There are several other ways to frame Douglass's constituent call that I do not address here. We could read Douglass as addressing a new nation, as Dorothy Ross does: "to disengage nationhood from an exclusive principle of cohesion and open it to a universalistic civic nationalism." We could also specify Douglass's audience as black Americans, that his autobiography was part of a broader effort for black Americans to make themselves into "a new people," as Steven Hahn writes. See Dorothy Ross, "'Are We a Nation?': The Conjunction of Nationhood and Race in the United States, 1850–1876," *Modern Intellectual History* 2, no. 3 (2005): 350; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 9. It's also worth remembering that while Douglass did envision a broader American constituency, he continued to clash with other black leaders even as they similarly championed an open community, in particular Martin Delany. See Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass*, 140.

scope of inclusion.²⁹ Whereas the good liberal Franklin cast self-authorization in contrast to his father and stifling inheritance, Douglass outlines a far more oppressive tyranny that precludes black Americans' independence.³⁰ As Douglass would argue in speeches like his 1848 "What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?", independence required more than self-authorization, but solidarity formation.³¹ Thus a reading of authority in Douglass's narratives complicates attempts to place him within trajectories of liberalism or republicanism. There's no question that Douglass promoted the language of natural rights, and many political theorists productively explore Douglass's political theory in this context.³² But his autobiography often recalls communal attachments or details foreign to a strictly liberal or republican

²⁹ Douglass's autobiography privileges what Michael Hanchard describes as "the practice of reconfiguration," a mode of reading that does not simply rescue marginalized subjects but "aims to literally reconfigure the representation of the relationship between forms of black politics and a wider (national, regional, global) set of political, economic, and social realities." Michael Hanchard, "Contours of Black Political Thought: An Introduction and Perspective," *Political Theory* 38, no. 4 (2010): 512.

³⁰ Douglass is frequently compared to Franklin, particularly for their joint emphasis on self-making, ethics of work, and natural rights. My argument stresses that Douglass's autobiographies reveals a clear inheritance from Franklin and other early nineteenth-century liberals, but that its approach to authority and representation implies a critique of the supposedly-straightforward mode of citizenship Franklin had provided. For another comparison of the two, see Rafia Zafar, "Franklinian Douglass: The Afro-American as Representative Man," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 99–117.

³¹ Frederick Douglass, "What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?, July 14, 1848," in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass. Vol. 1, Early Years, 1817-1849*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 314–20.

³² See Myers, *Frederick Douglass*; Buccola, *Frederick Douglass*; Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Reading Douglass's autobiography as attuned to subject formation partially recovers the thinker from Mills's critique: in this reading, Douglass more closely approximates Mills's contrast of the Cartesian epistemic subject to African-American philosophy, wherein George Yancy reiterates the latter as "referentially *this*-worldly; it is a site of conceptualizing the world that looks suspiciously upon and rejects the *a-historical* nature of the epistemic subject." See George Yancy, "African-American Philosophy: Through the Lens of Socio-Existential Struggle," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37, no. 5 (2011): 552.

tradition, putting my argument closer to those studies that either complicate Douglass's place in liberalism or complicate liberalism through Douglass.³³

The chapter presents *Bondage* and denunciation in three sections: (1) I look at the relation between authority and experience in the slave narrative genre and Douglass's 1845 *Narrative*, both of which parallel his developing critiques of Garrison and others. (2) I read the preface to *Bondage* as reorienting the rhetorical strategy of "slavery on trial" from a claim of popular judgment to a renegotiation of the people. (3) In light of these two critiques, I portray *Bondage* as providing an account of slave-making that denounces others not as wrong-doers but as subjects of slavery as well. Whereas to narrate wrongs is to try them against popular law or morality, to denounce wrongs implicates readers in the practice and product of self-examination that make up Douglass's autobiography. In addition to the emancipatory practices advocated within *My Bondage and My Freedom*, autobiography seeks to convert readers beyond the injustice that sponsored slavery and lingered even in abolitionist circles.

The Binding of Narrative

In the early nineteenth century, abolitionists published slave narratives as the public testimonies of slavery's survivors. Unlike autobiography, abolitionists and not authors authorized personal experience in the slave narrative: though focused on the

³³ On the former, see Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, chap. 5. On the latter, see Nicholas Knowles Bromell, "A 'Voice from the Enslaved': The Origins of Frederick Douglass's Political Philosophy of Democracy," *American Literary History* 23, no. 4 (2011): 697–723; Turner, *Awakening to Race*, chap. 3. Nick Bromell depicts Douglass as understanding "more deeply than most philosophers of democracy that even though individual liberty may be a 'natural' right, it is not a natural state of affairs; it is secured only when citizens submit to the laws they mutually and equally enact" (718).

life stories of narrators such as Charles Ball and Moses Roper, slave narratives treated authors as a means to illuminate and not interpret slavery.³⁴ In William Andrews's words, the genre made the narrator "an eyewitness, not an I-witness."³⁵ Intended to reorient white readers' moral compasses, the slave narrative's political effectiveness hinged on its status as empirical proof. As a result, a common pro-slavery strategy was to question narratives' authenticity, although narrators did rarely forge accounts. Shortly after publication, readers discovered the 1836 *Memoirs of Archy Moore* and the 1838 *Narrative of James Williams* to be fictional: the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society had distributed and defended the latter in *The Liberator*.³⁶ Although slave narratives were instrumental in swaying the national conversation on slavery as well as raising funds for abolitionist politics, this was a conversation mostly among whites, the narrative's ex-slave author in the background.

The racial hierarchies borne by slavery lingered in abolitionist strategies to authenticate slave narratives. The black ex-slave related his experience in speech or writing, and the white abolitionist validated the story as ghostwriter, amanuensis, or by simply putting his name on it.³⁷ Although white testimony occasionally required verification (such as the narratives and letters of Theodore Dwight Weld's 1839 *American Slavery As It Is*, a work that inspired Douglass's writings), here too other white citizens certified the evidence.³⁸ Abolitionists not only warranted ex-slave

³⁴ See Andrews, *To Tell*, 6.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, 65.

³⁶ See Blassingame, "Introduction to Volume One," xxvi–xxvii.

³⁷ See Andrews, *To Tell*, 33–35. See also John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo*, no. 32 (1987): 482–515.

³⁸ See Blassingame, "Introduction to Volume One," xxiv.

experience: they interpreted it, in literature and in rhetoric. Jeannine DeLombard writes that the “slavery on trial” motif “portrayed slaveholders as perpetrators and defendants, slaves as victims and witnesses, white abolitionists as advocates for the slave, and the American reading public as a court of public opinion.”³⁹ Black testimony was inadmissible evidence in courts and their “newly racialized space” of the witness stand.⁴⁰ Fitting with the prevalent culture of Jacksonian popular judgment, to put “slavery on trial” was to critique the law as misrepresenting the people.⁴¹

All of these qualities distinguished the slave narrative from autobiography. The latter, James Olney writes, requires that “the autobiographer is not a neutral and passive recorder but rather a creative and active shaper.”⁴² As in Franklin’s archetypal example, autobiography both captures a story of self-authorization and self-authorizes through the narrative’s elevating the author as agent of that story. The slave narrative, like many of the genres that preceded and accompanied autobiography (such as the captivity or conversion narrative), experimented with self-authorization yet could not quite imbue it in the genre’s form and content. Though not a slave narrative but a pseudo-spiritual confession, texts like *The Confessions of Nat Turner* of 1831 similarly confronted readers with the contrasting voices of white and black responses to slavery: against Turner’s subjective account was his interpreter Thomas Gray’s.⁴³

This shouldn’t suggest that slave narrative lacked any emancipatory potential. As Houston Baker writes, the genre was the ex-slave’s first chance to “seize the

³⁹ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, 109.

⁴² Olney, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” 149.

⁴³ On Nat Turner, see Andrews, *To Tell*, 77.

word”: without a history of (literary) citizenship, his problem was “not to answer Crèvecoeur’s question: ‘What then is the American, this new man?’” but “the problem of being itself.”⁴⁴ In addition to supporting abolitionist appeals to moral suasion, slave narrative accompanied the rise of literary societies among free blacks.⁴⁵ In contemporary scholarship, the slave narrative, among other genres, would pave the way for a more inclusive canonization of genres past those of white, Protestant men. But the genre nonetheless put its authors in an awkward political position. Although it encouraged white readers’ sympathy, it reinforced inequality supposedly unique to slavery. As we’ll see with Douglass, it also paralleled explicit racism that endured among abolitionists. Slave narrators suffered what feminist Kristie Dotson calls “an *epistemic exclusion*,” “an infringement on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduces her or his ability to participate in a given epistemic community.”⁴⁶ The effort to shift focus from the author to slavery and the abolitionist undercut the genre’s potential self-authorization.

Written in the slave narrative tradition, Douglass’s *Narrative* exemplifies this clash between author and abolitionist. Like most ex-slaves on the abolitionist circuit, Douglass regularly spoke from experience: “my friends,” he welcomed an audience in

⁴⁴ Houston A. Baker, Jr., “Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave,” in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991), 94. Slave narratives were “an act or process of simultaneous self-creation and self-emancipation.” Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 69.

⁴⁵ See Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African-American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 13.

⁴⁶ Kristie Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33, no. 1 (2012): 24.

1841, “I have come to tell you something about slavery.”⁴⁷ Douglass wrote *Narrative* in response to allegations that he was too articulate to have been a slave.⁴⁸ Even after its publication, Douglass continued to defend his account: when his owner’s colleague A.C.C. Thompson indicted Douglass’s book in a Delaware paper, Douglass responded by thanking him for proving the existence of the story’s characters, pledging to publish the complaint with subsequent copies of *Narrative*.⁴⁹ Elements early in the text (its “autobiographical pact”) establish Douglass’s authenticity through appeal to Garrison and Phillips.⁵⁰ The title page of *Narrative* – “WRITTEN BY HIMSELF” – authenticates Douglass as a lecturer, writer, and ex-slave, and the next page features a signed daguerreotype of the young narrator.⁵¹ In his preface, Garrison (also the book’s editor) introduces Douglass by verifying his tale, their first meeting, and that Douglass wrote the story (*NF*, 3-10). The event of the two meeting is in fact Douglass’s closing scene in *Narrative*, and Garrison ends his preface “No compromise with slavery! No union with slaveholders!” (10).⁵² In the book’s introduction, Phillips’s letter also authorizes Douglass: he insists of him that “we have known you long, and can put the

⁴⁷ Frederick Douglass, “I Have Come to Tell You Something about Slavery: An Address Delivered in Lynn, Massachusetts, in October 1841,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 1, 1841-1846*, ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3.

⁴⁸ See Martin, *Frederick Douglass*, 25.

⁴⁹ See “Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, Perth, Scot. 27 Jan[uary] 1846,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 1, 1842-1852*, ed. John R. McKivigan, Series Three: Correspondence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 81–88.

⁵⁰ Lejeune, “The Autobiographical Pact.” On Lejeune, see the manuscript’s introduction.

⁵¹ Frederick Douglass, “*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*,” in *Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, [1845] 1994), 2. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (*NF*, #). For an explanation of Douglass’s use of the daguerreotype, see Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, chap. 2.

⁵² This is also likely the first time Douglass ever spoke before a white audience; William C. Coffin, who invited Douglass up on stage, had heard Douglass speak “in the colored people’s meeting at New Bedford” (*NF*, 96).

most entire confidence in your truth, candor, and sincerity” (12). Douglass may have written *Narrative* to verify his lectures, but white abolitionists verify his narrative.

The tragedy of *Narrative* is that its form stifled Douglass’s authority to tell his story, even as the content of that story recounted his self-authorization. Despite what prefaced his narrative both in politics and publication, the book provided a landmark recollection of resistance. A common abolitionist claim depicted slaveowners as hypocritical for their devout Christianity.⁵³ In light of this, Douglass framed *Narrative* as a conversion story, its protagonist turning to abolitionism while his masters grew only crueler in their conversion to Methodism. When Douglass moves to Baltimore he recalls it “a special interposition of divine Providence” (*NF*, 36). It’s there that he teaches himself to read and first overhears the word “abolition.”⁵⁴ Later in the text, Douglass’s master Thomas Auld converts to Methodism, and yet

if it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before. Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his

⁵³ On moral suasion and slave narrative, see Dickson D. Bruce, “Politics and Political Philosophy in the Slave Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30. On Douglass’s use of moral suasion more generally, see Frank M. Kirkland, “Enslavement, Moral Suasion, and Struggles for Recognition,” in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 243–310; Bernard R. Boxill, “Fear and Shame as Forms of Moral Suasion in the Thought of Frederick Douglass,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 31, no. 4 (1995): 713–44.

⁵⁴ Though Douglass does not mention his conversion to methodism in *Narrative* (recalling it later in *Bondage*), the first book is filled throughout with religious rhetoric. Within the first few pages of *Narrative* Douglass invokes the pro-slavery argument that God had cursed Ham – the progenitor of Africans – and that for that reason “American slavery is right” (*NF*, 17). In his descriptions of life on the plantation, Douglass likens slave songs to “a prayer to God for deliverance from chains” (24), and he frequently invokes divine providence in explaining the death of a vicious overseer or his initial move to Baltimore (22, 36). Douglass also draws on allegorical rhetoric to vilify slaveholders; in the pinnacle scene of Douglass’s wrestling with the slave-breaker Edward Covey (which I explore in *Bondage* below), Douglass describes Covey as “the snake” that he must overcome before becoming a man (56). At times, Douglass’s invocation of biblical rhetoric verges on muddled: upon emerging victorious from Covey’s grasp, he feels as though “it was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom” (65).

conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. (52)⁵⁵

Although Douglass goes on to exhort several white, religious men whose attitude toward slaves better match Douglass's impression of the bible's emancipatory principles, his characterization in *Narrative* incited enough controversy that later editions included an appendix specifying Douglass's target as southern Christianity in particular (95).⁵⁶ Though not through-and-through a conversion narrative, Douglass's first book outlined a critique of slaveholders that would come to resemble his later denouncing of Garrison and others: men of principle and personal experience with injustice, who nevertheless let suffering go on.

Narrative mostly clearly broke from the slave narrative genre in Douglass's efforts to describe his independence: his first awareness of chattelhood in learning to read, his fight with Covey, his escape. But the text is at once focused on Douglass's life *and* on the institution of slavery, failing to explain slavery's broader consequences

⁵⁵ In the annotated copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom* of Auld's great-granddaughter, Harriet Lucretia Anthony (born in the same year it was published) wrote in the margins of this passage "I hope [Douglass] is wrong about Capt. Auld's conversion." Harriet L. Anthony, "Annotated Copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom*," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 2, My Bondage and My Freedom*, by Frederick Douglass, ed. John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, Series Two: Autobiographical Writings (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 438.

⁵⁶ Of note here are Mr. Cookman, a minister who had supposedly inspired a slaveowner to emancipate his slaves, and Mr. Wilson, a young white man who keeps a Sabbath school for slaves (*NF*, 52-53). Later, Douglass rejoices that his master William Freeland makes no religious pretenses (68). Where Douglass made his hate of southern Christianity most clear, however, was in the quote that followed his description of Freeland: "I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes, – a justifier of the most appalling barbarity, – a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, – and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. For of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst." On the appendix that Douglass included with *Narrative*, see Donald B. Gibson, "Faith, Doubt, and Apostasy: Evidence of Things Unseen in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*," in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95.

or how the two were connected. Unlike his expanded interpretation of the plantation in *Bondage*, early accounts of slavery in *Narrative* focus primarily on the system's injustices, with few passages attesting to Douglass's early awareness of his subjection. Though Douglass recounts his youthful beatings, his sleeping cold and with no bed, left out of these accounts is any sense of self-reflection till he first attempts to read (33). Again, *Narrative* would be the first of several narratives to push against trends in the genre: yet its limited self-portrayal reveals that Douglass had not yet incorporated into his analysis of slavery the critiques that would motivate his leaving Garrison.

Though reviews praised *Narrative*, they suggested work to be done in another personal narrative. Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller highlighted the text as "evidence" against racial prejudice, yet lamented Garrison and Phillips as unappealing to the people, in contrast with Douglass.⁵⁷ But the problem was greater. As Joan Scott writes of orthodox history, slave narrative's use of experience as evidence "reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems."⁵⁸ In reading *Narrative*, "we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as relationally constituted."⁵⁹ In his 1849 review of slave narrative, Ephraim Peabody criticized Douglass for *Narrative*'s "violent and unqualified statements" and "sweeping denunciations."⁶⁰ Having begun his transition from Garrison, Douglass clarified these denunciations in his *North Star*, writing there that "what slavery is to the slave, the slaveholder is to the slave; and the

⁵⁷ Margaret Fuller, "[Review of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*]," in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991), 21–22.

⁵⁸ Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," 778.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 779.

⁶⁰ Ephraim Peabody, "Narratives of Fugitive Slaves," in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. William L. Andrews (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991), 25.

character of the slaveholder may be fairly inferred from his treatment of the slave.”⁶¹

This clarification – that a critique of the plantation was not moral but social or systemic – Douglass would weave into the self-analysis of his autobiography.

I’ve emphasized the political context of slave narrative, particularly its racial hierarchy and use of experience as evidence, to make a crucial point about Douglass’s transition to *My Bondage and My Freedom*. If *Narrative* staged Douglass’s break from slavery, then Douglass’s autobiography emancipates its author from both slavery and Garrison’s abolitionism. Toward the end of *Bondage*, Douglass criticizes the Garrisonian abolitionists for politics similar to the problems of slave narrative, thus returning that text to its motivating concern. Three major disagreements stand out. First, abolitionists criticize Douglass when he begins his own newspaper upon returning from Britain in 1846, a paper to be run primarily by black Americans and to be “awakening an interest in them” (*MB*, 387). He defends the project for the same reasons he’ll defend *Bondage* in its preface, that “the greatest hinderance to the adoption of abolition principles by the people of the United States, was the low estimate, everywhere in that country, placed upon the negro, as a man” (386). Garrisonians respond that Douglass is “better fitted to speak than write” (389-390).⁶²

Second, Garrison’s followers are unwilling to consider Douglass’s developing pro-

⁶¹ Quoted in Blassingame, “Introduction to Volume One,” xlvi.

⁶² The racial politics of Douglass and Garrison’s press war is more complex than Douglass depicts it. Robert Fanuzzi notes how Garrison himself had been inspired by black journals for his publication of *The Liberator*, such that both Garrison and Douglass were in some ways invested in “journalistic missions in the image of a colored newspaper.” Later, when Douglass failed to keep the *North Star* funded on customers alone, his interest in keeping the newspaper published would be simply that a newspaper ran by blacks, for blacks was in existence – no matter its relatively small subscriber base. Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition’s Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 109, 113.

Constitution views, Douglass having come to see disunion as abandoning southern blacks: “Those who could not see any honest reasons for changing their views, as I had done, could not easily see any such reasons for my change” (392-393). Douglass describes the abolitionists much as he had slaveholders in *Narrative*: confronted by racism, wielding principles of justice, yet unable to convert. Finally, prejudice endures among abolitionists. Douglass recounts their stubbornness on the circuit, admitting that though the abolitionists resisted racism they “were not entirely free from it.”

But what’s most interesting in reading *My Bondage and My Freedom* as a response to *Narrative* is how the later text employs the metaphor of writing to critique the early abolitionists. Before Douglass’s first narrative, Franklin had also relied on metaphors of print for political identity. If autobiography staged what Michael Warner calls Franklin’s “being-in-print,” then Douglass’s use of this metaphor further reveals his attempts to join the national conversation represented by autobiography.⁶³

Douglass ends *Narrative* with his first meeting Garrison, yet describes that lecture later in *Bondage* as Garrison “taking me as his text” (*MB*, 365). In another lecture, John Collins introduces Douglass as “a graduate from the peculiar institution... *with [his] diploma written on [his] back!*” Abolitionists frequently silence Douglass’s analysis: Collins blocks Douglass’s attempt to interpret his own life, directing him to “give us the facts,” and “we will take care of the philosophy” (367). We know from outside sources that Douglass philosophized in early lecturing more than he lets on, further evidence of distancing the individual of *Bondage* from that of *Narrative*.⁶⁴ As

⁶³ Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 74.

⁶⁴ See DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 102.

Robert Gooding-Williams notes, Douglass's writing metaphor accompanies his break with Garrison's hermeneutical approach to narrative evidence.⁶⁵ But anecdotes like these also draw parallels to Douglass's critiques of overseers: abolitionists introduce Douglass "as a 'chattel' – a 'thing' – a piece of southern 'property,'" despite also reducing Douglass from an individual to a prop (*MB*, 366). In the pages before, Douglass invokes the writing metaphor to describe slaveowners' cruelty: in Baltimore he relates that "the overseer had written his character on the living parchment of most of [slaves'] backs" (329). Like the overseer, Garrison's colleagues saw Douglass as mere material to be shaped. There was what John Sekora calls an "abolitionist imprint" on Douglass.⁶⁶ If we take these as motivating concerns for Douglass's political break with Garrison, we see then how slave narrative had too framed Douglass as a text to be analyzed and interpreted by others.⁶⁷

At the same time, Douglass too criticized former slave narrators in *Bondage* for having bettered the abolitionist cause while failing the ex-slave. Unlike many slave narratives published at the time, both of Douglass's first two personal narratives left out the details of his escaping slavery, leaving that anecdote for the Reconstruction-era *Life and Times*. In *Bondage*, upon narrating the scene of his runaway plot, Douglass criticizes those slave narrators who would make of the underground railroad the "Upper-ground Railroad" by revealing escape strategies to readers (340). Citing the work of Henry Box Brown (named after his escape in a box) Douglass supposes "we

⁶⁵ Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, 199.

⁶⁶ Sekora, "Black Message," 497.

⁶⁷ In a well-known line from *Narrative*, Douglass had also connected the slave's body to writing: speaking of the harsh conditions, he writes that "my feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes" (*NF*, 33).

might have had a thousand *Box Browns* per annum” had his plan remained concealed (339). Douglass’s autobiography is, on one hand, a text for those who could likely not read it due to bondage, poverty, and illiteracy. “In publishing such accounts” as Brown’s, “the anti-slavery man addresses the slaveholder, *not the slave*” (340). An autobiography couldn’t prioritize principles over the very people suffering injustice.

After its publication in 1845, *Narrative* provided a textual supplement to Douglass’s politics; he referenced it in lectures till the early 1850s.⁶⁸ For unknown reasons, *Narrative* went out of print in the 1850s and was not republished till 1960.⁶⁹ The context surrounding *Narrative* suggests that Douglass’s decision to write *My Bondage and My Freedom* corresponded with both substantive political disagreements and the abolitionists’ use of experience. The autobiography, DeLombard writes, would envision narrators not as witnesses but “autonomous citizens.”⁷⁰

The People on Trial

Garrison introduced the Douglass of *Narrative* as a “fugitive slave,” fit to write his story of “SLAVERY AS IT IS” (*NF*, 6-7). Ten years on, James McCune Smith introduces the author of *My Bondage and My Freedom* as a “Representative American Man,” a man spurned by Garrison and others, for “they did not delve into the mind of a colored man for capacities which the pride of race led them to believe to be

⁶⁸ See Blassingame, “Introduction to Volume One,” xxxii.

⁶⁹ See Stauffer, “Frederick Douglass’s Self-Fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man,” 207.

⁷⁰ DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial*, 105.

restricted to their own Saxon blood” (*MB*, 132).⁷¹ Although Smith compares Douglass to slave narrators before, all of them “banners on the outer wall” of abolitionism, he compares the introspection and style of the present text to the Scottish geologist Hugh Miller’s autobiography (125-6). Douglass’s second narrative will be different, as Smith concludes with a promise for black agency and inheritance: “I feel joy in introducing to you my brother, who has rent his own bonds... I shall place this book in the hands of the only child spared me, bidding him to strive and emulate its noble example. You may do likewise” (137). A result of Douglass’s self-making and solidarity with bondsmen, “it is an American book, for Americans, in the fullest sense of the idea.” In addition to Smith’s introduction, the editor’s preface includes a letter from Douglass.⁷² This letter, written at the editor’s request for the autobiography, transitions personal narrative from putting “slavery on trial” through popular judgment to an occasion to ask who that people is – what “American” is. The letter not only warrants the book’s publication but welcomes the reader’s own introspection.

Douglass begins his letter concerned that personal narrative seems to seek “personal notoriety, for its own sake” (*MB*, 105). The genre may misconstrue critique as requiring the experience of slavery, that the book is to invoke empathy: “I have

⁷¹ It is of course significant that Douglass chose a black scholar to write his introduction, as opposed to the white Garrison and Phillips of *Narrative*. Maurice Lee suggests additionally that Douglass’s self-analysis in *Bondage* shows the influence of Scottish commonsense philosophy on Douglass: Smith had trained earlier at Glasgow University. See Maurice S. Lee, *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 3.

⁷² The book doesn’t name the editor, though Gerald Fulkerson believes it to have been Douglass’s close colleague, Julia Griffiths. Gerald Fulkerson, “Textual Introduction,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 2, My Bondage and My Freedom*, by Frederick Douglass, ed. John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, Series Two: Autobiographical Writings (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 288. On Douglass’s and Griffiths’s relationship, see Frank E. Fee, “To No One More Indebted: Frederick Douglass and Julia Griffiths, 1849-63,” *Journalism History* 37, no. 1 (2011): 12–26.

often refused to narrate my personal experience in public anti-slavery meetings,” Douglass writes, and “I have never placed my opposition to slavery on a basis so narrow as my own enslavement, but rather upon the indestructible and unchangeable laws of human nature, every one of which is perpetually and flagrantly violated by the slave system.” His advice has been that those “having histories worth the writing” don’t write but “commit such work to hands other than their own” (106). “To write of one’s self” without “weakness, vanity, and egotism,” Douglass writes, “is a work within the ability of but few.” Douglass doesn’t deny that he’d relied on personal experience before: he had written *Narrative*, lectured on it frequently, and drawn on his own history in his journal. But he’s distinguishing his present intentions from his previous use of experience. Before this text, personal narrative (and *Narrative*) was all about slavery and the abolitionists, not the slave.

Douglass suggests another use for narrative, as he invokes the motif of “slavery on trial.” Slavery “is now at the bar of public opinion – not only of this country, but of the whole civilized world – for judgment.” Those for slavery “have made for it the usual plea – ‘not guilty,’” such that any evidence to the contrary cannot “be innocently withheld.” This is where abolitionists invoke slave narrative to bring slavery to judgment. But Douglass wants to use autobiography differently: “I see, too, that there are special reasons why I should write my own biography, in preference to employing another to do it.” The rhetoric of “slavery on trial” has mischaracterized the means and ends of abolitionism. Underneath this motif is another, more important object of judgment, not slavery but its subjects: “not only is slavery on trial, but unfortunately, the enslaved people are also on trial.” And they are on trial not as

accomplices, but as of their assumed irrelevance to the task of justice: “it is alleged, that they are, naturally, inferior; that they are *so low* in the scale of humanity, and so utterly stupid, that they are unconscious of their wrongs, and do not apprehend their rights.” No perspective is named; these could represent the views of slaveowners or abolitionists. When Douglass defends *The North Star* against abolitionists, later in *Bondage* and mentioned above, he uses almost identical language, his reason “the low estimate” of blacks, “his assumed natural inferiority” (386).

This injunction signifies autobiography’s political role, an inquiry common to democratic theory: not to ask whether slavery contradicts law, but to ask from what people these laws arise. At its surface, Douglass’s book will contradict that the enslaved are incapable of knowing wrong and their rights: he’s not writing autobiography to justify his own role, but that of the oppressed. Yet notice the force of Douglass’s denunciation. If the people responsible for judgment are wrong about slaves – if they’ve misjudged black agency – then “the people” of antebellum America, with its principles and roles, is itself wrong. Douglass is staging an indictment from the defendant to the judge: slavery on trial is not “the enslaved on trial,” rather it is the people on trial. Slave narrative relied on the abolitionist’s authorization of ex-slave experience, but Douglass is questioning that relation. By writing an autobiography, Douglass can reflect on the lives of others through his own, and ask that readers do the same. He closes the letter: “looking, then, at your request, from this stand-point, and wishing everything of which you think me capable to go to the benefit of my afflicted people, I part with my doubts and hesitation” (106).

Thus Douglass's letter orients readers to his view of authority and authorship in a mode not unlike the Benjamin Vaughan's and James Abel's letters partway through *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. For Franklin, these letters not only allowed him to avoid egotism but transitioned his autobiography from a gift for his son to a guide for posterity, the letters' inclusion before the "Art of Virtue" dramatizing citizens' clamor for Franklin's ethics. As the letter begins *Bondage* rather than sever it partway, it serves as a transitional guide between the 1845 and 1855 texts, much in the same way Franklin's letters signaled a shift in authority from part one as a letter and part two as a reflection on American citizenship. Yet at the same time, by including a letter he himself wrote, Douglass begins his autobiography as though responding to a vocation, an injustice. Douglass's goal within the letter is to outline the political problem and how autobiography will reply. Thus whereas the letters in Franklin's autobiography authorize his passing on a guide, Douglass's letter stages a dissenting critique of authority even as it insists on his autonomy. From the preface of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass questions the authority that popularized slave narrative, not simply the publishing abolitionists but "the people" that read it. A new narrative wouldn't reflect a people that was, but authorize a people that could be.

Denunciation in *My Bondage and My Freedom*

My Bondage and My Freedom presents Douglass's life in two narrative parts. The first twenty-one chapters cover the "Life of a Slave," and the final four chapters present the "Life of a Freeman." But the book's title also indicates the two dimensions of denunciation through which Douglass frames his second story: as a descriptive

analysis of the people constituted by slavery, and as the advocacy of solidarity in a broader conception of the people.⁷³ From early in the book, Douglass frames autobiography as a response to his inquiry: “*Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves, and others masters? Was there ever a time when this was not so? How did the relation commence?*” (*MB*, 178). His answer provides an “untold story,” Priscilla Wald writes, “through which a nation – ‘a people’ – [speaks] itself into existence.”⁷⁴

The first part of denunciation describes the conditions that constitute slavery’s subjects, a close analysis of what Douglass in the 1850s referred to as “Slave Power.”⁷⁵ Slave Power concerned not simply the top-down domination of slaves, but how slavery created and corrupted the character of even its advocates. In *Bondage*, Douglass illuminates the subjection of slaves, slaveowners, and those around the plantation. The first chapter introduces his hometown Tuckahoe, Maryland by its origin of a man who “took a hoe”: the “dull, flat, and unthrifty district, or neighborhood, surrounded by a white population of the lowest order, indolent and drunken to a proverb, and among slaves, who seemed to ask, ‘*Oh! what’s the use?*’ every time they lifted a hoe” (*MB*, 139-140). Tuckahoe is no emblem of Jefferson’s agrarian ideal, but impoverished and born in theft. The patriarchy that conditioned both the Declaration’s and Franklin’s rebellious independence is absent here:

Douglass does not know who his father is, nor his own age, and fatherhood is “literally

⁷³ My reading of *Bondage* is greatly indebted to the scholarship of Sundquist, Andrews, and Gooding-Williams, all of whom emphasize the communal politics unique to the second autobiography. My account is distinct in setting out to elucidate denunciation, and to contrast its motifs of self-making against the context of *Narrative*. See Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, chap. 5; Andrews, *To Tell*, chap. 6; Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, chap. 1.

⁷⁴ Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

⁷⁵ See Blight, *Douglass’ Civil War*, 40.

abolished in slave law and slave practice” (140). Names are taken from owners, not fathers (often one and the same) (151), and mothers determine children’s age by the harvest seasons (140): a mother has “*many children*, but no family!” and Douglass’s siblings are “by blood; but *slavery* had made us strangers” (149). Denunciation outlines the plantation as “a little nation of its own, having its own language, its own rules, regulations and customs,” all of which influence the identities of both slaves and slaveowners (160).⁷⁶ The first step of dissent requires Douglass see his oppression.⁷⁷

The second part of denunciation expands the reader’s view of the people by narrating Douglass’s self-making through acts of independent *and* interdependent emancipation, similar to what Gooding-Williams calls Douglass’s “plantation politics.”⁷⁸ Throughout the autobiography, Douglass invokes Lord Byron’s “Hereditary bondsmen, know ye not // Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow?” (*MB*, 287). As an address to those in chains, “hereditary bondsmen” casts those men as Douglass’s alienated family; framed as an inquiry, the address invites those bondsmen to reply. Self-making is not strictly individualist: the autobiography forecasts Douglass’s “Self-Made Men,” first presented in 1859, saying there that “I believe in individuality, but individuals are, to the mass, like waves to the ocean.”⁷⁹ In

⁷⁶ These conditions of slavery bear some resemblance to what Karen and Barbara Fields call “sumptuary codes”: the “rules, written, or unwritten, that establish unequal rank and make it immediately visible,” and that “produce a regular supply of circumstantial evidence about what the world is made of and who belongs where within it.” Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012), 33, 37.

⁷⁷ Douglass characterizes his first realization of oppression as a lack of will: “I was A SLAVE – born a slave – and though the fact was incomprehensible to me; it conveyed to my mind a sense of my entire dependence on the will of *somebody* I had never seen; and, from some cause or other, I had been made to fear this somebody above all else on earth” (*MB*, 147).

⁷⁸ Gooding-Williams, *Shadow of Du Bois*, 183–184.

⁷⁹ Frederick Douglass, “Self-Made Men,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 5, 1881-1895*, ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 549.

speeches like these and the 1848 “What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?”, Douglass demonstrates what Waldo Martin calls “the inevitability and necessity of human interdependence” and what Jack Turner has recently theorized as Douglass’s “democratic egalitarian obligation”: the communal activities that ground self-reliance.⁸⁰ As Turner observes in Douglass’s later politics, *Bondage’s* denunciation promotes solidarity not only with bondsmen but white dissenters on and off the plantation. According to Douglass, men and not race produced slavery: “it was not color, but crime, not God, but man, that afforded the true explanation of the existence of slavery; nor was I long in finding out another important truth, viz: what man can make, man can unmake” (*MB*, 179). Though denunciation carves out a specific need for black agency, it does so by appealing to solidarities that may include others as well. As in his description of slavery, Douglass explains these practices such that a white reader might approach *Bondage* differently than he had *Narrative*.

In order to explore how *Bondage* remakes Douglass through denunciation, we can look at the book’s invocation of three conceptual areas of self-authorization resonant in early American political thought and autobiography: education, resistance, and labor. Each will establish Douglass’s authority in solidarity with others, in line with the epigraph by Samuel Taylor Coleridge that prefaces *Bondage*: “a PERSON is eternally differenced from a THING” (103).

⁸⁰ Martin, *Frederick Douglass*, 257; Turner, *Awakening to Race*, 47.

Education

Education on Douglass's plantation is limited for the slaveowner as well as the slave. No schoolhouse exists in these communities: visiting teachers tutor the slaveowners' children (158). The control of knowledge on the plantation, much like the politics surrounding slave narrative, veils both sides: "ignorance is a high virtue in a human chattel; and as the master studies to keep the slave ignorant, the slave is cunning enough to make the master think he succeeds" (172). Douglass realizes this when asking his mistress Mrs. Auld to teach him to read. Overheard by her husband, Hugh chides her that reading "would forever unfit [Douglass] for the duties of a slave" (217). The slave's only education is to work, not think. Though this scene appears in *Narrative*, unique to *Bondage* is the slaveowner's subjection: Douglass describes the corruptive influence of Hugh Auld's forbiddance on Sophia's character. She twists to see Douglass not as family but property: "we were both victims to the same overshadowing evil – *she*, as mistress, *I*, as slave" (227). This scene also contains Douglass's early awareness of racial domination; he notes in Hugh's preemption "the *white* man's power to perpetuate the enslavement of the *black* man." "That which he most loved I most hated," Douglass writes, "and the very determination which he expressed to keep me in ignorance, only rendered me the more resolute in seeking intelligence" (218). Knowledge for the owner is not simply a view to truth, but a way of racializing the power disparity between slave and master: for Douglass it will be "the direct pathway from slavery to freedom."⁸¹

⁸¹ In this scene, Douglass also expands the account of conversion that grounded its depiction in *Narrative*: in *Bondage*, he writes that "the more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest slavery,

By recognizing the scope of ignorance on the plantation, Douglass glimpses the possibility of emancipation. While a shipyard apprentice, he later explains that

to make a contented slave, you must make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate his power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. The man that takes his earnings, must be able to convince him that he has a perfect right to do so. It must not depend upon mere force: the slave must know no Higher Law than his master's will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate, to his mind, its necessity, but its absolute rightfulness. If there be one crevice through which a single drop can fall, it will certainly rust off the slave's chain. (337)

Intellectual resistance begins with “a single drop.” Douglass’s first act is his secretly reading *The Columbian Orator*’s story of a slave and his master debating slavery, the slave’s argument winning his manumission (225). Like Franklin, knowledge has social value beyond its appeal to truth: it frees the slave. Education requires Douglass to be both educated and educator. Shortly after, Douglass converts to Methodism and learns the bible from a local black man named Lawson, whom in turn he teaches to read (232). In Baltimore, young white boys help Douglass learn to write in the streets, “with play-mates for my teachers, fences and pavements for my copy books, and chalk for my pen and ink” (235). Upon leaving, Douglass pledges new community with “those to whom I *imparted* instruction, and to those little white boys from whom I *received* instruction” (243). Just as ignorance implicates his holders, emancipation implicates whites while building black solidarity. Once at St. Michael’s to work under Thomas Auld, Douglass begins a Sabbath school with the assistance of a young white man, which Auld soon interrupts (254). Another attempted school while at Mr.

and my enslavers... Knowledge had come; light had penetrated the moral dungeon where I dwelt” (*MB*, 227).

Freeland's farm results in "an attachment, deep and lasting," Douglass writes, that "sprung up between me and my persecuted pupils" (300). Every scene of education past the *Orator* advocates the collective education of clandestine pupils, leaving room for white aid without undermining black agency.

Resistance

Scenes of violence provide further opportunity for denunciation: as Douglass had written in 1854 on slave kidnapping, "resistance is... wise as well as just."⁸² Although Douglass's permissive attitude toward violence had characterized his thinking early on, his increasing interest in forceful resistance as an appropriate response to slavery (culminating later in his friendship with John Brown) was another of the many reasons he parted ways with Garrison.⁸³ Violence is everywhere in *Bondage*. After witnessing Esther's beating for courting another slave, Douglass is "hushed, terrified, stunned" that "the fate of Esther might be mine next" (*MB*, 175). Force establishes hierarchy: every member of the plantation "wants the privilege of whipping somebody else" (165). Thus violence is systemic and not innate in the overseer, "part of the system, rather than a part of the man" (174). He acts on "motives of policy, rather than from a hardened nature." These structures reach beyond the plantation to local governance. Douglass recalls the overseer Gore's shooting of the

⁸² Frederick Douglass, "Is It Right and Wise to Kill a Kidnapper?," in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass. Vol. 2, Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850-1860*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 287.

⁸³ For more on the influence of Douglass's thoughts on violence on the autobiographies, see Robert S. Levine, "Identity in the Autobiographies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*, ed. Maurice S. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31–45.

resistant slave Denby: the law leaves Gore unindicted, yet he defends the shooting as his “duty” (201). Yet the Douglass of *Bondage* often cautions the slaveowner as himself a likely victim of the system, he who “never lisps a syllable in commendation of the fathers of this republic, nor denounces any attempted oppression of himself, without inviting the knife to his own throat, and asserting the rights of rebellion for his own slaves” (302).⁸⁴ As in passages on education, Douglass invokes American themes of self-authorization (like the right of rebellion) to critique slavery.

