



METAFOR

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü
&
Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
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The Department of Western Languages and Literatures and the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Boğaziçi University are pleased to announce the launching of a new journal: *METAFOR: The Boğaziçi University Journal of Literary Studies*.

Our mission is to issue an academic periodical of the highest standards, one that provides a forum for innovative discussions in the field of literary studies and literary criticism. The journal accepts submissions of original essays, book reviews, interviews and short commentaries.

We especially welcome contributions that take an interdisciplinary and comparative approach. *METAFOR* will be a semi-annual journal, accepting submissions in Turkish and English. All submissions will be peer-reviewed by referees assigned by the editorial board.

*We thank Burak Şuşut and FİKA
for our cover design...*

*Kapak tasarımımız için Burak Şuşut ve
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Burcu Kayışçı Akkoyun, Kadir Has University

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS (E)UTOPIA: *REVERIES* OF THE SOLITARY WRITER

Abstract

This article argues that an autobiographical project can be regarded as utopian with the connotations of both a good place and a non-existent (no) place. It represents a good place (*eutopia*) offering an understanding of the self to the author. It is at the same time a “no” place (*outopia*) due to the impossibility of achieving full transparency in self-understanding and transcribing that transparency into writing. In this article, the implications of this dual framework in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* will be explored in relation to his *Social Contract* with the purpose of shifting the emphasis from completeness/unity as the ultimate aim of autobiography to the expression of change, or from *outopia* to a desired *eutopia*. When considered within the paradigm of change and stasis, the utopian quality of autobiography becomes manifest. The task of the author is to capture an image of her own life in a static condition, which is that of writing, whereas she is continuously required to reconsider, re-member, and rework her perceptions of past events within the constant flux of life. However, this dilemma could still hold a “eutopian” potential if the urge to narrate is considered as the primary motive of the autobiographical endeavor regardless of the contradictions and ambiguities in narrative. The article will attempt to trace this potential by focusing on Derrida’s concept of the “supplement” and examining the issues of spontaneity and narrative ambivalence in the *Reveries*.

Keywords: autobiography, conversion, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, utopia, Derrida, supplement spontaneity, narrative

BİR ÜTOPYA OLARAK OTOBİYOGRAFİ: YALNIZ GEZEN YAZARIN DÜŞLERİ

Öz

Bu makale otobiyografinin hem “yok-yer” hem de “güzel yer” anlamları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda ütöpik bir proje olarak düşünölebileceğı iddiasını önermektedir. Otobiyografi yazarın kendini anlamasını sağlayacağından güzel bir yeri temsil eder. Ancak bu yer, yazar kendini anlama ve bunu yazıya dökme esnasında tümünden şeffaf olamayacağı için aynı zamanda bir “yok-yer”dir. Bu makalede söz konusu bu ikili çerçevenin Jean-Jacques Rousseau’nun *Yalnız Gezenin Düşleri* adlı eserine yansımaları, yazarın bir diğör eseri olan *Toplumsal Sözleşme* ile ilintili olarak ele alınacak ve eserleri incelemede odak noktası otobiyografinin nihai tamlık/ birlik hedefinden değışimin ifadesine, yani “yok-yer”den “güzel yer”e doğru değıştirilmeye çalışılacaktır. Otobiyografinin ütöpik niteliğı değışim ve durağanlık ikilemi içinde ele alındığında daha iyi ortaya çıkmaktadır. Yazarın görevi hayatının imgesini yazının durağanlığında yakalamaktır fakat aynı zamanda hayatın akışı içinde geçmiş olayları algılayışını tekrar tekrar gözden geçirmesi gerekmektedir. Yine de bu zorluk, anlatıdaki çelişki ve belirsizlikler göz ardı edilerek anlatma dürtüsü otobiyografinin temel amacı olarak göröldüğünde olumlu anlamıyla ütöpik bir potansiyel taşıyabilir. Bu makale Derrida’nın “ilavesellik” kavramına odaklanarak ve *Yalnız Gezenin Düşleri*’ndeki muğlaklık ve birdenbirelik/kendiliğindenlik konularını ele alarak bu potansiyelin izlerini araştıracaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: otobiyografi, dönüşüm, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ütöpa, Derrida, ilavesellik, birdenbirelik / kendiliğindenlik, anlatı.