Few scenes capture Douglass’s self-making like his work on the land of “Covey the Negro breaker.” His owner Thomas Auld sends the young man to Edward Covey’s to be broken, the slave-breaker no mere man but an institution: he provides slaveowners a fast track for slave subjection (256). Covey’s notoriety slows Douglass’s pace on the way, Douglass “to be broken to the yoke of a bitter and life-long bondage” (259). Once there, Covey subjects Douglass to conditions that emphasize slavery as producing not goods but the slave subject: when asked to retrieve wood using two oxen (themselves unbroken), Douglass recalls the task as unproductive (261). Covey’s treatment of Douglas is so severe that the latter hesitates even to narrate these scenes, Douglass at the time “completely wrecked, changed and bewildered” (269). A year into his stay, an opportunity arises. Douglass briefly escapes to beg of Auld’s sympathy, who sends Douglass back (276). Though Douglass returns unmolested, soon the breaker springs at Douglass to subdue him. Both Covey and Douglass are caught off-guard by the slave’s response: “my resistance was

⁸⁴ In a similar passage, Douglass articulates his desire to “let [the slaveholder] be made to feel, that, at every step he takes, with the hellish purpose of reducing a brother man to slavery, he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible hand” (*MB*, 340).

entirely unexpected,” yet “*I was resolved to fight*” (283). Covey, trembling, asks “are you going to resist, you scoundrel?”, to which Douglass returns “a polite ‘*yes sir.*’” Douglass’s fight meets subjection with agency, the two equals now, eye-to-eye. “At the moment, as though we stood as equals before the law,” Douglass recalls, “the very color of man was forgotten.” They are matched: “he held me, and I held him.”

Though this scene features prominently in *Narrative*, Douglass’s emphasis on communal resistance in *Bondage* is unique. During the two-hour struggle, Covey appeals to and is rejected by three colleagues, each of whom represent different authorities within a slave economy. Covey’s cousin Hughes shies away when Douglass delivers him a “kick which sent him staggering away in pain” (284). Covey yells for the hired man Bill, who insists that his job is not the beating of slaves and walks away upon Douglass’s appeal (285). Finally, Covey calls his slave Caroline, who will not even respond; in an earlier chapter Douglass introduces Caroline as Covey’s so-called “breeder” (267). Covey’s attempt to break Douglass is refused by family, employee, and property, all relations protected by Slave Power. Those once complicit in breaking now turn away, Douglass writing that “we were all in open rebellion, that morning” (285). This moment, Douglass notes, “was the turning point in my ‘life as a slave’”: “I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW” (286). It inspires in Douglass “a renewed determination to be a FREEMAN.” In a letter a century on, Herbert Marcuse recounted to Angela Davis what she and Douglass taught him, that

Frederick Douglass one day hits back, he fights the slave-breaker with all his force, and – the slave-breaker does not hit back, he stands trembling; he calls other slaves to help, and they refuse. The abstract philosophical concept of a freedom which can never be taken away suddenly comes to life and reveals its

very concrete truth: freedom is not only the goal of liberation, it *begins* with liberation; it is there to be “practiced.”⁸⁵

Freedom is not just philosophical nor is it private, but practiced in concert with others.

Throughout the book, Douglass forms his “band of brothers,” the men with whom he plans to escape (*MB*, 320). Though he never sponsors insurrection, *Bondage* depicts Douglass’s plantation fellows as “revolutionary conspirators” (309). The band works for liberty, “even against the lives of our enslavers.” Douglass calls his community at Freeland’s farm “a unit”: “thoughts and sentiments were exchanged between us, which might well be called very incendiary... by oppressors and tyrants” (301). He is a leader among men such as John and Henry Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Charles Roberts, and Henry Bailey, but he takes responsibility rather than credit. When his band fails, Douglass insists “if any one is to blame for disturbing the quiet of the slaves and slave-masters of the neighborhood of St. Michael’s, *I am the man*” (309). Knowing the slaveowners might find his forged road pass, he casts it into the fireplace while they’re not looking (319). Caught by the holders, Douglass is saddened not for his likely removal to Alabama, but that he is now “solitary in the world” (324). To respond to what violence constitutes slavery’s subjects requires new solidarity.

Labor

Finally, we return to the property inequality upon which Tuckahoe was founded. Having escaped in 1841, Douglass did not buy his legal freedom till two

⁸⁵ Marcuse, “Dear Angela.”

years after he published *Narrative* (*MB*, 376).⁸⁶ Since slave narrative risked locating runaway slaves or elaborating runaway plots, Phillips told Douglass then that he'd rather throw the manuscript into the fire than publish it (just as Douglass threw his almost-emancipatory forged pass into the fire at Freeland's farm).⁸⁷ In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Law reaffirmed the legal status of the slave as property, a law (as Douglass lectured in 1852) that reduced the slave below a "jackass," since only the removal of the latter required a jury.⁸⁸ By 1855, the legal status of both Douglass and black Americans had changed. In *Bondage*, Douglass explains how slavery corrupts property for all participants. The plantation treats the slave like livestock, evident in Covey's pairing the 'unbroken' Douglass with 'unbroken' oxen, or in the auction to divide slaves after Douglass's master dies: "personality swallowed up in the sordid idea of property! Manhood lost in chattelhood!" (*MB*, 237). Slave children sleep in beds with no blankets, and eat cornmeal mush "like so many pigs" (208). Again, this touches the slaveowner's character: Sophia Auld's disapproval of Douglass's reading requires "some training," to forget Douglass's "human nature and character" (221).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Douglass's decision to buy his freedom (though encouraged and financially enabled by colleagues) further alienated him from Garrison and his abolitionists, who saw Douglass's act as complicit with the slave trade (*MB*, 376). This is another example of Douglass's interest in pragmatic action, even within the system, while Garrison and others chose the path of complete rejection.

⁸⁷ In the letter from Phillips included in *Narrative*'s opening, he wrote that "they say the fathers, in 1776, signed the Declaration of Independence with the halter about their necks. You, too, publish your declaration of freedom with danger compassing you around... I am free to say that, in your place, I should throw the MS. into the fire" (*NF*, 12-13).

⁸⁸ Frederick Douglass, "The Fugitive Slave Law, Speech to the National Free Soil Convention at Pittsburgh, August 11, 1852," in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 208. On slavery's property laws, see Stephen M. Best, *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁸⁹ In a later passage, Douglass writes that "it is the interest and business of slaveholders to study human nature, with a view to practical results, and many of them attain astonishing proficiency in discerning the thoughts and emotions of slaves. They have dealt not with earth, wood, or stone, but with *men*; and,

Even when slaveowners provide slaves some autonomy, Douglass is a machine rather than man. When he's beaten while apprenticing in the Baltimore shipyard, Hugh Auld is infuriated by the assailants' disregard for his "rights of property" in Douglass (334).

Douglass observes that human chattelhood not only treats slaves as animals, but distorts slaveowners' entire relation to labor. Trying to understand the slaveowner's accusations of slaves' laziness, Douglass pins it on owners cultivating "such an intense dread of labor" that they refuse to work but through the slave (276). For Master Thomas to assume Douglass's languor reflects not slave behavior but the institution's influence on Thomas: "he probably thought that were *he* in the place of a slave – with no wages for his work, no praise for well doing, no motive for toil but the lash – he would try every possible scheme by which to escape labor." The Lockean ethos that connects individuality to labor is absent on the plantation, and thus the slaveowner is equally dependent on the slave. His identity requires he work only through slaves. Although Douglass's observation focuses on the plantation, it resembles those that Lincoln had made against the Kansas-Nebraska Act just one year prior, that nationwide slavery sapped the land's potential for the agrarian ideal: for blacks as well as whites.⁹⁰ In that register, Douglass describes the slave's character as contrary to the frontier fantasy that supposedly animated westward movement and liberal individualism. Whereas Douglass sees freedom among white Northerners as "to come and go, to be here and there," to foster a sense of rugged detachment from any

by every regard they have for their safety and prosperity; they must study to know the material on which they are at work" (*MB*, 307).

⁹⁰ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois," in *Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Gore Vidal (New York: Library of America, 2009), 93–99.

roots or inheritance, the slave is instead “a fixture; he has no choice, no goal, no destination,” rather he is “pegged down to a single spot” (*MB*, 238). For Lincoln, a citizen betters his condition by working the land, whereas for Douglass

a slave seldom thinks of bettering his condition by being sold, and hence he looks upon separation from his native place, with none of the enthusiasm which animates the bosoms of young freemen, when they contemplate a life in the far west, or in some distant country where they intend to rise to wealth and distinction. (238)

Slavery doesn't simply skew individualism by revoking workable lands, but through changing a slave's orientation to the Earth that Locke's God gave men in common.

Emancipation from this alienation requires Douglass to subvert and oppose the system. He justifies stealing food from Thomas Auld as “a question of *removal* – the taking his meat out of one tub, and putting it into another; the ownership of the meat was not affected by the transaction” (247). If human beings *are* property, then a *right* of property is nonsensical. “Since each slave belongs to all: all must, therefore, belong to each” (247-248), Douglass declares, the plantation having “no conflicting rights of property” (160). Real freedom, however, requires that Douglass learn a trade.

Apprenticing at a shipyard while living with Hugh Auld, Douglass begins leasing out his skills (336-337).⁹¹ He asks, “why should I be a slave?”: “I contracted for it, worked for it, earned it, collected it; it was paid to me, and it was *rightfully* my own.” With this trade comes Douglass's increased awareness of oppression, the affirmation of his

⁹¹ As for Franklin and Americans before, the shipyard is again a symbol of freedom throughout Douglass's personal narratives. In several parts of *Bondage*, Douglass connects that text to his former slave narrative by citing *Narrative*: at the point of his story in which the younger Douglass works on Covey's land, the author reprints a beautiful soliloquy to the free-moving ships of the ocean: “You are loosed from your moorings, and free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O, that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing!” (*NF*, 59; *MB*, 268).

own acquisitive capacity, and further opportunities to resist Hugh by embezzling earnings in preparation for escape (343). Yet again, these acts complement the need for community among those oppressed. In the shipyard, Douglass notes a lack of workers' awareness of the conflict between slavery and "the interests of the white mechanics and laborers of the south" (329-330). Douglass predicts the "overthrow" of slavery following these workers' consciousness, despite racial animosity between whites and blacks; at the end of the century, Goldman will champion a similar consciousness among workers and women in her autobiography. Every scene of self-making in *Bondage* is preceded by an analysis of the plantation, and succeeded by a call to awakening and solidarity. This is to denounce wrongs through autobiography.

Conclusion: Denunciation beyond *Bondage*

Between his two narratives, Douglass published his only piece of fiction: the 1853 novella, "The Heroic Slave." An embellished account of an ex-slave rebel and mutineer's true story, the tale is told through third-person perspectives of several white men's encounters with Madison Washington: moving in and out of focus, Washington is "a guiding star on a stormy night."⁹² It begins with a white traveler overhearing the slave's soliloquized "what is freedom to me, or I to it?"⁹³ After the slave reflects out loud, his pronounced "I shall be free" moves the eavesdropper, who "long desired to sound the mysterious depths of the thoughts and feelings of a slave."⁹⁴ The slave

⁹² Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," in *Three Classic African-American Novels*, ed. William L. Andrews (New York: Mentor, 1990), 26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

finishes with “scathing denunciations of the cruelty and injustice of slavery” and leaves.⁹⁵ The listener (aptly “Mr. Listwell”) stands for his own soliloquy:

“Here is indeed a man,” thought he, “of rare endowments, – a child of God, – guilty of no crime but the color of his skin... Goaded almost to madness by the sense of the injustice done him, he resorts hither to give vent to his pent up feelings, and to debate with himself the feasibility of plans, plans of his own invention, for his own deliverance. From this hour I am an abolitionist.”⁹⁶

Though separate, the black claimant converts the white onlooker by self-affirmation.

To denounce wrong is not to retire subjective accounts of injustice, rather it stages dissent *through* self-analysis. *My Bondage and My Freedom* is an answer to what Douglass had asked his audience on July 5th, 1852: “Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence?”⁹⁷ Douglass finds his autobiographical identity through structures that implicate not only other slaves but those in and around plantation society. Thus Douglass authorizes himself twice: as an author he philosophizes on slavery and its subjects in ways prohibited by *Narrative* and the early abolitionists, and as a narrated protagonist he emancipates himself in solidarity with others. Both dimensions of denunciation, then – analysis and advocacy – implicate other Americans. Whereas *Narrative* asked its reader only to confirm Douglass’s tale and its correspondence to Garrison’s politics, Douglass concludes *Bondage* committed to the “universal and unconditional emancipation of my entire

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

⁹⁷ Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 2, 1847-1854*, ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 367. Douglass included an extract of this speech in the appendix for *Bondage*.

race” (*MB*, 398). As Wilson Jeremiah Moses and others have pointed out, Douglass is inconsistent on the question of race throughout his life, his thoughts fluctuating through the Civil War and Reconstruction.⁹⁸ Yet *Bondage* reveals Douglass to be increasingly aware of the racial inequality that will linger beyond slavery, and so he balances the call to black solidarity with the invocation of white readers as well. Everything is bigger in *Bondage*: the stakes higher, the critiques expanded, the advocacy more ambitious. Douglass doesn’t only narrate his disagreements with Garrison, but writes a new story of self-making inspired by those disagreements.

My Bondage and My Freedom is an autobiography for the people. Readers find in it not an account of what one man was but who the people could be. The autobiography recalls not “the dead form of the Union,” but “the living present,” just as Douglass read the Constitution in response to the 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford*: “‘We, the people’ – not we, the white people – not we, the citizens, or the legal voters – not we, the privileged class.”⁹⁹ Not “we, the horses and cattle” (not we, the property), “but we the people – the men and women, the human inhabitants of the United States.” We might say that denunciation provides an altered form of Stanley

⁹⁸ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

⁹⁹ Frederick Douglass, “The Dred Scott Decision: An Address Delivered, in Part, in New York, New York, in May 1857,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Vol. 3, 1855-1863*, ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 172, 176. Robert Cover reads Douglass’s break with Garrison as symbolic of his renewed constitutionalism: “When Frederick Douglass asserted his psychological and political independence from his Boston abolitionist benefactors, he chose, in part, to break with Garrisonian anticonstitutionalism by embracing a vision – a vision of an alternative world in which the entire order of American slavery would be without foundation in law.” Robert M. Cover, “*Nomos and Narrative*,” in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law: The Essays of Robert Cover*, ed. Martha Minow, Michael Ryan, and Austin Sarat (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 137. For a reading of Douglass on higher law as “cosmopolitan constitutionalism,” see Gregg D. Crane, *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Cavell's claim to community. Whereas for Cavell a failure of "we say" may imply that "there is no us (yet, maybe never) to say anything about," Douglass leaves this abandonment to Garrison's disunion politics, Douglass in favor of a more perfect union.¹⁰⁰ For Douglass, denouncing is to search for what we *can* say of us, to make way for some new people and popular response to slavery and racial injustice.

This is not the last time that Douglass sought self-authorization through autobiography. In 1881 he would publish the much longer *Life and Times*, revising it again in 1892. By that time, the American landscape had drastically changed: 1892 was the year before Henry Adams would first witness the dynamo at the Chicago Exposition, and 1892 was the same year that Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman attempted their *attentat* against the industrialist Henry Clay Frick. In Douglass's third narrative, he captured a life of increasing attention to racial injustice, recalling his friendship with John Brown, his rejection from Lincoln's celebration, and his meeting Thomas Auld once more before his previous master's death. Closing the autobiography, he echoed the call to arms that heralded his narratives half a century prior: "I write freely of myself, not from choice, but because I have, by my cause, been morally forced into thus writing. Time and events have summoned me to stand forth both as a witness and an advocate for a people long dumb, not allowed to speak for themselves, yet much misunderstood and deeply wronged."¹⁰¹

Autobiography, for Douglass, had provided a democratic genre to speak on others' behalf, in contradiction to the racial disparities once promoted between

¹⁰⁰ Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 20.

¹⁰¹ Douglass, "*Life and Times*," 938.

witnesses and advocates for justice.¹⁰² Though the impact of his autobiographies would survive Douglass's death, his legacy would reveal the ongoing need for others to speak not simply for others, but him. Though Franklin's autobiography had left silent myriad voices unrepresented within it, readers had been only too eager to champion his life upon its end. But the problem of racial justice would continue to haunt Douglass, even in death and despite his personal narratives. On the other side of autobiography is the obituary. The brief 1895 notice of Douglass's death in the *New York Times* speculated as to which race could claim Douglass for his achievements:

It might not be unreasonable, perhaps, to intimate that his white blood may have something to do with the remarkable energy he displayed and the superior intelligence he manifested. Indeed, it might not be altogether unreasonable to ask whether, with more white blood, he would not have been an even better and greater man than he was, and whether the fact that he had black blood may not have cost the world a genius, and be, in consequence, a cause for lamentation instead of a source of lyrical enthusiasm over African possibilities. It is always more or less foolish to credit or discredit a race with the doings, good or bad, of a particular member of that race, but if it must be done, plain justice should see to it that the right race gets the glory or the humiliation.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Although the roles supporting slave narrative and abolitionism eroded following the Civil War, the issue of misrepresenting others through personal narrative would continue into the twentieth century, even among those supposedly oriented to ending racial injustice. In his recent biography of Malcolm X, Manning Marable sets out to contrast what he depicts as "liberal Republican" Alex Haley's purpose to make the autobiography "a cautionary tale about human waste and the tragedies produced by racial segregation." It's perhaps no coincidence that the subtitle of Marable's biography, *A Life of Reinvention*, brings to mind Carl Van Doren's biography of Franklin's many professions and postures. Haley's influence on the autobiography was to cast Malcolm X as less radical and more of a liberal, Marable writes: this is why "the *Autobiography* does not read like a manifesto for black insurrection, but much more in the tradition of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography." Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), 9, 466. This problem of autobiography and biography perhaps never ends, though. Shortly after Marable's biography, an edited collection emerged in critique of his depiction of Malcolm X, featuring essays by many black radicals. See Jared Ball and Todd Steven Burroughs, eds., *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable's Malcolm X* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2012).

¹⁰³ Quoted in Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*, 46.

Beyond the antebellum injustice he survived, Douglass would need readers and writers to voice a new denunciation: one that countered new narratives of America in which its alleged racial disparities touched even one of its most representative citizens.

Chapter III

The Statesman and the Dynamo: Authority in *The Education of Henry Adams*

Man is his own star.

- Epilogue to Beaumont and Fletcher, *Honest Man's Fortune*;
Epigraph to R.W. Emerson, "Self-Reliance"¹

Like later readers of Benjamin Franklin's memoirs, only Henry Adams's posterity called *The Education of Henry Adams* an autobiography. In March of 1916, Adams sent Senator and former student Henry Cabot Lodge a letter with instructions for the minimal changes to be made to the text before publication.² None of these instructions suggested Lodge add the subtitle *An Autobiography*, and yet this is how he titled the book upon publishing it shortly after Adams's death.³ At no point in the *Education* or in his letters does Adams refer to it as an autobiography.⁴ At the end of its twenty-ninth chapter, he recalls his first inclination to write the book and its original title: *The Education of Henry Adams: a study of twentieth-century multiplicity*.⁵ In an autobiography like Franklin's, Adams likely thought, the author interpreted his experience to provide an authoritative set of virtues to be imitated or

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, [1841] 1983), 257.

² Henry Adams, "Adams to Henry Cabot Lodge, 1603 H Street, 1 March 1916," in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 726.

³ See Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright, "Postscript," in *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, by Henry Adams, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007), 413.

⁴ See *ibid.*, 402.

⁵ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, [1918] 2007), 342. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (*EH*, #).

emulated. The autobiographer bore authority over his experience, and his text bore instruction for the reader. But as Adams saw the world, modernity – what he called “twentieth-century multiplicity” – had outmoded this genre of self-authorization. In a letter to Charles Milnes Gaskell, between the book’s limited release in 1907 and wide publication in 1918, Adams voiced doubts as to posterity’s need for his narrative:

I hardly think my ‘Education’ is fit for any public. It is only proofsheets, full of errors, and I’ve not given it to any library here. The more I watch the coming public the more likely I think it that the public of fifty years hence will be something quite different from the past, and that we need not want to please it, for it will not want to please us. Burn up the volumes when you are done with them!⁶

Adams thought his autobiographical experiment a failure, yet readers disagreed. Six months after Adams died, Lodge published *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography*. The book sold twelve thousand copies, and won a Pulitzer Prize.⁷

It’s for quotes like that to Gaskell that political theorists have generally recognized Adams as the great American pessimist. Wilson Carey McWilliams called him “an annoying, as well as perplexing, figure in American thought and letters.”⁸ Judith Shklar named the *Education* “a matchless contribution to the literature of pure sadness.”⁹ Recent works by James P. Young and Garry Wills have returned to

⁶ Henry Adams, “Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, 1603 H Street, 12 April 1912,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 533.

⁷ See Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Major Phase* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 568.

⁸ William Carey McWilliams, “Henry Adams and the ‘Burden of History’: Intimations of Fraternity amidst the Ravages of Nature Conquered,” in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 247.

⁹ Judith N. Shklar, “*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams,” in *Redeeming American Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155.

Adams's broader oeuvre to find a complex historian and theorist whose insight is often clouded by other studies' fixation with the *Education*.¹⁰ Born February 16, 1838, in Boston, Adams was the great-grandson of one president and the grandson of another (*EH*, 3). Unlike his forefathers, he never took any influential political office. He was an assistant to his diplomat father during the Civil War, and turned down several significant federal positions after, despite knowing personally every president in his lifetime; likely his greatest influence was his close relationship to Secretary of State John Hay.¹¹ Citizens knew Adams better as a journalist and historian. He wrote many biographies of statesmen and volumes of the *History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*. He composed two novels, one published anonymously, the other pseudonymously, and later in life wrote on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, his *Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres* a partner text to his autobiography. He had no children but many nieces, and died in 1918.¹²

Consistent throughout Adams's oeuvre and culminating in the *Education* was a diagnostic analysis of how politics, religion, history, economics, and science had changed since the early modern period. As the floundering son of founding fathers, Adams wrote at a time of great transition. In politics, the republican statesmanship of the founding and postrevolutionary periods had succumbed to the "machine politics" of patronage systems in New York and other urban centers, with changes in immigration straining representatives' ability to present uniform, monolithic ideals. In

¹⁰ Young, *Henry Adams*; Wills, *Henry Adams*.

¹¹ See Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams: The Middle Years* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), 158.

¹² See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 158.

the study of history, the increasing interest in structural accounts obscured the agency of previous leaders like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. Technology extended people across the country through the railroad, the steamer, and the telegraph; science split people into atoms. Modernism changed not simply the political or material makeup of the nation, but to Adams it changed how Americans *saw* America. If politicians weren't paralyzed in the web of patronage politics, they remained but an effect of atomic or structural causes. Drawing on Thomas Carlyle, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill, Adams diagnosed the impact and survival of authority in democratic times. Like Max Weber and Friedrich Nietzsche, Adams saw in modernity the disenchantment of power and its dissemination into a multiplicity of forces. Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Adams saw self-examination and biography as a potential foundation for authority in a time of loosening ground.

He wrote *The Education of Henry Adams* for two purposes. On the one hand, the *Education* takes up the form of self-examination found in Augustine's and Rousseau's *Confessions*, in an attempt to locate a new source of authority for the modern age. Whereas Augustine addressed God, and Rousseau his fellows, Adams addresses himself in third-person to replace what he chronicles as the fall of republican statesmen and great heroes in modernity. Autobiography builds individual authority through the mastery of one's own experience, and yet for Adams the relation to experience has been fractured by the conditions of modernity.¹³ *The Education*

¹³ Hayden White writes of the *Education* that "its manifest message is that it is impossible to write an autobiography like any of the traditional types (religious, psychological, ethical) on the basis of the modern experience." Though a shorter critique than that here, White latches on as well to the formal dimensions of the *Education* that convey this. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), 203.

might replicate the goal of Augustine's *Confessions*, whose author told God "in you my 'scattered selves are reunited'"¹⁴ Adams grounds his self-examination on the idea that "any schoolboy could see that man as a force must be measured by motion," he writes, "from a fixed point" (*EH*, 342). After his first book in the series, *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres: a study of thirteenth-century unity*, Adams "proposed to fix a position for himself," to be called the *Education*. On the one hand, then, the "education" of Henry Adams attempts to recover authority in the self, in an age where modernity has disenchanted the gods and heroes that once gave men purpose. To this effort, Adams finds two solutions: his narrated encounter with the dynamo in Chicago and Paris, which he will describe as a source of authority in a mechanical age, and his "dynamic theory of history," a theory of progress explored at the end of the book.

But the book's second purpose is to educate its reader. By describing his life and attempts at education as failures, Adams hopes the *Education* will convince readers of the *futility* of finding oneself in God and great men as in pre- and early-modernity, and the *potential* for some new mode of self-authorization characteristic of what he calls the "new American." Though Adams figures himself outmoded in modernity, he suggests that a new kind of citizenship or subjectivity might emerge to better suit the new age.¹⁵ By mourning the fall of great men as he laments his own obsolescence, he hints that the new political individual will neither need nor desire old

¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 251.

¹⁵ As Jackson Lears points out, between Adams's stated pessimism and his performed optimism, there lies a contradiction: for "in his refusal to rest content with unity or stasis, in his acceptance of a fragmented self in a fragmented universe, Adams prefigured the 'modern consciousness' celebrated by many avant-garde artists and intellectuals in the twentieth century." He was an "antimodern modernist," whose elegies took a writing form that modernists would emulate in the years after his death. T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 296–297.

forms of authority. Whereas Carlyle, Mill, and Tocqueville lamented the loss of statesmen in the nineteenth century, Adams provides an autobiographical exercise parallel with Emerson's *Representative Men*: as Emerson urged that great men educate by stepping aside for greater men, we can read Adams's literary suicide as a similar stepping down, to yield to what new American modernity might demand. Reading the *Education* for both its interior, self-examining content, and its exterior, didactic form, we see the autobiography's unlikely democratic character. The book, Adams told a reader, was "meant only for revision, suggestion, correction, and general condemnation... It hobbles on its knees, asking to be raised and educated."¹⁶ Readers like Lodge would step in and take authority, as Adams withdrew his own.

Like autobiographies before, *The Education of Henry Adams* responds to a problem of authority in American citizenship and letters. Franklin had solved his autobiographical problem by constructing authority not simply from experience but out of interchangeable, imitable public virtues to last for posterity. Franklin insisted on his authority not simply as a citizen or statesman, but as a citizen-maker. In the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass or Emma Goldman, the author instead self-authorizes by implicating readers within the narrative: by denunciation or by raising social consciousness. Adams's *Education* does neither, but instead encourages the authority of his reader by actively diminishing his own. What survives Adams is not his name nor a sense of the people implicated by his narrative, but solely the form of autobiographical self-examination that might encourage new Americans to find

¹⁶ Henry Adams, "Adams to Margaret Chanler, 1603 H Street, 30 January 1908," in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 111.

authority in a different-yet-undetermined relation to politics and experience. What Adams found in writing the *Education* was the difficulty of attaining an autobiographical sense of self at the *fin-de-siècle*, of finding unity through multiplicity in an age of industrial capitalism and atomic physics. By writing an autobiography, and not simply another treatise on par with *Democracy in America* or *On Liberty*, Adams offers himself as not simply a doomsayer but a martyr for the people to come.

To explore Adams's autobiography and education, I structure the chapter through the following claims: (1) Adams bases the form of *Education* on Augustine's and Rousseau's separate *Confessions*, and on the latter's *Emile*, all of which establish the book's goals of educating its author *and* readers. (2) Adams introduces *Education* by outlining a concept of representative authority tied to pre- and early-modern political thought, placing himself alongside other diagnosticians of democracy such as Carlyle, Mill, Tocqueville, Emerson, and Nietzsche. (3) Adams's critique of democracy is that it divides authority among "political machines" and new constituencies encouraged by immigration, both creating multiplicities that frustrate previous forms of representative authority. (4) Adams's first two solutions to multiplicity are to source it through the dynamo and to analyze it through a "dynamic theory of history." Finally, (5) Adams's concluding solution is the *Education* itself, as a biography of a great man whose failure leaves room for an entirely "new American."

Augustine, Rousseau, and the Form of Adams's *Education*

The Education of Henry Adams has three audiences: Henry Adams, his colleagues, and the general reading public. In his 1912 letter to Charles Milnes

Gaskell, he clarified that the book was unfit for the last: “burn up the volumes,” he urged. But several years earlier, in January 1908, Adams reflected on how the *Education* had served its writer in a letter to Richard Olney:

I have gone to the expense of printing a few copies, and unless I attain my object – revision – I shall be at a great loss to know what next to do with the book – unless to throw it into the fire like half a dozen of its predecessors. It has at least served one purpose – that of educating *me*.¹⁷

Adams repeated a similar idea in a letter to Henry Osborn Taylor the following year.¹⁸

For what reason was Adams convinced that the *Education* had failed its readers, yet had still educated its author? Toward the end of the chapter, I’ll argue that the book succeeded by staging a coup against Adams himself, by turning his authority over to a new American. Here, I frame the *Education* and its constitutive concepts, “unity and multiplicity” and “education,” by looking at the two prefaces accompanying the text and its major literary inheritances. By drawing on Augustine’s *Confessions*, Rousseau’s *Confessions*, and *Emile*, Adams frames his autobiography as producing truth through self-examination, and whose pedagogy requires the reader listen in rather than Adams address him. Adams’s claim that the *Education* had educated him but not the coming people is part of a performance to unify his fractured self and then sweep it aside for new authorities and identities in the twentieth century.

¹⁷ Henry Adams, “Adams to Richard Olney, 1603 H Street, 30 January 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 112.

¹⁸ Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry Osborn Taylor, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 22 November 1909,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 288.

Adams published the *Education* twice: first as a private edition for colleagues in 1907, and second as a public version by The Massachusetts Historical Society and Houghton Mifflin Company in 1918.¹⁹ When he sent the revised second edition to Henry Cabot Lodge for publication in 1916, Adams included an “Editor’s Preface,” which he had written yet signed with Lodge’s initials (*EH*, 400). Franklin had played this trick before part two of his *Autobiography* to guise his appeal to posterity: Adams’s letter turns the *Education* inward, as a work of self-examination whose audience is first Adams (as its third-person narrative suggests). Franklin’s text began as a memoir for his son, distributed for a wide readership; Adams’s text begins as a confession to authority, closed off to others for his failures. The “Editor’s Preface” explains the *Education*’s publication as “not in opposition to the author’s judgment, but only to put both volumes equally within reach of students who have occasion to consult them” (401). This reluctance conceals the critical edge of the *Education*.

In the “Editor’s Preface” and letters, Adams claims that his closest model for the *Education* was Augustine’s *Confessions*. According to “Lodge,” Adams would say “half in jest, that his great ambition was to complete St. Augustine’s ‘Confessions’” (400). From Augustine, Adams adopts a mode of self-examination whose audience is an unaddressed but observant reader. As Garry Wills explains, Augustine’s audience was God: this was a rhetorical way of both addressing and not addressing the reader,

¹⁹ See Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright, “Introductory Note,” in *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Version*, by Henry Adams, ed. Edward Chalfant and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007), viii.

since obviously God didn't need Augustine to write anything down.²⁰ Long after his conversion in the garden, Augustine writes:

Why let others overhear my testimony, as if they could treat my symptoms? People want a transgressive knowledge of others' lives, but are blissfully ignorant of what might change their own. Why, anyway, should they care to hear from me about my own condition if they will not hear from you about theirs?²¹

Augustine authorizes the *Confessions* through a conversation with God, whereas eavesdropping readers are encouraged not to converse with Augustine but God.

Rousseau also framed his *Confessions* as an experiment in self-examination, but with a wider audience. Yet in the *Education*'s original "Author's Preface," Adams includes a quote from Rousseau that frames his address as closer to Augustine's:

"I have shown myself as I was; contemptible and vile when I was so; good, generous, sublime when I was so; I have unveiled my interior such as Thou thyself hast seen it, eternal Father! Collect about me the innumerable swarm of my fellows; let them hear my confessions; let them groan at my unworthiness; let them blush at my meannesses! Let each of them discover his heart in turn at the foot of thy throne with the same sincerity; and then let any one of them tell thee if he dares: – 'I was a better man!'" (*EH*, xiii)

On the hand, this quote helps explain Adams's inspiration to frame the *Education* as a fairly intimate exposure of his life and character (far more intimate than Franklin's autobiography). But although Adams writes that Rousseau "began his famous *Confessions* by a vehement appeal to the Deity," this isn't Rousseau's first appeal. He first introduces his autobiography pledging an unprecedented objective, to portray "simply myself": "I know my own heart and understand my fellow man."²² Rousseau

²⁰ Garry Wills, "Introduction," in *Confessions*, by Augustine, trans. Garry Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), xi.

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 212.

²² Rousseau, *The Confessions*, 17.

claims he is unique, that “I may be no better, but at least I am different.” This is still not an invitation to the sort of didactic imitation that frames Franklin’s autobiography, yet it’s more welcoming to readers than what Adams cited. That Adams chooses Rousseau’s second paragraph, where he pledges, if needed, to “present myself before my Sovereign Judge,” suggests that he modeled the *Education* closer to the genre out of which Rousseau was moving and which Augustine had pioneered. The *Education* adopts a Rousseau closer to Augustine, the latter having written that “I enter my plea before your mercy, not before a fellow man, who might well mock me.”²³

This is suggested further by Adams’s oblique mention of another book by Rousseau: *Emile: Or, On Education*.²⁴ After he exalts Rousseau as “a very great educator,” Adams laments that “the twentieth century finds few recent guides to avoid or to follow” (*EH*, xiii). Of educators, Adams writes, Rousseau was “easily first,” and his success is that he “erected a monument of warning against the *Ego*.” Toward the end, I’ll make more of Adams’s referencing *Emile*; for now, it’s important to note that in neither Franklin nor Rousseau has Adams satisfactorily found someone who “has discussed what part of education has, in his personal experience, turned out to be useful, and what not.” One has to go back to “the abandoned sphere of the dead languages” to find anything similar (again pointing to Augustine).

²³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.

²⁴ Although Adams prefaces the *Education* with a line from Rousseau’s *Confessions*, he suggests that *Emile* is his model. Adams writes that in American literature “the student must go back, beyond Jean Jacques, to Benjamin Franklin, to find a model even of self-teaching” (*EH*, xiii). If we read Adams’s reference as to Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Franklin’s *Autobiography*, this line makes no sense, as the former was published in 1782, the latter in 1791. What Adams means here, instead, is likely their birthdates: Franklin was born before Rousseau, in 1706 as opposed to 1712. This suggests that Adams wanted to go back not to their self-examinations but their biographies, their lives, for models of self-education.

Thus Adams wrote the *Education* first as a form of self-education and only secondarily for the education of others. He made this clear in letters surrounding the initial publication of the *Education*, circulating around a hundred copies of the first edition among anyone mentioned in the manuscript a week after he wrote the preface.²⁵ In a letter typical of those accompanying the text, he wrote to Lodge in March of 1907: “I send you a volume, in the nature of proof-sheets, which contains allusions to you and yours which I wish you would glance at, and after running your pen through anything that seems to you personally objectionable, return the volume to me.”²⁶ In cataloguing his experience, Adams didn’t want to misrepresent any of his fellows. He wrote to Gaskell ten days later that “I had meant to call them all back, expecting large changes or omissions. The President tells me that he means to keep the volume, whatever I say; and the various ladies not only refuse to return it, but clamor for more copies.”²⁷ Even Theodore Roosevelt had no intention of returning the book, and it’s unclear whether Adams received any corrections. Adams resisted publishing the *Education* up to his death, rejecting Ferris Greenslet of Houghton Mifflin’s initial request in 1907.²⁸ Any motivation to revise the *Education* stalled when a stroke in 1912 effectively ended Adams’s writing career.²⁹ In a letter to Greenslet, Adams insisted that “I could not let the thing go, in its incomplete, uncorrected, tentative

²⁵ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 332.

²⁶ Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry Cabot Lodge, 1603 H Street, 5 March 1907,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 49.

²⁷ Henry Adams, “Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 15 May 1907,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 66.

²⁸ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 559.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 533.

form”: “I could only sit still, and trust to time to forget it.”³⁰ Before this book, Adams had advocated others pirate his previous works given their unlikely commercial success.³¹ In the same letter to Greenslet he voices this as one of two options, suggesting “either to pirate it outright, avowedly without my knowledge; or, better, to wait a few months till I am gone, and then do what you like.”³² In another letter to Greenslet sent that same month, Adams specified that “during my life I should not publish the *Education*,” yet that he would leave a corrected copy to the Massachusetts Historical Society “to do what they pleased with.”³³ Though it’s hard to take Adams’s hesitation seriously, he had burned letters and journals before. At one point an entire manuscript of a biography on Aaron Burr disappeared after its rejection from a publisher.³⁴ What’s most significant is that Adams’s reluctance, sincere or not, is further evidence that he wrote the *Education* for an audience closer to that of Augustine than of Franklin or Douglass.

What Adams liked in Augustine, he told William James, was “the notion of writing a story with an end and object, not for the sake of the object, but for the

³⁰ Henry Adams, “Adams to Ferris Greenslet, February 1916,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 720.

³¹ See Samuels, *Middle Years*, 338.

³² Adams, “Adams to Ferris Greenslet, February 1916,” 720.

³³ Henry Adams, “Adams to Ferris Greenslet, 1603 H Street, 18 February 1916,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 723.

³⁴ See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 105. Adams also destroyed many writings while mourning the suicide of his wife, including a journal written while studying at Harvard. See Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 42.

form.”³⁵ To others he admitted that this was an unsuccessful experiment.³⁶ Yet the *Education*’s parity with Augustine’s *Confessions* is clearest in the final three chapters that elaborate Adams’s dynamic theory of history. Adams admitted that these were influenced by Augustine, intended to replicate the “Father,” “Son,” and “Spirit” books that conclude the *Confessions*.³⁷ Augustine’s self-examination and conversation with God resulted in these philosophical treatises; one of Adams’s solutions to modernity is the theory of history that concludes his *Education*. As he pointed out in the “Editor’s Preface,” he’d expand these experiments in his final writings. Like Augustine, Adams’s objective was to motivate other readers to self-examine, or at the very least to draw some philosophical value from these final theories.

Despite what he told William James, Adams also modeled the *Education* after Augustine’s *Confessions* for its objectives. Augustine’s first goal was self-examination through a conversation with God: “do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.”³⁸ According to Charles Taylor, Augustine was the first to experiment with “radical reflexivity,” to evaluate experience itself rather than simply live it.³⁹ From this first-person experience, Taylor writes, Augustine proved God’s existence: “I am aware of my own sensing and thinking; and in reflecting on this, I am

³⁵ Henry Adams, “Adams to William James, 1603 H Street, 17 February 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 119.

³⁶ *Education* was an experiment in form, Adams said: “I can see where the form fails, but I cannot see how to correct the failures.” Henry Adams, “Adams to Edith Morton Eustis, 28 February 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 122.

³⁷ Henry Adams, “Adams to Barrett Wendell, 1603 H Street, 12 March 1909,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 238.

³⁸ Quoted Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

made aware of its dependence on something beyond it, something common.”⁴⁰ Adams takes from Augustine his use of “unity and multiplicity” to describe education through authority. In the preface, he wrote “that St. Augustine, like a great artist, had worked from multiplicity to unity, while he, like a small one, had to reverse the method and work back from unity to multiplicity” (*EH*, 400). In the *Confessions*, Augustine says to God that “you gather me from my own scatterings, after I have torn myself from your unity and fallen apart into multiplicity.”⁴¹ These concepts merit explanation.

What did Adams mean to call his *Education* a “study of twentieth-century multiplicity”? The terms describe a classic Christian understanding of the one and the many: of God as singular will and the complexity of his creation. According to Adams, on one side were “Unity, Continuity, Purpose, Order, Law, Truth, the Universe, God,” on the other, “Multiplicity, Diversity, Complexity, Anarchy, Chaos” (*EH*, 358). According to Adams, his age was one increasingly of multiplicity: “The child born in 1900 would, then, be born into a new world which would not be a unity but a multiple.” (360). Throughout the *Education*, Adams describes his goal as finding a form of education to fit these conditions. Without getting too lost in what for Adams are often contradictory or obscurantist terms, we can think of unity and multiplicity as the difference between authority and power. Before Augustine found God, certainly he witnessed agency in other sources: he saw it in a diversity of worldly philosophers and political leaders. But Augustine finds unity in his conversion to Catholicism and to God, an ultimate authority from which all power (and truth) emanates.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 27.

From the beginning of the *Education*, Adams depicts himself as looking for unity: “Already at ten years old, the boy found himself standing face to face with a dilemma that might have puzzled an early Christian. What was he? – where was he going?” (17). Unity, for Augustine, had been the result of his conversion and his writing the *Confessions*: Adams hopes education and *Education* to do the same. A primary tenet of his critique of modernity will be its distributing power away from central authority (be it God, statesmen, or the Virgin) through various economies, politics, technologies, and so on.⁴² John P. Diggins calls the *Education* “a discourse on power,” likening it to twentieth-century theories like Michel Foucault’s that would study power as it spread out into society and knowledge.⁴³ Adams was the first to study “the mindlessness of power and the powerlessness of mind to resist it.”⁴⁴ Education requires looking inward, Adams writes: “unity is vision; it must have been part of the process of learning to see” (*EH*, 312).

We can also draw from Adams’s reliance on Rousseau and Augustine a basic understanding of what he means by education. Rousseau also describes education in terms of unity. In the opening pages of *Emile*, he writes that

Natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind. Civil man is only a fractional unity dependent on the denominator; his value is determined by his relation to the whole, which is the social body. Good social institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to

⁴² Multiplicity is not simply diversity, not is it necessarily the antithesis of unity. Adams’s frequent phrase for education is “unity *through* multiplicity,” and he’ll distinguish this from a multiplicity of unities. Patrick Deneen argues that multiplicity is thus a term to describe both patronage politics but also the sameness of new industry: “a form of every greater homogeneity and standardization.” Patrick Deneen, “*Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*: From Unity to Multiplicity,” in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 175.

⁴³ John P. Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

give him a relative one and transport the *I* into the common unity, with the result that each individual believes himself no longer one but a part of the unity and no longer feels except within the whole.⁴⁵

The gist of Emile's education is protect that natural unity as long as possible till he is prepared to enter society, at which point his "fractional unity" will resemble something like the entrance to the general will in the *Social Contract*: the individual is sublimated into the whole. This further helps to explain the relationship between authority and the individual in Adams's view of philosophy and education. For Augustine, one overcomes the divided self through education as a conversion or confession to God. For Rousseau, one overcomes the divided self through education via nature (in *Emile*) or the general will (in the *Social Contract*). Adams's goal in the *Education* is similarly to find a form of self-examination that goes from a divided self to unity, be that unity God or science. Though Adams will settle on science, the *Education* will be, for the reader, Adams's sign-off for a new-yet-undetermined conception of unity and self-examination.

In the first chapter of the book, Adams explains education in terms of unity and multiplicity, that "from cradle to grave this problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education, as it is the moral of religion, philosophy, science, art, politics and economy" (*EH*, 9-10). When Adams lays out his dynamic theory of history toward the end of the book, he describes man as enduring forces that "impinge on his senses, whose sum makes education" (372). Education is

⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: Or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (United States: Basic Books, 1979), 39-40.

to know the world and one's place in it, and the challenge of education is to find unity among the multiplicitous conditions of modernity. The path that Adams is going to chart through the narrative of *Education* is how history has moved from a politics of *will* to a politics of *force*. Will, like that of God or statesmen, is unified and emanates outward. Force, typical of the multiplicitous conditions of modernity, comes from all angles. What education requires is that the student find himself at the nexus of these different influences. At the end of the "Author's Preface," Adams writes that "the young man himself, the subject of education, is a certain form of energy; the object to be gained is economy of his force" (xiv).

What makes reading the *Education* as a work of political theory so difficult is that Adams will regularly employ the term "education" to varying significations. When Adams begins teaching at Harvard, he states his goal as a "new education" (229).⁴⁶ He contrasts the American university from Berlin's "state-education": "a sort of dynamo machine for polarising the popular mind" (60-61).⁴⁷ In Rome he stumbles

⁴⁶ At the end of his life, Adams was greatly involved in university reform, his pedagogy influenced by the same forces of technology and economy present throughout the autobiography. In the *Education*, he writes that "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. A teacher is expected to teach truth, and may perhaps flatter himself that he does so, if he stops with the alphabet or the multiplication table, as a mother teaches truth by making her child eat with a spoon; but morals are quite another truth and philosophy is more complex still. A teacher must either treat history as a catalogue, a record, a romance; or as an evolution, and whether he affirms or denies evolution, he falls into all the burning fagots of the pit. He makes of his scholars either priests or atheists, plutocrats or socialists, judges or anarchists, almost in spite of himself. In essence incoherent and immoral, history had either to be taught as such, – or falsified" (235). On Adams's university work, see Samuels, *Major Phase*, 375.

⁴⁷ Although I explore Adams's debt to Mill below, this passage already indicates their alignment. In *On Liberty*, Mill writes "all that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body." John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *Mill: The Spirit of the Age, On Liberty, The Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 124.

on “accidental education” (73), whereas in Washington and Westminster he wonders over “political education” (141, 218). Some educations end (“diplomatic education” (152)), others end up useless (“social education” (158)). Most chapters in the first half of the book conclude with Adams reaching still for education or dismissing that acquired.⁴⁸ When he returns from the Civil War, he decides “nine-tenths of his acquired education was useless,” resolving to start again (174). In the chapter before the twenty year gap, “Failure,” the author notes that “Henry Adams’s education, at his entry into life, stopped, and his life began” (241). In 1871, Adams recalls, he concludes education and puts it to practice instead (246). But then, several chapters later, education not only resumes but switches course (“the object of education, therefore, was changed”), Adams referencing his new interest in the fragmentation of the nation (276). Again, Adams describes the dynamo as another new education (300). Education is sometimes aesthetic: from Beethoven (“a prison-wall that barred his senses on one great side of life, suddenly fell” (62)), and from Swinburne’s poetry in England (109). When Adams’s sister dies of tetanus, he describes it as “the sum and term of education,” the final lesson (224). This is despite the fact that Adams’s skips over the two decades during which his wife, Clover, married him and committed suicide in grief over her father’s death, though the tragedy had affected Adams in his later life like nothing before.⁴⁹ More often than not, education is a failure. Adams

⁴⁸ For example, the end to chapter three: “the American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900. The education he had received bore little relation to the education he needed. Speaking as an American of 1900, he had as yet no education at all. He knew not even where or how to begin” (*EH*, 41).

⁴⁹ The only indication of Marion Adams’s suicide in the *Education* is Henry’s frequent description of himself in the later chapters as already dead, that “even dead men allow themselves a few narrow prejudices,” and that “like other dead Americans, he went to Paris because he could go nowhere else”

laments his education at Harvard as “an autobiographical blank” (43), his “education had not begun” (53); his trip to Germany after, a “third or fourth attempt at education,” also unsuccessful (55). He describes his later professorship “as a failure” (238).

Adams begins the *Education* born a “child of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” his inheritance of the Adams name an “old, established traffic” to help him in the race of life (3). But despite “no child” born that year having “better cards than he,” Adams laments that this “story of education” reflects that he’d “lost himself in the study” of the game, rather than play it (4). Education throughout the book seems aimless, unpredictable, entropic. In a letter to Whitelaw Reid, Adams called it

a story of how an average American education, in spite of the most favorable conditions, ran down hill, for twenty years, into the bog labelled Failure; and how it had to be started again, under every disadvantage, and the blindest fumbings, to crawl uphill a little way in order to at last to get a little view ahead of the field it should have begun by occupying.⁵⁰

Though Augustine and Rousseau give Adams a sense of the *form* of education, the moral of *Education* will be his inability to substantively describe what education requires in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. Adams’s failure will be his difficulty finding an ultimate authority to replace Augustine’s God and Rousseau’s general will or nature. With these concepts and goals in mind, we can now examine the narrative of *Education* as Adams charts the rise and fall of those former sources of unity. Once we’ve looked there and laid out Adams’s critique of democracy, we can

(258, 282). This morbidity was common in letters as well, particularly in Adams’s morose flirtations with Elizabeth Cameron. See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 74.

⁵⁰ Henry Adams, “Adams to Whitelaw Reid, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 9 September 1908,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 177.

finally consider his two solutions (what educated him) as well as how his aforementioned failure makes way for the reader's authority to come.

The Rise and Fall of Great Men

In the opening chapters of the *Education*, Adams's recollections of his youth in Boston and Quincy give readers a sense of the authority that had governed early America and republics before. According to Adams, pre- and early-modern periods elevated ideal representatives through whom citizens defined themselves and their places in society. These early anecdotes suggest that while Adams brushed with several great men as a young boy, national changes had already begun corrupting and converting politics to new centers of power; this also aligns the first chapters of *Education* alongside major nineteenth-century critics of democracy.

The *Education* presents young Henry's relation to authority as an historical continuation of Augustine's relationship to God. Just as Adams parroted his form, he frames his youth as a more modern Augustine. In the *Confessions*, the young theologian's first memories are of the word⁵¹; in the *Education*, the young scientist's first memories are of the senses, color and taste (5). Both are sick as children, Augustine with chest fever and Adams with scarlet fever (*EH*, 5).⁵² Like Augustine's infatuation with Manicheanism, Adams describes his childhood as between poles: "winter and summer, cold and heat, town and country" (6). Winter was school,

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

Boston, his grandfather Brooks. Summer was nature, Quincy, and John Quincy.

Boston was “domestic comforts,” Quincy “flint-and-steel” (8). Adams writes that “the boy was accustomed to feel that, for him, life was double” (8).⁵³

As in Augustine’s book, Adams’s Manichean doubleness will briefly yield to his first encounter with authority. This encounter is also Adams’s first education and lesson in running “unity through multiplicity” (10). Around the age of six or seven, Adams spends a summer with his grandfather J.Q. Adams, known in his family simply as “the President.” One day, the young Henry refuses to leave for class. The President, exiting his library at the top of the stairs, takes Adams’s hand and silently leads him to school. Although Henry sees avenues for escape, he is “paralysed with awe”:

This act, contrary to the inalienable rights of boys, and nullifying the social compact, ought to have made him dislike his grandfather for life. He could not recall that it had this effect even for a moment. With a certain maturity of mind, the child must have recognized that the President, though a tool of tyranny, had done his disreputable work with a certain intelligence. He had shown no temper, no irritation, no personal feeling, and had made no display of force. Above all, he had held his tongue. (11)

J.Q. Adams had acted against Henry’s consent, persuading without convincing, guiding the young boy to school. “During their long walk,” Adams writes, “he had said nothing; he had uttered no syllable of revolting cant about the duty of obedience and the wickedness of resistance to law; he had shown no concern in the matter;

⁵³ Shamoon Zamir connects Adams’s doubleness to Du Bois’s “double consciousness,” both a reflection of modernity’s fracturing the self. Although both thinkers conclude with a certain ambivalence between the poles that pull them, Du Bois’s focus on race allows him to (perhaps) more productively find a concept of the self in response to the political problems of his day. See Shamoon Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888-1903* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3–7. What’s slightly confusing is that Adams seems to suggest that the doubleness above is *not* modern, rather a reflection of his growing up in Boston, typical more of a revolutionary time.

hardly even a consciousness of the boy's existence." The President didn't need to say anything – let alone look at Adams – to move him.

This scene reveals what Adams sees as the representative authority characteristic of the pre- and early modern age. In Augustine's *Confessions*, this authority was God; for a boy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Adams looked to J.Q. Adams. Adams doesn't imply this continuity simply by mimicking the *Confessions*, but in a symbolic scene shortly after his trip to school. Adams sits in a parish church built "before railways entered the New England town": behind the bald head of J.Q. Adams, Henry sees over his shoulder "the tablet in memory of a President great-grandfather" (12). This genealogy of authorities constituted society "since the time of St. Augustine, if not since the glacial epoch." When an Irish gardener jokes to Henry for his likely assuming that he'd rise to the presidency as well, Adams recalls his first thinking that anything else *could* happen, any "doubt whether a system of society which had lasted since Adam would outlast one Adams more" (13). Adams's likening himself to Augustine through the form and early narrative of the *Education* is crucial not simply for the book's intended genre of self-examination, but because Adams sees an historical continuity between the type of authority and representation connecting Augustine and God and that which bound citizens and statesmen, sons and fathers in the early-modern theories that grounded America and republics before.

More than making reference to Augustine, these early descriptions of Boston and the presidency invoke nineteenth-century debates over heroic leadership best articulated by Carlyle and Emerson, both of whom Adams mentions frequently throughout the *Education* (30, 27). In his 1841 *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the*

Heroic in History, Carlyle argues that “universal history... is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.”⁵⁴ These heroes (men like Dante, Luther, Napoleon, etc.) were “leaders of men,” the “creators... of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain.” On the one hand, the hero is creative and active; on the other, he provides an historical ideal to which other men appeal for guidance. “We cannot look,” Carlyle writes, “however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him.”⁵⁵ The hero is “a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven... of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness.”

Although Adams doesn't dwell on what his heroes had done, he narrates encounters with an early entourage of statesmen who had similarly provided the young Henry ideals to emulate. In the second chapter, Adams exhorts his father's political character as “the larger part of his education”: Charles Francis Adams “possessed the only perfectly balanced mind that ever existed in the name” (*EH*, 21). Like Carlyle's heroes above the masses, C.F. Adams had “the faculty of standing apart without seeming aware that he was alone.” He's different, but his character works with “mastery of form”: twice, Henry calls his father a “model” (21, 22). Other great men guide Adams. Charles Sumner, “the classical ornament of the anti-slavery party,” was “the boy's ideal of greatness; the highest product of nature and art” (24). He was “heroic.” These men, Adams will write later, figure in his “story of education” “only as educators or educated”: their influence “on the mind of a boy... was wholly

⁵⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Electric Book Company, [1841] 2001), 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

political and literary” (28). They serve in the early *Education* to capture the representative authority prevalent till the mid-nineteenth century.

Adams pairs descriptions of heroism with those of classic republican statesmen preserved in New England. Of Daniel Webster, Sumner and others, “it was the old Ciceronian idea of government by *the best* that produced the long line of New England statesmen” (25). These were heroes like Carlyle’s, monolithic: “the little group of men in Mount Vernon Street [Adams et al.] were an off-shoot of this system; they were statesmen, not politicians; they guided public opinion but were little guided by it.” Carlyle “found friendship and alliances” there, and Adams describes the men as varieties of Tocqueville and Mill. Boston, he writes, “had solved the universe” (26). When he ventures to Washington, D.C. for the first time, Adams observes the same: “Senators were a species; they all wore an air, as they wore a blue dress coat or brass buttons; they were Roman” (35). These are leaders to be seen, to stare and speak little.

Unlike Carlyle’s heroes, doers of great deeds, representatives’ greatness for Adams is almost purely educative: they influence citizens not through gentle coercion but as passive, relational figures. Adams frequently describes heroic figures as silent, isolated, or inertial. In a snowball fight as a young boy, he describes the “two heroes” of his side standing their ground against “a swarm of blackguards from the slums” (32).⁵⁶ J.Q. Adams, the great image of silent authority, a “protégé of George Washington,” was “a statesman designated by destiny, with nothing to do but look

⁵⁶ Adams hints at how the Civil War will tear this heroic ideal apart. Of these heroic boys, he writes: “ten or twelve years afterwards when these same boys were fighting and falling on all the battle-fields of Virginia and Maryland, he wondered whether their education on Boston Common had taught Savage and Marvin how to die” (*EH*, 33).

directly ahead, follow orders, and march” (40). When Senator Timothy Howe likens Adams to a begonia much later in the book, Adams considers it his “ideal of the successful statesman”: “standing always in the most prominent positions” despite having “no useful purpose” (228).⁵⁷ Adams’s heroes, educative as they are, don’t really do much in the *Education*.⁵⁸ They’re independent and transcendent, but they stand more as ideal, imitable monuments than as active, instrumental forces.

According to Adams and others, these great men were disappearing. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Tocqueville and Mill had mourned the passing of great men in democratic times. Carlyle wrote *Heroes* in reaction to what he saw as the leveling of human life in a “machine universe.”⁵⁹ In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle’s fictional Teufelsdröckh claimed “the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.”⁶⁰ According to these authors, the democracies of America and Europe brought with equality a humbling mediocrity

⁵⁷ In *Emile*, Rousseau writes that “plants are shaped by cultivation, and men by education.” In *Representative Men*, Emerson writes that “man is that noble endogenous plant which grows, like the palm, from within, outward... education is his unfolding.” Rousseau, *Emile*, 38; Ralph Waldo Emerson, “*Representative Men*,” in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, [1850] 1983), 616–617.

⁵⁸ Russell L. Hanson and W. Richard Merriman make a compelling argument that Adams is one of the last republican American thinkers: “to use language that Adams might have employed, republican politics is the achievement of ‘unity through multiplicity,’ and the destruction of unity by multiplicity means that republican politics no longer exists, or even more strongly, that it can no longer exist. In Adams’s estrangement from history we may read this epitaph for a distinctly republican tradition in American politics.” Russell L. Hanson and W. Richard Merriman, “Henry Adams and the Decline of the Republican Tradition,” in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 37.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Jason A. Frank, “Standing for Others: Reform and Representation in Emerson’s Political Thought,” in *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alan Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 395.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 179.

from which few great men could emerge. In the 1835 introduction to the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville lamented what he saw as the loss of “the majesty of laws”: “the people despise authority while fearing it.”⁶¹ Worse yet, “we have destroyed those independent beings who were capable of fighting single-handed against tyranny.” That power now went to government, giving way “to the weakness of the whole community.” No one (Adams least of all) would say that J.Q. Adams had been of the order of Shakespeare or Plato, let alone God, and yet the *Education*’s author describes him in the way Tocqueville speaks of these antiquated great men.

In 1859, as Adams left college, Mill echoed similar regrets in *On Liberty*. The aim of democracy was “mediocrity.”⁶² The people no longer learn from “dignitaries in Church or State,” nor from books. Great men are rare when needed most:

No government by a democracy or a numerous aristocracy, either in its political acts or in the opinions, qualities, and tone of mind which it fosters, ever did or could rise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided (which in their best times they always have done) by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few. The initiation of all wise or noble things comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual. The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open.⁶³

Both Tocqueville and Mill, who Adams at one point calls “the two high priests of our faith,” saw the educating impact of great men fading in modern times.⁶⁴ True genius, Mill thought, was measured in “eccentricity,” and “that so few now dare to be

⁶¹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 19.

⁶² Mill, “*On Liberty*,” 92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 92–93.

⁶⁴ See Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 136. In the letter, Adams continues: “I have learned to think De Tocqueville my model, and I study his life and works as the Gospel of my private religion. The great principle of democracy is still capable of rewarding a conscientious servant.” Quoted in Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 59.

eccentric marks the chief danger of the time.”⁶⁵ Adams will meet Mill in 1863 while a diplomat in England during the Civil War, and in a chapter called “Eccentricity” will summarize other English claims that Americans lacked greatness (*EH*, 99). The English mind, according to Adams, “was one-sided, eccentric, systematically unsystematic and logically illogical” (150). To his English colleagues (whom Adams describes as followers of Tocqueville and Mill), “the American mind was not a thought at all; it was a convention, superficial, narrow and ignorant; a mere cutting instrument, practical, economical, sharp and direct” (141). England was aristocratic, spontaneous, creative: America was instrumental, predictable, common.

These critiques didn’t end with Tocqueville and Mill. Though not theoretically opposed to democracy, Emerson also diagnosed what he saw as the inclination to conformity and egoism in nineteenth century American culture. In his 1841 “Self-Reliance,” Emerson preached self-trust and individuality in the face of conformity.⁶⁶ He writes there that “society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.” The “great man,” Emerson writes, “is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”⁶⁷ He located this conformity in the day’s devotion to consistency: in politics, industry and religion as they were changing in the nineteenth century. Writings like these would inspire more vehement critics of democracy such as Nietzsche, who at the end of the century argued that “the democratic movement is not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of man, making him

⁶⁵ Mill, “*On Liberty*,” 93.

⁶⁶ Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” 261.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

mediocre and lowering his value.”⁶⁸ While Tocqueville and Mill were suspicious of democracy, Nietzsche outright condemned it.

Adams sees these great men disappearing in democratic times, though his position is more complex than Nietzsche’s. At the end of the *Education*’s first chapter, Adams writes that “this prehistoric stage of education” ended at age ten, upon J.Q. Adams’s falling, his paralysis, and his death two days after collapsing symbolically on the House floor (16). From early in the *Education*, Adams suggests that this concept of statesmen is unfit for the future. Webster and others of Boston exemplified the politics of “turning away one’s eyes as one approaches a chasm” (27). The first abyss confronting statesmen is the Civil War, which threatens Adams’s ideal heroes early in the book. On Adams’s first trip to Washington, D.C. (where his family had lived twice before), he’s struck by “the sudden change that came over the world on entering a slave State” (34). The Adams family was anti-slavery to its core, and there he saw slavery, a “nightmare... the sum of all wickedness.” And yet he’s confused (“the more he was educated, the less he understood”). Something about the “freedom, openness, swagger, of nature and man” in the South appeals (35). The object of his confusion is not just D.C., but George Washington: “a primary, or, if Virginians liked it better, an ultimate relation, like the Pole Star, and amid the endless restless motion of every other visible point in space, he alone remained steady” (37). Adams and Americans made pilgrimages to Mount Vernon, and yet, that was a place built by slavery. At the time, Adams doesn’t think on “how to deal with the moral problem that deduced

⁶⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, [1886] 1989), 117.

George Washington from the sum of all wickedness”; he acknowledges that had he done so later in life he likely would have dropped his idealism of Washington right then.⁶⁹ The Civil War, of course, would shake many American presuppositions about authority and freedom, and though the postbellum period would be marked by the spirit of regeneration, Adams acknowledges here what was already starting to eat away at these great men, these ultimate relations.⁷⁰

Before Adams, critics of democracy had attempted various solutions to resuscitate great men. For Mill, it was a comprehensive theory of liberalism and individualism; for Nietzsche, the solution was the apex of the individual: the overman. Adams begins his *Education* with these pre- and early-modern authorities to establish himself similarly as a diagnostician of democracy. In these early years, Adams writes, none of these statesmen had foreseen change: only Karl Marx had (26). No one yet suspected the “seventy million tons of coal” or “million steam-horse-power.” “Education was divine,” Adams continues, “and man needed only a correct knowledge of facts to reach perfection.” The rest of the book will illuminate what conditions erode those older forms of authority: democracy, “machine politics” and changes in immigration, and technological advancements. These changes are both political and epistemic: they change not simply how power is distributed in America, but how citizens see and respond to power. Toward the end of the *Education*, Adams will

⁶⁹ The Civil War leads to Adams’s disillusionment with quite a few great men, including their champions. In learning of Carlyle’s attitude about the war, Adams writes: “Demolition of one’s idols is painful, and Carlyle had been an idol. Doubts cast on his stature spread far into general darkness like shadows of a setting sun. Not merely the idols fell, but also the habit of faith. If Carlyle, too, was a fraud, what were his scholars and school?” (*EH*, 103).

⁷⁰ On the spirit of postbellum regeneration, see T.J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

discover two potential solutions: the dynamo as a source of infinite energy, and the “dynamic theory of history” as a comprehensive worldview of this new society. Adams will use autobiography to attempt the sort of recovery of great men that Emerson theorized in his 1850 *Representative Men*. For Emerson, great men and heroes stand isolated and transcendent from society, whereas the representative men of democratic times lead through example and then step down. Adams notes that, in his youth, Emerson’s challenge to the orthodoxy of great men would be deemed “from an old-world point of view, less serious. It was *naïf*” (*EH*, 27). Yet it will come to be incredibly significant for the *Education*, which retracts Adams authority (as well as his family’s) to yield to a “new man.” Before that, we’ll consider more closely Adams critique of nineteenth-century democracy.

The Political Machine in the Garden

Adams is not squarely an advocate nor opponent of democracy: he narrates *The Education of Henry Adams* rather as its diagnostician. Like other Mugwumps at the end of the century, Adams finds himself serried between new modes of industry and corruption on the right and a burgeoning populism and labor movement on the left. Outside of a brief flirtation with the candidacy of William Jennings Bryan, Adams’s depictions of democracy emphasize representatives and not the represented.⁷¹ Adams describes his brush with poverty as a young boy traveling in England: he witnesses “an unknown society of the pit” where “Karl Marx was

⁷¹ On Bryan, see Young, *Henry Adams*, 181–182.

standing there waiting for him,” yet “the boy ran away from it, as he ran away from everything he disliked” (56).⁷² Adams’s life is one of high society, and the *Education* rarely descends from the circles of London, Paris, and Washington (111).

His first flirtation with democratic politics and representation is a terrifying, fragmenting experience. At the end of his career at Harvard, “the ambition of the literary student” is to become the Class Orator, “the representative of his class” (51). This position strikes Adams as “political as well as literary success”: exactly “the sort of eighteenth-century combination that fascinated an eighteenth-century boy.” Adams figures this position will be like that of great statesmen, and in some ways it is: the process allows “no active candidacy,” Adams to be chosen without his consultation (52). But when Adams wins the oratorship, he notes with surprise that he’s neither the best scholar nor the most popular. He’s the mediocre pick. Furthermore, to represent men to whom you owe your election is fracturing. Of those who picked Adams, “they saw in him a representative, – the kind of representative they wanted, – and he saw in them the most formidable array of judges he could ever meet, like so many mirrors of himself, an infinite reflection of his own shortcomings.” If representative men provide fixed points for reflection, *being* representative is like living in a house of mirrors. If Adams’s onlookers all see themselves in him at once, how can he find himself?⁷³ His only pleasure is a gentleman’s positive review of Adams’s “self-possession”: his ability to “stand alone” like the statesmen of old (53).

⁷² This is not the only time in the *Education* that Adams flirts with Marx: elsewhere he is tempted by his historical method, yet remains anxious about his politics (176). It’s likely that Adams appreciated Marx’s use of grand narrative for history, while he shied away from the consequences of this narrative.

⁷³ The Class Day speech’s topic was fittingly “the dangers of materialism and the commercial spirit.” See Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 49.

Adams's anxious Harvard election symbolizes the challenges facing democracy in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. In the abstract, democracy is a system of government that achieves unity *through* multiplicity: power distributes throughout the people while the idea of "the people" remains its center (even if expressed through the state or by statesmen). Changes toward the *fin-de-siècle* will decentralize that authority, such that democracy becomes a multiplicity of unities. As America struggled to piece itself back together after the Civil War, the emergence of political machines and distribution of the economy, via technology, and demography, via immigration, will pull that American unity apart. This makes Adams one of many Americans critical of how the new economy would warp representation. As James Livingston points out, books like Edward Bellamy's 1887 *Looking Backward* portrayed a similar crisis ignited by credit, wherein money no longer represented tangible commodities or resources.⁷⁴ In Adams's narrative, the politician's enslavement to the market will make him what Henry Thoreau had sworn that he himself wasn't: the "son of the engineer."⁷⁵

Adams's first brush with corruption occurs shortly after his first visit to Washington. Before arriving in the capital, Adams had witnessed "nothing but eighteenth-century statesmanship": but "America and he began, at the same time, to become aware of a new force under the innocent surface of party machinery" (38).

⁷⁴ James Livingston, "The Politics of Pragmatism," *Social Text*, no. 49 (1996): 155.

⁷⁵ In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau writes "the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced... I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer... If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man." Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, [1849] 1982), 126–127.

Adams watches a bargain between the Massachusetts Democrats and the Free Soilers, exchanging the state's votes for a seat in the Senate. The Free Soilers give the spoils to the great Charles Sumner, and Adams "learned the nature of a flagrantly corrupt political bargain in which he was too good to take part but not too good to take profit." Before the late nineteenth century, political parties in America had already relied on machinery: on patronage, behind-the-scenes dealings and other collusion outside the election process. Statesmen benefitted from this machinery, but they didn't dirty their hands with it. Sumner's windfall is Adams's first clue that politicians, not statesmen, had begun to create "a machine which no one but themselves could run."

Before he has any choice, Adams is already implicated in the political decay that would lead to the patronage politics of political machines in the 1880s and 90s:

The boy might ignore, as a mere historical puzzle, the question how to deduce George Washington from the sum of all wickedness, but he had himself helped to deduce Charles Sumner from the sum of political corruption. On that line, too, education could not go further. Tammany Hall stood at the end of the vista. (38-39)

At the end of the nineteenth century, a series of political machines like Tammany Hall would shift power from statesmen to various pockets of influence in urban centers of America. In the wake of patronage politics and the political machine, George Washington was no longer the pole star, and neither was Washington, D.C. The rise of the political machine in the latter half of the nineteenth century brought new unities and new multiplicities, moving the American center from Washington to New York and disseminating its authority to a decentralized patronage system. An 1898 cartoon

titled “New York’s New Solar System” showed society’s new orbit around the sun: Richard “Boss” Croker of Tammany Hall (*fig. 1*).⁷⁶



Figure 1: “New York’s New Solar System”

Machines nurtured a nationwide turn from politics to the economy, even within the state. Adams wrote of William Seward’s diminishing influence after the war, that “the State department had ceased to be the centre of his interest, and the Treasury had taken its place” (*EH*, 193). Here was the rise of political economy: the trust, the gold standard, the banks, the railroad. Even if the state increasingly put more hands on the national economy, politicians couldn’t keep theirs clean. The best early example of this in the *Education* is Jay Gould’s attempt to corner the gold market in 1869, through buying up gold and forcing wheat farmers to sell by railroad (211). What startles

⁷⁶ J. Ottman Lithographic Company, “New York’s New Solar System,” still image, (1898), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/00650794/>.

Adams is President Ulysses S. Grant's involvement in the scandal and the administration's lack of transparency (212). Grant's corruption worries Adams, "a young man who had hitched his wagon, as Emerson told him, to the star of reform" (213). Even if Grant had more unified control over the economy than Washington had before, scenes like these reveal how political authority had disseminated out among counterfeiters, bosses and bankers. For Adams, the trust and scandal are almost inevitable in democracy: in an 1870 article, he wrote of the corporation that "wherever a popular and limited government exists this difficulty will be found in its path."⁷⁷ Gould's scandal epitomizes what will become the prime target of Adams and Mugwump colleagues later in life: the inexorable march of capitalism to reckless speculation and profiteering.⁷⁸ What had been the virtue of commerce would become money for money's sake. That Grant is involved in this, and that his constituents vote him into a second term of office, no less indicate to Adams that "the moral law had expired, – like the Constitution" (*EH*, 219).

The representative authority of pre- and early-modern politics?: "politicians had tacitly given it up," and now "nine tenths of men's political energies must henceforth be wasted on expedients to piece out, – to patch, – or, in vulgar language, to tinker, – the political machine as often as it broke down" (220). Under the authority of God or heroes, power emanates from a central source, inspiration or genius to be distributed among society. "Modern politics," Adams writes later in the *Education*, is

⁷⁷ Henry Adams, "The New York Gold Conspiracy," in *The Great Secession Winter of 1860-61, and Other Essays*, ed. George Hochfield (New York: Sagamore Press, 1958), 189.

⁷⁸ The irony of this position, as Ernest Samuels points out, is that this machine politics was in some ways the natural evolution of the checks-and-balances system created by the Federalists and supported by men like Adams. Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 195.

“a struggle not of men but of forces. The men become every year more and more creatures of force, massed about central powerhouses. The conflict is no longer between the men, but between the motors that drive the men, and the men tend to succumb to their own motive forces” (331). Instead of a unified will, modern politics is a multiplicity of forces. It’s no longer clear who moves whom, nor who anyone is. At the same time, and almost paradoxically, the atomization of government effects in most politicians an effete inability to get any work done without the machine, men “pathetic in their helplessness” (233).⁷⁹ It provides what Ernest Samuels calls Adams’s “political determinism,” little agency left for the statesman.⁸⁰ Its progress might be “steady though slow,” as Adams told Gaskell in a letter, yet Adams presaged “the assimilation of our forms of government to the form of an industrial corporation – a railway or bank.”⁸¹ Railways and banks often do have coherent national systems, and yet trains and money move across the country at the entropic whims of migration and the market, rather than at the orderly march of history and progress.

The immediate effect on Adams is to disaffect thoroughly his interest in Washington politics, and eventually to turn his gaze, like others, to New York. After Grant, Adams is “for sale. He wanted to be bought”: his eye was “not on the government, but on New York” (*EH*, 209). Once Adams gives up on any hope of

⁷⁹ In recalling her meeting Adams while young, Eleanor Roosevelt told Gore Vidal of his response to someone’s referencing President Woodrow Wilson: Adams laughed and said, “young man, it doesn’t make the slightest difference who lives in that house, history goes on with or without the president.” Quoted in Diggs, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 22. In the *Education*, Adams describes how the northern mission in England barely flinched when Lincoln died, despite his greatness: “Nothing happened. The travellers changed no plan or movement” (*EH*, 164).

⁸⁰ Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 294.

⁸¹ Henry Adams, “Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 17 July 1907,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 77.

political involvement, he turns to study statesmen as cogs in the machine, “as measures of mass and motion” (309).⁸² In 1880, he’ll anonymously publish *Democracy*, a novel set to capture modern politics.⁸³ The book’s main character, Lightfoot Lee, goes to Washington “to see with her own eyes the action of primary forces; to touch with her own hand the massive machinery of society; to measure with her own mind the capacity of the motive power.”⁸⁴ With many references to Adams’s socialite life on Lafayette Square, *Democracy* follows Lee through her courtship by a senator corrupted by lobbyists. Here too Adams mourns a past politics. In a conversation on George Washington, one character notes “that General Washington was a raw-boned country farmer, very hard-featured, very awkward, very illiterate and very dull,” and yet another continues that “for all that, we idolize him. To us he is morality, Justice, Duty, Truth; half a dozen Roman gods with capital letters. He is austere, solitary, grand; he ought to be deified.”⁸⁵ Here again is the preface to the *Education* and the book’s praise for Washington: though representative men may have flaws, they serve as fixed ideals. In *Democracy*, like in Adams’s own day, this had given way to corruption. As Young notes, *Democracy* ends with its protagonist’s

⁸² Writing to Hay, Adams described himself as “a sort of ugly, bloated, purplish-blue, and highly venomous hairy tarantula which catches and devours Presidents, senators, diplomats, congressmen and cabinet-officers, and knows the flavor of every generation and every country in the civilized world.” It’s suggestive that Adams describes himself as a tarantula, a variety of spider not known for weaving the webs otherwise invoked by Adams and others to symbolize the structures that immobilized politicians. Quoted in Samuels, *Major Phase*, 202.

⁸³ The book’s author would be revealed two years after Adams’s death. See Samuels, *Middle Years*, 69.

⁸⁴ Henry Adams, “*Democracy: An American Novel*,” in *Democracy, Esther, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams, and Poems*, ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels (New York: Library of America, 1983), 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63, 68.

retreat from politics and Washington, like the *Education*.⁸⁶ In a letter to his brother Brooks, Adams writes: “I bade politics good-bye when I published *Democracy*.”⁸⁷

The deeper problem with political machines in America is that they further fragmented the nation into diverse constituent parts. Many political machines, located as they were in bustling urban industrial centers, had relied on immigrant support earlier in the century, and changes in the acceleration and demographics of immigration would add to American multiplicity. Though oblique, mentions of race and immigration in the *Education* suggest that while Adams wasn't necessarily against open immigration, he recognized it as fuel for the machines and thus another obstacle (though inevitable) for American democracy.

After assisting his diplomat father for the north during the Civil War, Adams depicts his return from London as though he were of the many migrating to America:

Society offered the profile of a long, straggling caravan, stretching loosely towards the prairies, its few score of leaders far in advance and its millions of immigrants, negroes and Indians far in the rear, somewhere in archaic time... Meanwhile each newcomer needed to slip into a place as near the head of the caravan as possible, and needed most to know where the leaders could be found. (*EH*, 185)

The racial landscape of America was changing, and (according to Adams) its newcomers needed guidance. In addition to freed blacks' slow and resisted integration into the demos, some thirty-five million Europeans would cross the ocean to settle in the United States by 1910; these numbers spiked in the 1880s and 90s, at the peak of

⁸⁶ Young, *Henry Adams*, 111.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Samuels, *Middle Years*, 89.

Adams's academic career.⁸⁸ For most of the nineteenth century, lax immigration law, open land, and the flexibility of frontier democracy meant that immigrants had a relatively easy time moving across the country.⁸⁹ Political machines mid-century often aimed to naturalize immigrants immediately prior to elections, and, as a result, party interests usually united to overcome nativist legislation.⁹⁰ Developments in transportation and communication eased the passage of immigrants across the continent. Merely six years after Adams's birth, "he and his eighteenth-century, troglodytic Boston were suddenly cut apart... by the opening of the Boston and Albany Railroad; the appearance of the first Cunard steamers in the bay; and the telegraphic messages which carried from Baltimore to Washington the news that Henry Clay and James K. Polk were nominated for the Presidency" (*EH*, 4-5).⁹¹ Toward the end of the century, German and Irish immigration subsided as Eastern and Southern European immigration surged: Polish, Italian, and Russian immigrants accompanied consistent migration of Chinese workers to the west and rising Jewish immigration to the east.⁹² In 1890, the U.S. Census declared the frontier closed, an event whose impact on the white American mind would be captured in Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 "frontier thesis."⁹³ As public lands disappeared in the west, immigrants arriving in the east increasingly remained in the cities, enticed by new

⁸⁸ See Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 26–27.

⁸⁹ See Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), chap. 3.

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 59.

⁹¹ On the influence of transportation and technology on immigration, see Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5–7.

⁹² See Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70.

⁹³ See Turner, "On the Significance of the Frontier."

industrial opportunities.⁹⁴ The cities where big political machines churned were changing drastically. Although in 1890 a third of Americans lived in cities, two-thirds of immigrants lived there, and by 1910, 80% of those coming through Ellis Island would stay in urban centers.⁹⁵ With the increased movement of black Americans from the south and the incipient emergence of suburbs, cities like New York presented a microcosm of economic and ethnic multiplicity.