Autobiographical accounts reflecting the diverse aspects of self in writing are in fact based upon a narrative predicament, that is, the difficulty, if not impossibility, of formulating a well-structured answer to the question “Who am I?”, the alpha and omega of autobiography. Authors ideally exploit the full reservoir of self-knowledge, or perhaps anticipate arriving at self-knowledge at the end of the process. The contradictions and ambiguities which inevitably permeate their accounts and disrupt the sense of coherence and totality may, however, hinder this endeavor. This article argues that an autobiographical project can be regarded as utopian with the connotations of both a good place and a non-existent (no) place. It represents a good place (*eutopia*) offering an understanding of the self to the author. It is at the same time a “no” place (*outopia*) due to the impossibility of achieving full transparency in self-understanding and transcribing that transparency into writing. In this article, the implications of this dual framework in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* will be explored in relation to his *Social Contract* with the purpose of shifting the emphasis from completeness/unity as the ultimate aim of autobiography to the expression of change, or from *outopia* to a desired *eutopia*.

In its traditional interpretation, utopia as a literary genre is criticized for being intrinsically static and failing to accommodate the essential element of change. When considered within the paradigm of change and stasis, the utopian quality of autobiography becomes manifest, albeit in different terms. Crafting an autobiography is challenging not because “nothing happens,” but because “many things have happened and are still happening.” The task of the author is to capture an image of her own life in a static condition which is that of writing, whereas she is continuously required to reconsider, re-member and re-work her perceptions of past events within the constant flux of life. Autobiography demands that the author stand outside to be able to look inside or be nowhere, in an *outopia*, so as to be everywhere. However, this dilemma could still hold a “eutopian” potential if the urge to narrate is considered as the primary motive of the autobiographical endeavor regardless of the contradictions and ambiguities in narrative.

Taking himself as his main object of inquiry, Jean-Jacques Rousseau strives to adopt such an omniscient position in his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. In line with generic conventions, the impact of a conversion, of a great change in his life, is at the center of the narrative. This impact can be better understood when the dialogical relationship between the *Reveries* and *The Social Contract* is taken into account. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau delineates the ideal system for modern civil societies in the form of a political utopia. In the *Reveries*, however, his tone changes from (e)utopian to dystopian, and he makes a very dark

reading of his own political theory. He creates an individual utopia in response and as opposed to the social one formulated in the previous work. This individual utopia conveyed through an autobiographical mode is not exempt from challenges, either. Yet, the very same challenges, such as the split occurring in the self after his conversion and the desire to fix change in expression, allow Rousseau to create an “arresting” narrative.

The Social Contract opens with Rousseau’s declaration of citizenship, and his sociopolitical identity occupies the foreground of the work. As “a citizen of a free state and a member of its sovereign,”¹ he explains the purpose of his social contract theory, which is “to devise a form of association which will defend and protect the person and possessions of each associate with all the collective strength, and in which each is united with all, yet obeys only himself and remains as free as before.”² According to Rousseau, such association, which reflects both the collective strength and the individual autonomy, is necessary because people are no longer in the state of nature. They are members of the civil state that substitutes justice and rights for instinct and provides their acts with the lacking moral principles and sense of duty. A “civil” life is superior to the state of nature in the sense that it enables individuals to exercise their faculties and broaden their visions. They can only be pleased to “be drawn out of the state of nature forever and changed from a stupid, short-sighted animal into an intelligent being and a man.”³ The individuals must, however, first give consent to the legitimate power of the collective will, which Rousseau calls “the sovereign” throughout the *Contract*, in order to enjoy the privileges provided by the civil state. The sovereign compels them to obey its will, which paradoxically forces the subject to be free. The organization of this ideal political system becomes further complicated by Rousseau’s proposition that there should be other bodies such as governments, governors or magistrates to maintain the dialogue between the sovereign and the subjects. The bipartite contract between the sovereign and the individuals has now been extended to include intermediary agents, which will in turn include the individual will of their own members and the collective will of the group. Rousseau seems aware that there is a delicate balance among all these organs of the body politic when he gives examples of good and bad governments in history. What is particularly relevant to the purposes of this article is the tension between his ostensibly unshakeable belief in human potential and values such as equality and freedom, and his resentment for the current condition of modern society.