Adams does not dwell on race at length in the *Education*, nor was he particularly progressive on the topic. Though he described himself as an abolitionist, he misunderstood the need for a more efficient Reconstruction following the war.⁹⁶ Increasingly in letters toward the end of his life, and in a few spots in the *Education*, Adams reveals his growing anti-Semitism at a time somewhat premature of global arguments scapegoating the Jewish for the corruptions of capitalism.⁹⁷ In the *Education*, these comments are connected to a general uneasiness about the urban city. Around the time that he returns from London, Adams writes:

His world was dead. Not a Polish Jew fresh from Warsaw or Cracow, – not a furtive Yacoob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish to the officers of the customs, – but had a keener instinct, an intenser energy, and a freer hand than he, – American of Americans, with Heaven knew how many Puritans and Patriots behind him, and an education that had cost a civil war. (*EH*, 186)

⁹⁴ United States Census Office, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I: Progress of the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), xxxiv.

⁹⁵ See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 70.

⁹⁶ See Young, *Henry Adams*, 114–118.

⁹⁷ As Young points out, Adams's anti-Semitism is inconsistent and more pronounced in later letters. In earlier works, Adams includes positive Jewish characters, and his later critical remarks only partially reflect the rise of scapegoating Jews for economic issues. This does not excuse his anti-Semitism, but does suggest these remarks as connected to other critiques for which Adams saw Jewish peoples as symptomatic. See *ibid.*, 188.

Given that Adams invokes a few identifications that he spends the rest of the book lamenting, it isn't entirely clear whether he's endorsing this racial stereotype or not. But in this moment and others he perpetuates an increasing tendency in American culture to connect new immigrants to the ills of the city and corruption. In the same passage, Adams casts himself as lost among them: "a flotsam or jetsam of wreckage."

Throughout the rest of the book, Adams depicts the people as increasingly caught between the cogs of new machines: "for a hundred years, between 1793 and 1893, the American people had hesitated, vacillated, swayed forward and back," between industry and capitalism, "centralising, and mechanical" (269). It came down to the gold standard, the American preference for which signaled to Adams the election of "the capitalistic system with all its necessary machinery." Like with Grant's hand in scandal, the people's submission to the gold standard indicates to Adams the fall of republican ideals and the rise of instrumental politics. For "the rest was [a] question of gear; of running machinery; of economy; and involved no disputed principle." "There," Adams writes, "education in domestic politics stopped."

Adams reads these events as signs that the American is lost. And though he disavows the immigrant, Adams too felt as though this country has no room for him:

Thus, in 1892, neither Hay, King nor Adams knew whether they had attained success, or how to estimate it, or what to call it; and the American people seemed to have no clearer idea than they. Indeed the American people had no idea at all; they were wandering in a wilderness much more sandy than the Hebrews had ever trodden about Sinai; they had neither serpents nor golden calves to worship. (257)

Adams's frustration with politics in Washington and the people helps explain why in later life he increasingly turns his interest toward international relations, through travel

and the work of his colleague John Hay. The American body had opened its eyes to the globe after events like the Boxer Rebellion (332).⁹⁸ According to Adams, the American is in something of a diaspora, political machines pulling the people apart from myriad directions. Adams “watched mankind march on, like a train of packhorses on the Snake River, tumbling from one morass into another, and at short intervals, for no reason but temper, falling to butchery, like Cain” (276). Raised with an early-modern yearning for ultimate authority and spiritual conversion, Adams hopes to find his oasis in the desert, like Augustine’s garden. But whether the metaphor was the political machine or the arid wasteland, Adams can’t find unity.⁹⁹

An American Faith in Electricity

Disappointed with Washington, Adams largely abandons electoral politics, aside from his hosting politicians at home, in a building overlooking the White House. After traveling abroad at one point, Adams describes himself as “likely to be a more useful citizen without office” (253). The later chapters of the *Education* follow Adams’s ongoing attempts to find education and the ultimate authority he no longer

⁹⁸ After Hay’s success in the Boxer Rebellion, “the diplomacy of the nineteenth century, with all its painful scuffles and struggles, was forgotten, and the American blushed to be told of his submissions in the past” (*EH*, 307).

⁹⁹ Something I do not address in this chapter is Adams’s self-identification as a “conservative christian anarchist,” a complex term that is mostly idiosyncratic in its tripartite definition. Adams describes this orientation as one toward progress and power, of acceleration and displeasure with the present (*EH*, 319). We might assume that by “anarchist” Adams means the individualist anarchism of figures like contemporary Benjamin Tucker, yet Adams aligns anarchy with chaos and multiplicity. “Conservative” supports the idea that Adams longed for an earlier age of representative authority. Adams uses christian in a strangely secular way (note that he does not capitalize it). My best approximation of this moniker is that it performs Adams’s overall claim about fractured identities, each of these terms a potentially contradictory description. As Adams writes elsewhere, “the new American would need to think in contradictions” (391).

located in religion or statesmen. Whereas he'll first look to journalism and teaching, he'll settle on studies in science and history: first, through his observations on the Virgin and the dynamo, and, second, through his "dynamic theory of history," presented at the end of the autobiography. These solutions will satisfy (and educate) Adams, whereas the reader will benefit from the so-called failure of the autobiography. As Adams told Brooks in a letter while writing the *Education*, "as I understand it, the whole social, political and economical problem is the resultant of the mechanical development of power."¹⁰⁰ According to Adams, scientific discoveries will bear great consequences for modern politics.¹⁰¹

Adams takes up a career first in journalism and then in teaching at Harvard, both of which he describes as failed education. While still in England during the Civil War, Adams publishes several articles on British finance and the banks for Boston's *North American Review*, articles that eventually earn his enrollment on the journal's permanent staff (*EH*, 183). "The press was still the last resource of the educated poor who could not be artists and would not be tutors," Adams writes earlier, yet it was "an inferior pulpit; an anonymous school-master; a cheap boarding-school; but it was still

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 346.

¹⁰¹ In a letter, Adams sums up the connection between science and society: "the truth is, everything in this universe has its regular waves and tides. Electricity, sound, the wind, and I believe every part of organic nature will be brought some day within this law. But my philosophy teaches me, and I firmly believe it, that the laws which govern animated beings will be ultimately found to be at bottom the same with those which rule inanimate nature, and as I entertain a profound conviction of the littleness of our kind, and of the curious enormity of creation, I am quite ready to receive with pleasure any basis for a systematic conception of it all. Thus (to explain this rather alarming digression) as sort of experimentalist, I look for regular tides in the affairs of man, and of course, in our own affairs. In every progression, somehow or other, the nations move by the same process which has never been explained but is evident in the ocean and the air. On this theory I should expect at about this time, a turn which would carry us backward." Quoted in Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 132.

the nearest approach to a career for the literary survivor of a wrecked education” (165). His work for the press eventually lands Adams a position teaching medieval history at Harvard in 1870, after he’s promised editorship of the *Review* with the job (229). This surprises him: his career as a student at Harvard was nothing exemplary, and his knowledge of the subject was meager. But he reluctantly takes the position, which he recounts in his chapter “Failure”; looking back, his seven years teaching “seemed to him lost” (238). Adams’s embellished failures in the press and university serve to emphasize his hunt for authority, even once he has left politics in Washington.

Adams will finally find a twentieth-century education in new scientific discoveries and technologies. From an early age, Adams looks to identify himself through science. While in England during the Civil War, Adams meets “the geological champion of Darwin,” Sir Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* Adams would review for the *North American* (175).¹⁰² Lyell had popularized a concept of “Natural Uniformity,” arguing that the geological processes that created Earth still govern today (176). Adams sees in this science a flirtation with unity, “the whole motive of philosophy.” Science doesn’t simply tell Adams about the world, but about his place in its family tree. Upon learning the basics of evolution, “Adams gave up at the attempt to begin at the beginning, and tried starting at the end, – himself” (178). The “first vertebrate,” Lyell tells Adams, “was a very respectable fish,” one still sleeping “under Adams’s own favorite Abbey on Wenlock Edge.” Adams mentions the

Pteraspis frequently in the *Education*:

That here, on the Wenlock Edge of time, a young American, seeking only frivolous amusement, should find a legitimate parentage as modern as though

¹⁰² On Adams and Lyell, see *ibid.*, 165.

just caught in the Severn below, astonished him as much as though he had found Darwin himself. . . . To an American in search of a father, it mattered nothing whether the father breathed through lungs, or walked on fins, or on feet. (179)

Among its many impacts, Darwin's discoveries had disabused the modern mind's belief in God. In geology and evolution, Adams continues to look for the patriarchal lineage he'd lost with the fall of great statesmen.¹⁰³ Weber would capture this one year before Adams's death in 1917's "Science as a Vocation": "the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service."¹⁰⁴ With discoveries in the biological and physical sciences, "with God dead," John P. Diggins writes, "the problem of creating meaning fell to men and women."¹⁰⁵ Adams and Weber would likely agree that Franklin had made his meaning in the *Autobiography* or in his experiments in electricity; for Adams, modern science made grounding the self more difficult.

Though Adams (like Weber) sees the modern world as disenchanted, he seeks in science and technology not simply personal but popular re-enchantment.¹⁰⁶ The American's become obsessed, reverent toward technology and science. "The

¹⁰³ On evolution and unity, Adams writes: "Life depended on it. One had been, from the first, dragged hither and thither like a French poodle on a string, following always the strongest pull, between one form of unity or centralisation and another. The proof that one had acted wisely because of obeying the primordial habit of nature flattered one's self-esteem. Steady, uniform, unbroken evolution from lower to higher seemed easy" (*EH*, 176-77).

¹⁰⁴ Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, [1917] 1946), 139.

¹⁰⁵ Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Adams turns away from Weber's final comfort: "To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard for him. One way or another he has to bring his 'intellectual sacrifice' – that is inevitable." Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 155.

American layman had lost sight of ideals,” Adams writes, “the American priest had lost sight of faith” (258). American faith no longer looks to God but the railroad: not the leviathan of the Old Testament but the sprawling railway monopolies captured in Frank Norris’s 1901 *The Octopus*. This “one active interest” has “absorbed the energies of some sixty million people to the exclusion of every other force” (*EH*, 258). For Adams to understand how the new American will be educated, he needs to find an ultimate authority in which these energies originate. Although neither a vitalist nor pragmatist, Adams draws on science for new opportunities in the twentieth century.

In the chapter “The Virgin and the Dynamo,” Adams contrasts the authority of pre-modern, religious unity with what he sees as the new authority of the twentieth century. Like with the *Pteraspis*, education requires that Adams find a common source of energy despite scientific theories that scatter power throughout the world. During his visit to the Paris Exposition of 1900, Adams reflects on the Virgin as “the greatest force the western world ever felt,” having “drawn man’s activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done” (304). Culture and education once revolved around her: the Virgin inspired architecture, art, and science. And yet Americans have never known the Virgin: “in America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force; – at most as sentiment. No American had ever been truly afraid of either” (300-301). Adams appraises the Virgin’s power as greater than any machine, any force in America. There, “an American Virgin would never dare command” (301-302). Inspired at the Paris Exposition in 1900, Adams’s calling is “to follow the track of the energy; to find where it came from and where it went to” (305).

Adams's visit to the exposition inspired him to write an entire book on the Virgin, *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, published privately in 1904 and intended as a partner text to the *Education*.¹⁰⁷ The book explores twelfth- and thirteenth-century architecture and philosophy, sponsored by Adams's observations that "at Chartres, one sees everywhere the Virgin, and nowhere any rival authority."¹⁰⁸ *Chartres* includes some of Adams's earliest mentions of unity and multiplicity, particularly as they appear in the philosophy of Aquinas. The concepts had "broken the neck of every philosopher,"¹⁰⁹ just as Adams found himself in 1900, "his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of force totally new": the force of the dynamo (*EH*, 300). Although Adams introduces *Chartres* as an uncle's review of the period to his niece, his interest in unity there is, again, as it relates to authority and the individual: he reflects on Aquinas's question, "what made an individual?" in a world of unity and multiplicity.¹¹⁰ Adams wrote the two books as inseparable: in chapter twenty-nine of the *Education* he envisions one a study of unity, the other multiplicity (342). In letters, Adams urged readers to pair the final three chapters of each, the rest of the *Education* "prelude, background, detail or side-light."¹¹¹ If we read the two texts side-by-side,

¹⁰⁷ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 223.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Adams, "*Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*," in *Democracy, Esther, Mont Saint Michel and Chartres, The Education of Henry Adams, and Poems*, ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels (New York: Library of America, 1983), 444.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 674.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*.

¹¹¹ Henry Adams, "Adams to Mary Cadwalader Jones, 1603 H Street, 11 April 1907," in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 60. In another letter, this one to his brother Brooks, Adams wrote "I hope to finish soon my study of Multiplicity to pair with Thomas Aquinas, and I rather imagine I had better die pretty quick before it gets read. I fear it is wicked." Henry Adams, "Adams to Brooks Adams, 1603 H Street, 19 December 1906," in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 36.

Adams's pairing of Augustine on theology with Carlyle et al. on heroic authority in the beginning of *Education* becomes the segue from *Chartres*'s discussion of pre-modern concepts of authority. Adams's *Chartres* and the *Education* jointly chart a history of unity and multiplicity that ends (or begins) with autobiography.

What satisfies Adams at the Paris Exposition is his discovery of the dynamo, which he understands as the ultimate source of energies for the American faith in electricity: a unity *through* multiplicity. As on the Virgin, Adams had written briefly on the dynamo before the *Education*, in a poem discovered in a pocket on the coat in which he died.¹¹² Adams had originally included the poem in a letter to Elizabeth Cameron, written between *Chartres* and the *Education*; he titled the poem that would inspire "The Virgin and the Dynamo" aptly the "Prayer to the Virgin."¹¹³ Partway through the poem, another begins: the "Prayer to the Dynamo," which is preceded by "Our father's kingdom in the promised land! // – We seized it, and dethroned the father too. // Listen, dear lady! You shall hear the last // Of the strange prayers Humanity has wailed."¹¹⁴ There are notes here of Nietzsche's madman in the marketplace in 1882's *The Gay Science*, wailing "God is dead... And we have killed him."¹¹⁵ The poem continues:

Seize, then, the Atom! rack his joints!
Tear out of him his secret spring!
Grind him to nothing! though he points
To us, and his life-blood anoints
Me – the dead Atom-King!¹¹⁶

¹¹² See Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism*, 32.

¹¹³ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 228.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 233.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, [1882] 1974), 181.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Samuels, *Major Phase*, 234.

Before Adams wrote the *Education* to better understand American modernity and his place within it, he voiced a far more cataclysmic and violent fear of what the dynamo and atomic sciences will make men do. This poem suggests that Adams, himself an atom-king, increasingly felt challenged to find himself as his knowledge of science and technology grew ever more complex.

In the *Education*, Adams gives a reading of the dynamo that retains the prayer's suspicions yet elaborates it as a source of modern unity. Before Paris, Adams first encountered the dynamo years before at the Chicago Exposition (*EH*, 267). The dynamo accompanies other great strides in technology: the Cunard steamer entrances Adams in Chicago, and in Paris he fawns over the steam-engine (267, 298). But the dynamo is "a symbol of infinity," a machine of seemingly-endless force:

As he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, such as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within arm's-length at some vertiginous speed, and barely murmuring, – scarcely humming an audible warning to stand a hair's-breadth further for respect of power, – while it would not wake the baby lying close against its frame. Before the end, one began to pray to it. (298)

When Adams saw the dynamo in Chicago, he called it "the first expression of American thought as a unity" (268). The dynamo will replace what the American never found in the Virgin and the hope lost at the end of the nineteenth century: "he could see only an absolute *fiat* in electricity as in faith" (298). The new American will be "the child of steam and the brother of the dynamo." Adams describes the dynamo in spiritual terms so as to match it with the Virgin: to articulate its authority as not simply its generating electricity but its moving men such as God and great heroes had.

The passage parallels what Augustine's *Confessions* captured in "The Garden," trading Adams's conversion at the exposition for Augustine's under the fig tree.¹¹⁷

This scene clarifies Adams's use of unity and multiplicity, for the dynamo is not one or the other, but unity *through* multiplicity. This is what God and great men had been. But with the increasing multiplicity of modernity, Americans need a new faith: a new ultimate authority under which power can be understood. The dynamo educates Adams because it brings together all the complexities aforementioned in his critique of democracy and modernity. Converted by the dynamo, he writes:

All one's life, one had struggled for unity, and unity had always won. The national government and the national unity had overcome every resistance, and the Darwinian evolutionists were triumphant over all the curates; yet the greater the unity and the momentum, the worse became the complexity and the friction. One had in vain bowed one's neck to railways, banks, corporations, trusts, and even to the popular will as far as one could understand it, – or even further; – the multiplicity of unity had steadily increased, was increasing, and threatened to increase beyond reason. (*EH*, 311)

Thus the dynamo accompanies and helps explain other multiplicities wrought by science: the railroad, the automobile, and the atom (299). The dynamo offers Adams a way of finding himself. Considering the transition from Virgin to dynamo, he writes that "if he was bound to reduce all these forces to a common value, this common value could have no measure but that of their attraction to his own mind" (300). This attraction, the common value between the Virgin and the dynamo, is force (304).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 181.

¹¹⁸ There are other reasons to note consistency between Adams's reading of the Virgin and the dynamo: as a student of Louis Agassiz at Harvard, Adams had adopted his metaphysical, "anti-rationalist" approach toward science, leaning away from experiments and toward philosophy. This might help to explain his spiritual approach to the dynamo. See Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 17.

“The Virgin and the Dynamo” signals a point in the *Education* where the narrated Adams becomes aware of his need to self-examine through autobiography.¹¹⁹ Like Augustine’s conversion to Catholicism in the garden, this is the moment when Adams first begins to reckon modernity through self-reflection. By figuring out where he fits in all of this, he hopes to synthesize the complexities of democracy, science and religion. After the exposition, Adams scatters magnets over his desk at home, staggered at the intricate convergence of forces: “he could not escape it; politics or science, the lesson was the same” (*EH*, 311). Adams’s visit to Paris in 1900 converts his gaze to “lines of force all about him”: “where he had always seen lines of will” (336). At the beginning of the book, education was simply the absorption of force through a central authority: even if the authority were God or a few statesmen, they all represent a teleological march of history and progress. Like Augustine’s final three chapters in the *Confessions*, Adams concludes the *Education* with a series of philosophical treatises that result from these reflections. In letters to Henry Lee

¹¹⁹ It bears mention that the figures of the Virgin and the dynamo reveal a subtle, gendered distinction between *Chartres* and the *Education*. Whereas Adams addresses schoolboys in the preface to the *Education*, in *Chartres* he invites nieces as readers, beginning “the uncle talks:--” In the first publication of the “Prayer to the Virgin,” a preface by Mabel La Farge (a so-called “niece” of Adams’s) wrote “to them all [Adams] was the *generic Uncle*, the best friend.” Adams had an antiquated but proto-feminist view of women, having argued in an early essay for the “Primitive Rights of Women”: that women had an innate freedom based in reproduction and oppressed by modernity. In the *Education*, Adams describes the Virgin too as a fecund power. Something I do not address in this chapter – Adams’s reasons for the twenty-year gap in the book – can be partially explained by this odd gender distinction. Though many readers point out that the gap primarily obscures Adams’s wife and her suicide, it also leaves out his infatuation with and rejection by Elizabeth Cameron, as evidenced in the prayer he wrote her. This is contrasted with the acute focus of the *Education* on Adams’s friendship with Clarence King and John Hay. Though Adams speaks highly of women in the *Education*, there is almost no mention of any female character throughout. Though irrelevant to my present argument, it is significant that Adams’s attitudes to gender are apparent in the form and content of the *Education*. Adams, “*Mont Saint Michel*,” 342; Mabel La Farge, “Henry Adams: A Niece’s Memories,” in *Letters to a Niece and Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres*, by Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 4. On Adams’s writings on women, see Young, *Henry Adams*, 128. On Adams’s relationship with Cameron, see Samuels, *Major Phase*, 74.

Higginson and Barrett Wendell, Adams complained of his inability to integrate into his narrative these theories, which take up the final seven chapters of the *Education*.¹²⁰ Adams developed these theories further in his last publications: his 1894 presidential address to the American Historical Association, “The Tendency of History,” 1909’s “The Rule of Phase Applied to History,” and 1910’s *A Letter to American Teachers of History*.¹²¹ Like many thinkers of his time (such William James, Henri Bergson, and the social Darwinists), Adams saw world-historic implications in discoveries like that of the atom or of the second law of thermodynamics.¹²² In the *Education* we find Adams’s first attempt at a theory of modernity articulated in scientific terms.

What’s most significant about these theories (and what justifies my explicating them below) is that they essentially argue for a first-person, autobiographical perspective as required for wrestling with modern politics and science. This requirement, as Adams wrote in the “Author’s Preface,” represents the “tools” that the student should take from the master, the same Adams uses for his own self-examination throughout the *Education* (xiv). As I’ll explain in the final section, Adams is suggesting that his own character, individuality, subjectivity and citizenship

¹²⁰ Henry Adams, “Adams to Henry Lee Higginson, 1603 H Street, 1 April 1907,” in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 58; Adams, “Adams to Barrett Wendell, 1603 H Street, 12 March 1909,” 238.

¹²¹ On these later texts, see Samuels, *Major Phase*, 593.

¹²² The last work, *A Letter to American Teachers*, argues for historians to model theories after the second law of thermodynamics, and contains critiques of similar efforts by Darwinists and vitalists. Though this impression of the second law was later debunked, many like Adams saw entropy as heralding the gradual degradation of civilization, with varying degrees of debate as to how man, as a vital force, could resist. Henry Adams, *A Letter to American Teachers of History* (Baltimore: Press of J.H. Furst Co., 1910), 32, 79. On the impact of science on vitalism, see Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 51.

are antiquated and must move aside for the new man of modernity. But what survives this martyrdom is the form of *Education*: a hunt for unity through multiplicity.

Adams's first attempt at a theory of history models it after the entropy of gases. In a chapter originally titled "The Abyss of Ignorance" and later corrected as "A Kinetic Theory of History," Adams attributes the theory to Blaise Pascal and Auguste Comte: it conceives man as an innate, restless force guided by God (*EH*, 336).¹²³ Adams's use of "kinetic" refers to the kinetic theory of gases, which "asserted that any portion of space is occupied by molecules of gas, flying in right lines at velocities varying up to a mile in a second" (339). Applied to history, kinetic theory maps the world as an "ocean of colliding atoms," "without clue to unity or direction." The political consequence of such a theory is "ultimate chaos," Adams writes: "Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man" (355). Adams turns to psychology and is frustrated at its obfuscation of the individual in personalities and chemicals (340). The problem with a kinetic theory of history, like machine politics, is that it affords no sense of self. The mind becomes "a bicycle-rider, mechanically balancing himself by inhibiting all his inferior personalities" (341). Stripped of metaphysics, the body fragments to atomic processes or mechanical-biological interactions, above which Adams is "an acrobat, with a dwarf on his back, crossing a chasm on a slack-rope." Through scientific and historiographic theory, Adams is describing the very fragmentation of the individual that makes it so difficult for him to write an autobiography. If the state is but a collection of clashing economic interests, and the

¹²³ See Chalfant and Wright, "Postscript," 415.

citizen but a multiplicity of backgrounds, bodies, limbs and atoms, through what form of writing can any individual assert authority over his experience?

This difficulty is what motivates the experimental *Education*. This is the chapter that ends with Adams's plan for self-examination: from *Chartres* he will "fix a position for himself" in the second text, by which he "hoped to project his lines forward and backward indefinitely" (*EH*, 342). Like his turn to Augustine and Rousseau, Adams seeks an *Education* that may result in a unified self. Prior to elaborating his "dynamic theory of history," he writes that

One sought no absolute truth. One sought only a spool on which to wind the thread of history without breaking it. Among indefinite possible orbits, one sought the orbit which would best satisfy the observed movement of the runaway star Groombridge, 1838, commonly called Henry Adams. As [a] term of a nineteenth-century education, one sought a common factor for certain definite historical fractions. Any school-boy could work out the problem if he were given the right to state it in his own terms. (371)

This is an important moment in Adams's understanding of authority. Unlike Augustine or the Adams family before him, Adams no longer seeks any "absolute truth," but just enough of a perspective from which he can understand the chaos around him. According to a book on astronomy published in 1894, "Groombridge, 1838" is a sequence of stars.¹²⁴ No longer setting out to be George Washington, the pole star, Adams now settles for a constellation: some sense of unification despite its multiplicitous composition. Toward the end of the book, Adams will describe new attempts to find himself in multiplicity: "every man with self-respect enough to become effective, if only as a machine, has had to account for himself somehow, and

¹²⁴ Adams likely chose this sequence for its use of 1838, the year he was born. See The Royal Observatory, Greenwich, *Astronomical and Magnetical and Meteorological Observations* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1894), 18.

to invent a formula of his own for his universe” (*EH*, 377). With God and J.Q. Adams dead, Adams’s confession can’t address either: so he writes to himself.

In Adams’s dynamic theory of history, he defines progress as “the development and economy of Forces,” force causing physical “work” (372).¹²⁵ The theory emphasizes the individual: man is himself a force, and he improves through accommodating various other forces. Conditions of modernity (the machine, the city, the train, the dynamo) act as forces to which the individual must respond in order to progress. The point of contact is sensory; the sum of these sensory perceptions “make education.” For the longest time, man evaluated this force as God: a symbol of unity (373). In other words, forces of the world diverged *from* God and converged *in* the individual. The individual’s hunger for these forces is due to “the love of power,” mechanical power understood as a product of forces upon an object and its velocity.

Adams further develops his theory to explain technological change. After moving through a short history of Christianity, Adams points to the compass and gunpowder as two innovations that “dragged and drove Europe at will through frightful bogs of learning” (379). Society accelerates to a point at which man or God are no longer in control: “suddenly society felt itself dragged into situations altogether new and anarchic, – situations which it could not affect, but which painfully affected it” (380). In modernity, force becomes super- or sub-sensual, like magnetism or the private machinations of political machines. Instruments like the compass had once merely augmented the senses, but after scientific innovation the individual can only

¹²⁵ Adams borrows heavily from Newton’s laws of motions in providing a vocabulary for understanding the world, though his implementation is somewhat incoherent. These terms are more important to connect Adam’s scientific worldview to the one literarily composed through the *Education*.

understand the world by “forces other than his own, and on instruments which superseded his senses” (381). Benjamin Franklin was a literal conductor of these “new forces from nature to man,” his encounter with electricity from kite to key. Who had once been an American symbol of independence and virtue, a model for modern citizenship, is now but another conduit for science and electricity.

In the following and final chapters, Adams complicates this theory by expanding his discussion to acceleration and inertia.¹²⁶ Unity, according to Adams, is a way of seeing. He ends the *Education* with an abstract theory that, while convolutedly wrapped in *fin-de-siècle* pseudoscience, boils down to the need for a first-person reckoning with modernity. Adams, as he states elsewhere, didn’t think he had perfected this theory in the *Education* (and he’d continue to write on it afterward). Adams ends these chapters on a note of what might lie beyond the shortcomings of his life and writings. As I’ll explore in the final section of the chapter, here Adams both

¹²⁶ This abstract theory is made somewhat more concrete in the following chapter, “A Law of Acceleration,” in which Adams suggests we measure this dynamic progress by coal-power (*EH*, 385). He enumerates the proliferation of inventions in the nineteenth century: the ocean-steamer, the railway, the electric telegraph, the Daguerreotype, etc. (388). The rate of yield from coal had increased exponentially in Adams’s lifetime (385). Several chapters before, Adams describes the inverse of acceleration: *vis inertiae*, “inertial force.” In the chapter by that name he goes on at length describing China and Russia as two such forces (346). An inert force may not be accelerating, but it is moving all the same; for Adams this unchanging velocity spells trouble for how an accelerating America will respond. In the same chapter he refers to “sex-inertia” as the similarly-perpetual motions of maternity and reproduction, “uniting history in its only unbroken and unbreakable sequence” (347). Inertia is on the side of unity: the Virgin too was reproduction: “the greatest and most mysterious of all energies” (301). Adams suggests that he’s also an inertial force, struggling to keep up with innovation (on several occasions Adams describes his frustration at learning new modes of transportation: “at past fifty, Adams solemnly and painfully learned the ride the bicycle,” and he reluctantly buys an automobile to cover France more efficiently while researching *Chartres*, describing it as the form of force “he most abominated” (258, 368)). In an inertial frame of reference (a body of consistent velocity), the laws of physics appear constant. Though the world spins on its axis, its inertia allows one on its surface to study physics by a consistent set of laws. But if that body were to accelerate, suddenly an entire array of fictitious forces would converge on its passengers – like sliding back on the seat of an accelerating train. What Adams is attempting to find, in the *Education* and in his theory, is a way to hold on.

laments his passing and that of those like him, and yet leaves the door open for what new individual might find education among the multiplicities of modernity.

Autobiography and Failure

Adams's brush with the dynamo and his dynamic theory of history had educated him through writing the *Education*. Each gave him a sense of where he stood in relation to the new unities of the twentieth century. But where he stood, among others, was in a position of increasing obsolescence: "an average mind had succumbed already in 1850; it could no longer understand the problem in 1900" (*EH*, 390). The century would need a new kind of citizen:

The movement from unity into multiplicity, between 1200 and 1900, was unbroken in sequence, and rapid in acceleration. Prolonged one generation longer, it would require a new social mind. As though thought were common salt in indefinite solution, it must enter a new phase subject to new laws. Thus far, since five or ten thousand years, the mind had successfully reacted, and nothing yet proved that it would fail to react – but it would need to jump. (391)

Adams ends the penultimate chapter of the *Education* with this quote, and titles its final chapter "Nunc Age": Latin for "now go!" or "now act!" A chasm lay before the younger Adams, into which J.Q. Adams and others had fallen.¹²⁷ Whoever surpassed Henry had to leap. "Nunc Age" begins with an image of New York in an industrial age, "demanding new men": "a man with ten times the endurance, energy, will and mind of the old type" (392). Adams did not see himself as that new man. As his final paragraph concluded, for him, Clarence King and John Hay, "it was time to go" (396).

¹²⁷ Early in the book, Adams describes the challenge of modernity and his difficulty: "To outsiders, immigrants, adventurers, it was easy, but the old puritan nature rebelled against change" (*EH*, 20).

The dynamo and his dynamic theory of history had given him a sense of unity with the turning tide of modernity. The *Education* provided a point of self-examination through which he could find this unity. But for readers, it was an indication that Adams (and those like him) would have to step aside for the new American to come. Adams would accomplish this, finally, through an autobiography that cast his education as a failure and its author as a modern martyr. To grasp this point requires a detour.

Before *The Education of Henry Adams*, the younger historian wrote several biographies, most of them focused on statesmen.¹²⁸ In 1879, Adams composed a biography on Albert Gallatin, and he also wrote on John Randolph for Houghton Mifflin's "American Statesmen" series in 1882.¹²⁹ At the time, the genre of biography was transitioning from the republican deification of great heroes and Samuel Johnson's argument for revealing the "domestic privacies" of subjects, to romantic appeals to the "inner man," exemplified by Emerson.¹³⁰ According to Scott Casper, the new paradigm emphasized instructing readers not through imitation but inspiration.¹³¹ Houghton Mifflin's series, in particular, looked to recover a unified vision of America's past during the regenerative period following the war.¹³² In his theory of

¹²⁸ For a survey of Adams's literary oeuvre, see William Merrill Decker, *The Literary Vocation of Henry Adams* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

¹²⁹ It's fitting that Adams's *Education* was finally found and published by a representative of Houghton Mifflin. In the late nineteenth century, the company sponsored two series of biographies to canonize American literary and political culture, particularly that of the northeast. See Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 271.

¹³⁰ See *ibid.*, 4–5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³² Casper writes: "Overwhelmingly populated by northeastern subjects and biographers, these series represented their New England publisher's, editors', and authors' conception of the reconstructed United States and its great men less than a generation after the Civil War. Their American past also offered cautionary lessons for the present: ambivalence about literary realism, outright horror at excessive democracy." *Ibid.*, 272.

education, Rousseau had also advocated that Emile engage with great men through biography. Through history, Rousseau writes, Emile can “read the hearts of men.”¹³³ What Rousseau wants for Emile, though, is not the hero worship of Carlyle: biographies must be raw fact, revealing their subjects like Rousseau had in his *Confessions*.¹³⁴ One must study men in all their details “intimate and low.” For this, Rousseau champions Plutarch’s “depicting great men in small things,” the careful details that “characterize his hero.” Recall that in Benjamin Vaughan’s letter to Franklin, he too had likened Franklin’s story to Plutarch’s *Lives*.¹³⁵ Like Rousseau in his *Confessions*, Adams writes the *Education* in an intimate and low mode. But before that, he waxed anxiously on what the genre might do to great men.

In letters, Adams described biography as the assassination of great men, writing that biographers “destroy their heroes”: that never was there “a mere biography that did not hurt its subject.”¹³⁶ Though Adams continued to publish biographies at the behest of colleagues throughout his life (his last of George Cabot Lodge in 1911), he remained suspicious of the genre.¹³⁷ When Hay died in 1905, Adams only reluctantly helped his widow publish a biographical collection of letters; when she censored many of the letters, Adams grew ashamed of his efforts.¹³⁸ Adams particularly recoiled at the idea of biographizing the man who had been so influential

¹³³ Rousseau, *Emile*, 237.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹³⁵ Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 138–139.

¹³⁶ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 313.

¹³⁷ See *ibid.*, 502.

¹³⁸ See *ibid.*, 404.

in his early life. In response to his brother's request for help with their father's biography, he again invoked the language of assassination:

Now I understand why I refused so obstinately to do it myself. These biographies are murder, and in this case, to me, would be both patricide and suicide. They belittle the victim and the assassin equally... I have sinned myself and deeply, and am no more worthy to be called anything, but, thank my diseased and dyspeptic nervous wreck, I did not assassinate my father.¹³⁹

These anxieties for great men infected Adams's writings on history as well.¹⁴⁰ On Jefferson and Madison in his massive *History of the United States*, six volumes of which were published from the mid-1880s onward, Adams wrote that

in a democratic ocean science could see something ultimate. Man could go no further. The atom might move, but the general equilibrium could not change... American types were especially worth study if they were to represent the greatest democratic evolution the world could know. Readers might judge for themselves what share the individual possessed in creating or shaping the nation, but whether it was small or great, the nation could be understood only by studying the individual. For that reason, in the story of Jefferson and Madison individuals retained their old interest as types of character, if not as sources of power.¹⁴¹

Great statesmen had become but atoms in a sea of energies. Modernity threatened not only the extinction of future representatives, but how we represented those past in

¹³⁹ Quoted in Shklar, "*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams," 155. Along with his work on Hay's biography, these remarks help explain another letter in which he explained of the *Education* to Mary Cadwalader Jones, that "the motive of the first part is to acquit my conscience about my father. That of the second part is to acquit my conscience about Hay. *Ego* exists only for the last three chapters." Adams, "Adams to Mary Cadwalader Jones, 1603 H Street, 11 April 1907," 60.

¹⁴⁰ J.C. Levenson describes this as the difficulty of historicizing individual agency when democracy aims to disseminate it among the people. J.C. Levenson, *The Mind and Art of Henry Adams* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1957), 126.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Young, *Henry Adams*, 72. According to Samuels, Adams's histories revealed "the unimportance of the hero in history, the mechanical determinism which governs the interplay of social forces, the absence of freedom of the will in the historic process... history was a vast irony, a web of paradoxes in which man was enmeshed. Habitually unable to foresee the necessity of circumstances man became the victim of them." Samuels, *Middle Years*, 349–350. Garry Wills argues, however, that the *History* is a text overall far more optimistic than the *Education*'s pessimism. Wills, *Henry Adams*, 392.

biography and historical scholarship, as our increasingly complex and structural worldview dissolved what illusions had made power gentle, and obedience liberal.

Autobiography, then, was both an attempt for Adams to turn self-examination upon himself (as Augustine and Rousseau had) and was furthermore the final genre in a long academic history of attempting to represent modernity. From *Democracy* to the *Education*, Adams had written articles, biographies, novels, short treatises, poetry, and multivolume histories. The *Education* could be Adams's signing off as he left the reader to his own self-examination. Reading an autobiography around the time he was drafting *Randolph*, Adams wrote that "after seeing how neatly [the autobiographer] can destroy the last vestige of heroism in his own life, I object to allowing mine to be murdered by any one except myself."¹⁴² He depicted his own self-writing the same, describing the *Education* to Henry James as not only taking his own life but as a "shield of protection in the grave," and he urged James find the same.¹⁴³

Adams's literary benefactors had all exalted and mourned the passing of great men. But only one, Emerson, had suggested that in democratic times great men would appear but must step down once the people stepped up. Emerson wrote his 1850 *Representative Men* as an attempt to recover democratic heroes from Carlyle's elegiac *Heroes*.¹⁴⁴ Although Emerson's book walks similarly through great historical figures such as Plato and Montaigne (also writing on Shakespeare and Napoleon, like

¹⁴² Quoted in Samuels, *Middle Years*, 192.

¹⁴³ Henry Adams, "Adams to Henry James, 23 Avenue Du Bois de Boulogne, 6 May 1908," in *The Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson and Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. 6 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 136.

¹⁴⁴ See Frank, "Standing for Others," 394.

Carlyle), he emphasizes in his introduction a more democratic appearance of great men, noting that “it is hard for departed men to touch the quick like our own companions.”¹⁴⁵ There he wrote (as Adams would confirm in the *Education*) that “the search after the great is the dream of youth, and the most serious occupation of manhood.”¹⁴⁶ Emerson described the individual like Adams portrayed himself, as a multiplicity seeking unity, “a centre for nature, running out threads of relation through every thing, fluid and solid, material and elemental.”¹⁴⁷ Great men would educate, like Carlyle, Tocqueville, Mill, and even Rousseau had thought. But for Emerson, the content of this education would yield, in time, to its form. Great men, like the lawgiver or foreign founder, would educate and then step aside:

True genius seeks to defend us from itself. True genius will not impoverish, but will liberate, and add new senses. If a wise man should appear in our village, he would create, in those who conversed with him, a new consciousness of wealth, by opening their eyes to unobserved advantages; he would establish a sense of immovable equality, calm us with assurances that we could not be cheated; as every one would discern the checks and guarantees of condition. The rich would see their mistakes and poverty, the poor their escapes and their resources.¹⁴⁸

As genius educates, it dissolves into the unity that it seeks to generate. As great men find unity and bring others to it, they cease to be great:

This is the key to the power of the greatest men, – their spirit diffuses itself. A new quality of mind travels by night and by day, in concentric circles from its origin, and publishes itself by unknown methods: the union of all minds appears intimate: what gets admission to one, cannot be kept out of any other:

¹⁴⁵ Emerson, “*Representative Men*,” 621. For more on Emerson’s theory of representative men, see Frank, “Standing for Others”; Judith N. Shklar, “Emerson and the Inhibitions of Democracy,” in *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alan Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 53–68.

¹⁴⁶ Emerson, “*Representative Men*,” 615.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 618.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 623.

the smallest acquisition of truth or of energy, in any quarter, is so much good to the commonwealth of souls.¹⁴⁹

Emerson's solution to great men's scarcity in democratic times is to insist on their relevance by theorizing their irrelevance. According to other thinkers, their disappearance led to mediocrity. For Emerson, "great men exist that there may be greater men."¹⁵⁰ A famous man is an "exhibition... of new possibilities."¹⁵¹

This is how Adams articulates the speech act of his *Education*. He does not present himself as a great statesman nor teacher in the *Education*, because he too (and the Adamses before him) must step aside for some new man. He instead emphasizes failure. His attempts to understand the conflict that leads to the treason of the Civil War "disastrously failed" (*EH*, 85). During the war, working as an assistant to his diplomat father, Adams vows never to attempt "to be useful again," the *Trent* affair having "dwarfed individual effort" (94). He describes his position as "irregular," that he was more assistant son than secretary (113). He titles the chapter covering his time teaching at Harvard "Failure." But Adams embellishes many of these accounts, including his depiction of Charles Sumner, his performance at Harvard, his Civil War diplomacy, and his teaching career.¹⁵² After the *Education*'s publication in 1918,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 631. Also on stepping aside: "I like a master standing firm on legs of iron, well-born, rich, handsome, eloquent, loaded with advantages, drawing all men by fascination into tributaries and supporters of his power... But I find him greater, when he can abolish himself, and all heroes, by letting in this element of reason, irrespective of persons; this subtiliser, and irresistible upward force, into our thought, destroying individualism; the power so great, that the potentate is nothing" (625).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 632.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 630.

¹⁵² See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 54, 70, 89. On Adams as a student at Harvard, see Samuels, *Young Henry Adams*, 9. As Samuels points out, Adams had actually contributed an autobiographical sketch to the "Life-Book" of the class of 1858 at Harvard, which depicted his time at Harvard as pleasant (51). Compare this to Adams's depiction of Harvard in the *Education*: "four years of Harvard College, if successful, resulted in an autobiographical blank, a mind on which only a water-mark had been stamped" (44).

many of Adams's former students stepped forward to correct his self-portrayal as a failed educator.¹⁵³ Though he criticized his place in the academy, Adams passionately advocated university reform later in life.¹⁵⁴

Adams's *Education*, with all of the flair expected of an author who described autobiography as suicide, reveals itself in the end to be an oddly democratic speech act. For it pronounces the type of great men expiring in the age of democracy and its unsavory consequences, yet insists to the reader of his own antiquity along with these views of what and who may come. Like Ahab sinking with the *Pequod*, Adams's pursuit of education succeeds even as he fails.¹⁵⁵ In the earlier pages of the *Education*, a younger Adams seemed sure he might join the twentieth century.¹⁵⁶ But toward the end, he is increasingly confident that he cannot be that new citizen. America would need what Adams could not be: a "new American" (*EH*, 390).

Conclusion: The Tailor's Tools

The *Education* is an example of what Natalie Taylor Fuehrer calls Adams's "literary statesmanship," his attempt to replace fallen great men with a new kind of literary citizenship.¹⁵⁷ While in content it mourns the passing of an American

¹⁵³ See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ See Samuels, *Major Phase*, 375.

¹⁵⁵ On suicide, boats, and the passing of great men, note that Adams in fact had an uncle, George Washington Adams, who committed suicide by throwing himself off of a boat after suffering debt and the threat of blackmail. See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Adams writes that "the new Americans, of whom he was to be one, must, whether they were fit or unfit, create a world of their own, a science, a society, a philosophy, a universe, where they had not yet created a road or even learned to dig their own iron... They knew enough to know that their world was one of energies quite new" (*EH*, 187).

¹⁵⁷ Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, "Introduction: The Literary Statesmanship of Henry Adams," in *A Political Companion to Henry Adams*, ed. Natalie Fuehrer Taylor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 13–14.

aristocracy and the complications of nineteenth-century democracy, its owning and rejection of modernism paves the way for the twentieth-century uptake of autobiography and the multiplicity of citizenships that may better respond to its new conditions. By aligning himself with a dying breed, Adams's pessimism makes way for optimism in the reader's ability to take up Adams's abdicated authority.

Before Rousseau instructed Emile through biography, he gave him *Robinson Crusoe*, an isolated man whose errors taught as well as his triumphs: Emile is "to note Robinson's failures attentively."¹⁵⁸ Adams called himself a "literary survivor of a wrecked education" (*EH*, 165). The reader must learn from Adams's failures. In the "Author's Preface," he symbolized education in two figures: a tailor, and

a manikin on which the toilet of education is to be draped in order to show the fit or misfit of the clothes. The object of study is the garment, not the figure. The tailor adapts the manikin as well as the clothes to his patron's wants. The tailor's object, in this volume, is to fit young men, in Universities or elsewhere, to be men of the world, equipped for any emergency; and the garment offered to them is meant to show the faults of the patchwork fitted on their fathers. (xiv)¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Emile*, 185.

¹⁵⁹ Adams's use of the clothing metaphor suggests further connections between the *Education* and other work: for example, Edmund Burke's articulation of tradition and history as "decent drapery of life" to cover the defects of our "naked, shivering nature." The best example of this rhetoric in the nineteenth century, and where Adams without doubt took inspiration, is Carlyle's 1836 *Sartor Resartus*, a fictional book review of a fictional philosopher. Carlyle's protagonist constructs a clothes-philosophy that lends purpose to the garment and its tailor:

The Tailor is not only a Man, but something of a Creator or Divinity. Of Franklin it was said, that "he snatched the Thunder from Heaven and the Sceptre from Kings:" but which is greater, I would ask, he that lends, or he that snatches? For, looking away from individual cases, and how a Man is by the Tailor new-created into a Nobleman, and clothed not only with Wool but with Dignity and a Mystic Dominion, – is not the fair fabric of Society itself, with all its royal mantles and pontifical stoles, whereby, from nakedness and dismemberment, we are organised into Politics, into Nations, and a whole co-operating Mankind, the creation, as has here been often irrefragably evinced, of the Tailor alone? – What too are all Poets, and moral Teachers, but a species of Metaphorical Tailors?

That Adams read and was inspired by *Sartor Resartus* is supported by Carlyle's mention in the *Education* as well as the title of its twenty-seventh chapter, "Teufelsdröckh," taken from the subtitle of *Sartor Resartus*: "The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in Three Books." See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. John Greville Agard Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 67; Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr*

The content of *Education*, like the clothing draped upon the manikin, must show its reader the fault of his ancestors. What the student gets from *Education* is its method: “at the utmost, the active-minded young man should ask of his teacher only mastery of his tools.” The student is “a certain form of energy; the object to be gained is economy of his force.” The reader’s investment is not the vestment of education but its tailoring. “Once acquired,” Adams writes, “the tools and models may be thrown away.”

The Education of Henry Adams, like Franklin’s and Douglass’s autobiographies before it, is a reflection on authority through the mode of personal narrative. But whereas Franklin and Douglass had asserted their authority through the genre of autobiography, Adams adopts the genre to diminish his. Some hundred years before Adams, Franklin had inserted into his *Autobiography* the “art of virtue,” a table of principles picked from religious and secular sources designed to bring men to moral perfection. This included Franklin’s own account of his engineering and essaying moral education. But Franklin had already intended to publish his art of virtue before the *Autobiography*, and he introduced the latter stating that his narrative was “fit to be imitated.”¹⁶⁰ So whereas Franklin had written his *Autobiography* to reiterate the practice by which he had found his sense of self, it was published such that others may find such education useful. Writing after Franklin, Douglass had taken up autobiography to insist not simply on his own authority, but to demonstrate how an oppressive authority before his had prevented his and others’ self-expression.

Teufelsdröckh in Three Books, ed. Rodger L. Tarr and Mark Engel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 212.

¹⁶⁰ Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 43.

Henry Adams was a long way from Franklin or his great-grandfather John Adams. His biographies drew on an inherited historical mode associated with Franklin's autobiography: a puritan tradition of self-writing that emphasized the public qualities of private experience and the historical contingency of providence.¹⁶¹ Adams's contemporary Weber would identify Franklin and his secular economic ethics as the archetypal, early-modern man.¹⁶² But by Adams's time the conditions that had supported Franklin's character would be largely gone: whereas Franklin made his name by running his own press, Adams haggled with publishers, dreamed of piracy, and fought off men like Ferris Greenslet. Franklin was born with nothing, and did everything; Adams was born with everything, and, according to him, did nothing.

It is perhaps in light of these changes that Adams never signed *The Education of Henry Adams* as an autobiography. Though its author was hardly the average American in 1900, his book represents what had changed historically and conceptually in democratic politics, genres of self-writing, and the American sense of self. Adams saw the changes of his day as barriers before him, and he could not teach because "he sought education; he did not sell it" (*EH*, 229).

By diminishing his authority in the *Education*, Adams hoped that readers would take up his form of self-examination, inspired as it was by Augustine and Rousseau, to discern a mode of education for the twentieth century. In doing so, the

¹⁶¹ See Wills, *Henry Adams*, 48.

¹⁶² Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*.

reader might find in *Education* an optimism set aside from the grim failures filling its pages.¹⁶³ At the close of the “Author’s Preface,” Adams concluded that

the manikin, therefore, has the same value as any other geometrical figure of three or more dimensions, which is used for the study of relation. For that purpose it cannot be spared; it is the only measure of motion, of proportion, of human condition; it must have the air of reality; must be taken for real; must be treated as though it had life; – Who knows? Possibly it had! (xiv)

Although the age was disenchanted, education left simply to fit young schoolboys for politics and the economy, there might still be some magic in autobiography, after all.

¹⁶³ Shklar writes of the *Education* that “unlike [Adams], however, we can see that his *Education* was not a failure, that his confession redeemed his life, and that, in spite of his irony, he has taught his readers much.” Shklar, “*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams,” 90.

Chapter IV
Attentat and Autobiography:
 Social Consciousness through
 Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*

I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story?
 I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead,
 for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell.
 Physical continuity with my earlier self is not disadvantage.
 I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading.
 I can analyze my subject, I can reveal everything; for *she*, and not *I*, is my real heroine.
 My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began.

- Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*¹

Suppose truth is a woman – what then?
 - Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*²

Two approaches to radical action surround the Emma Goldman of her 1931 autobiography, *Living My Life*. Before her in the nineteenth century, the first of these approaches looked to the impersonal force of violence. Sergey Nechayev's 1869 *Revolutionary Catechism* endorsed revolutionary action that replaces the individual actor with an objective cause: he writes that "the revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution."³ The young Alexander Berkman recounted a similar focus during his attempted assassination of the strikebreaker Henry Clay Frick in 1892: "The feeling is quite impersonal, strange as it may seem. My own individuality

¹ Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Penguin Books, [1912] 1997), 1.

² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1.

³ Sergey Nechayev, *The Revolutionary Catechism* (The Anarchist Library, [1869] 2009), 1, http://files.uniteddiversity.com/More_Books_and_Reports/The_Anarchist_Library/Sergey_Nechayev_The_Revolutionary_Catechism_a4.pdf.

is entirely in the background; aye, I am not conscious of any personality in matters pertaining to the Cause. I am simply a revolutionist, a terrorist by conviction, an instrument for furthering the cause of humanity.”⁴ William McKinley’s assassin, Leon Czolgosz, also acted on this sentiment. Radicals first knew him as “Nieman,” a name with etymological roots in the German for “new man” and a play on “niemand”: “no man.”⁵ His final words confessed no regret for his crime: “I killed the President because he was an enemy of the good people.”⁶ A man with no accomplices or past, just a cause, the state helped his quest for anonymity: officials electrocuted Czolgosz, dissolved his body in acid, and buried his emptying casket in an unmarked grave. Goldman had involved herself with both doomed men, helping Berkman’s attack and defending Czolgosz in the press. Some decades later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty would critique this radical approach for abdicating the individual, that “one does not become a revolutionary through science but out of indignation.”⁷ That in violence “the consciousness of self and the other which had animated the enterprise at the start had become entangled in the web of mediations separating existing humanity from its future fulfillment.” Through disavowing the personal, Merleau-Ponty wrote, violence dissolved the human bonds that inspired revolution at first. Any worldview that survived would forget the doomed men and women who made it.

⁴ Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, 13.

⁵ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, [1931] 1970), 290. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (*LM*, 1:#).

⁶ “Assassin Czolgosz Is Executed at Auburn; He Declared That He Felt No Regret for His Crime. Autopsy Disclosed No. Mental Abnormalities -- Body Buried in Acid in the Prison Cemetery.” October 30, 1901, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40613F63F5B11738DDDA90B94D8415B818CF1D3>.

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 11.

In the mid-twentieth century, a second approach to action greeted the 1970 paperback reissue of Goldman's autobiography: the consciousness-raising of second-wave feminism. With roots in Marxism and the suffrage movement, this tradition did not transcend the personal but lifted it up. Susan Brownmiller's 1999 memoir recalls Anne Forer's coming up with the term:

In the Old Left, they used to say that the workers don't know they're oppressed, so we have to raise their consciousness. One night at a meeting I said, "Would everybody please give me an example from their own life on how they experienced oppression as a woman? I need to hear it to raise my own consciousness."⁸

The 1969 "Redstockings Manifesto" called consciousness-raising "the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives."⁹ The personal isn't private, but politics itself: action doesn't require objective distance but subjective accounts of oppression. After *Living My Life* was reissued in 1970, it became one of the many texts assigned in the first courses in women's history. Important figures who helped start the nation's first women's studies programs, including Kathryn Kish Sklar, Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, and Nancy Hoffman, would all later recall assigning Goldman in their early courses.¹⁰ Though these Old and New Left approaches bore different practices for emancipation, Emma Goldman's autobiography is crucial in understanding the transition from one to the next.

⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dell Publishing, 2000), 21.

⁹ Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi, eds., "Redstockings Manifesto," in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 1353.

¹⁰ I discuss these early courses at greater length in the conclusion. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Women's Studies Moment: 1972," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe (New York: Feminist Press, 2000), 130–41; Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, "Modern Woman Not Lost," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe (New York: Feminist Press, 2000), 229–42; Nancy Hoffman, "Teaching Across the Borders of Race and Class," in *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from Thirty Founding Mothers*, ed. Florence Howe (New York: Feminist Press, 2000), 16–28.

During her life, Goldman fashioned a radical politics in the fusion of anarchism and feminism. Born in Lithuania in 1869, Goldman emigrated from St. Petersburg in 1885 first to Rochester and then New York, one of two million Jews coming to America from Russia and eastern Europe between 1881-1914.¹¹ Though Jewish, she was not the “furtive Yacob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto” of Henry Adams’s anti-Semitic fears.¹² Her story parallels those of self-made immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, yet Goldman’s communities in America were cosmopolitan, bohemian.¹³ She built political and philosophical ties with radicals such as Johann Most, Max Baginski, Roger Baldwin, Bolton Hall, and Margaret Sanger. Goldman’s anarchism, inspired by Max Stirner’s individualism, Peter Kropotkin’s collectivism, and Mikhail Bakunin on revolution, championed labor movements and free speech while opposing war and conscription. Goldman’s feminism critiqued suffrage movements, marriage and republican motherhood; she defended prostitutes, birth control, free love and femininity. Anarcha-feminism would disempower the state and patriarchy and empower the people.

¹¹ See Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 222.

¹² Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 186. Although I do not directly compare Adams and Goldman in this chapter, it is important to note how the two respond uniquely to the epistemic pressures of modernism. Whereas Adams saw in modernity the hopeless fracturing of the individual, Goldman attempts to find an anarchist concept of the self that can accommodate vast diversity of intellectual and popular inspirations. According to Christine Stansell, “Goldman’s story is in itself a model of the modernist principle of merging disparate phenomena: she embodied both celebrity and politics, spectacle and radicalism, universality and self-aggrandizement.” Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 121.

¹³ Stansell gives a comprehensive overview of Goldman’s unique status as a Jewish immigrant in New York: “She styled herself a secular Jew who was in touch with her immigrant past but at home, intellectually and socially, in a heterogeneous milieu,” and “shed the attributes of the picturesque and exotic ghetto dweller to assume instead a revolutionary modern cosmopolitanism.” Goldman’s politics were rarely influenced by her Judaism: her few mentions of her background are usually in effort to critique Orthodox Judaism or question the significance of anti-Semitism. Stansell, *American Moderns*, 126–130.

Goldman's firsthand political career in America ended after her 1917 arrest for lecturing against the Great War, leading to her deportation in 1919. And yet despite Goldman's origins and exile, she frequently dedicated her life to the American people. In speeches she quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, in writings she invoked the Revolutionary War and John Brown. In her final statement at the 1917 trial, she told the court that "I know many people – I am one of them – who were not born here, nor have they applied for citizenship, and who yet love America with deeper passion and greater intensity than many natives."¹⁴ Following deportation, Goldman spent two years in the fledgling Soviet Russia, where she asked Vladimir Lenin to organize the "Russian Friends of American Freedom."¹⁵ As it did many radicals, the early twentieth century had marooned Goldman between the Scylla and Charybdis of market liberalism and state socialism.¹⁶ Disillusioned with Russia by 1921, Goldman bounced around Europe and Canada for the next ten years with no

¹⁴ Emma Goldman, "Address to the Jury," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 370. In an interview with Paul Avrich, Goldman's lawyer Arthur Ross told him "most people would find it hard to believe, but [Goldman] loved America deeply, in spite of what it did to her. She could talk and breathe freely here, where in Russia they pent her up." Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 73.

¹⁵ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, [1931] 1970), 767. Future citations in this chapter in-text as (*LM*, 2:#).

¹⁶ For a discussion of Goldman's anarchism in the context of American state surveillance, see Elena Loizidou, "This Is What Democracy Looks Like," in *How Not to Be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from a Critical Anarchist Left*, ed. Jimmy Casas Klausen and James R. Martel (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 170. Though often allied with socialists, even before her experience in Russia Goldman described socialism as seduced by the State: "The aim of Socialism today is the crooked path of politics as a means of capturing the State. Yet it is the State which represents the mightiest weapon sustaining private property and our system of wrong and inequality." Emma Goldman, "Socialism: Caught in the Political Trap," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 102.

home. After a decade of touring largely on the subject of modern drama, Goldman settled in Saint-Tropez, France, to write *Living My Life*.¹⁷

Through most of her career, Goldman had avoided autobiography. Early on she helped Berkman attempt Frick's life in 1892, and afterward preferred other propagandistic media: she lectured, published the journal *Mother Earth*, contended false trials, attended international congresses, and published several short works on anarchism and art. Frederick Douglass had worried that personal narrative wasn't philosophical; Goldman thought it wasn't urgent. Action was current, "the actual living of a truth once recognized, not the mere theorizing of its life element."¹⁸ In the preface to *Living My Life*, Goldman recalls her skepticism:

One should write about one's life only when one had ceased to stand in the very torrent of it. "When one has reached a good philosophic age," I used to tell my friends, "capable of viewing the tragedies and comedies of life impersonally and detachedly – particularly one's own life – one is likely to create an autobiography worth while." (*LM*, 1:v)¹⁹

Other radicals overcame their hesitations earlier: Douglass published two personal narratives at the peak of his radicalism, and even anarchists Berkman and Kropotkin published memoirs respectively in 1912 and 1899.²⁰ It's tempting to read *Living My*

¹⁷ See Miriam Brody, "Introduction," in *Living My Life*, by Emma Goldman, ed. Miriam Brody (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), ix.

¹⁸ Emma Goldman, "What I Believe," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 60.

¹⁹ Several colleagues had urged Goldman to write an autobiography. While she is in prison in 1917, William Marion Reedy sends Goldman materials to write, telling her "now is your chance: you have a home, three meals a day and leisure – all free of charge. Write your life. You have lived it as no other woman. Tell us about it," and American author Theodore Dreiser tells Goldman later that "you must write the story of your life... it is the richest of any woman's of our century," shortly before she succumbs to these requests (*LM*, 2:628, 986).

²⁰ For the purposes of argument, this chapter does not carefully distinguish between autobiography and memoirs. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define memoir as "a mode of life narrative that situated the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant, the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than the narrator." As we see below, this is only partially true of Berkman. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 274.

Life as nothing more than a memorial for Goldman's political career, written reluctantly at a time when anarchism was increasingly unwelcome in global politics. Yet this is not how second-wave feminists received the text. Candace Falk, the founding director of the Emma Goldman Papers Project at University of California, Berkeley (begun in 1980), and who wrote one of the first major biographies of Goldman, recalled of the 1970 reissue that copies "were passed from woman to woman, the tattered condition of their soft covers a tribute to the fascination and perceived relevance of this work to the women's movement. In Goldman's own time, the book was a popular success, but its two-volume hardcover format was too expensive for the public she hoped to reach."²¹

Living My Life solves a central problem in anarchism and radical politics, one that had colored Goldman's writings on action throughout her career. In Goldman's anarchism, the state does not simply dominate individuals through violence nor through sanctioning an exploitative capitalist market. Its authority extends to citizens' ideological self-identification with the state; it confronts the people as a totalizing center with which no other will can compete. Emancipatory action, according to Goldman, must stir the masses from false consciousness without coercion, without replacing state authority with that of the anarchist. Radicals could avoid this – could motivate the people's self-authorization – through practices that would raise social consciousness, understood by Goldman as a democratic awareness of suffering under the state. Social consciousness was not unlike Douglass's analysis of authority in

²¹ Candace Falk, "Let Icons Be Bygones!: Emma Goldman: The Grand Expositor," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 48.

antebellum society. Goldman's help with the *attentat* was her first solution, inspired by Nechayev and the appeal of revolutionary violence.

But *Living My Life* critiques violent action as confronting the people as its own arbitrary authority, and as exiling its actors and victims from the masses.

Autobiography grants Goldman an alternative to raising social consciousness by interrogating authority through personal narrative. *Living My Life* depicts Goldman's self-authorization as contingent upon raising her and others' social consciousness: she develops as an intellectual and anarchist in her autobiography through her increasing awareness of the underclass and her place among it. This narrative results in a genre of autobiography devoted to biography: on the history, memory, and context of radical movements in her time. Goldman describes writing her book as "reliving my long-forgotten past, the resurrection of memories I did not wish to dig out from the deeps of my consciousness" (*LM*, 1:vi-vii). Goldman's authority *in* and *over* the text requires her to represent others and to raise the reader's social consciousness.²² This exemplifies a form of authority not simply concerned with physical force, but how Goldman and others define themselves: an *epistemic* authority, similar to Douglass's resistance of the early abolitionists' claim over his character. Autobiography emphasizes a new epistemic authority in which the author and readers define

²² Janet E. Day charts this concept of individuality through Goldman's oeuvre, writing that "freedom, as Goldman defines it, is not just freedom from external means of coercion and authoritative institutions; it is also freedom in the inner being of an individual – a spiritual disposition of the soul. There is a hidden dialectical tension between her romantic notion of an unfolding individuality and the fact that it involves hard work to cultivate a consciousness of self" (133). Day suggests, as I do below, that Goldman's conception of individuality was grounded in self-expression and consciousness, the latter of both self and others (116). Janet E. Day, "The 'Individual' in Goldman's Anarchist Theory," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 109–36.

themselves not in relation to the state, but each other. If the work of anarchist action is to authorize without coercion, Goldman's autobiography seeks to raise social consciousness in her readers such that they see their deep connection to Goldman, radical movements, and the people at large.

This argument suggests that *Living My Life* and autobiography are crucial to understanding the transition from the violent action of Nechayev to the consciousness-raising groups of the Redstockings. Not only a critique of violence, *Living My Life* presents autobiography as itself a form of radical action that authorizes through mutual representation. Goldman's autobiography requires biography: it requires that she illuminate the lives of others as she represents her own. The benefit of this mutual representation, as we will see with her accounts of her father and Johann Most below, is that it allows readers to recuperate transgressors (be they state actors, capitalists, or the *attentater*) into a new sense of the people: it does this by emphasizing the structures that compel not only state violence but radical retaliation. *Living My Life* connects an Old Left preoccupation with violence, action, and social consciousness to a New Left interest in truth-telling: it replaces the impersonal, objective approach to change with one subjective and immersive. Whereas autobiographies before had dealt in inheritance, dissent, and education, Goldman's enacts social consciousness.

To explore *Living My Life* as a mode of social consciousness, I structure the chapter in three claims: (1) I argue that anarchism, as an anti-authoritarian theory, contends with a fundamental problem of action: how to emancipate the people without coercion. Goldman attended to this by insisting on action that raises social consciousness, leading to the people's self-authorization. (2) Putting anarchism

alongside autobiography, I claim that both seek to relocate authority from church or state to authors or democratic actors. By looking at anarchist writings on confession and two examples of narratives published shortly before Goldman's, I cast the self-authorizing character of autobiography as a potential solution to the anarchist problem of action. I also briefly outline women's autobiography in the nineteenth century to argue the genre's relevance for anarcho-feminism. (3) By reconstructing the narrative of her autobiography around the critique outlined above, I argue that Goldman uses *Living My Life* to narrate her rise to social consciousness and to raise consciousness in readers by providing a biography of the domination and radical action of others.²³

Radical Action and Social Consciousness

In her 1910 "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," Emma Goldman defines anarchism as "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary."²⁴ Anarchism, according to

²³ In every chapter, there lies a hazy line between the theorist of the autobiography and her historical or archival self. With Goldman and my argument, that line is incredibly significant. Previous readers point to considerable differences between the Goldman of her autobiography and her archive, particularly her obscuring the greater participation in Berkman's *attentat* and her smuggling ammunition to Russia. As I am arguing for *Living My Life* as a critique of violence, I must insist that this doesn't necessarily represent the Goldman of history or archives. As with chapters before, my analysis concerns primarily Goldman's self-representation within her autobiography, as well as this portrait's appeal for various political movements. Goldman's views on violence throughout her oeuvre are far more complex; I flag these complexities in footnotes below. Goldman herself was unsure as to what best represented her. In a revealing anecdote partway through her autobiography, the painter Robert Henri asks to paint the "real Emma Goldman," to which she responds "But which is the real one?... I have never been able to unearth her" (2:529). On the disparity between Goldman's autobiography and other depictions, see Oz Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'? Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon," *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (1996): 906; Falk, "Let Icons Be Bygones!," 51–52.

²⁴ Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 64.

Goldman and many before her, strives for freedom and sees the state as unfreedom. Although its intellectual origins date back to the Greeks, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840 is the first to articulate anarchism as a positive theory of politics.²⁵ Modern anarchism builds on two inheritances of the Enlightenment: the autonomy of the individual, and a concept of state sovereignty.²⁶

Anarchism's goal is to end the state by relocating its authority elsewhere, though thinkers differ on *where* authority should rest. Scholars distinguish answers as *individualist* or *collectivist* anarchisms. Individualist anarchists seek to empower the individual (drawing them closer to contemporary libertarian or classic liberal critiques). A major individualist anarchist, Max Stirner defended a concept of the "ego" that opposes not only the state but society, advocating non-coercive, voluntary organizations.²⁷ Other individualists let the market in: the American Benjamin Tucker opposed capitalism but endorsed regulated competition, and anarcho-capitalists in the twentieth century such as David Friedman or Murray Rothbard defend property against the state.²⁸ Collectivist anarchists align closer to socialism and Marxist theory:

²⁵ A more exhaustive intellectual history of anarchism would cover a wider lineage of anti-authoritarian writings, back through Heraclitus, through Taoists and Etienne de la Boétie, to name a few. See Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008). Most histories of anarchism resist constraining it to modern thought and, more importantly, resist canonizing it through individual leaders (to reflect anarchism's anti-authoritarian ideals). See, among others, Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, trans. Mary Klopfer (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, ed. Heiner Becker, trans. Ida Pilat Isca (London: Freedom Press, 1996); George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

²⁶ I take this simplified account of anarchism's inheritance from the Enlightenment from a conversation among Melvyn Bragg, John Keane, Peter Marshall, and Ruth Kinna on the radio show "In Our Time" in a segment on anarchism. Melvyn Bragg, "Anarchism," *In Our Time* (BBC Radio 4, December 7, 2006), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0038x9t>.

²⁷ See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 225.

²⁸ On Tucker, see *ibid.*, 390–391, 560. On anarcho-capitalism, see David D. Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism* (Santa Clara: Open Court Publishing Company, 1989); Murray Newton Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises

Proudhon's pseudo-federalist system of autonomous communes, Kropotkin's theory of "mutual aid" informed by Darwin, and Bakunin's ambiguous system of voluntary association best represent this pole.²⁹

Anarchists also differ on the question of action: not simply *where* power goes but *how* it gets there. Answers range from reform to revolution. For William Godwin, literary and intellectual elites enlighten the masses, and change is slow.³⁰ Tucker also endorsed gradual reform and preached civil disobedience only in retaliation.³¹ Other anarchists emphasize radical pedagogy: the Spanish radical Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, shot in Barcelona's Montjuich fortress in 1909, inspired the Modern School and the Francisco Ferrer Association.³² In the United States, more than twenty Modern Schools sprung up from 1910 to 1960; Goldman served as a charter member for the Modern School Association of North America. She also endorsed syndicalism: societies built from workers' collectives, often associated with Rudolph Rocker and which include examples like the Confédération du Travail in France and the

Institute, 1985); Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

²⁹ See Iain McKay, "Introduction," in *Property Is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, ed. Iain McKay (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011); Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 298, 322.

³⁰ See Isaac Kramnick, "Introduction," in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, by William Godwin, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 49.

³¹ See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 391.

³² See Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 191–192. Other examples include Sébastien Faure's "La Ruche." For Goldman's involvement, see Goldman, *Living My Life*, [1931] 1970, 1:408–409, 459, 475. For Goldman's arguments on education, see Emma Goldman, "The Child and Its Enemies," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012); Emma Goldman, "The Social Importance of the Modern School," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 140–49. For a contemporary critique of the Modern School's combination of rebel culture and revolutionary politics, see Florence Tager, "Politics and Culture in Anarchist Education: The Modern School of New York and Stelton, 1911-1915," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 1986, 391–416.

Confederación Nacional del Trabajo in Spain.³³ Urgent economic change called for the General Strike or “direct action.” Voltairine de Cleyre contrasted political from direct action, the former coercive, “even when the State does good things,” the latter cooperative, experimental, and emancipatory.³⁴ Direct action was transgressive: in “Anarchism,” Goldman claims direct action as responsible for universal suffrage, citing the American Revolution and John Brown.³⁵

Opposite reform is revolution, and although few anarchists defend violence for the length of their careers, many briefly endorse its emancipatory potential. Bakunin helped an uprising in Lyon, thinking it would spark revolution throughout France; though the state stopped him, the Commune emerged some months later.³⁶ Bakunin preached violence against the state and not its innocents, promising to cease once utopia arrived.³⁷ Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, and Johann Most all accepted violent retaliation to some degree.³⁸ The *attentat*, or “propaganda of the deed,” remains the most infamous example of anarchist violence: Bakunin, Kropotkin, Berkman, and Goldman all endorsed it at one point, and it was practiced by many more.³⁹ Kathy Ferguson defines the *attentat* as “an assassination intended to eliminate an oppressor of the people, demonstrate the vulnerability of the elite, and rouse the masses to revolt,” “often acts of revenge for prior assaults on protestors or last desperate acts of

³³ See Emma Goldman, “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 87–100.

³⁴ Voltairine De Cleyre, “Direct Action,” in *Anarchism: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham, vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 167–8.

³⁵ Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” 76.

³⁶ See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 286.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 300.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 316, 354, 415.

³⁹ For an in-depth list of *attentats* performed in the name of anarchism, see Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 41.

defiance.”⁴⁰ A type of direct action, the *attentat* satisfies Nechayev’s task for the radical: “to weld the people into one single unconquerable and all-destructive force.”⁴¹

What explains the vast diversity of anarchist approaches to action? The least interesting answer is that it reflects a means-ends debate; that anarchists differ on whether action *under* the state need adhere to action *after*. Those who say yes prefer reform, those who say no, revolution. A better explanation is that anarchist action presents an elite-mass problem. Historian Daniel Guérin suggests that anarchist action relies on two sources of revolutionary energy: the individual and the spontaneity of the masses.⁴² Anarchists disagree because different forms of action envision different relations between the revolutionary and the masses, the one and the many, and this connection poses a problem: if anarchism aims to end the state by empowering the people, by what means can a select few emancipate the people without coercion? This is a problem of *authorization*, one that other political theories solve with the social contract, natural rights, or institutions and concepts of representation, to name a few examples. But anarchists reject much of democratic theory, particularly representation and majoritarian politics. Bakunin doubted “that a government and a legislature emerging out of a popular election must or even can represent the real will of the people.”⁴³ Kropotkin was unconvinced that either democracy or socialism could adequately represent the people via the state.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴¹ Nechayev, *The Revolutionary Catechism*, 7.

⁴² Guérin, *Anarchism*, 27.

⁴³ Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, “The Illusion of Universal Suffrage,” in *Anarchism: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE to 1939)*, ed. Robert Graham, vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 87.

⁴⁴ See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 325.

Anarchist action faces another problem. As Guérin again suggests, this relation “between the masses and the conscious minority” risks not only political but epistemic coercion.⁴⁵ Like Marx, many anarchists see the underclass suffering not only materially but in false consciousness. Unlike Marxists, anarchists locate false consciousness in the state, and are unconvinced that the bourgeois will be their own gravediggers. Bakunin’s argument with Marx at the First International roughly comprised of two concerns: Bakunin rejected Marx’s theory of history for a politics of will, and he distrusted the transitional role of the state in Marx’s analysis.⁴⁶ Although anarchists and Marxists are often political allies before 1917, this debate over consciousness and the state will resurface in the anarchist reaction to Lenin’s Russia.

Though this summary generalizes a vast diversity of anarchisms and thinkers, it illuminates two requisites for anarchist action: that action seeks to stir the people to social consciousness, and that the people self-authorize. Social consciousness here means that individuals are aware not simply of their oppression but its source: whereas for second-wave feminists, consciousness-raising would reveal this source as social and political constructions of gender (among other things), for anarchists this source is usually the state. Self-authorization means that the people, through their awareness, work collectively to abolish the source of their oppression. The anarchist must avoid replacing the state’s authority with his own if anarchism is to be truly emancipatory. This epistemic relation between the anarchist and the people (that the former helps the

⁴⁵ Guérin, *Anarchism*, 38.

⁴⁶ See Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 26. To be fair, this emphasis on state ideology is most pronounced in Bakunin’s writings, and many anarchists are far more ambiguous as to whether the state or market is the root of oppression.

latter to see oppression) helps explain why others have historically accused anarchism of veiled elitism, as acting from the assumption of mass ignorance.⁴⁷ The problem of authorization also highlights the appeal of violence as an act of pure, impersonal will. Anarchists interested in violence see it as above ideology and sentimentality, a subliminal act to snap the people into consciousness. *Living My Life* demonstrates how Goldman comes to see violence as an insufficient act of popular authorization.

In her broader oeuvre, Goldman advocated immediate action against the forces that divide society. She refused to distinguish between means and ends: in her 1908 essay “What I Believe,” Goldman writes that anarcho-feminism is not a product but a process.⁴⁸ Means and ends distance today’s injustice from tomorrow’s utopia, asking the underclass to be patient. “Anarchism was not a mere theory for a distant future,” she writes, “it was a living influence to free us from inhibitions, internal no less than external, and from the destructive barriers that separate man from man” (*LM*, 2:556). We can look to several areas of Goldman’s political theory for her insight on action: her broad inheritance of intellectual sources and combination of individualist and collectivist varieties of anarchism, her nuanced views on the relation between elites and masses, and her critique of feminist politics as misrepresenting women.

⁴⁷ Isaac Kramnick writes that “anarchists waver, like Godwin, between a progressive, futuristic orientation with assumptions of perfectibility and endless innovation and improvement, and a nostalgic yearning for a simple, agrarian, and preindustrial existence. Most decisively, however, he has stamped anarchism with its elitism, its abiding convictions that if only all men were as wise or as sensitive as the anarchist then governments would be superfluous, and that until this was the case government represented pure coercion.” Isaac Kramnick, “On Anarchism and the Real World: William Godwin and Radical England,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 1 (1972): 128.

⁴⁸ Goldman, “What I Believe,” 49.

Goldman read widely in anarchist literature, from Proudhon on property, Bakunin on violence, and Kropotkin on community. She drew not simply from the individualist Stirner but Friedrich Nietzsche and Thoreau, and not only from collectivist Kropotkin but Henrik Ibsen and Sigmund Freud.⁴⁹ Scholarship on Goldman often ungenerously marginalizes her as merely combining or carrying out these ideas.⁵⁰ And yet it was Goldman's great strength to bring individualist and collectivist anarchisms together: combining the two would uniquely prepare her to write an autobiography that mutually represented the one and the many, the author and readers.⁵¹ In her life, Goldman's alleged compromises enabled a wide diversity of radical practices, allowing her to broaden anarchism's applications. She contested Kropotkin's hesitations over discussing sex in the anarchist journal *Free Society*, and spoke on behalf of prostitutes and gays as well, despite anarchist resistance (*LM*,

⁴⁹ Late in life, Goldman stops through Concord to meet with Thoreau's biographer, to whom she describes the transcendentalist as "the precursor of anarchism in the United States" (*LM*, 2:585).

⁵⁰ For an overview of Goldman's treatment by scholars, see Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger, "Digging for Gold(man): What We Found," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 3–18; Jason Wehling, "Anarchy in Interpretation: The Life of Emma Goldman," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 19–37. Perhaps the best of these approaches is the comparison between Kropotkin's and Goldman's canonization in Jonathan McKenzie and Craig Stalbaum, "Manufacturing Consensus: Goldman, Kropotkin, and the Order of an Anarchist Canon," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 197–216. In case there is any confusion over whether these gendered readings of Goldman still take place, see the recent dust-up between Don Herzog and Lori Jo Marso in *Political Theory*. Don Herzog, "Romantic Anarchism and Pedestrian Liberalism," *Political Theory* 35, no. 3 (2007): 313–33; Lori Jo Marso, "The Perversions of Bored Liberals: Response to Herzog," *Political Theory* 36, no. 1 (2008): 123–28. One solution to the theory-practice divide critiqued by feminists is Ferguson's description of Goldman's working in a "located register," her thinking "in the streets." Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 3, 6.

⁵¹ The balance of individualist and collectivist strands of anarchism is the focus of Goldman and Max Baginski's participation in the international congress held in Holland in August, 1907: there, as in other essays, she draws on the language of organicism to make her point (*LM*, 1:402). See Maurizio Antonioli, ed., *The International Anarchist Congress, Amsterdam (1907)*, trans. Nestor McNab (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, [1907] 2009), 50. For a detailed argument about Goldman's combination of these strands, see Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 164.

1:253). Her political theory prioritized emancipation at the cost of intellectual camps or conceptual distinctions. Goldman insisted that anarchism should attend to both society and the individual: “the individual is the heart of society, conserving the essence of social life; society is the lungs which are distributing the element to keep the life essence – that is, the individual – pure and strong.”⁵²

In the source of spontaneous change – the people – Goldman saw both the temptations of mass ideology and the need for elites to temper condescension.⁵³ Some read Goldman’s attitude to the masses as increasingly pessimistic, particularly following McKinley’s assassination.⁵⁴ It isn’t difficult to make a case for Goldman’s elitism. She often drew on Nietzsche’s idea of the Dionysian, and although she preferred the optimistic Nietzsche, she occasionally dipped into his anti-democratic arguments.⁵⁵ In a 1910 essay, “Minorities Versus Majorities,” Goldman declares that “the living, vital truth of social and economic well-being will become a reality only through the zeal, courage, the non-compromising determination of intelligent minorities, and not through the mass.”⁵⁶ Most of Goldman’s writings on the masses, however, suggest more nuance. Goldman’s statement at her 1917 trial and de Cleyre’s defense of Goldman both depicted her as “untimely” like Socrates or Jesus Christ, put

⁵² Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” 65.