1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* in *The Essential Rousseau*, trans. Lowell Bair (NY: New American Library, 1974.), 8.

2 Ibid., 17.

3 Ibid., 20.

In the section where he explains why a monarchy is inferior to a republic, Rousseau states that “In a republic, the voice of the people *nearly*⁴ always raises enlightened and able men to the highest positions [...] whereas those who rise in a monarchy are usually nothing but petty troublemakers.”⁵ He believes that when people are governed by a republic, they will “almost always” act rationally. However, while depicting the Roman public assemblies, he also acknowledges that such democratic quality is not possible to achieve in modern societies, as the “devouring greed, restlessness, incessant movements, and constant reversals of fortune”⁶ of people would not allow such a system. In these instances of faltering faith, it is possible to trace the dialogical relationship between the *Social Contract* and the *Reveries*. What has been hinted at in the former is explicitly stated in the latter. The voice of the civil/ social philosopher who presents himself first and foremost as a citizen of Geneva transforms into that of an individual disillusioned with and cynical of the state of his society.

Reveries of the Solitary Walker is the total renunciation of society in the rational capacity of which Rousseau has put his confidence. “So now I am alone in the world,” he expresses his disappointment, “with no brother, neighbor or friend, nor any company left me but my own. The most sociable and loving of men has with one accord been cast out by all the rest.”⁷ These sentences can be read as the acknowledgement of defeat: the social contract is doomed to fail as Rousseau’s own case demonstrates. The collective will no longer apply to him. Yet, it is equally possible to interpret this case not as failure but as complete success of the system. Rousseau himself states in the *Social Contract*:

If there are those who oppose the social pact at the time when it is made, their opposition does not invalidate the contract: It only excludes them from it. They are foreigners among the citizens [...] When, therefore, an opinion contrary to mine prevails, it proves only that I was mistaken, that what I thought was the general will was not.⁸

The sovereign is entitled to banish any citizen if the latter refuses to comply with the social pact as citizenship automatically requires consent. It can banish him “not for impiety, but as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life

4 Emphasis mine.

5 Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 62.

6 Ibid., 95.

7 Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (NY: Penguin Books, 1979), 27.

8 Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 88.

to his duty.”⁹ Rousseau’s exclusion from society ironically confirms the efficiency of his social contract. In the *Reveries*, he claims that his “only remaining duty is towards [himself].”¹⁰ However, his defiance insinuates a major conflict between the individual and the collective will. People are now living in a civil state, and it is impossible to go back to the state of nature in which one used to have duties only towards oneself. That would make the individual a total sovereign holding both the general and the individual will in the same body with no mediators. Rousseau seems willing to give up his status as an “intelligent being and a man” to return to his natural state and become the individual sovereign. In other words, he yearns for a “no place,” or perhaps for a “eutopia” that has already expired.

Although Rousseau is pleased to finally be able to inquire into the depths of his soul, solitude still arouses ambivalent feelings in him. The whole “First Walk,” as well as many other parts in the work, is built upon this duality. The pleasure of being on his own is tainted by the fact that everybody has blamed and turned against him. He is torn between attraction and repulsion, that is, between the simultaneous feelings of sorrow and disappointment, and anger and bitterness against society. His ambivalent emotional state exemplifies yet another instance of self-refutation. According to his theory, it is the individual’s problem when his personal opinion is different from the general opinion. Within this framework, there cannot be a misunderstanding on the part of the society but only an individual misconstruction. Rousseau’s argument that the society fails to see him in the way he wants is thus based on a false premise. He seems nonetheless reluctant to affirm the power of the majority in the *Reveries*. What he has described as the collective will of the sovereign before is now regarded as “the tyranny of public opinion.”¹¹ The practices of this tyranny “are all nothing to the man who sees in the hardships he suffers nothing but the hardships themselves [...] and whose place in his own self-esteem does not depend on the good-will of the others.”¹² *The Social Contract* is permeated by the dream of an inclusive society despite the author’s hesitations and bad examples from history. As Patrick Riley points out, “the solitary self of the *Reveries*, by contrast, has no longer to be defined in terms of a causal relations to society.”¹³ “How has this come about?” Rousseau wonders throughout the Eighth Walk explaining that he has learnt “to bear the yoke of necessity

9 Ibid., 113.

10 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 32.