⁵³ As in the rest of this manuscript, Goldman does not consistently invoke “the people,” generally writing “the masses,” and I rely on this term here to maintain focus on a democratic theory of constituent power.

⁵⁴ See Brody, “Introduction,” xviii.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche’s influence on Goldman runs deep through much of her political writing, though he had criticized anarchism. See Kevin Morgan, “Herald of the Future? Emma Goldman, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist as Superman,” *Anarchist Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 55–80.

⁵⁶ Emma Goldman, “Minorities Versus Majorities,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 86.

to death by an unconscious majority.⁵⁷ In “The Individual, Society and the State” (a 1914 speech published in 1940), Goldman distinguishes between individuality and the homogeneity or aggression of “rugged individualism,” defending creativity against industriousness.⁵⁸ This critique of Herbert Hoover brings to mind Adams’s and other nineteenth-century critics of mediocrity. Yet in these examples, Goldman’s target isn’t “the people” but their false consciousness through the state or the market.

Elsewhere, Goldman is critical of elite disregard for the people. Many intellectuals and artists suffer living conditions similar to workers, yet their egos prevent mutual aid and enlightenment.⁵⁹ The masses must educate the elite: “the people have nothing to learn from this class of intellectuals, while they have everything to give to them. If only the intellectuals would come down from their lofty pedestal and realize how closely related they are to the people!”⁶⁰ State and capital trick classes into internalizing these divisions as the necessary consequences of material or academic progress. Elite-oriented radical action also perpetuates a divisive ideal of progress. Thus the state disenfranchises both groups, and elitist action can exacerbate what it seeks to end.⁶¹ As Christine Stansell notes, one of Goldman’s greatest strengths was this appeal to elites, the artist and intellectual both categories unavailable in a basic Marxist analysis.⁶² By invoking these groups, Goldman could

⁵⁷ Voltairine De Cleyre, “In Defense of Emma Goldman,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 301–10.

⁵⁸ Emma Goldman, “The Individual, Society and the State,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 112.

⁵⁹ Emma Goldman, “Intellectual Proletarians,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 231.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶¹ Goldman, “The Individual, Society and the State,” 119.

⁶² Stansell, *American Moderns*, 142.

convert the bourgeois to a social consciousness more appropriate for change, and eliminate the distinction between elites and masses.⁶³

Goldman's general approach to action was to seek a sense of the people beyond present-day categories, to represent them not as they were but could be: on women, Goldman writes that "emancipation should make it possible for woman to be human in the truest sense."⁶⁴ American politics at the turn of the century offered women two primary means of representation: the "republican motherhood" of conservatism, and the liberal suffrage movement's emphasis on rights.⁶⁵ Goldman's first targets were the ideas that pinned women to the private sphere.⁶⁶ The republican mother, as Linda Kerber argues, represented "the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the polis."⁶⁷

⁶³ In the thousand pages of *Living My Life*, Goldman never critiques the masses in language like in earlier essays, whether discussing Americans or Russians. Many of Goldman's arguments with defenders of Soviet Russia concern their negative attitudes about the Russian masses, including her dispute with the author Maxim Gorki (*LM*: 2, 743).

⁶⁴ Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 159. There she wrote "true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul" (167). As Lori Jo Marso points out, Goldman's definition of femininity is fairly minimal: she gives little indication as to whether the concept concerns biology, psychology, social or political hierarchies, etc. Lori Jo Marso, "A Feminist Search for Love: Emma Goldman on the Politics of Marriage, Love, Sexuality, and the Feminine," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 83–84.

⁶⁵ As several scholars describe the period, feminists at the time had two concepts to appeal to: rights and virtue. Goldman's strength was in aiming for a third, passion, that focused more on women's autonomy through free love and without state assistance. See Kate Zittlow Rogness and Christina R. Foust, "Beyond Rights and Virtues as Foundation for Women's Agency: Emma Goldman's Rhetoric of Free Love," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 2 (2011): 149. Alix Kates Shulman also provides an excellent overview of the various strands of women's activism of Goldman's day. See Alix Kates Shulman, "Dancing in the Revolution: Emma Goldman's Feminism," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 241–54.

⁶⁶ See Keally McBride, "Emma Goldman and the Power of Revolutionary Love," in *How Not to Be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from a Critical Anarchist Left*, ed. Jimmy Casas Klausen and James R. Martel (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 160.

⁶⁷ Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment - An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1976): 188.

Orestes Brownson provides a good example of this ideology at the time: in “The Woman Question,” he fears women’s suffrage for threatening the role of women as citizen-makers and statesmen-supporters.⁶⁸ This 1869 text captures conservative attempts to meet the march of women into the public by valorizing the private.⁶⁹ Goldman’s feminism connected the woman question to both capital and the state. Her critique of marriage drew a clear line from Mary Wollstonecraft through to John Stuart Mill, denouncing marriage as a binding contract over women’s freedom. Just as “rugged individualism” prioritized the purse over personality, marriage conjoined not *for* but *despite* love.⁷⁰ Her critique of prostitution particularly emphasized the threat of the state and of false consciousness: prostitution keeps women “in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex,” and emerged from capital and state.⁷¹ The American “Property Morality” blinds women to the issue: it “condemns woman to the position of a celibate, a prostitute, or a reckless, incessant breeder of hapless children.”⁷² Even those against prostitution might critique it for the wrong reasons. In “The Traffic in Women,” Goldman describes prostitution as a commodification of sex: those morally opposed to prostitution condemn it not out of care for the woman, but because she sells her body out of wedlock, out of contract.⁷³ The solution, as with other forms of oppression, is consciousness: it’s an “educated public opinion” that will

⁶⁸ Orestes Brownson, “The Woman Question,” in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology*, ed. Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 854–60.

⁶⁹ McBride, “Emma Goldman and the Power of Revolutionary Love,” 161.

⁷⁰ Emma Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 204.

⁷¹ Emma Goldman, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 181.

⁷² Emma Goldman, “Victims of Morality,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 171.

⁷³ Goldman, “The Traffic in Women,” 181.

improve the conditions of prostitutes.⁷⁴ Finally, Goldman criticized those who valorized motherhood only to condemn contraceptives, who said that “the race must be preserved, though woman be degraded to a mere machine.”⁷⁵ The strength of Goldman’s feminism is her consistent attention to reactionaries’ reliance on statist concepts in addressing the woman question.

Toward the other side of the aisle, Goldman took aim at liberal feminists who advocated emancipation through suffrage. Describing the suffrage movement as a “tragedy,” she wrote that “woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation, if she really desires to be free.”⁷⁶ Goldman forged her critique of the suffrage movement in anarchist ideals: suffrage mistakenly seeks freedom *through* the state. Women, Goldman thought, could not “purify politics.” Suffrage is a “fetish” that blinds feminists to economic inequality or prostitution.⁷⁷ Much as republican motherhood misrepresents women in the private sphere, suffragists misrepresent women solely through the public.⁷⁸ In retrospect, it’s difficult to see how Goldman missed the symbolic importance of suffrage: what Judith Shklar would call its “standing,” rather than its instrumental value.⁷⁹ But Goldman’s critique of liberal feminism remained suspicious of its misrepresentation and false consciousness. In “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation,” Goldman writes that

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷⁵ Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 212.

⁷⁶ Goldman, “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation,” 160.

⁷⁷ Emma Goldman, “Woman Suffrage,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 190.

⁷⁸ Although Goldman strove to erode the public-private divide, many feminists following her have criticized the various contradictions between her feminist principles and her compromises in life, particularly her love life. See McBride, “Emma Goldman and the Power of Revolutionary Love,” 161.

⁷⁹ Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 3.

advanced women “never truly understood the meaning of emancipation. They thought that all that was needed was independence from external tyrannies; the internal tyrants, far more harmful to life and growth – ethical and social conventions – were left to take care of themselves; and they have taken care of themselves.”⁸⁰ The suffrage movement’s problem was that it recast women’s liberation in liberal terms: women become *autonomous, independent, solvent*, without seeing how concepts of rights or contracts perpetuated sexual domination in the form of prostitution or poverty.

Although this is only a brief overview of Goldman’s oeuvre, it reveals how consistently she attended to issues of action and social consciousness in her work. The right action had to raise social consciousness without misrepresenting or coercing the underclass. Thus for Goldman social consciousness was the root of anarchist action, the solvent between elites and masses, and the end of patriarchy: anarchism was “the only philosophy which brings to man the consciousness of himself.”⁸¹ Goldman’s calls to social consciousness echo throughout her essays. In her critique of prisons, social consciousness illuminates the criminal as “a reflex of the tendencies of the aggregate,” a product of the state rather than an agent.⁸² In her writings on action, Goldman advocated different ways to raise consciousness. Defending syndicalism, she defined direct action as the “conscious individual or collective effort to protest against, or remedy, social conditions.”⁸³ Goldman carried support for social consciousness in her writings on revolutionary Russia, and in *The Social Significance of Modern Drama*,

⁸⁰ Goldman, “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation,” 164–5.

⁸¹ Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For,” 65.

⁸² Emma Goldman, “Prisons: A Social Crime and Failure,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 342.

⁸³ Goldman, “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice,” 94.

Goldman described modern dramatic art as “the dynamite which undermines superstition, shakes the social pillars, and prepares men and women for the reconstruction.”⁸⁴ Goldman’s defense of the Modern School and her critiques of contemporary education also called for greater consciousness.⁸⁵ Social consciousness was the key to combining individualist and collectivist anarchisms, to merging anarchism with feminism. Social consciousness was both the theory and practice of anarchism, both its goal and the way there: either a motivated people would dismantle the state, or their social consciousness would render its structures superfluous.

The Appeal of Autobiography for Late Nineteenth-Century Radicalism

Of all those forms of action summarized above, autobiography seems an unlikely vehicle for anarchists. Lectures, journals, and art: these were anarchist propaganda.⁸⁶ Why would anarchists have any interest in an individualist genre that required a full life to write? My goal in this section is to broadly theorize the appeal of autobiography for the radical movements central to Goldman’s politics, and to propose autobiography as a possible solution to anarchism’s action problem. The section

⁸⁴ On Russia, see Emma Goldman, “Afterword to My Disillusionment in Russia,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 384. On drama, see Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of Modern Drama*, ed. Harry Gilbert Carlson and Erika Munk (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987), 3. Goldman’s writings on art and aesthetics invoke many of the themes I explore in her autobiography, notably the use of art as a mirror for society. In the preface to *Modern Drama*, she distinguishes between the aloofness of “art for art’s sake” and “modern art, which is preeminently the reflex, the mirror of life. The artist being a part of life cannot detach himself from the events and occurrences that pass panorama-like before his eyes, impressing themselves upon his emotional and intellectual vision” (1). Ferguson writes at length on Goldman’s approaches to art and genre, particularly her preference for romantic realism over modernism. While romantic realism aims to represent society, modernism abdicates the self in a fracturing of various influences. See Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 190.

⁸⁵ Goldman, “The Child and Its Enemies.”

⁸⁶ On anarchists’ relation to art, see Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

follows the logic of the last, considering anarchist autobiography first as a critique of authority and then as an attempt to relocate authority elsewhere. Autobiography, when distinguished from the confession and testimony, should appeal to anarchism for relying upon authorization that is both individual and communal. We see this in anarchist writings on confession and in two attempts at anarchist autobiography written before *Living My Life*. Toward the end of the section I briefly look at women's autobiographies up to the turn of the century, so as to clarify additional stakes of the genre for Goldman's anarchy-feminism.⁸⁷

Proudhon's declaration in 1840 is not only the first positive endorsement of anarchism, but an autobiographical claim: "What are you, then?" – "I am an anarchist."⁸⁸ Anarchism shares with autobiography an intellectual debt to the Enlightenment: both require a concept of the individual as a comprehensive unit and of the people who will read or act. The two benefit as well from the concurrent development of European and American reading publics.⁸⁹ Just as various anarchisms invest more authority in the individual or collective, autobiographies figure different relations between author and reader. Compare the stark difference between Benjamin

⁸⁷ This latter section on women's autobiography is far shorter than the former on anarchism. This is for two reasons, neither of which intend to marginalize the importance of women's writings: (1) Goldman was far more intellectually and politically invested in anarchist circles, particularly those represented by Berkman and the Haymarket martyrs, and (2) far more intellectually-engaging and historical work has been written on women's autobiography, whereas I have found nothing on the subject of anarchism and autobiography.

⁸⁸ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Property Is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 133. According to Iain McKay, Proudhon would shift from socialism to anarchism in the nineteenth century with that declaration, alongside his "Property is theft!" McKay, "Introduction," 1.

⁸⁹ For more on the reading publics that surrounded Goldman, see Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, chap. 2.

Franklin's and Douglass's autobiographies as they connect author and reader: whereas Franklin invites readers to participate in a political project he'd already authorized within the narrative, Douglass constructs his authority through the reader's implication in his narrative. But what these and other autobiographies share, like anarchism's iterations, is a critique of authority and the desire to relocate that authority elsewhere.

If anarchism moves away from state authority, anarchist autobiography transitions from that of the confession. Distinguishing the two genres is a useful way to conceive of autobiography as authorizing its author outside the church or state. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define confession as "an oral or written narrative... addressed to an interlocutor who listens, judges, and has the power to absolve."⁹⁰ Though Augustine had God, the confession can look to the state's absolution as well, as in trial testimony or in pseudo-confessions like 1831's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*.⁹¹ As we saw in the prefaces to *The Education of Henry Adams*, confession defines the individual in relation to an external, objective truth.⁹² A Catholic confession determines and expiates its author by way of God, morality and clergy; a court confession does so by way of the state, law and attorney. Autobiography, on the other hand, looks to the people.⁹³

⁹⁰ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 265.

⁹¹ See Kenneth S. Greenberg and Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, [1831] 1996).

⁹² For this reason, the confession features famously in both Foucault's and Weber's respective treatment of sexual knowledge and modernity. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*.

⁹³ As mentioned in chapter three, confessions are of course often published: nonetheless, the genre's approach to self-examination establishes it as a conversation with the author and God.

In at least two instances, anarchists have drawn on confession to critique state authority.⁹⁴ In the 1793 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, William Godwin uses confession as a metaphor for relocating authority from the church to his new society. Godwin lays out three principles for what Isaac Kramnick calls his “utopian anarchism”: “political simplicity,” “public inspection,” and “positive sincerity,” resulting in a decentralized system of small, autonomous parishes bound not by law but public opinion.⁹⁵ Godwin envisions the best form of society as one in which behavior is regulated by members’ complete sincerity and honesty, rendering law and jurisprudence obsolete.⁹⁶ Godwin takes up confession to turn from monarchical or theistic to popular authority. Continuing his defense of sincerity, Godwin turns confession from an hierarchical, individualist discipline to one communal and social:

the popish practice of confession is attended with some salutary effects. How much better would it be if, instead of an institution thus equivocal, and which has been made so dangerous an instrument of ecclesiastical despotism, every man were to make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?⁹⁷

With ecclesiastical authority restored to the community, the people and not the pope define the individual. Although Godwin’s vision is unexpectedly disciplinarian for an anarchist, his rhetorical use of confession illustrates how the anarchist critique of authority might function through differing forms of personal narrative.

⁹⁴ Though Proudhon in 1849 wrote *Confessions of a Revolutionary*, this is primarily a philosophical reflection on the French revolution of 1848, written more from an abstracted or collective perspective despite his participation there. See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “Confessions of a Revolutionary,” in *Property Is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (Edinburgh: AK Press, [1849] 2011), 395–477.

⁹⁵ Kramnick, “Introduction,” 24–25.

⁹⁶ See *ibid.*, 26, 30.

⁹⁷ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1793] 1985), 311–312.

The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin provides another illustration, written after Saxon authorities arrested him in 1849 for involvement in the Dresden uprising and handed him over to Russia in 1851.⁹⁸ Eric Voegelin describes the text's impetus:

After two months the door of his cell opened, and he received a call from Count Orlov, aide-de-camp to the Tsar and chief of the Third Section. The caller informed Bakunin that he was sent by the Tsar personally, and was ordered to invite him to write a confession of his sins to the Tsar. "Tell him," the Tsar had ordered, "that he shall write to me like a spiritual son to his spiritual father."

What resulted from this request is a brief, personal narrative of Bakunin's introduction to anarchism, accompanied by the confessional accoutrements expected of the Tsar's paternal injunction: Bakunin addresses his confession to "Your Imperial Majesty, Most Gracious Sovereign!"⁹⁹ Understandably, an anarchist's confession of guilt could be damning for his reputation. While there is evidence that the later Tsar Alexander II prepared a brochure of passages from the *Confession* to discredit Bakunin publicly, for whatever reason he never published them at a politically opportune moment.¹⁰⁰

But Bakunin is careful to subvert the genre of confession, primarily as he's not seeking absolution. A smuggled letter to his sister Tatiana suggests that Bakunin was mentally suffering and feigned repentance to escape and rejoin the revolutionary cause.¹⁰¹ Bakunin insists on the intimacy and deference of confession to protect his comrades: "I implore you for only two things... Sire, do not demand that I confess to

⁹⁸ See Eric Voegelin, "Bakunin's Confession," *The Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (1946): 24.

⁹⁹ Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin: With the Marginal Comments of Tsar Nicholas I*, ed. Lawrence D. Orton, trans. Robert C. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1851] 1977), 31.

¹⁰⁰ See Lawrence D. Orton, "Introduction," in *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin: With the Marginal Comments of Tsar Nicholas I*, by Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, trans. Robert C. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 17.

¹⁰¹ See *ibid.*, 23.

you the sins of others. For in good conscience no one can bare the sins of others, only his own.”¹⁰² The tsar is unconvinced, writing in the margins that “precisely by this he destroys all confidence: if he feels all the weight of his sins, then only a PURE, complete confession, and not a CONDITIONAL one, can be considered a confession.” All of Bakunin’s apologies are deflections. He sarcastically laments that he’s “lost the right to call myself a loyal subject of Your Imperial Majesty.”¹⁰³ Voegelin argues that this rhetoric undermines the confession: Bakunin’s regret was not for his actions but his inability to follow through on his work in Paris, Berlin and elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ A clearer iteration of Bakunin’s confession would be Kropotkin’s account of life in tsarist Russia in his 1899 *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, written not to appease any authority but to reckon with the conditions of the state that bore on the author’s upbringing.¹⁰⁵

Autobiography appealed to radicals in the late nineteenth century for many of the reasons earlier authors had turned to the genre. As in Franklin’s case, autobiography provided a form of personal narrative in which the author’s authority over his own story – his ability to interpret and draw from it various political ideas – could be experimented with in a variety of forms. These experiments resulted in the differences I’ve outlined from Franklin’s mode of inheritance, to Douglass on dissent and Adams on education. But radicals had to move past these texts. Though they might endorse Franklin’s rejection of his father, anarchists and feminists would find

¹⁰² Bakunin, *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin*, 33.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Voegelin, “Bakunin’s Confession,” 31.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ed. George Woodcock (Montreal: Black Rose Books, [1899] 1989).

nothing in Franklin's authority as a man of institutions: the print shop, his "Art of Virtue," his statesmanship, etc. Feminists could find more in his unmentioned sister, Jane Franklin. Of the three preceding cases, anarchists might prefer the transgressive authority of Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which asserted an alternative authority grounded in the shared, narrated suffering of a dominated group of peoples. As in the push and pull between the one and the many, or between individualist and collectivist strands of anarchism, different forms of autobiography emphasized either the independence or dependence of its author on society.

Many radicals in the late nineteenth century wrote autobiographies, including those with anarchist sympathies such as "Big Bill" Haywood and Mary Harris "Mother" Jones.¹⁰⁶ Of radicals writing in this period, two anarchist autobiographies in particular exemplify the appeal of the genre's self-authorization: *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* and Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. Just as anarchism relocates authority from the state to the people, these works sought to move the authority of court testimony to a democratic readership. Due to their opposition to political representation, American anarchists in the late nineteenth century found themselves at the mercy of judges, juries and lawyers that had few qualms making of defendants the movement's martyrs. The Haymarket writings and Berkman's memoirs allowed authors to critique state injustice by projecting testimonies beyond the courtroom, not unlike the abolitionists' use of slave narrative to circumvent the inadmissibility of black testimony in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁶ William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929); Mother Jones, *Autobiography of Mother Jones* (New York: Arno, [1925] 1969).

Anarchists could use personal narrative to provide the people with the evidence required to evaluate the state's claims against the accused.

Few events in the century moved American radicals like the 1886 riots at Chicago's Haymarket Square. Goldman recalls the event in *Living My Life* (1:7). At the peak of American labor strikes for an eight-hour workday, a demonstration in the square turned violent when "something flashed through the air and exploded" from protestors to the police. The bomb killed at least one officer then (several more dying from wounds), and the pursuant gunfire killed or mortally injured many more on both sides (1:8). Of the thirty-one radicals indicted, eight anarchists stood trial in what was a clear accusation against anarchism. As State Attorney Grinnell's closing statement revealed: "Law is on trial. Anarchy is on trial. These men have been selected, picked out by the grand jury and indicted because they were leaders. They are no more guilty than the thousands who follow them. Gentlemen of the jury; convict these men, make examples of them, hang them out and you save our institutions, our society."¹⁰⁷

Months after the trial and one month before the sentence, on October 9, 1886, the Chicago journal *Knights of Labor* serially published the autobiographies of the eight men.¹⁰⁸ The advertisement began "*THE STORY OF THE ANARCHISTS TOLD BY THEMSELVES. PARSONS SPIES FIELDEN SCHWAB FISCHER LINGG ENGEL NEEBE. The only true history of the men who claim that they are CONDEMNED TO SUFFER DEATH for exercising the right of Free Speech.*"¹⁰⁹ The autobiographies

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Philip Sheldon Foner, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 7–8.

¹⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 11–12.

followed months of radicals' contesting the alleged involvement of the accused.

Justice, if not blind, was swift. Four of the eight were hanged, one committed suicide in his cell after the sentence, and three would be released by the governor in 1892.¹¹⁰

The journal published *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* to bolster arguments for amnesty and to provide defendants a platform to contest the state. At the end of the trial, the judge having delivered their sentences, the convicted delivered final statements for three days.¹¹¹ Philip Foner explains how August Spies charged the state “with deliberately plotting to use the Haymarket tragedy as an excuse to assassinate the leaders of the working class,” optimistic that the court couldn't squelch their radical voices.¹¹² Samuel Gompers, William Dean Howells, Henry Demarest Lloyd, George Bernard Shaw, and others had worked to have the men pardoned.¹¹³ The autobiographies provided another means of representing the anarchists beyond the false trial, the writings including “their association with Labor, Socialistic and Anarchistic Societies, their views as to the aims and objects of these organizations, and how they expect to accomplish them; Also their connection with the Chicago HAYMARKET AFFAIR // Each man is the author of his own story.”¹¹⁴ The autobiographies gave defendants space to state their anarchism clearly, authors encouraging in readers not pity for the consequences but solidarity for the cause. In his introduction, W.P. Black urged readers to ask of each narrative: “Is the scheme these

¹¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 10.

¹¹¹ See *ibid.*, 8.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹¹³ See *ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

men espouse practicable? Is there occasion with us for this agitation?"¹¹⁵ These autobiographies might replace the judgment of the judge and jury with that of their authors and audience, thus swapping political for popular authority. They moved readers to see the injustice inflicted upon the accused, to democratically align with them against the state, and then to act as necessary to ultimately free these eight men.

Berkman's 1912 *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (and to a lesser extent, his underground "Prison Blossoms") provide another example of how autobiography sought to move authority from the court to the square: Berkman gives an account not only of his false trial, but his maltreatment by the state in prison afterward. Written in 1910, the text follows Berkman's attack on Frick, his prison sentence of fourteen years, and his life before as an anarchist. Goldman describes the full background of Berkman's act in her autobiography: in July 1892, with Andrew Carnegie in Scotland and Frick in charge, the Carnegie Steel Company shut down the mills in Homestead, Pennsylvania in response to the proposed contract of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (*LM*, 1:83). Confronting the emerging strike, Frick called on Pinkerton agents to move on strikers, killing many in the skirmish (1:86). Given the public outcry against Frick, Goldman and Berkman saw this as the perfect moment for the *attentat* (1:87). Breaking into his office in Pittsburgh, Berkman failed to kill Frick despite shooting him twice and stabbing him: the young anarchist was sentenced to twenty-two years, ultimately serving fourteen.¹¹⁶ Goldman called the memoirs a "brilliant study of criminal psychology" (*LM*, 1:483).

¹¹⁵ W.P. Black, "Introduction," in *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, ed. Philip Sheldon Foner (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 24.

¹¹⁶ Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, 38.

Berkman first critiques authority in the memoirs during his narrative of the trial. In true anarchist fashion, Berkman refuses legal aid, beginning his defense “I address myself to the People.”¹¹⁷ He continues that “the real question at issue is not a defense of myself, but rather the *explanation* of the deed. It is mistaken to believe *me* on trial. The actual defendant is Society – the system of injustice, of the organized exploitation of the People.” As I discuss later, Berkman is attempting to explain the propaganda of his *attentat*. But he’s given little chance to denounce Frick as an enemy of the people. He’s delivering his defense in German, but his interpreter is stumbling over Berkman’s written notes: the translator is blind. Berkman protests, and the judge silences and suspends his statement. The *Memoirs* give Berkman room to explain his deed, and it confirms his intent to critique the state and not seek its absolution.

By publishing his memoirs after serving his sentence, Berkman uses the text to stage additional critiques of the state, examining the prison as a system of breaking down individuality through conformity, punishment and solitude, contradictory to what the prison doctor had assured him was a “democratic institution.”¹¹⁸ Though the placard in Berkman’s cell describes it as a system of moral reform, his narrative reveals the tense antagonism between its members: “A perfected model it is, this prison life, with its apparent uniformity and dull passivity... Hidden by the veil of discipline rages the struggle of fiercely contending wills.”¹¹⁹ Berkman describes the prison like other anarchists had, as both the epitome of tyranny and a condition for dissent against it. At the end of the book, Berkman reflects that “daily contact with

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 269, 273.

authority has strengthened my conviction that control of the governmental power is an illusory remedy for social evils.”¹²⁰ Unlike the Haymarket narratives, Berkman clearly didn’t publish his memoirs to encourage readers to act on his behalf. Instead, he seems intent on describing his own coming to consciousness before and under imprisonment: to persuade readers to see an unknown dimension of state oppression. Berkman doesn’t implicate readers in the prison like Douglass did in the plantation, and yet his testimonial memoirs provide readers evidence warranting anarchist claims about the injustices and ills of state despotism.

A few things stand out in tracing anarchism through these personal narratives. The appeal of autobiography for anarchists is its transgressive authority: it seeks to ground the author in both a critique of the state and an address to the people. By subverting genres of confession or testimony, autobiography not only looks to different readers, but constitutes the author as a popular subject. In other words, autobiography authorizes the self *alongside* the people, in the same way that a confession exemplifies church authority by defining the author as its subject. The Haymarket martyrs’ stories and Berkman’s memoirs attest to kind of authorization. But although these autobiographies were written in the context of violent action, they do not sufficiently assess violence as emancipatory. As I argue below, Berkman’s critique is most focused on how the state responds to anarchist retaliation, rather than on coercive force as originating in the state. And as much as *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* appeal to popular judgment, these texts remain part of a

¹²⁰ See John William Ward, “Introduction,” in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, by Alexander Berkman (New York: New York Review of Books, 1999), 475.

broader attempt to have the authors' cases revisited by the courts. Though pragmatic, this intention doesn't jibe well with an anarchist abandonment of institutional representation. Thus the autobiographies are less a critique of violence than an attempt to have the judge reconsider their complicity in the events of May 4th. *Living My Life* will similarly enact a mode of anarchist self-authorization, but will go further to suggest autobiography itself as action more suited to anarchism than violence.

While anarchists wrote autobiographies to move from the cell to the city square, women in the early twentieth century saw the genre as another opportunity to move from the home. As Estelle Jelinek explains, the past several decades' successes in women's emancipation led to a proliferation in autobiography as another transition from private to public.¹²¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton published an autobiography in 1898, and Jane Addams in 1910.¹²² In 1903 Helen Keller released her autobiography, the author of which Goldman praises at length in *Living My Life* (2:648-649).¹²³ Dancer and friend Isadora Duncan published her autobiography in 1921.¹²⁴ Margaret Sanger, who would found Planned Parenthood and was a leading proponent of birth control alongside Goldman, published her autobiography several years after Goldman's in 1938.¹²⁵ Other women's autobiographies paralleled Goldman's labor interests or immigrant origins, including autobiographies by Anne Ellis and Mary Antin.¹²⁶ As it

¹²¹ Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present*, 128.

¹²² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More (1815-1897): Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898); Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, [1910] 1954).

¹²³ Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1903).

¹²⁴ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, [1927] 1995).

¹²⁵ Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography* (New York: Dover Publications, [1938] 1971).

¹²⁶ Anne Ellis, *The Life of an Ordinary Woman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929); Antin, *The Promised Land*.

did the anarchists, autobiography could represent women outside of state institutions, though the genre paralleled their representation through suffrage and the market.

More than complementing new freedoms, autobiography helped erode the public-private distinction that had long prevented women's political participation. Much like the anarchist move from confession or testimony, autobiography appealed to American women in the nineteenth century as a step beyond genres previously gendered as inferior. As Smith and Watson point out, personal diaries, journals, and letters were "understood as properly feminine forms of the autobiographical for literate women."¹²⁷ Contrasted with the heroic statesmanship of a Franklin or Douglass, readers expected women's writing to focus on the quotidian and intimate. These works were "circulated within a vibrant private circuit of exchange among sisters and friends, rather than the marketplace." This again distinguishes women's from anarchist autobiographies, as the former validated how women had politically used narrative before: speeches by Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, for example, "referenced their own experience as representative of that of enslaved African woman," whereas postbellum texts by Elizabeth Keckley and Anna Julia Cooper continued similar themes.¹²⁸ For anarchists, autobiography moved away from the confession and sought representation outside the state; for feminists, autobiography recast diaries and letters as political and parallel to state representation.

¹²⁷ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Introduction: Living in Public," in *Before They Could Vote: American Women's Autobiographical Writing, 1819-1919*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 8-9.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-13. Smith and Watson note that women's autobiography in the nineteenth century suffered from epistemic framing similar to that I described of slave narrative in chapter two: works by American Indian women, for example, were usually written in collaboration with a white amanuensis or editor (14).

We can briefly sketch how autobiography might appeal to Goldman's anarchist-feminism, drawing on both anarchist and women's autobiographies up to 1931. The genre of autobiography requires authorship that rejects the authority of external sources such as church, state, or patriarchy. Autobiography is emancipatory because it better represents its authors as one with the people. It does so in part by allowing authors to present particularities of life illegible in the perspectives that previously determined citizenship. Anarchist autobiography captures anarchist lives and conditions beyond what the state sees. Feminist autobiography captures women's lives and conditions beyond what patriarchy sees in the public and private. Goldman's autobiography, as influenced by both histories, will not only contest the authorities of state and patriarchy but find a mode of self-authorization that looks to the people.

Action and Authorization in *Living My Life*

Given all that preceded her autobiography, it's unsurprising that Goldman described writing it as "the hardest and most painful task I have ever undertaken or gone through" in a letter to Berkman.¹²⁹ *Living My Life* doesn't simply recap a life of resisting authority and emancipatory action: it also articulates Goldman's life as itself an act of social consciousness-raising. It responds to the problem of authorization that I sketched in the first section by dovetailing the anarchist and feminist interests in autobiography outlined in the second.

¹²⁹ See Richard Drinnon and Anna Maria Drinnon, eds., *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 145.

This section reconstructs the narrative of *Living My Life* around the problem of authorization and social consciousness in several acts: (1) Goldman's early critiques of authority; (2) her attempt at self-authorization through the violent *attentat*; (3) her revised attempt through raising her social consciousness among the underclass; (4) her socially-conscious response to Leon Czolgosz's violence and (5) the autobiography as an act of raising social consciousness.

Critiques of Authority

Although *Living My Life* opens with Haymarket as the inaugural scene of state authority and violence, Goldman first encounters authority through her relationships with men. The first of these figures is her father, Abraham Goldman, who appears in the autobiography primarily through flashbacks. Goldman's narrative begins with her arrival in New York from Rochester in 1889, three years after the Haymarket affair (1:3). She first mentions her father in recalling her earlier emigration from St. Petersburg to "the Promised Land" in December 1885 (1:11). "Since my earliest recollection, home had been stifling," she writes, "my father's presence terrifying. My mother, while less violent, never showed much warmth." As she narrates her first months in New York anarchist circles, Goldman returns to Abraham as an example of unfreedom. Early memories of Abraham include his preventing Emma from studying ("All a Jewish daughter needs to know is how to... give the man plenty of children"), wasting his stepdaughters' inheritance on a failed venture, and forbidding she attend a

ball (1:12, 19).¹³⁰ Looking back at her first sexual encounter, Goldman recalls her mother's shame and her father's beating her for courting a hotel clerk (1:23). Though Goldman's mother appears in several of these memories, it's Abraham that exemplifies absolute power. Goldman castigates him as "the nightmare of my childhood," "whose tyranny had held me even after my marriage" (1:50).

These memories give context to Goldman's developing politics. Although Goldman advocates education reform throughout her life, she never has children of her own, originally due to a required medical procedure. Goldman refuses the procedure after she recalls her miserable childhood under her father: "I remembered his saying that he had not wanted me. He had wanted a boy, the pig woman had cheated him" (1:59). From that moment on, Goldman's "home had become a prison" (1:60). Goldman has other reasons (she fears her children would live in poverty and limit her politics), but this memory confirms her decision (1:61).¹³¹ Memories of Abraham help establish many of Goldman's early inclinations to feminism and anarchism.¹³²

Depicting her father's tyranny through flashbacks helps to establish the young Goldman's anti-authoritarianism, yet these critiques do not alone distinguish her

¹³⁰ Dancing would be of great importance to Goldman later in life. The often misquoted line "It's not my revolution if I can't dance" originates in Goldman's autobiography: "I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy... even in spite of the condemnation of my own closest comrades I would live my beautiful ideal" (*LM*, 1:56).

¹³¹ Themes of motherhood appear elsewhere in *Living My Life*: "Goldman depicts herself in the more conventional role of mother in relationship to the masses, to her anarchist periodical *Mother Earth*, and to her lovers and certain other men." Heather Ostman, "The Most Dangerous Woman in America": Emma Goldman and the Rhetoric of Motherhood in *Living My Life*," *Prose Studies* 31, no. 1 (2009): 56.

¹³² According to biographer Alice Wexler, Goldman's depiction of Abraham's cruelty was not an overstatement. In digging up his will, Wexler reveals that he'd arbitrarily left fewer possessions to Goldman than to other children. Alice Wexler, "Emma Goldman and the Anxiety of Biography," in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing about the Lives of Modern American Women*, ed. Sara Alpern (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 40.

autobiography from those studied before. After all, the critique of paternalism is the idiom perhaps most frequent in American autobiography, crucial for Franklin, Douglass, and Adams. But in the same way that Douglass's interest in race motivates his critiques of paternal slaveowners *and* abolitionists, Goldman's feminism turns her attention to anarchists as well. Although anarchists rejected a paternalist monarchy, they often defended patriarchy within their private lives. Proudhon, who defined liberty as the "mother of order," rested his mutualism on local, gendered hierarchy within communities.¹³³ With few exceptions, most male characters early in *Living My Life* attempt some patriarchal authority over Goldman. The most important of these characters following Abraham is Johann Most, and both play distinct narrative roles. Whereas Abraham appears in flashbacks to explain Goldman's immigration and early anti-authoritarianism, Goldman uses Most to illustrate her introduction to anarchism and her youthful ignorance of the gender inequality persistent in its circles.

Most was the major collectivist anarchist active in late nineteenth-century America, who advocated the abolition of private property and violent revolution (till backing off in the late 1890s).¹³⁴ Goldman first encounters Most not ten pages into *Living My Life*, shortly after her arrival in New York (1:3). Berkman, whom Goldman had only met that night, takes her to a lecture where she witnesses Most as a sublime figure: first in "revulsion" from his appearance, his speech on Haymarket sways her interest (1:6). As I discuss below, Goldman's narrative here steps back to her first learning of the riots, establishing a connection between that event and her meeting

¹³³ See McKay, "Introduction," 48.

¹³⁴ See Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 3.

Most. Although an earlier lecturer introduces Haymarket to Goldman, Most introduces it to the reader, making him the anarchist exemplar of *Living My Life*.

It doesn't take long for Most to fall back on patriarchy. Soon after the lecture, Goldman begins working for him at the journal *Freiheit* (1:30). The two begin a flirtatious apprenticeship, Most taking Goldman to the theatre and confessing his loneliness (1:34). Their relationship is sexualized, deferential. She asks of his ideals and politics, he asks: "Where did you get your silky blond hair?" (1:35). Unlike Abraham, Most claims authority for his place and principles in the movement. When he encourages Goldman to begin lecturing, she recalls that "Most became my idol. I worshipped him" (1:40). When Most lectures, his force catches Goldman "in the storm of his eloquence, tossed about, my very soul contracting and expanding in the rise and fall of his voice" (1:43). Most ennobles anarchism and enables Goldman, but he conditions his endorsements upon tithes in marriage and motherhood. When Most finally arranges her lectures in Rochester, Buffalo and Cleveland, he confesses his love for Goldman in a cab on the way to Grand Central (1:48).

This is an important scene in the autobiography, for it captures the coerciveness of Most's patriarchal authority and forecasts Goldman's critiques of man as a "cause" (essential for Goldman's transition from Old to New Left thinking). What's interesting is that Goldman depicts her younger self as seemingly unconscious of either. Most covering her with kisses in the cab, Goldman sits limply, inclined to surrender herself to him if only for the cause: "'All for the Cause,' Sasha had so often said. The fighter next to me had already given all for the Cause. But who had given all for him? He was hungry for affection, for understanding. I would give him both"

(1:49). The revolutionary man may be doomed, but apparently he wants for nothing. Since he gave himself to the cause, she must give herself to him. This suggests early in the text that the claim to impersonal authority can *itself* be a source of coercion. Goldman at twenty does not see this contradiction, that anarchism should flush out tyranny even in interpersonal affairs.

It's not till Goldman steps from private to public that she begins to realize her dependence on Most. Stepping onstage in Rochester (having closely memorized Most's notes), Goldman stands frozen till memories of her early work in "the Garson factory, her marriage, the Chicago crime," inspire in her a "passionate intensity" (1:51). Responding to the audience's questions, Goldman realizes her mistake in acting as "a parrot repeating Most's views" (1:52). When the young lecturer returns to New York, Most shows little interest in her experience (having heard from others), asking only for her companionship: when Goldman bursts out that "I would not be treated as a mere female," Most ripostes that "he had reared a viper, a snake, a heartless coquette" (1:53). Although they collaborate for some time, Goldman soon confirms Most's obsession "to win me, to bind me to himself" (1:65). When Most moves on to another woman, he lambastes Goldman for her unwillingness to give him a home or children, confirming his original motivations (1:77).