11 Ibid., 129.

12 Ibid., 130.

13 Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP), 129.

without complaining”¹⁴ and with total indifference. He now prefers to stay away from society and people’s “evil plots” replacing them with nature in the new phase of his life.

The thought of a “silent conspiracy” haunts Rousseau’s writings as the “Second Walk,” which describes how he is hit by a Great Dane dog and gets acutely injured, makes clear. This seemingly irrelevant and accidental incident becomes, in Rousseau’s eyes, the link that connects the chain of events culminating in his banishment from society and crystalizes his thoughts about the grand plan of others: “The accumulation of so many chance circumstances, the elevation of all my cruelest enemies, [...] all those who occupy places of credit and authority seem to have been hand-picked from among those who harbor some secret animosity towards me to take part in the universal conspiracy.”¹⁵ The impact of his paranoia is such that he has traced the signs of this conspiracy until his complete renunciation of society. This so-called “fetishization” of the other makes the absence of social bonding all the more conspicuous for Rousseau as emphasized by Riley: “the *Reveries* is predicated on a bracketing of any concern with an ‘outside.’ Nonetheless, the outside returns here as a reminder that the meaning of solitude depends on imagining the other from whom one is excluded, even if it is only to reaffirm the radicality of that exclusion.”¹⁶ In order to tackle this radicality, Rousseau utilizes his urge to write and explain himself in the clearest manner. He traces his main motives and strives to delve into the basic principles that compose his identity. Self inquiry thus offers the means not only for self justification but also for better self knowledge. This endeavor finds its expression in the autobiographical account of the *Reveries*; however, promise does not entail its fulfillment. The work has its own challenges as “the ‘Know Thyself’ of the temple at Delphi was not an easy precept to observe” as Rousseau thinks it would be in his *Confessions*.¹⁷ The difficulty of the task doubles when self knowledge seeks expression in writing, and, knowing the self is expected to become writing the self.

In his reading of Rousseau, Derrida notes that “Rousseau considers writing a dangerous means, a menacing aid, the critical response to a situation of distress. When Nature, as self-proximity, comes to be forbidden or interrupted, when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. It must be *added [sic]* to the word urgently.”¹⁸ Derrida’s observation is particularly relevant to the *Reveries*, which may be considered to function as an appendix to the *Confessions*. Rousseau himself alludes to his previous work at many points. After he describes

14 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 126.

15 Ibid., 44.

16 Riley, 133.

17 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 63.

18 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 144.

his solitary state in the First walk, he explains: “This is my state of mind as I return to the rigorous and sincere self-examination which I formerly called my *Confessions*.”¹⁹ He returns to his old project making amendments where necessary. Similarly, in the Fourth Walk he “confesses” that he has been too harsh on himself in *Confessions* heralding the amelioration of his bad mood in the new work: “I can declare with a proud consciousness of my achievement, that in this work I carried good faith, truthfulness and frankness [...]”²⁰ Each text operates to fill in the gaps of the previous one and present a better and ideally a more accurate representation of the self by re-evaluating the autobiographical narrative. To borrow from Derrida, they each become a supplement for the one they ensue. Examining the impediments to transparent communication in Rousseau’s writings, Jean Starobinski reiterates this observation, albeit in different terms: “Throughout the *Reveries* he seeks to justify his decision to end all relations with other human beings and relate only to himself; ultimately the justification supplants the intimate dialogue it is supposed to introduce.”²¹ Rousseau’s evasive tone in the *Reveries* implies that the intimate dialogue is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve, and that is why his narrative has to be “supplanted” with justifications and “supplemented” with further elaborations.