Even though Goldman narrates Most as clearly hypocritical, she depicts her younger self as only gradually aware of his arbitrary authority. What blinds Goldman at the time, it seems, is her earnest hope that Most's love for her is authentic and uncomplicated by the desire to dominate her. She only becomes conscious of this domination when Most's appeals bottom out in sexual lust, calling Goldman (in her

words) “an object, to be taken and owned” (1:73). Douglass had also used his autobiography to demonstrate the abolitionists’ blindness to their racial prejudices and tendency to treat him as property despite their critiques of slavery. Like the earlier *Narrative* that revealed a Douglass not yet aware of these contradictions, Goldman uses memories of Abraham and Most to emphasize her unconsciousness of these problems before her later developments as an anti-authoritarian thinker.

Patriarchy follows Goldman through most of her intimate relationships in the autobiography. Goldman’s early marriage to the impotent Jacob Kershner thematizes the disparity between love and marriage in *Living My Life*: loveless marriages on one side (of which Goldman’s sister Helena’s and her parents’ are exemplary) and lovers’ coercive marriage pleas on the other (1:20). Goldman’s later partner, Edward Brady (who inspires in Goldman “the meaning of the great life-giving force”), consistently urges Goldman to abandon politics for marriage (1:120-121).¹³⁵ On tour in New Mexico, a mysterious Mr. V arranges Goldman’s lectures in Los Angeles before spontaneously proposing (“Radical or conservative, every male wants to bind the woman to himself”) (1:229). Finally, Goldman’s tempestuous relationship with Ben Reitman, the “pseudo-king of Hoboland” and her manager, eventually breaks from his repeatedly pressuring her to bear children (2:581).¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Highlights of their relationship include Brady telling Goldman of a fellow anarchist that “nature has made her for motherhood. All else is nonsense, artificial and unreal” (*LM*, 1:151).

¹³⁶ Reitman will have an immense impact on Goldman’s ability to lecture throughout America, due to his management skills, advertisement, and introduction of Goldman to new social circles. In one of her early tours with Reitman, Goldman attends 37 cities in 25 states, lecturing 120 times (*LM*, 1:469). Goldman’s initial attraction to Reitman was both his public character and intimacy, that he lacked “artifice” (1:433).

The young protagonist Emma is thus in a strange state of social consciousness. She has subjective experiences with her father's authority that motivate much of her early anarchism, and yet she's slow to realize how the anarchism of Most and others retains arbitrary authority in patriarchy. It won't be another hundred pages or so till Goldman begins building her awareness of domination through exposure to the underclass. In later passages, Goldman will provide revised accounts of Abraham and Most that reveal the work of social consciousness as not contending their authority through the institution of another central force, but by adopting a worldview, a sense of the people, that understands their transgressions as the result of structural forces beyond their immediate control. Before that, though, Goldman will make her first attempt at authorization, at taking back authority: the *attentat*.

Self-Authorization through Violence

Although the events of Homestead prompt the *attentat*, the originary act of violence in *Living My Life* is again the riots of May 4th, 1886 at Chicago's Haymarket Square. On the night that Goldman first sees Most speak, she loses sleep reliving "when the Chicago men had suffered their martyrdom" (1:7). It was "the violence of the press, the bitter denunciation of the accused, the attacks on all foreigners" that turned Goldman and her sister's sympathies to those indicted. Although the *attentat* some hundred pages into *Living My Life* targets Henry Clay Frick, Goldman describes it as a symbolic response to Haymarket. Violence responds to authority by igniting within the people an awareness of their shared suffering and the vulnerability of the

ruling class. The *attentat* is an attempt at self-authorization, such that it relocates authority from the state to the people through the actions of just a few revolutionaries.

Berkman's *attentat* against Frick is arguably the signature event of the autobiography. When attorney Arthur Ross requested she remove its narration from the autobiography, Goldman responded that "my connection with Berkman's act and our relationship is the leitmotif of my forty years of life [since]. As a matter of fact it is the pivot around which my story is written."¹³⁷ From early in their friendship, the anarchists share similar views: one of Goldman's first memories of Berkman is their discussion over tea that "nothing personal mattered. Only the Cause mattered" (*LM*, 1:26). As in her relationship to Most, language of the "cause" colors Goldman's love for Berkman (though he does not marginalize her for her gender). Berkman hesitates to confess his love for Goldman: he cites Nechayev's catechism "that demanded of the true revolutionist that he give up home, parents, sweetheart, children, everything dear to one's being" (1:46). Berkman's idealism attracts Goldman early and later creates a wedge to separate the two romantically and intellectually.

Seduced by revolutionary violence, Goldman and Berkman see the *attentat* as a means to rouse social consciousness. The account of Berkman's attack on Frick in *Living My Life* is quite similar to that of his *Prison Memoirs*, with one major exception: her autobiography includes the first public admission that Goldman had

¹³⁷ Quoted in Richard Drinnon and Anna Maria Drinnon, "Introduction," in *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, ed. Richard Drinnon and Anna Maria Drinnon (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), xx. This, however, did not stop Berkman from contesting his characterization in *Living*, telling Goldman in one edit that she had depicted him as too much a fanatic. See Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 268.

been instrumental in the *attentat*.¹³⁸ Berkman had called Goldman “the Girl” in his memoirs, to protect her. With full exposure, Goldman can give her reader a fuller account of the deed’s theory and aftermath. The *attentat* would consist of at least three components. First, the revolutionary requires the right conditions: popular uproar over a fresh injustice. The strike at Homestead would pave the way, the event not unlike Chicago years prior. The people rage, yet they remain unaware of the state’s yoke. Homestead “was the psychological moment for an *Attentat*; the whole country was aroused, everybody was considering Frick the perpetrator of a coldblooded murder” (*LM*, 1:87). Second, the revolutionary would engage in an act of violence against an enemy of the people to awaken social consciousness. That target would be Frick, left in charge of workers by Andrew Carnegie (1:83). A blow to Frick would “re-echo in the poorest hovel, would call the attention of the whole world to the real cause behind the Homestead struggle” (1:87). As Berkman recalls in his own memoirs, action was required when “the time for speech was past.”¹³⁹ Violence would be a conversionary experience: “It is the People calling,” Berkman writes, “Ah, the People! The grand, mysterious, yet so near and real, People...”¹⁴⁰ Finally, Goldman, “the born speaker,” would stay to explain the deed, to speak for the doomed revolutionary (*LM*, 1:87).

But the *attentat* doesn’t work. It doesn’t help that Berkman fails to kill Frick, and in his ensuing testimony is unable to explain his deed. In his *Prison Memoirs*, Berkman also recalls difficulty convincing even the Homestead strikers. While in jail, Jack Tinford asks Berkman whether his attempt on Frick’s life was the result of a

¹³⁸ See Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 34.

¹³⁹ Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

“business misunderstanding.”¹⁴¹ When Berkman tells Tinford that it was “for your people,” the striker interrupts Berkman, asserting his belief in the law and workers’ self-organization. Tinford doesn’t see Berkman’s act as emancipatory but transgressive *against* the people. Berkman’s response in the memoirs is that Tinford is a “Judas-striker,” that “only his death can aid the Cause.”¹⁴² Goldman’s propaganda comes up short too: the *attentat* not only fails to rally the people, but it sends a rift through anarchists, confirming her break with Most. In a later argument with Berkman over Czolgosz, she confirms that the attack on Frick had not been “understood by the people” (*LM*, 1:325).¹⁴³ The conditions for the *attentat* had been in place, and though Berkman had failed to kill Frick, his attack should have turned the people’s consciousness. Something about violence had failed.

Goldman’s evolving reflections on Berkman’s *attentat* signify her turn from violence to other forms of action. For much of the autobiography, she will continue to defend and depict Berkman in the revolutionary tradition that motivated them to act: as a willful idealist whose act was justified by Homestead. Tortured by the guilt of his twenty-two-year sentence, Goldman consoles herself that “no sacrifice is lost for a great ideal” (1:135). But despite her efforts to have Berkman’s sentence commuted, Goldman’s depictions of violence gradually take on a tragic tone. When Santa Caserio kills French President Carnot, Goldman laments that “something deep in my consciousness rebelled against such tragic waste, yet I knew there was no escape. I

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 58–59.

¹⁴³ Disagreement over Berkman’s act is the final straw for Goldman and Most, the former of which whips the latter at a lecture hall after Most publishes a critique of the *attentat* (*LM*, 1:105).

had learned the fearful effects of organized violence: inevitably it begets more violence” (1:152). Although her defense of Berkman never wavers, there is an important moment in the text where Goldman suddenly characterizes Berkman as not an agent against Homestead but its victim:

I had ceased to regard political acts, as some other revolutionists did, from a merely utilitarian standpoint or from the view of their propagandistic value. The inner forces that compel an idealist to acts of violence, often involving the destruction of his own life, had come to mean much more to me. I felt certain now that behind every political deed of that nature was an impressionable, highly sensitized personality and a gentle spirit. Such beings cannot go on living complacently in the sight of the great human misery and wrong. Their reactions to the cruelty and injustice of the world must inevitably express themselves in some violent act, in supreme rending of their tortured soul. (1:190)

We can attribute part of this changing attitude to Goldman’s recent experience: the failure of the *attentat* against Frick, the persistence of state and anti-state violence around the globe, and her contrition for Berkman’s imprisonment. But this does not capture what becomes for Goldman a drastically different way of reading Berkman’s and her act. Some time later, in response to a letter from Benjamin Tucker, Goldman laments of his misunderstanding Berkman, that he “could not grasp the psychology of a man whom the brutality of Frick during the Homestead lock-out had caused to express his protest by an act of violence” (1:233). Suddenly, Berkman is not a cause: he was caused.¹⁴⁴ Where does this revised take on violence come from?

¹⁴⁴ Goldman will continue to vacillate in her attitude toward Berkman’s violent act, as she confesses to Max Baginski and others in Paris later on (*LM*, 1:272). Overall, much of Goldman’s focus on Berkman in *Living My Life* is to contrast his idealism with her protean anarchism. She writes that “I knew that the personal would always play a dominant part in my life. I was not hewn of one piece, like Sasha or other heroic figures. I had long realized that I was woven of many skeins, conflicting in shade and texture. To the end of my days I should be torn between the yearning for a personal life and the need of giving all to my ideal” (1:152-153).

Self-Authorization through Social Consciousness

To understand Goldman's changing views on violence requires we consider concurrent events in this part of her *Life*, particularly her other attempts at authorization. Before the *attentat*, Goldman begins to contest Most's authority through publishing. Like Douglass breaking from Garrison to start *The North Star*, Goldman's first move away from Most follows her working at competitor Joseph Peukert's *Die Autonomie* (LM, 1:75). As Douglass develops his own circles with Gerrit Smith and company, Goldman begins working with other radicals like Berkman and Modest Stein ("Fedya"), and assisting Joseph Barondess and striking workers (1:54).

What distinguishes Goldman's developing authority in *Living My Life* is how she takes up the autobiographical motif of economic independence. For Franklin, work and ownership stage a contest of authorities with his father, brother, and competitors like Samuel Keimer. Douglass's apprenticeship as a caulker does inspire observations on class and race in the shipyard, but first his insistence on the right to property. In both cases, work emphasizes independence, thus contesting individuals' authorities with the author's. Anecdotes early in *Living My Life* provide similar occasion for Goldman to contest authority. Goldman recalls her first job in a Rochester factory as an early encounter with domination: the workers are under surveillance, she's allowed little movement, and she soon clashes over a foreman after caring for an injured worker (1:17). Later in the narrative, Goldman, Berkman and Fedya open an ice-cream parlor (a "long-cherished dream") to sponsor their anarchist mission (1:82).

But Goldman's work as a nurse will stress her social *interdependence*, despite her living off its wages. Goldman begins this career during her one-year sentence in

Blackwell Prison. There she quickly builds a rapport with inmates for refusing to manage them like a “slave-driver” (1:135). In prison, Goldman is introduced to the intersections between crime and poverty, the inmates’ “personal misfortunes filled their thoughts; they could not understand that they were victims, links in an endless chain of injustice and inequality” (1:136). The sick ward’s doctor offers Goldman a nursing position: an “opportunity to come closer to the sick women” (1:136-137). Through this apprenticeship, Goldman expands her consciousness of another suffering class in America: prostitutes. This is not Goldman’s first encounter: earlier she had accidentally moved into a brothel, and, though worried for her reputation, remains and grows close to the working women (1:104-105). In prison, Goldman tends to an influx of prostitutes suffering withdrawal, saying of one dying woman: “How she must have fascinated men! And they destroyed her” (1:144). Through this work, prison will be for Goldman what it was for Kropotkin and would be for Malcolm X: a place of great intellectual development. It’s there that she reads Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Spencer, Mill, Fourier, Sand, Eliot, and Ouida (1:144-145). Goldman calls prison “the best school”: here she’s “brought close to the depths and complexities of the human soul,” and had “learned to see life through [her] own eyes” (1:148).

What’s significant about *Living My Life* is how Goldman’s career as a nurse will not only begin in an institution of state oppression, but will allow her to become more greatly aware of authority’s reach in society. In this way, prison and nursing are like the plantation and caulking for Douglass: nursing provides Goldman a constant forum for social consciousness. After prison, Goldman will take up practical nursing as a main source of income before her lecturing becomes sustainable (1:157). Nursing

will take Goldman to Vienna; on the way, she compares the English and Austrian underclasses (1:170). Back in America, midwifing puts Goldman “into intimate contact with the very people [her] ideal strove to help and emancipate” (1:185).

Nursing will drastically influence Goldman’s anarchism, both in its approach to action and its view of the state. Seeing that “women and children carried the heaviest burden of our ruthless economic system, I saw that it was mockery to expect them to wait until the social revolution arrives in order to right injustice” (1:187). As in prison, nursing will expand Goldman’s focus to prostitution, after Goldman forms a temporary friendship with a patient who turns out to be a keeper of a “house” (1:283). While in the brothel, Goldman runs into several familiar johns: the detective-sergeant who had sent her to the penitentiary in 1893, as well as a New York lawyer who had slandered her (1:286). Thus through caring for the morphine-addict Spenser, Goldman comes to see the entanglement of prostitution in large structures of complicity by men and the state, both represented in the figures of law enforcement. When Kropotkin is in town, Goldman introduces him to Spenser: he calls the woman “a real human document” (1:288). Nursing will also inspire in Goldman her unique approach to women’s emancipation. As she acquires more patients, she boasts that among them the women represent fourteen different professions. Though these women claim economic autonomy, Goldman writes that “the emancipation of women was frequently more of a tragedy than traditional marriage would have been. They had attained a certain amount of independence in order to gain their livelihood, but they had not become independent in spirit or free in their personal lives” (1:371).

In Franklin's autobiography, his work as a printer carries heavy symbolic weight. It helps explain his approach to ethics and his depiction of readers or posterity as apprentices. But Franklin's work is also a means of representing himself in America through popular virtues. This symbolism is equally prevalent in *Living My Life*, but its politics are flipped. Nursing is not only a primary means of intimacy and care for others, but it's through that work that Goldman narrates much of her later political thinking. As Goldman becomes more self-sufficient, she grows more socially conscious of class and gender issues in America. It's also in this period of the book that Goldman commits to lecturing in English, "among the American people" (1:181). On top of this, nursing pushes Goldman to a structural view of inequality, which helps explain her shift on violence. Despite Berkman's attempt to martyr himself for the people, his act reveals his deep imbrication within state structures of domination. The violence of Haymarket and the poverty and sexism that condemn prostitutes are other examples. It isn't till Goldman lowers herself among the people (for whom the *attentat* had been intended) that she realizes this mutual implication. Authorization through violence fails because it is disconnected from the people. Goldman uses what in other autobiographies is an idiom of self-authorization – economic independence – to demonstrate the need for social consciousness. Printing allows Franklin to represent himself; violence allows Berkman to represent nothing; nursing allows Goldman to represent others. Goldman's response to Leon Czolgosz's *attentat* clarifies this.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Nursing allows Goldman to distinguish herself from Franklin in other ways. Unlike Franklin, Goldman is skeptical of wealthy benefactors' funding. Much later in life, upon a dispute with men funding her trip to Europe to practice nursing, she writes that "patronage is paralyzing to one's integrity and independence" (*LM*, 2:547).

Bring In the Doomed Man

Goldman first encounters the young Czolgosz as a handsome young man going by Nieman, briefly meeting him after a lecture in Cleveland (*LM*, 1:290-291).

Goldman convinces the editor of *Free Society* to retract a warning to readers that Nieman may be a spy, but she never sees him again. When Czolgosz shoots McKinley shortly thereafter, rumors about Goldman's involvement lead to her arrest and interrogation; detectives threaten that she'll "go the way of those bastard Haymarket anarchists" (1:300). Though the authorities eventually clear Goldman of charges, she'll implicate herself again by defending Czolgosz in public, in an effort to raise social consciousness not for his cause but of the state structures that forced his hand.

Two elements of Goldman's narrative distinguish her connection to Czolgosz from her relationship with Berkman: her effort to make Czolgosz's background known, and her willingness to defend him as a victim of the state. Comparing the event to Haymarket, Goldman writes that

it was the repetition of the dark Chicago days... The boy in Buffalo – his life had scarce begun. What was his life, I wondered; what the forces that drove him to this doom? "I did it for the working people," he was reported to have said. The people! Sasha had also done something for the people; and our brave Chicago martyrs, and the others in every land and time. But the people are asleep; they remain indifferent. They forge their own chains and do the bidding of their masters to crucify their Christs. (1:304)

As in her revised impression of Berkman's act, Goldman laments the people's unconsciousness to Czolgosz's life: another disconnect between an act for the people and the people's inability to see themselves in the act. Here Goldman suggests that the people are unaware not merely of Czolgosz's ideals but his background. Goldman herself doesn't know why he committed this act, and commits herself to learning the

conditions of his crime. McKinley's assassin, like the Haymarket martyrs, is a victim of popular unconsciousness and structural inequality.¹⁴⁶

After she's legally cleared of any connections to Czolgosz, Goldman continues to lecture on his innocence, despite her colleagues cautioning against it (1:316). Goldman publishes "The Tragedy at Buffalo" in *Free Society*, including its text in her autobiography: there she emphasizes that Czolgosz is American, that he was born and raised a citizen of its state (*LM*, 1:312). A first-generation immigrant, Czolgosz embodies the dual identity of an American both the product of the state and the son of émigrés. Beyond what she had published before *Living My Life*, Goldman includes in her autobiography multiple accounts of her investigating Czolgosz. A friend relays to her that in Buffalo he had been tortured to confess accomplices (1:316). A reporter, Miss T, narrates the day of the assassination: how a man dug his nails into Czolgosz's eyes after the attack, the scene scrubbed from a news report (1:354). Finally, Goldman recalls how in 1902, in a moment removed from her present narrative, she sought out the family of Czolgosz in Cleveland. His parents were "dark people, the father hardened by toil, the stepmother with a dull, vacant look." All of this, unlike the account before Berkman's attack, is focused not on the deed but its doer and the conditions that pushed the *attentater* to act.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ The symbolic connection between this event and Haymarket is greatly emphasized in *Living My Life*. Goldman is not only held in jail in Chicago, but her jailer confesses that he watched over the imprisoned martyrs as well. She writes: "Here I was, the spiritual child of those men, imprisoned in the city that had taken their lives, in the same jail, even under the guardianship of the very man who had kept watch in their silent hours... Strange, indeed, the complex forces that had bound me to those martyrs through all my socially conscious years!" (1:307).

¹⁴⁷ In a later scene, Goldman is introduced at the Severance Club in Los Angeles by a man claiming to have worked for the D.A. when Goldman was arrested under suspicion of connections to Czolgosz. He tells Goldman that though he thought her guilty then, reading her work had revealed his mistake. Goldman sums up her take on Czolgosz in her response: "I declared that since we are all links in the

In an essay published around the time of Berkman's memoirs, "The Psychology of Political Violence," Goldman eulogizes McKinley's assassin. "Poor Leon Czolgosz," she writes, "your crime consisted in having too sensitive a social consciousness."¹⁴⁸ On the other side of Czolgosz were the people, who were not socially conscious enough. In this essay, as in *Living My Life*, Goldman refrains from judging Czolgosz's actions, suggesting even that his "supersentiveness" was to be mourned and not celebrated.¹⁴⁹ As Goldman's political career develops, she will increasingly preach sympathy for those lives lost in violent action, even if she never fully condemns violence. When anarchists prematurely detonate a bomb in a Lexington Ave apartment, she swears that she "could never again participate in or approve of methods that jeopardized innocent lives," though she still holds a public funeral for the anarchists (*LM*, 2:536). "Psychology" portrays Goldman between two perspectives, the actor's and the people's:

High strung, like a violin string, [the resistant] weep and moan for life, so relentless, so cruel, so terribly inhuman. In a desperate moment the string breaks. Untuned ears hear nothing but discord. But those who feel the agonized cry understand its harmony; they hear in it the fulfillment of the most compelling moment of human nature. Such is the psychology of political violence.¹⁵⁰

social chain, no one can avoid responsibility for such deeds as that of Leon Czolgosz; not even the chairman. He who remains indifferent to the conditions that result in violent acts of protest cannot escape his share of blame for them. Even those of us who see clearly and work for fundamental changes are not entirely exempt from guilt. Too absorbed in efforts for the future, we often turn a deaf ear to those who reach out for sympathetic understanding and who hunger for the fellowship of kindred spirits. Leon Czolgosz had been one of such" (*LM*, 2:560).

¹⁴⁸ Emma Goldman, "The Psychology of Political Violence," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 265.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 279.

This view of violence culminates in an exchange with Berkman. While defending Czolgosz, Goldman receives a letter from Berkman questioning her take on McKinley's assassination. Both *Living My Life* and the *Prison Memoirs* include this conversation, and it clarifies how Goldman had come to see violence as unlikely to educate the people. In that letter, Berkman challenges Czolgosz's intentions, that his target was not an enemy of the people: that a target should be an *economic* enemy of the people (*LM*, 1:324). Goldman's response – to the reader, not to Berkman – is not that her friend's distinction is incorrect, but disbelief that Berkman sees his own *attentat* as democratic. Even Berkman's attack on Czolgosz is divisive: it resembles the argument that Most had used in dismissing Berkman from the anarchist ranks.

What's remarkable is how this reading sets Goldman's autobiography apart from Berkman's memoirs. Looking back at the discussion of his writing earlier in the chapter, we see now that Berkman's *Prison Memoirs* focus almost exclusively on an act of violence and the state's retaliation. Berkman regrets his inability to be *more* of a cause.¹⁵¹ Upon seeing Frick's face, covered in blood, he narrates that “for an instant a strange feeling, as of shame, comes over me; but the next moment I am filled with anger at the sentiment, so unworthy of a revolutionist.”¹⁵² For Berkman, the *Prison Memoirs* are a catharsis along the way to other action, the final chapter of the book titled “The Resurrection.”¹⁵³ But he's not working through his anti-state violence, but

¹⁵¹ In her autobiography, Goldman stresses the continuity between Berkman and his *Prison Memoirs*: “Whatever greatness and humanity the book possesses, they are woven of these elements. There is no gap between the silly youth and the mature man. There is a continuous flow, a red thread that winds like a leitmotif throughout the entire life of Alexander Berkman” (*LM*, 2:508).

¹⁵² Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, 38.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 491.

the state violence perpetrated against him. In Goldman's autobiography, the order of operations are reversed: hers is not a critique of how the state *responds* to anti-state violence, but how it *generates* anti-state violence. And as an act of narrative reconciliation, *Living My Life* accounts for how radical politics can reconcile the violent actor without evaluating the act. It is, as we see in her depiction of Czolgosz, a memorial effort to bring the *attentater* back into the society he renounces.

In the original plan of the *attentat*, Goldman's role was the third step: to survive Berkman and explain his act to others. This is exactly what she did following his attack on Frick. But her revised response to Czolgosz reveals how the survivor can do the work of propaganda – of raising consciousness – *without* the constitutive violence, in a manner that still accommodates that violence and its agent within a larger worldview. It isn't that Goldman's attempts to raise social consciousness disavow violence as unlikely or off the table. It's that Goldman is working toward strategies of action that recuperate those who suffer by violence or authority. Goldman's no hypocrite when she tells the press that she cares for Czolgosz's life yet would nurse McKinley on his deathbed (*LM*, 1:306). She recognizes that state and retaliatory violence cast out both the *attentater* and his target from the masses that constitute society. In the same way that nursing helps Goldman self-authorize not in direct confrontation with Most or her father, social consciousness provides Goldman (and her readers) with a worldview in which all parties are touched by structural state oppression, and thus all parties jointly positioned to resist.

This means that Goldman can recast previous enemies like Most, Abraham and the factory owner as victims of structural inequality. Later in the book, Goldman

defends garment-workers against the factory owner under whom she had first experienced economic domination. She ridicules economic self-improvement, that “it isn’t the saving of pennies that makes people rich; it is the labour of your ‘hands’ and their ruthless exploitation that has created your wealth” (1:352). Goldman also folds Abraham and Most back into the structures they represent. Upon Abraham’s falling ill, Goldman writes that “I came to understand that it is ignorance rather than cruelty that makes parents do so many dreadful things to their helpless children” (1:209). Abraham lacked the worldview by which to see the source of his strife. He came to America a Jewish immigrant, a “foreigner not familiar with the language of the country.” Goldman “began to regard him as one of the mass of the exploited and enslaved for whom I was living and working.” When Abraham finally dies, Goldman suggests that his anger stemmed from marital frustrations, that only in old age had his temper attenuated with his “erotic vitality” (1:448). These latter reflections (clearly influenced by Freud), signify as well Goldman’s desire to fit Abraham within larger structures of suffering, here the frustrations of sexual repression.

Goldman also describes Most in new terms later in *Living My Life*. While in Buffalo on tour in 1906, she learns of his death in Cincinnati. Upon looking back at their falling out, she reflects on the “senselessness of that feud”: Goldman’s struggle had “helped me to understand the hard and lonely life of the rebel who had fought for an unpopular cause” (1:379). She recalls an earlier visit to Most after his release from Blackwell’s Island in 1903, “to let him feel the change in me.” Most ignores Goldman. When she sees Most act in a play the following year, he accepts her praise as though she were any other audience member (1:380). Once more before dying, Most

overlooks Goldman at Louise Michel's memorial. All of these memories effect in Goldman a great sympathy for "the suffering that had made him so inexorable and harsh." Only when he's dead is Goldman permitted to speak for Most at his memorial. That speech and her autobiography recuperate into the movement the lonely, isolated individual of the revolutionary anarchist who had once emblemized the cause and his own arbitrary authority over Goldman.

Under the state, violence is inevitable.¹⁵⁴ The will of the state will always be to ostracize the impoverished and revolutionary. When Berkman is finally released from his fourteen-year sentence, Goldman describes him as "a stranger," the prison having shaved his head and adorned him in ill-fitting clothes "to make him smart at the gaping of the outside world" (*LM*, 1:384). For Berkman in particular, Goldman will urge that he write his memoirs to overcome the horror of his exile.¹⁵⁵ Goldman's *Living My Life* is rather to recuperate or reconcile many of those who suffer under the state, be they the innocents of the Haymarket, the misguided Most, or the

¹⁵⁴ Berenice Carroll explores Goldman's later depictions of violence as inevitable under state and in revolution. Goldman tells Havelock Ellis in 1925 that "we can neither make nor prevent revolutions. They are as inevitable as hurricanes." What determines the *level* of violence is the "preparation on the part of the conflicting forces – the amount of inner preparation." Quoted in Berenice A. Carroll, "Emma Goldman and the Theory of Revolution," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 164–165.

¹⁵⁵ "I had often urged him to write them, believing that if he could re-create his prison life on paper, it might help him to get rid of the phantoms that were making his readjustment to life so difficult" (*LM*, 1:470).

transgressing Berkman and Czolgosz.¹⁵⁶ Violence begins and ends with disunity; raising consciousness seeks to effect a view of society where all are connected.¹⁵⁷

The Haymarket Martyrs and Biography

The narrative thread from Haymarket to Czolgosz maps *Living My Life* on to the problem of anarchist action that I outlined early in the chapter: violence is an insufficient form of action for raising social consciousness not only because the people do not recognize it as emancipatory, but because it exiles the actor and acted upon from society. Goldman's efforts to defend Czolgosz or recast Berkman, Most and others exemplify her attempts to recuperate outcasts into a concept of the people. But my original argument was that *Living My Life* itself does this: that the autobiography is a mode of raising social consciousness. To explain how *Life* accomplishes this, we should consider a few broader ways to read the form of Goldman's book.

¹⁵⁶ Goldman and Berkman's disagreements over idealism continue after prison. Goldman, outside bars, "no longer fitted into the old mould, as he had expected me to" (*LM*, 1:399). Berkman's time in an institution that epitomized the coercive state had reinforced his anarchist principles as absolutely abstract, whereas Goldman's various efforts in larger society had made her work more pragmatic and protean. At one point Goldman tells Berkman that "you are a zealot... you judge human quality by your criterion of one's value to the Cause, as the Christians do from the standpoint of the Church. That has been your attitude towards me since your release. The years of struggle and travail I suffered for my growth mean nothing to you, because you are bound in the confines of your creed" (1:435-6). This argument will continue throughout the text, even through their time together in Russia.

¹⁵⁷ Goldman will use the threat of police violence as counterpoint to the peaceful collective action prompted by her lectures. After police and hecklers interrupt an anti-conscription meeting at Hunter's Point Palace, Goldman tells the crowd that "your presence here... and the presence of the multitude outside shouting their approval of every word they can catch, are convincing proof that you do not believe in violence, and it equally proves that you understand that war is the most fiendish violence... We must refuse to be provoked to it. Intelligence and a passionate faith are more convincing than armed police, machine-guns, and rowdies in soldiers' coats. We have demonstrated it tonight. We still have many speakers, some of them with illustrious American names. But nothing they or I could say will add to the splendid example you have given. Therefore I declare the meeting closed. File out orderly, intone our inspiring revolutionary songs, and leave the soldiers to their tragic fate, which at present they are too ignorant to realize" (*LM*, 2:606).

One option is to read *Living My Life* as the unfolding of a prophecy, what Kathy Ferguson (in drawing on Michael Shapiro) calls a “pious narrative.”¹⁵⁸ That prophecy begins with Haymarket. As noted before, Goldman introduces Haymarket through two temporal filters; in the present narrative she recalls the event through Most’s lecture, which then reminds her of a lecture in Rochester where she first hears of the event. In that memory, speaker Johanna Greie tells her audience the Haymarket anarchists’ story (*LM*, 1:7). This is Goldman’s first time hearing the term “anarchism,” and she wrestles with its meaning: “They were to be put to death for their ideal. But what was their ideal?” (1:9). As the lecture hall empties, Greie calls out to Goldman, noticing her consternation. Of the anarchists, the seer tells her “that you will know them better as you learn their ideal, and that you will make their cause your own.” A few weeks later the martyrs are hanged, and Goldman wakes the next day to “a burning faith,” “to make known to the world their beautiful lives and heroic deaths” (1:10). Greie, Goldman writes, “was more prophetic than she had probably realized.” In an essay published after *Living My Life*, Goldman writes that progress is always the result of “the prophet, the seer, the idealist.”¹⁵⁹

To read the autobiography as prophecy would suggest that Goldman dedicates the rest of her life to the martyrs’ ideals. Given how often she references Haymarket in her *Life*, there’s good evidence for this reading. One mention suggests an alternative reading better fit to the problem of action and social consciousness. While touring,

¹⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 137. It should be noted that this is not how Ferguson reads the text, instead drawing on Deleuze to see the narrative as “a turbulent and contingent process rather than the unfolding of a prior truth.”

¹⁵⁹ Goldman, “The Individual, Society and the State,” 115.

some time in the 1890s, Goldman visits the martyrs' graves in Waldheim Cemetery (*LM*, 1:221). A statue stands over their grave: "the figure of the woman on a high pedestal, and the fallen hero reclining at her feet"; "her face, beautiful in its great humanity, was turned upon a world of pain and woe, one hand pointing to the dying rebel, the other held protectingly over his brow." Goldman had once opposed this statue's placement, convinced that the dead's ideals stood alone (1:222). Seeing it now, she recants: "The monument served as the embodiment of the ideals for which the men had died, a visible symbol of their words and their deeds." The statue of the woman standing over the dead is a memorial, a testament, a physical instantiation of the ideals for which they had suffered. The protagonist Goldman of *Living My Life* is that watchful warden in the cemetery scene; the autobiography is the statue itself. Goldman's text unfolds not such that her *learning* of the ideals of Parsons, Spies, and others remained her work, but rather *making known* their lives.

That Goldman begins her autobiography with the Haymarket massacre and trial perfectly synthesizes the democratic appeal of the book. First, it locates violence in the state. By beginning her autobiography with a story of state violence, Goldman casts both Berkman's and Czolgosz's acts as part of a greater structural problem: this is a common way that Goldman explains violence in other writings.¹⁶⁰ In Goldman's statement at the 1917 trial that led to her deportation, she tells the court that "it is organized violence on top which creates individual violence at the bottom."¹⁶¹ Second, introducing Goldman through Haymarket appeals to what Eyal Naveh identifies as the

¹⁶⁰ See Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 34–36.

¹⁶¹ Goldman, "Address to the Jury," 364.

democratic problem of martyrdom, which requires a people to *see* that these individuals died for them. Radical martyrdom at the end of the nineteenth century, Naveh argues, couldn't penetrate the social consciousness of a heterogeneous public: these deaths only "reinforced the coherence of the small and already dedicated group of radicals."¹⁶² The autobiography is a place for Goldman to expand social consciousness, to recuperate the martyrs into readers' conceptions of society. Finally, beginning the autobiography with Haymarket casts the book as one of exile and reentry. It opens on a young émigré recalling a story of exile, eight men interned or interred by the state, along with countless others killed at the riot. Goldman's critique of violence, of Berkman's and Czolgosz's acts, is that it exiles them from a conception of the people. Abandoning the personal, the *attentater* forgoes social ties. The state will eventually deport Goldman. Autobiography, as a form of raising social consciousness, is its author's and others' return to the people.

Living My Life is more a work of biography than prophecy. To construct her own authority as an autobiographical subject, Goldman dedicates much of her thousand-page book to detailing the radical movement in America, providing the entire anarchist network the sort of context Goldman as protagonist had afforded Abraham, Most, Berkman, and Czolgosz. What is written to be an autobiography, emergent from the authority of its author, is revealed rather to authorize its narrative only in the telling of others' sufferings under the state and capital.

¹⁶² Eyal J. Naveh, *Crown of Thorns: Political Martyrdom in America from Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 151.

For this reason, it is around the end of McKinley's assassination that *Living My Life* turns from a narration of Goldman's social consciousness to her performing social consciousness-raising, by historicizing her attempts to represent others and by biographizing others through the book itself. The narrative of *Living My Life*'s middle act sees Goldman competing against other forms of representation in America. Goldman's primary venues are her *Mother Earth*, a magazine dedicated to anarchist politics and art and started in March 1906, and her lecturing circuits, which take Goldman across the country: through Canada, and into Europe, among various audiences and with myriad run-ins with local authorities (1:378).¹⁶³ Goldman lectures on a variety of subjects, varying from the art and philosophy of Ibsen and Nietzsche to birth control and conscription. On many topics, Goldman encounters pushback from other anarchists, including her speaking on women and gays (2:555). Goldman is a founding member of several Free Speech Leagues formed among anarchists, radicals, and liberals, inspired by the Federal Anti-Anarchist Law (1:348).¹⁶⁴ She champions free speech when defending Czolgosz, when censored by the police, prevented from lecturing, or when her office is raided (1:391). Motivated by the Haymarket trials, Goldman spends much of her *Life* representing persecuted radicals. In addition to Berkman and Czolgosz, Goldman defends William Buwalda the soldier-turned-anarchist (1:445), Bill Haywood and colleagues (1:480), the Mexican anarchist Magón

¹⁶³ For more on the printing press's centrality for anarchists, see Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 103. For an overview of gender issues discussed within and performed by *Mother Earth*, see Linda L. Lumsden, "Anarchy Meets Feminism: A Gender Analysis of Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*, 1906–1917," *American Journalism* 24, no. 3 (2007): 31–54.

¹⁶⁴ Goldman also helps build a Free Speech League in 1907 in Chicago (1:418) and later in Cleveland (2:588). More activism for free speech is reported on Goldman, *Living My Life*, [1931] 1970, 1:454, 459, 475, 494.

brothers (2:576), anarchists Thomas J. Mooney and Warren K. Billings (2:578), and colleague Bolton Hall (2:587). In one of the final scenes of *Living My Life*, Goldman learns of the trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti', two Italian-American anarchists convicted of murder under suspicious evidence. Seeing how little had changed since Haymarket, Goldman asks "how could I have believed that Sacco and Vanzetti, however innocent, would escape American 'justice'?" (2:990). She'll contest mob claims to the people as well, particularly when a group calling themselves the Vigilantes terrorizes her and Reitman during a 1912 visit to San Diego (1:494). This is only a summary of the detailed pages covering every labor dispute, strike, assassination, trial and injustice dealt American radicals from 1889 to 1931.

Beyond its narrative, Goldman dedicates much of *Living My Life* to biographies of radicals, victims, and larger movements. Apart from Goldman's own engagements, she devotes paragraphs and pages at a time to the history of individuals significant to American radicalism. In the preface to *Living My Life* (called "In Appreciation"), Goldman dedicates the book to those who helped compose its text and author. She writes that "my life as I have lived it owes everything to those who had come into it, stayed long or little, and passed out... *Living My Life* is my tribute and my gratitude to them all" (1:vii). The state's earlier seizure of Goldman's writings and the scope of the book frustrated Goldman's ability to write *Living My Life* from memory. To aid her, anarchist historians Max Nettlau and Rudolf Rocker helped with context, and her colleagues returned the many letters through which Goldman had sustained her network (1:vi). The style of the autobiography exemplifies its collaborative nature. Historical events are sometimes specific, long passages of

dialogue reproduced verbatim, yet elsewhere Goldman will dart between topics sporadically as though shuffling through letters. Blanche Gelfant points out that Goldman's "Appreciation" brings together her literary persona and politics: she literally and literarily constructed her identity through voluntary cooperation.¹⁶⁵

This communal effort is clear in the bulk of Goldman's *Living My Life*, dedicated not simply to historical events but a vast series of biographies and portraits of radicals. Goldman recalls the deeds of the Italian anarchist Malatesta and the French communard Louise Michel (1:166). She praises the educative efforts at the University of Tokyo of Denjiro Kotoku, who had allegedly attempted the life of the Mikado (1:474). Goldman captures Roger Baldwin of the future American Civil Liberties Union, and Robert Minor of the American Communist Party (1:477). Throughout the book the reader encounters Bill Haywood (1:489), M. Eleanor Fitzgerald (2:520), Eugene Debs (2:567-568), Bolton Hall, and others. And then there are Goldman's extended engagements with Kropotkin and Russian socialist Catherine Breshkovsky. Throughout *Living My Life*, Goldman biographizes figures on the margins, in animosity, and in alliance with any radical movement of the late nineteenth century. Whereas the first few hundred pages of the autobiography will perform that self-authorization detailed above, the vast majority of its pages will focus on a documentary history of those who fought the state till 1931.

This is ultimately what makes *Living My Life* a form of radical action attentive to the problem of social consciousness. For it constructs Goldman's authority in

¹⁶⁵ Blanche H. Gelfant, "Speaking Her Own Piece: Emma Goldman and the Discursive Skeins of Autobiography," in *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 241.

narrative and focus only insofar as the book works to biographize the radical movement. It is self-authorizing only insofar as it authorizes and represents those who had suffered under and against the state as well.

Afterword: Goldman in Russia

Though this chapter focuses on Goldman's addressing the American people, the final two hundred pages of *Living My Life* cover her time in Soviet Russia. According to a letter to publisher Alfred Knopf, Goldman had intended the autobiography to end at her deportation; it was only at his behest that she included this final part.¹⁶⁶ Yet in these pages, Goldman goes through the same awakening to the ills of Russia.¹⁶⁷ Upon arriving, Goldman's joy ("Soviet Russia! Sacred ground, magic people!") soon sours with the apparent suppression of free speech, the persistence of poverty, and the special treatment of party members (2:732). Goldman tries to remain optimistic to revolutionary ideals: "I wanted to see only its beauty and radiance, longed passionately to believe in its strength and power, yet the very hideousness of the other side compelled with an irresistible appeal" (2:737-738). She consistently clashes with supporters and party members, struggling to find a place for herself that supports the revolution while not endorsing the Soviet state.¹⁶⁸ Her collocutors insist

¹⁶⁶ See Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'?", 907.

¹⁶⁷ As Goldman is preparing to leave America, a reporter asks "that is the end, Emma Goldman, isn't it?" and she responds: "It may only be the beginning" (*LM*, 2:710).

¹⁶⁸ Here Goldman continues to critique violence as a means of social reform, telling John Reed: "I must be crazy... or else I never understood the meaning of revolution. I certainly never believed that it would signify callous indifference to human life and suffering, or that it would have no other method of solving its problems than by wholesale slaughter" (*LM*, 2:740).

that she focus on the big picture: that once the rebels have been crushed and the masses educated, things will be better (2:756-757).

Though Goldman busies herself with factory and hospital visits in her first few months, she slowly grows socially conscious of the people's suffering, through helping the Petrograd Museum of the Revolution, a memorial for the masses that created communist Russia (2:782). She imagines hopefully that

in the darkest hours of our groping we would often discover the most heroic endurance and devotion hidden under the official Soviet surface. Not the kind daily acclaimed in public places and feasted with showy demonstrations and military display... [The people] made up for the vulgar ostentation by their own singleness of purpose and probity. Silently they plodded at their tasks, giving their all to the Revolution and asking nothing in return for themselves either in rations, praise, or other recognition. These great souls redeemed for us much that was hateful in the Bolshevik régime. (2:784)

Goldman's work for the museum exposes her to the Russian people, traveling through Kharkov, Poltava, Fastov, Kiev and elsewhere, Russian border skirmishes interrupting her trip. Goldman's work for the museum ends when the Soviets sponsor a state-led collection of similar historical materials (2:861). This is not Goldman's only effort at memorializing the Russian revolution; before she leaves, she helps arrange the funeral for Kropotkin, who had died in early 1921 (2:865). Here, too, resistance from the Soviets reminds Goldman of the state's desire always to control its citizens' representation. She eventually leaves Russia after the Bolsheviks' violent response to strikes in Petrograd and the Kronstadt rebellion (2:873-886). Having hoped for freedom in Russia, she will depart "rather than become a cog in the machinery, an inanimate thing to be manipulated at will" (2:886).

Before *Living My Life*, Goldman published her accounts of Soviet Russia in the 1923 *My Disillusionment in Russia*, followed by the 1924 *My Further Disillusionment in Russia*. In the preface to the first work, Goldman summarizes what had been her lifelong move away from Nechayev's impersonal approach to revolution. Goldman is not an historian, because an historian "may seem to be objective."¹⁶⁹ "But real history is not a compilation of mere data. It is valueless without the human element," she claims: "It is the personal reactions of the participants and observers which lend vitality to all history to make it vivid and alive." Great writers on the French Revolution, Goldman points out, draw their inspiration from the subjective accounts of participants. Goldman's intention in her 1923 autobiographical work is to give a personal reading of revolution. And this, she hopes, will lead to others' accounts. In her 1931 *Living My Life*, it is Goldman's goal to abandon the position of the doomed revolutionary, and to take up a subjective account of radicalism that aims to raise social consciousness in others as her life had in her.

Conclusion: *Living My Life* in 1931 and 1970

In the 1934 *Harper's* article "Was My Life Worth Living," Goldman explains that the Haymarket incident had been "a force that tore away shams and made reality stand out vividly and clearly."¹⁷⁰ Goldman's autobiography did the same. The article describes what might well capture the work of *Living My Life*:

¹⁶⁹ Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), vi.

¹⁷⁰ Emma Goldman, "Was My Life Worth Living," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2012), 433.

It requires something more than personal experience to gain a philosophy or point of view from any specific event. It is the quality of our response to the event and our capacity to enter into the lives of others that help us to make their lives and experiences our own. In my own case my convictions have derived and developed from events in the lives of others as well as from my own experience. What I have seen meted out to others by authority and repression, economic and political, transcends anything I myself may have endured.¹⁷¹

Autobiography does not mean the ability to represent oneself in the city square, as Franklin's did. Nor did it retreat from politics and society in the face of changing conditions, as it had for Adams. Goldman's approach to autobiography is closest to Douglass's denunciation: an attempt to instill in readers mutual awareness of injustice. Like Douglass, Goldman saw autobiography as a genre that could recast personal narrative as a story through which readers could imagine new, wider constituencies. Where Goldman went furthest, even beyond Douglass, was in compelling readers of *Living My Life* to remain suspicious not only of state authority or social movements, but *any* arbitrary authority. This is what made her text truly radical.

The initial release of *Living My Life* sold poorly. The \$7.50 tag and the economic climate of 1931 prevented its wide distribution.¹⁷² Goldman had urged Knopf to lower the price to \$5, but the book's length required two volumes. In a letter to Agnes Inglis, the author lamented the book's reach, her goal "to reach the mass of the American reading public." Goldman had "always worked for the mass."¹⁷³ Mostly libraries and newspapers purchased the book, of which Evelyn Scott wrote Goldman: "what irony that your book of all in the world must be given this exclusiveness."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 434.

¹⁷² See Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise*, 269.

¹⁷³ Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*

Yet the book was critically well-received, particularly for its focus on the complexity of Goldman's life in contrast with her public depiction.¹⁷⁵ Colleagues spurned its lurid detail or championed its free spirit: Lucy Parsons thought the book "disgusting" while Roger Baldwin credited Goldman with inspiring the ACLU.¹⁷⁶ The book also attracted unexpected readers (Eleanor Roosevelt thought highly of the book).¹⁷⁷ To her end, Goldman remained disappointed by her autobiography's uptake. Her colleague Ahrne Thorne recalled to the historian Paul Avrich that "it was a big book and too expensive, and in the Depression it didn't sell well."¹⁷⁸ Goldman's career did not end with *Living My Life*. She was active in Spain's civil war and continued to write on drama. In February 1940, Goldman suffered a stroke that left her unable to speak till her death months later.¹⁷⁹ She returned to America once more for her burial near the graves of the Haymarket martyrs in Chicago's Waldheim cemetery. Her epitaph reads: "Liberty will not descend to a people. A people must raise themselves to liberty."¹⁸⁰

Second-wave feminism gave *Living My Life* a second chance. In 1970, the paperback reissue of the autobiography would increase its accessibility for readers. This was the same year that the socialist *Women: A Journal of Liberation* advertised the biographical recovery of historical women, among them Margaret Sanger, Harriet Tubman, and Goldman.¹⁸¹ According to many feminists, women needed not only to

¹⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 271. Other coverage indicated further work for feminism: one review was literally a list of people Goldman had slept with, titled "Love Life of an Anarchist."

¹⁷⁶ See Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'?", 909.

¹⁷⁷ Roosevelt told this to Jeanne Levey, who then told it to Paul Avrich. Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 57.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Herbert A. Leibowitz, *Fabricating Lives: An Anatomy of American Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 195.

¹⁸¹ See Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'?", 919.

awaken consciousness among the oppressed, but to recover a concealed history of women. Before she helped found University of Michigan's women's studies program in 1972, Kathryn Kish Sklar taught the first course in women's history there in the spring of 1971: around the same time that Sklar was engaged in a consciousness-raising group at the end of 1970, she was arranging the syllabus that would include Goldman's autobiography.¹⁸² Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, the chair for the first women's studies program in the country at San Diego State University, also taught seminars on Goldman from 1973-4; Nancy Hoffman, instrumental in beginning a similar program at Portland State University in 1970, taught a course on women's autobiography in 1972 that included *Living My Life*.¹⁸³ These classes accompanied a recovery of Goldman's scholarship. Alix Kates Shulman, who had helped to found the Redstockings, arranged and published a collection of Goldman's writings in 1972. In the preface to the 1983 edition of *Red Emma Speaks*, Shulman wrote that "by the time I decided to write about [Goldman] in the late sixties, her books were all long out of print and few people I knew had ever heard her name."¹⁸⁴ Broader movements in the approach to autobiography nurtured further interest. Smith and Watson point out that it

¹⁸² Sklar, "The Women's Studies Moment: 1972," 138. Many readers of Goldman point out that consciousness-raising groups drew on Goldman's writings (and *Living My Life*), and yet I have been unable to further substantiate these claims with hard evidence. In the case of Alix Kates Shulman, however, it may be fair to guess that she is relying upon firsthand experience (and if so, this is certainly of the best evidence available). See Alix Kates Shulman, "Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman, 3rd Edition (Amherst: Humanity Books, [1983] 2012), 18; Falk, "Let Icons Be Bygones!," 48; Frankel, "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'?" 920.

¹⁸³ Boxer, "Modern Woman Not Lost," 234; Hoffman, "Teaching Across the Borders of Race and Class," 23.

¹⁸⁴ Shulman, "Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal," 4. Although several authors mention that Goldman's works were out of print before the 1970 edition of *Living My Life*, I've been unable to find any who specify the autobiography as having been out of print, as opposed to some of Goldman's lesser-known works.

was not till the 1970s that students took women's autobiographies seriously.¹⁸⁵ Many other texts important to feminism in that period held up personal narrative, including Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and Angela Davis's autobiographical writings.¹⁸⁶

Goldman's recovery is evident not simply in the renaissance of her writings but in her cultural impact on the period. As Shulman points out, Goldman's rebirth in the 1970s accompanied posters and clothing bearing her face and paraphrasing her ideas; groups organized around activism or the theatre also adopted her name (such as the Emma Goldman Brigade or Emmatroupe).¹⁸⁷ In 1973, the Women's Health Project, Incorporated, built the Emma Goldman Clinic shortly after the results of *Roe v. Wade*.¹⁸⁸ According to their mission statement, the clinic (still in operation today) was "the first women-owned and -operated health care in the Midwest and the first outpatient abortion clinic in Iowa."¹⁸⁹ They named the clinic for Goldman's devotion to women's health and "her challenging spirit." Her cultural impact did not end in the 1970s or 80s: in 1996, for example, a community called "Who's Emma?" opened in the Kensington Markets of Toronto, the collective dedicated to gender equality and providing safe spaces for the left.¹⁹⁰ It was through *Living My Life*, now more readily available, that American readers could more clearly engage with Goldman's legacy and goals for raising consciousness.

¹⁸⁵ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Introduction," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 4.

¹⁸⁶ See *ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁷ See Shulman, "Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal," 4.

¹⁸⁸ The Emma Goldman Clinic, "The Emma Goldman Clinic Mission Statement," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensing (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 319.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁹⁰ See Jeff Shantz, *Active Anarchy: Political Practice in Contemporary Movements* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 93.

Living My Life confirms the importance of American autobiography before Goldman, and its appeal for the radical movements that survived her. Though it moved beyond Franklin, Adams, and even Douglass, it provided a similar exploration of authority grounded in representations of the people. Past its cover was an author struggling to rectify an individualist form of writing with a democratic spirit of emancipation and radical change. Unique to Goldman's autobiography was its reliance on the concurrent need for biography. *Living My Life* recalls the injunction with which Virginia Woolf had concluded *A Room of One's Own* in 1929:

If we live another century or so – I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals – and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality... then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her fore-runners, as her brother did before her, she will be born.¹⁹¹

Woolf's call to recuperate those lost in history would motivate readers to recover even those hidden in autobiography, those like Jane Franklin.¹⁹² Goldman herself had appealed to biography, lecturing on Mary Wollstonecraft in 1911.¹⁹³ Her autobiography's 1970 publication fed this feminist need to recover from history the lives of women obscured by its victors.

¹⁹¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1929] 1957), 117–118.

¹⁹² Jill Lepore recalls Woolf's invocation of Shakespeare's sister in her study of Jane Franklin. See Lepore, *Book of Ages*.

¹⁹³ See Alice Wexler, "Emma Goldman on Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 227.

Thus Emma Goldman, anarchist and feminist, found herself in 1970 the bridge between an anarchist approach to radical change through the impersonal will and the feminist practice of consciousness-raising: she was a political thinker whose posterity might encounter autobiography as the representation of not one life nor a particular group of lives, but the emancipated people as its author.

Conclusion

The Politics of Personal Narrative in the Twenty-First Century

Defending himself against accusations that he'd corrupted the youth of Athens, Socrates told the democratically-selected jurors that "it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day... for the unexamined life is not worth living for men."¹ This wasn't a defense of autobiography, nor was Athens a modern democracy. But to live in the polis, Socrates told his accusers, he had to look inward. The first prominent theorist of the state, Thomas Hobbes, brought readers a bit closer to the genre still a century and a half out when he introduced *Leviathan* in 1651. In a passage as well-known as Socrates's injunction in the "Apology," Hobbes described the state as "Artificiall man," with an "Artificiall *Soul*" and "artificiall *Joynts*."² Hobbes's state, Hannah Pitkin would later explain, would rise to represent the people that had authorized it, the sovereign then free to do as he liked.³ Again, Hobbes's state was no American nation. But to outline this "Body Politique" (artificer of which was "*Man*"), Hobbes promised, his readers would need to follow a saying "not of late understood": not to read books or men, but "*Nosce teipsum, Read thy self*." To read yourself was

to teach us, that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, feare &c*, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men.⁴

¹ Plato, "Apology," in *Five Dialogues*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 41.

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9–10.

³ Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, chap. 3.

⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 10.

Whether against the court's death sentence or for the sovereign state, Socrates and Hobbes knew that to reckon political organization meant first to self-read. In the American tradition of reckoning popular authority, it meant also to self-write. In a democratic age, political inquiry required not simply self-regard, but self-examination through a media that joined the one to the many. "He that is to govern a whole Nation," Hobbes wrote at the top of *Leviathan*, "must read in himself... Man-kind."⁵

I have argued throughout these chapters that autobiography and democratic politics share an appeal to popular authority, and that autobiography in particular looks to make an author's personal experience a shared social reality. Autobiographers ground these appeals in narratives of personal development, stories of how they came to stand before readers as members of a community; in the very telling of that story, however, readers must judge the author's place among the people. This is how Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Henry Adams, and Emma Goldman approached autobiography from the founding to the dawn of the twentieth century.

For Franklin, wrestling with his own experiences in colonial America allowed him to replace the authority of his father and tradition with not simply his entrepreneurial spirit, but an inheritable guide for posterity. The people, according to Franklin, would be defined by those who took on his work ethic and self-discipline.

For Douglass, writing two narratives within the span of a decade permitted him to tackle two authorities: the systemic, economic domination of slavery, and the racial, hierarchical domination of the early abolitionists. But to insist on his own autonomy

⁵ Ibid., 11.

did not simply mean to replace those authorities with a new type of American citizenship, but rather to invoke readers to see themselves in his struggle and suffering. The people, according to Douglass, would be those touched by and turned to injustice.

For Adams, the turn *away* from autobiography enabled him to wrestle with what he saw as the end of authority in America: the loss of history, heroes, and God as educating young citizens. By searching for new authority in the genre of confession, Adams thought his failures could pave the way for an unknown and novel American authority. The people, according to Adams, would be anyone but an Adams, new citizens born amid conditions of technological, scientific, and bureaucratic modernity.

For Goldman, recalling her own development and that of the radical movements in America and abroad provided new authority in the face of God, state, patriarchy, and even violence. Autobiography captured Goldman's own social consciousness as a young anarchist, and through narrating movements' strife everywhere sought to provoke readers to their own consciousness. The people, according to Goldman, were those suffering under domination that required only their own introspection and consciousness to see the false lines dividing them.

Although each author here used autobiography to distinct political purpose – inheritance, dissent, education and social consciousness – they demonstrate emergent patterns in the relationship between American autobiography and democracy. Woven together, these narratives portray ongoing trends in the American struggle over authority, from the founding to the early twentieth century: trends essential to any story of American political thought. Four of these patterns stand out.

First, no trend appears more among these autobiographies than the recurring tyranny of fathers and patriarchy. For as much as the Enlightenment inspired political actors to make the world anew, in every autobiography reverberates the Declaration of Independence's constituent affront to King George III. Franklin's teenage running away from home, his education under his uncle, and his many investors are but a few events to symbolize his turn from Josiah Franklin and the constricting authority of tradition. The three authors following Franklin echo this anti-paternalist trope, yet in ways better fitting each author's politics. Douglass reveals that this "self-made" individual *requires* a father to spurn, whereas plantation economy dissolves fatherhood by splitting families or by overseers themselves fathering slaves. According to Adams, modernity has revoked from patriarchy and tradition any benign guidance it once provided. Goldman recalls memories of her tyrannical Abraham to evince the same patriarchy in the anarchist movement, symbolized by Johann Most.⁶ These authors' experiences suggest that freedom requires a dominant authority to contest, each exploring a variation of this idea throughout history.

A second trend emergent throughout these autobiographies is the slow turn from religious authority, albeit reluctant. Franklin's "Art of Virtue" parrots many Christian principles; as Weber pointed out a century later, Franklin manages to secularize authority while appealing to religious morals. Juxtaposing Douglass's two narratives is his transition from moral suasion toward political action, *My Bondage and My Freedom* is an appeal not to moral but popular justice. Douglass will also call

⁶ This trend doesn't stop with Goldman, Consider the title of Barack Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*.

out southern Christian hypocrisy, wherein slaveholders converting to Methodism grow only *more* vengeful and cruel toward the enslaved. Adams's entire confession focuses on the American transition from religious to scientific authority in the modern age, though he will attempt to retain enchantment in the latter. Finally, Goldman takes the strongest tack away from religious authority in her anarchist antipathy to God.

Although these authors do not fully represent historical attitudes to religion, each demonstrates how secularization often retains the trappings of religious thought: Franklin's disguised ethics, Douglass's political suasion, Adams's confession, and even the prophetic introduction of Goldman's autobiography exemplify the hold of Christian narrative on American political thought.

Third, each autobiography here wrestles with the complex relationship between knowledge of the world, knowledge of the self, and democratic politics. Franklin's education is essential to his success, and he creates his "Art of Virtue" from a balance of his knowledge of literature, philosophy, and religion, and his own experiences around town and abroad. As a result, Franklin exemplifies the eighteenth-century conception of subjectivity that autobiography inherits from the Enlightenment: we get the sense from Franklin that a prescriptive or ethical citizenship can be universal, that from Franklin's own experience he can promote a way of being that will fit any individual. The three authors after him complicate the type of citizen that will emerge from that conception. Knowledge of the world and reason are essential to Douglass's independence, such as in his reading of the *Columbian Orator*. But what's more important to *My Bondage and My Freedom* is first, how a prescriptive citizenship might racially distinguish political roles, and second, how the diversity of

constituents requires that claimants rely on empathy and not assumptions about another's experiences. Goldman's autobiography suggests something similar: despite her love for philosophy and drama, she grounds popular authority in the shared experiences of those touched by structural injustice. While Adams is not attentive to gender, class, nor race as it impacts modern subjectivity, he is instead convinced that modern conditions have fractured any relation between the individual and his experience. Though he returns to classical forms of self-examination, he intimates that readers will devise entirely new ways of knowing the world and each other.

Finally, and far briefer than those previous trends, autobiography reveals how frequently political actors seek representation outside of or against the state. Franklin polished his great narrative and model for self-representation alongside the very documents that would legally define political representation. As Adams watched these institutions crumble, he sought in personal narrative a renewed genre of representation that could capture a Henry Adams of relevance for his colleagues and posterity. The abolitionist and anarchist movements that surrounded Douglass and Goldman jointly turned to various genres of narrative to replace state testimony: slave narrative could represent the enslaved when black testimony was inadmissible in courts, and autobiography could testify for radicals misrepresented in false or abbreviated trials. These examples were not simply iterations of literary representation – attempts to provide some artful imitation of life in writing. Instead, their authors and publishers sought narrative to capture the sentiment and claims of various peoples: to do precisely what democratic representation takes as its goal.

I'll conclude my discussion of autobiography and American democracy with three brief assessments: (1) the value of autobiography for democratic theory, (2) whether autobiography is an inherently-egalitarian genre, and (3) the relevance of autobiography for twentieth- and twenty-first-century politics.

Autobiography and Democratic Theory

Throughout the dissertation, I've argued for conceptual and historical overlap between autobiography and democracy. Looking forward, what should the value of autobiography be for those interested in democratic theory?

Scholars interested by invocations of “the people” in democratic thought might read autobiography as an alternative example of what Jason Frank calls a “constituent moment”: “when the underauthorized – imposters, radicals, self-created entities – seize the mantle of authorization, changing the inherited rules of authorization in the process.”⁷ According to Frank, these appeals to popular authority look to enact a new democratic subject despite their lack of precedent in law or other sources of political legitimacy. Looking at similar speech acts in the history of black American political thought, Melvin Rogers distinguishes between the “descriptive” and “aspirational” invocations of the people: whereas a descriptive claim accounts for persons represented by a constitution or institution, an aspirational claim promotes an emancipatory view of a future, unbounded constituency.⁸ These are but two prominent examples among a host of democratic theorists interested in “the people” as a

⁷ Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 8.

⁸ Rogers, “The People, Rhetoric, and Affect,” 188.

democratic subject and the various rhetorical practices that summon or signify it.⁹ Autobiography is distinct from both Frank's and Rogers's examples, such that it attempts to negotiate conceptions of the people specifically through personal experience and history. In the autobiographies I've studied here, the line between descriptive and aspirational conceptions of the people can be quite blurry, as autobiography is always a forward-looking form of writing substantively focused on looking backward. An autobiographer's advocating for who the people may become necessarily requires they consider who the author and her people have been.

Autobiography may also appeal to those democratic theorists who seek an approach to political injustice alternative to what moral philosophers provide. In the wake of John Rawls's influential work on justice and inequality, a variety of scholars have sought ways to bring normative theory more in conversation with everyday democratic experience. Some of these critiques suggest that Rawls and others assume a problematic distance between the theorist and the polis under critique. In Sheldon Wolin's review of Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, he insists that democracy cannot be "gift to the demos" – an abstract template for justice removed from the experience of injustice.¹⁰ Wolin's critique echoes a longstanding question for political theory: how

⁹ See Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988); Margaret Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); Sofia Näsström, "The Legitimacy of the People," *Political Theory* 35, no. 5 (2007): 624–58.

¹⁰ Sheldon S. Wolin, "The Liberal/Democratic Divide. On Rawls's *Political Liberalism*," *Political Theory* 24, no. 1 (1996): 98. These ambiguous moments appear sporadically in Rawls's writings. For example, after his description of "reflective equilibrium" in *Political Liberalism*, he writes: "this position is set up by you and me in working out justice and fairness," without clarifying who *you* or *me* is in relation to justice or the polis. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 28. Though not aimed at Rawls, Jacques Rancière makes similar critiques of political theory distanced from the political. In his writings on politics, literature, and aesthetics, Rancière consistently returns to a view of radical democracy deeply suspicious of the literary and aesthetic dimensions in which it is argued and published. This is true particularly of *Disagreement* and "The Politics of Literature," but also in several of his lesser read works, including *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

should the theorist relate to the polis? From the foundations of Plato's *Republic*, political theorists have asked or left unanswered their place in the polis that they critique or create from abstraction. Democratic theory in particular, from Rousseau's formulation of the lawgiver and his preface to *The Social Contract* ("If I were a prince or a legislator, I should not waste time in saying what wants doing; I should do it, or hold my peace"), has joined questions of political founding to the very practice of writing on politics.¹¹ These are issues of authority and authorship: how to formulate a normative, political injunction without revoking from the people their self-authorization.¹² Equally important are those scholars who have more charitably attempted to connect normative philosophy to experiences of injustice. Tommie Shelby and Elizabeth Anderson have adapted Rawls's ideal theory of justice to non-ideal situations: to issues of disobedience in communities plagued by poverty and racial inequality, and to affirmative action, respectively.¹³ Charles Mills has looked similarly for the means to turn philosophy to the issue of racial inequality, or, as he often puts it, to liberalize illiberal liberalism.¹⁴

and *Mute Speech*. See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jacques Rancière, "The Politics of Literature," *SubStance* 33, no. 1 (2004): 10–24; Jacques Rancière, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: Everyman's Library, 1993), 181.

¹² For example, see Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³ Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2007): 126–60; Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Charles W. Mills, "Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice?: A Critique of Tommie Shelby," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 1–27.

Though not all concerned with justice, many autobiographers similarly look to find equality or better democratic governance in non-ideal situations, and they do so through appealing to histories of experiencing or witnessing injustice. Political thinkers will find drastically different solutions to democratic problems in a genre focused on intimate accounts of everyday politics. If theorists don't look to the broad history I've surveyed here, they can find similar appeals in the many ways political actors today rely on experience. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson summarize the vast diversity of claims to personal experience used in contemporary politics, such as the postcolonial coming-of-age story, memoirs of female politicians rising to power such as Hillary Clinton's, or what Gillian Whitlock calls "soft weapons": for example, the memoirs that women in Islamic states write to negotiate the relation between gender and citizenship in contemporary global politics.¹⁵ If we widen personal narrative beyond print media we could also include the "It Gets Better Project" aimed at LGBTQ youth, or the adoption of coming-out narratives in immigration politics surrounding the DREAM Act.¹⁶ The value of autobiography and personal narrative to democratic theory is not simply in the genre's appeal to the people, but in its providing new solutions to problems that have defined the study of democracy since its origins.

¹⁵ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 129–131. For a fuller account of contemporary personal narrative genres, see *ibid.*, chap. 5. See also Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁶ On narrative in immigration politics, see Cristina Beltrán, "Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: DREAM Activists, Cyber-Testimonio, and the Queering of Democracy," in *Transforming Citizens: Youth, New Media, and Political Participation*, ed. Danielle S. Allen and Jennifer Light (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Autobiography and Equality

In concluding the chapter on *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, I suggested that Franklin's model for citizenship, while progressive at the time, would restrict a number of American voices that Douglass, Goldman, and (in part) Adams would seek to better represent. This trajectory of American citizenship is evident in far more than autobiography, from Supreme Court cases to novels to social movements. The question remains, however, whether autobiography need necessarily be progressive. If autobiography is the genre best fit for democratic politics, and if it insists upon an appeal to popular authority, does it follow that autobiography will always be an egalitarian genre? Can autobiography promote social hierarchy?

Although these questions require more sophisticated consideration of how we define equality and hierarchy, my tentative answer is yes: autobiography *can* appeal to an elite audience. On the one hand, there is nothing in my definition of autobiography that restricts it from enacting a more exclusive conception of the people. As scholars have known since Aristotle, a democratic subject can be defined *specifically* through whom it leaves out. Arguments for social hierarchy often ground claims of constituency in history or tradition, and autobiography can appeal to personal experience in the interest of reaffirming a popular authority rooted in the past. Although William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale* is by no means a traditional autobiography, it perfectly exhibits this variant of popular appeal. In that book of 1951, in which he famously writes that "the duel between Christianity and atheism is the most important in the world... the struggle between individualism and collectivism is the same struggle reproduced on another level," Buckley argues from personal

experience that Yale's educators should be subject to strict alumni control: that only those who have freshly experienced the institution have the authority to influence future students' education.¹⁷ Buckley's insistence on experience authorizing these students was so great that he recused his older self from modifying the book, some twenty-five years later.¹⁸ Here is an exemplary case of an elite move to autobiography, for Buckley's appeal to his own experience grounds both his authority and that of a select group of individuals to influence future society and study at Yale University: this appeal was foundational for the modern conservative movement that sprung up around Buckley's book. Whittaker Chambers's *Witness* is another good example, which Chambers began with a "Foreword in the Form of a Letter to My Children," set out to delineate those who represent "Communism and Freedom."¹⁹ The title of Chambers's autobiography further suggests its alignment with my original definition: the book is another way for Chambers to testify outside the state. As I argued in chapter four, the anti-statist appeal of autobiography may move radicals on the left as well as individualist or libertarian conservatives on the right.

This is only a brief answer to a question that merits further research. Although the democratic appeal of autobiography I've outlined here allows for more conservative uses of the genre, it may still be the case that there simply exist far more progressive autobiographies. This is certainly true of the years following Buckley and Chambers: the political struggle of the Civil Rights movement, Black Power, and the

¹⁷ William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of "Academic Freedom,"* 50th ed. (South Bend: Regnery Publishing, [1951] 2001), lxvi, xli.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁹ Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, [1952] 1987), 3–4.

New Left. In particular, autobiography would be instrumental in rallying public opinion in radical prison movements like that in California. Like the anarchists before them, prison writing in the 1960s disavowed the confession and took up an autobiographical form that would still retain some of the same gender issues. In his critique of the crime fetishization of the New Left, Eric Cummins recalls how prison autobiographies like Eldridge Cleaver's 1968 *Soul on Ice* dismissed "the penitent, confessional tone of traditional prison literature," replacing it with "a supermasculine psychosexual politics" that mixed old-school hero worship with revolutionary violence and the racial politics of the mid-twentieth century.²⁰ In his autobiography's introduction, "On Becoming," Cleaver recounts his early violent politics as an "outlaw," his strategy to convince others that "rape was an insurrectionary act" against white women and white standards of beauty.²¹ When he finally repudiated this act, he says, "that is why I started to write. To save myself."²² Allegedly it is up to the reader to determine whether Cleaver's remorse saves him.

Cleaver was not Douglass or Goldman (nor was Chessman, for that matter), yet his narrative joined a swell of autobiographies in the period that catalogued racial and class injustice in personal narratives aimed at the state. An earlier text prefacing his was Richard Wright's 1945 *Black Boy*, and the most notable of the era was, of course, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley, published a few years earlier in 1965. 1968 was also the year of publication for W.E.B. Du Bois's

²⁰ Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 94.

²¹ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), 13–14.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

posthumous autobiography, its subtitle *A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of its First Century* (though Du Bois had already drawn on the genre in the 1903 *Souls of Black Folk* and 1940's *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*). In 1970, George Jackson published *Soledad Brother*, a collection of letters and autobiography written in Soledad Prison and released a year before a tower guard shot him in San Quentin.²³ Decades after, participants continued to capture the period's politics through autobiography: the Abbie Hoffman's *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* in 1980 and Assata Shakur's *Assata* in 1987, which narrated her incarceration and escape to Cuba from a lower-case "i" to readers in "amerika" and elsewhere.²⁴ Movements for civil rights, radical prison reform, Black Power, and the New Left came and went, yet these autobiographies continued their critiques and appeals to the people.

This is but a short summary of autobiography as it has attended issues of authority and equality in the years after Goldman's *Living My Life*. The pressing research question – whether autobiography is inherently egalitarian – will require further consideration of texts like these, books that better represent the genre in twentieth-century American politics.

²³ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, [1970] 1994), x.

²⁴ On Abbie Hoffman as a "hustler" and his autobiography, see Abbott, *States of Perfect Freedom*, chap. 2. See Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, [1987] 2001).

Memoir and the State

In closing this review of autobiography and American democracy, I'd like to consider an alternate genre of personal narrative – the memoir – as a potentially different form of representation in historical and contemporary American politics. Though autobiography is still popular today, authors have increasingly turned to the memoir, autobiography's avuncular predecessor. According to G. Thomas Couser, "‘memoir’ has eclipsed ‘autobiography’ as a term for a certain kind of life narrative": according to its popularity, "this is an age – if not *the age* – of memoir."²⁵ The memoir, Couser writes, is somewhere between biography and autobiography, best characterized by its narrower focus on a single experience or a specific theme throughout the author's life.²⁶ Of course, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* began as a memoir, and at least two other founding fathers produced memoirs, John Adams's left incomplete and Thomas Jefferson's published in 1821. Jefferson's memoir, which we know as his *Autobiography*, began with little pomp (though it did include a copy of the Declaration of Independence): "At the age of 77," Jefferson started, "I began to make some memoranda and state some recollections of dates & facts concerning myself, for my own more ready reference & for the information of my family."²⁷ It ended, however, with a familiar story: Franklin's death and the disappearance of his memoirs. On his deathbed, Franklin trusted to Jefferson "a quire of folio paper" containing the "history of his own life."²⁸ Jefferson returned the copy

²⁵ G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, "Autobiography," in *Writings* (New York: Library of America, [1821] 1984), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

after Franklin's death to his grandson William Temple Franklin, and only later realized Benjamin "had meant it as a confidential deposit in my hands."²⁹ The unique records of Jefferson's copy, which included an account of Franklin's dealing with the British Ministry, was to Jefferson's knowledge never again published, lost with William Temple.³⁰ Oddly enough, Jefferson ended his memoirs here.

Though Jefferson's memoirs stopped short of his time as president, politicians in the mid-nineteenth century increasingly took up the genre to recall their service.³¹ James Buchanan recounted his time in office in his 1861 *Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion*, and many readers consider the true originator of the presidential memoir to be Ulysses S. Grant (though his 1885 narrative focused more on his service in the Civil War than in office).³² As Couser points out, in the twentieth century nearly every president since Theodore Roosevelt has published a memoir or autobiography, in addition to those holding other major positions.³³ In 2010, George W. Bush published *Decision Points*, shortly before Dick Cheney's memoirs and well after Bill Clinton's and Ronald Reagan's.³⁴ You can find memoirs

²⁹ Ibid., 100.

³⁰ Ibid., 101.

³¹ There are certainly other subgenres of memoirs with interesting political valence. For example, Couser writes that Richard Henry Dana's 1840 *Two Years before the Mast* "is a forerunner of contemporary narratives in which a middle-class person deliberately samples working-class life (books like Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*)." Couser, *Memoir*, 11.

³² See *ibid.*, 118.

³³ Ibid., 144.

³⁴ See Michiko Kakutani, "George W. Bush's Memoir 'Decision Points' - Review," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2010, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/04/books/04book.html>; Michiko Kakutani, "Dick Cheney Tells His Side in Memoir 'In My Time' - Review," *The New York Times*, August 25, 2011, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/26/books/dick-cheney-tells-his-side-in-memoir-in-my-time-review.html>; Larry McMurtry, "'My Life': His True Love Is Politics," *The New York Times*, June 23, 2004, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/23/books/review/0623books-mcmurtry-clinton.html>; Maureen Dowd, "Where's the Rest of Him?," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1990, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/18/books/where-s-the-rest-of-him.html>.

as well by former members of the Supreme Court, White House staffers, and congresspeople; since Lady Bird Johnson, almost every First Lady has published a memoir.³⁵ Political memoirs are increasingly common and profitable for publishers and authors alike; this accompanies massive growth in the publishing and sales of books on politics in the United States since the 1990s.³⁶

Yet these recent memoirs could not be farther from the politics of those autobiographies I've studied here. Often focused on time spent and decisions made while holding political positions, many of these texts recall longingly Plato's "Apology," in its original Greek meaning a genre not of remorse but defense.³⁷ According to contemporary apologists, though, an unexamined post is still worth holding. Couser notes that both Bush's and former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld's memoirs "seem determined to defend all of [their] decisions, even if, like the invasion of Iraq, they were based on faulty premises," the texts "remarkably devoid of any acknowledgment of mistakes."³⁸ He continues that it's become

³⁵ See Couser, *Memoir*, 145.

³⁶ Craig Fehrman calls the recent trend in presidential memoirs since Reagan's the "blockbuster age": "in blockbuster publishing, a brand-name author generates reliable numbers for a mature (or even slightly contracting) industry. In blockbuster publishing, a book's release becomes the main event in order to satisfy retailers and their evershrinking release windows, which now run to six weeks, sometimes less. In blockbuster publishing, literary agents operate in a more proactive and pro-author fashion." Craig Fehrman, "Reagan and the Rise of the Blockbuster Political Memoir," *American Literary History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 485. On the increase in political books, see Ben Gibran, "Books as a Political Communication Medium in the United States," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2006): 38–48.

³⁷ Plato, "Apology," 21n1.

³⁸ Couser, *Memoir*, 40.

“conventional, almost compulsory” for presidents to write memoirs as *apologia*.³⁹

Texts like Bush’s are often ghostwritten, authors requiring advocates on their behalf.⁴⁰

Although Barack Obama’s *Dreams from My Father* certainly benefitted in sales from this trend, it’s perhaps an exception to the spate of presidential memoirs. Published in 1995 well before his position in the Senate or presidency, Obama first wrote the book after his election as the first black president of the *Harvard Law Review* while in law school.⁴¹ In the introduction, Obama admits his uncertainty as to the genre of the book, whether it’s an autobiography or not. Obama denies that his narrative can provide “feats worthy of record, conversations with famous people, a central role in important events,” nor an articulation of his “experience as being somehow representative of the black American experience.”⁴² And yet the book introduces Obama in a register similar to those opening the autobiographies discussed in this dissertation, a register that had framed the very American founding: autonomy and identity defined through an engagement with paternal authority. Obama describes the book as “a personal, interior journey – a boy’s search for his father, and through that search a workable meaning for his life as a black American.” And he frames the experiences that inspired his self-examination in a passage evocative of Du Bois’s 1903 “How does it feel to be a problem?”⁴³:

³⁹ Couser does note, however, that with some exceptions like Bill Clinton’s *My Life*, traces of sincere confession come through (in this case regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky) (40). Couser also acknowledges that as with other genres, the apology as aegis of protection can backfire, leading readers to increased scrutiny precisely as of an author’s prevaricating (41).

⁴⁰ See Couser, *Memoir*, 85.

⁴¹ Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Crown Publishers, [1995] 2004), xiii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁴³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

When people who don't know me well, black or white, discover my background... I see the split-second adjustments they have to make, the searching of my eyes for some telltale sign. They no longer know who I am. Privately, they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose – the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds. And if I were to explain that no, the tragedy is not mine, or at least not mine alone, it is yours, sons and daughters of Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island... I suspect that I sound incurably naïve... Or worse, I sound like I'm trying to hide from myself.⁴⁴

And yet while this passage brings to mind those introspective accounts of politics we've seen in Franklin, Douglass, Adams, and Goldman, it is important to remember that its author of 1995 is arguably a different individual than that of 2015. If some part of the memoir genre inclines authors not to democratic authority but a defense of the state, then we might wonder whether Obama after his presidency will turn back to autobiography or to memoir, if he chooses to return to personal narrative at all.

It has never been my intention throughout this dissertation to state unequivocally that autobiography is the most emancipatory genre, nor that it should take priority over issues of distributive justice, practices of revolution, or policy reform in the imagining of new authorities. Yet if autobiography as a genre emerges in moments of popular unrest, in which personal experience can provide the grounds for authors to appeal to some new people, and if the genre's last great stand stood along the now-fading politics of the 1960s and its aftermath, then it is far within the limits of reasonable inquiry to ask what the American shared social reality looks like today, and what genre of personal narrative, if not autobiography, could do it justice.

⁴⁴ Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, xv.

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