At the beginning of his work, Rousseau claims that he writes the *Reveries* only for himself. He is thus both the passive object under scrutiny and the active subject and the primary addressee. He feeds on his own substance, experiences and reflections to construct his subjectivity, which demonstrates that autobiography is more about self-reflection and construction than about the way the individual is perceived by others. If, as Jean-Luc Nancy argues, “the subject becomes what it is (its own essence) by representing itself to itself,”²² then writing first and foremost *to* the self before others is a *sine qua non* of autobiography. Nevertheless, writing about and primarily to oneself may not necessarily diminish the power of the “implied reader” on Rousseau when his paranoia about a universal conspiracy and obsession with the words of others is taken—perhaps literally—into account. Despite describing his reveries as a “formless record,” he also implies that he would like to put his thoughts about himself and others in order: “I myself will figure largely in [my reveries], because a solitary person inevitably thinks a lot about himself. But all the other thoughts which pass through my mind will also have their place here.”²³ Whether he assumes a reader or not, his yearning for accuracy

19 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 32.

20 Ibid., 76.

21 Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (Chicago: Chicago UP), 352.

22 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1993), 148.

23 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 32.

seems more urgent than his authorial endeavor for structure as his next sentence indicates: “I shall say what I have thought just as it came to me.”²⁴ But is it ever possible to transcribe the thoughts “today” as they were formed in the mind “yesterday”? Can spontaneity be captured in retrospect?

Rousseau’s narrative revolves around the core question of identity. Being expelled from the garden of society through a secular fall, he turns to himself and his writing as the only remedy. In the First Walk, he explains how he has gradually come to this stage and identifies his main objective as forming “an account of the successive variations” and taking “the barometer readings of [his] soul.”²⁵ In other words, he intends to write the spontaneity of the past by transferring his reveries and the fluctuations in his soul onto paper. His register is also noteworthy since the word “barometer” is suggestive of measurement and precision. The ambitiousness of the attempt is revealed in the tension between retrospection and spontaneity: “As I tried to recall so many sweet reveries, I relived them instead of describing them. The memory of this state is enough to bring it back to life; if we completely ceased to experience it, we should soon lose all knowledge of it.”²⁶ Rousseau claims that he does not simply remember those moments but rather experiences them again. According to Leo Damrosch, “the *Reveries* are about memory in a new sense: not the factual reconstruction of past actions, but the recovery of states of being that live on deep in the imagination.”²⁷ Even if remembering the past is not about remembering the actual events for Rousseau, he believes that he is at least able to bring back the “exact” impressions. This new sense of memory described by Damrosch in fact succinctly frames the narrative predicament of autobiography explained at the beginning. The desire of the author is nothing less than simultaneously capturing both the past and the present of the self; however, the void between experience and its transformation into writing would bring about a split in the subject.

The double existence of the past and the present in narrative highlights the significance of conversion as a pivotal element and the embodiment of change in autobiography. Riley aptly defines conversion as a “fulcrum” referring to various meanings of the word such as “a prop, support, base or anchor.” “Conversion,” he explains, “is the foundation upon which an autobiography is built, its justification and motivation, the center of gravity providing its cohesion.” However, as he points out, “the fulcrum disrupts as much as it unifies.”²⁸

24 Ibid., 32.

25 Ibid., 33.

26 Ibid., 36.

27 Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques: Restless Genius* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 482.

28 Riley, *Character*, 6.

Paradoxically, conversion both infuses within and diffuses into the narrative: it serves as a unifying theme but also separates before and after from the middle where the act of writing is taking place. Autobiography is formed in the vacuum of this rift as a supplementary gesture to satisfy the (e)utopian yearnings for self-cohesion.

The famous Great Dane incident in the Second Walk of the *Reveries* can be interpreted as an instant realization of self-cohesion and unity desired by Rousseau. After he has been hit by the dog and come to his senses, he experiences a momentary bliss and absolute sense of freedom. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Night was coming on. I saw the sky, some stars, and a few leaves. The first sensation was a moment of delight. I was conscious of nothing else. In this instant I was being born again, and it seemed as if all I perceived was filled with my frail existence. Entirely taken up by the present, I could remember nothing; I had no distinct notion of myself as a person, nor had I the least idea of what had just happened to me. I did not know who I was, nor where I was; I felt neither pain, fear, nor anxiety. I watched my blood flowing as I might have watched a stream, without even thinking that the blood had anything to do with me.²⁹

When the boundary between before and after is completely eradicated and the flow of time is felt as an eternal present, “autopia,” which includes both the “no place” of autobiography and the “good place” of the self, is attained. Similarly, the division between the subject and the object disappears, too, as the individual has blended into the fullness of the universal subject with “no distinct notion” of the self. Memory stops operating and fixes the moment within a sensation of delight. The rift seems to be closed, albeit only for a moment. This sense of unity, however, can occur only to the detriment of the self. If there is completeness, then there is no change, no conversion and thus no self. Feeling alienated both to his own identity and physicality, Rousseau could not even perceive that he is bleeding. Losing his connection with himself is the price to pay for absence of consciousness and memory.

In the Seventh Walk, he describes a similar state of mind in which he is able to forget himself by becoming one with nature: “I feel transports of joy and inexpressible raptures in becoming fused as it were with the great system of beings and identifying myself with the whole of nature.”³⁰ Like the momentary fullness after the Great Dane Incident, his reveries enable him

29 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 39.

30 Ibid., 111.

to go into a kind of trance. Yet, the whole passage begs the question of how Rousseau can actually describe a state to which his memory has no access. How can the inexpressible be expressed? Actually, throughout the *Reveries*, Rousseau is far from expressing the content of his reveries. Seeking to be justified in his conversion, he either tries to demonstrate how inexpressible they are or to declare his intentions for writing about them. The reveries themselves can be regarded only as meta-reveries that anticipate to be further explained, or if not, further supplemented by Rousseau. The supplement, however, only supplements as Derrida observes, and it “only adds to replace. [...] As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness.”³¹ Rousseau seems to supplement all along: he supplements his past writings, he substitutes society with solitude, and he replaces his exclusion from social interaction with his submersion into nature. The effort may be futile, though, since the supplement fails to meet the demand for presence by supplying absence in return.

Rousseau recognizes his own limitations when he oscillates between moments of self-assurance and ambivalence. While boldly declaring in one instance that his mind rests on solid foundations and “no strange doctrine, old or new, can any longer disturb [his] peace for a single moment,”³² he later regrets that “the real and basic motives of most of [his] actions are not as clear to [him] as [he] had long supposed.”³³ The fulcrum performs its double function in the text as his reveries reveal the internal conflicts within the world and the word. He claims indifference towards others and yet feels trapped between solitude and the narrative stasis of writing the self as “the desire to hypostatize the self, to freeze it in time and present it as the psychological essence of the individual, is opposed to the mobility and causal irreversibility involved in narrating one’s life.”³⁴ In the last Walk, he remembers the joyful times he has spent with Madame de Warens. Mutual love nourishes his soul granting him the sense of freedom he desires. He wishes that “sweet state” to last forever.³⁵ Looking back on those years, he has a single mental image rather than the whole live picture. The *Reveries* closes with this image Rousseau fixes into his writing since “fixing happiness in a written image is the expression of a wish to escape from the confusion and imperfection of the present,” as Starobinski suggests:

31 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145.

32 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 60.

33 Ibid., 94.

34 Riley, *Character*, 12.

35 Rousseau, *Reveries*, 154.

“reverie never realizes this wish, yet it never ceases to strive in that direction.”³⁶ Hence the “eutopian” gesture of autobiography, or the yearning for order and perfection.

Autobiography is a locus of hope for the individual who simultaneously desires to know herself better and be better known to the other. In *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Rousseau undertakes the noble task of inquiring into the depths of his soul even though he attempts to describe a state of forgetfulness with the aid of his memory. He retains the “eutopian” impulse within the vision of creating a true-to-life “autopia” after his conversion from solidarity to solitude. If the *Social Contract* is the legitimization of dependence, the *Reveries* is the melancholic celebration of independence. As the dialogical relationship between the two works demonstrates, the *Reveries* can be read both as a denunciation and as the confirmation of the utopian sociopolitical vision depicted in the *Social Contract*. It is also an attempt at a narrative utopia which, to borrow from Beckett, fails again but fails better each time as the urge to tell remains, and the search for the self continues.³⁷ This is by no means to undermine the act of writing as secondary to the experience of life. Even if words can only offer to go to a “no place” hindered by the narrative predicament of autobiography, they represent “failing better” as they gradually take the place of life itself and demand better expression from their writer.

36 Starobinski, *Transparency*, 363.

37 Samuel Beckett, *Worstward ho* (London: John Calder, 1999), 7.

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