

## Orestes Brownson's Autobiography and Autobiographical Novels : Self-Narrative as Negotiation between Facts and Fiction

(オレスティス・ブラウンソンの自伝と自伝小説：  
事実と虚構との間の調停としての自我物語)

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 自伝はアメリカ文学においては植民時代から盛んであった文学ジャンルである。建国期に書かれたフランクリンの『自伝』は読まれ続け、アメリカ文学の正典の中に位置づけられている。オレスティス・ブラウンソンは自伝と二つの自伝的小説を書いたが、これら3つともアメリカ文学研究者によってほとんど顧みられない作品である。しかし彼の自伝は2つの自伝小説とのかね合いで文学における自我の問題で興味あるテーマを提供する。ブラウンソンは自伝 *Convert* (『改宗者』) を2つの自伝小説 *Charles Elwood* (『チャールズ・エルウッド』), *The Spirit-Rapper* (『降霊術者』) の後で書いた。彼の自伝『改宗者』は改宗に至る経過と動機についての弁明が内容であるが、その特徴は主人公が自分自身の生涯の記述についてすべてが事実以外の何ものもないという「事実性」を強調していることである。自伝小説は自伝と小説のハイブリッド・ジャンルである。自伝小説は主人公が自分の生涯を語るという手続きが取られている。2つの自伝小説において主人公<私>が物語世界の中で事実を語るという虚構手続きによってストーリーが展開している。『チャールズ・エルウッド』は同名の主人公の回心物語がやや平板な対話形式で語られている。『降霊術者』はわざわざ自伝と副題で断って、虚構でないと言っている。しかし実際は本格的な小説であり、当時のいかがわしい疑似科学の危険性を警告している。ブラウンソンの自伝と自伝小説はアメリカ文学における本格的な文学意識の目覚めとともに起こった事実と虚構、作品における自我問題を内包している。

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## Introduction

Orestes Brownson wrote an autobiography and two autobiographical novels. But it must be said that these have been completely ignored by scholars of American autobiography. Autobiography was the genre New England Puritans particularly inculcated to exhibit their lives as exemplary types of religious lives (Bercovitch, *Puritan Self* 23-24). If this is due to the fact that the field is overshadowed by the fame of Benjamin Franklin's classic *Autobiography*, it is nevertheless rather strange that his later sympathetic interpreters (Thomas R. Ryan, Americo D. Lapati, and Patrick W. Carey) have not especially dealt with *Charles Elwood, or, the Infidel Converted*, written in 1834 but published six years later, and *The Spirit-Rapper; An Autobiography* has never been the subject of scholarly investigation, though most of them use *The Convert: or, Leaves from My Experience* (1857) as their source in reconstructing Brownson's "passage to Rome." Carey is more interested in Brownson's political philosophy, while Ryan and Lapati take up only his literary criticism in their respective books, the former referring to *The Convert* and *Charles Elwood* several times, but Lapati almost never.

### I. Myself and Nothing But Facts

The last of these three works is an autobiography, though the author never mentions the word "autobiography" but insists it contains no fiction—nothing but truth. Published thirteen years after Brownson's conversion—he must have felt a need to stress this point after having written two autobiographical novels—it is an account of his life presented to Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick of Boston, who accepted him into the Catholic Church. Brownson remarks at the outset of his "Preface":

The volume here offered to the reading public is no work of fiction, and the person who gives an account is no imaginary person around whom I have chosen to weave passages from my own experience. The person who tells his story is myself, and I have aimed to tell my story, so far as it bears on my religious convictions and experience, with simplicity, frankness, and truthfulness. (5: 1)

In a short space of three pages, Brownson speaks of “my book” and “the book,” and declares: “Though I am the hero of my book, and speak in the first person, I trust the reader will not find me immoderately egoistic. Nearly all that is contained in the volume derives whatever value or importance it may have from sources of my personality” (5: 1). He sets up “truth” as an objective criterion independent of errors deriving from the limitations of his own cognition and judgment: “Truth is not mine, nor my reader’s, and is the same whatever may be his or my opinions. It is above us both, and independent of us, and all that either of us should aim at is to conform to it” (5: 2). Truth is thus a common value Brownson and his readers Catholic or Protestant share, and he tries to show through his account some “connecting link” between his past and present life, which he enlarges to the connecting link between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, so that the reader may see “that, in becoming a Catholic, a man has no occasion to divest himself of his nature, or to forego the exercise of his reason” (5: 1).

## **II. Grace and the Elevation of Freedom—Church as Intercommunion**

Although in his account he is deeply concerned with his personhood and his own experience, Brownson’s characteristic as an American Catholic lies in his emphatic allusion to the elevation of his freedom by God’s grace:

My book, however, is the free production of my own mind, the free expression of my own honest convictions as formed by my experience, the inspiration of grace and the teachings of Catholic faith and theology, and may be taken by the readers as the specimen of that freedom which Catholicity secures to all her children. (5: 2)

In his autobiography, Brownson develops in a sense his own theory of autobiography, and it is an apology of his life consciously gathered in a meaningful framework of a unique individual as the *persona* through reflection; rather it may be said that through the book the *persona* emerges to himself as well as to the public readership. The core of the author’s inner life is consciously formed in conscious reflection on his part, mediated through the epistemological recovery

of past events in collusion with his emerging *persona* as past experiences presented to be fashioned into a narrative of the author's life. By reliving this life of his own, formed by seeking a meaning all the way through by reflective concentration on his past, the author gives an "account" of his life and its meaningfulness. An autobiography is no private act of textual inscribing and framing of one's self in a book, like memoirs, which are originally for private use, although the author of an autobiography may publish it as "memoirs" or they may become an autobiography. An autobiography always presupposes a public readership.

The nineteenth century still largely retained the idea of literature as something that instructs and entertains. Brownson's idea of autobiography as far as we can gather from his "Preface" is to be instructive: "I have little interest for those who read only for amusement. I have aimed to write an instructive, not an amusing, book" (5: 3). Brownson adumbrates:

[The book] embodies no small portion of fifty years of an active, perhaps feverish, intellectual life, devoted to serious and earnest purposes; with what obstacles and with what results, it tells in a plain, unpretending style. In writing it, I have occasion to review my whole past life, and renew my thanks to Him who died that we might live, for having conducted me, after so many wanderings, from the abyss of doubt and infidelity to the light and truth of his Gospel, in the bosom of his church, where I find the peace and repose so long denied me. (5: 3)

Since his autobiography is a narrative of a life that was brought to Brownson, he goes on to narrate his turbulent process—well-known to us by now—from his New England background and family circumstances through several unstable, violent changes of religious affiliation from Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, Unitarianism, Universalism, his independent ministry, engagement with the laboring class and young workers, and growing skepticism to the final embracing of Catholicism. Sectarian division and bitter animosity generated Brownson's deep-seated skepticism. It is certain that the impact of growing scientific thought on New England intellectual society had effectuated his view, although it had not yet let him disengage from Christian faith. But with the flowing-in of contemporary currents of scientific thought from Europe such as biblical criticism and Saint-Simonism, he started to loosen ties with traditional Congregationalist tenets. Brownson was closely connected with Ripley's utopian project of the Brook

Farm movement, and associated himself with the Transcendentalists around Emerson. American Transcendentalism was inspired by German Idealist philosophy. From Brownson's writings we note that he read many of the German and French books that had flowed into the East Coast of America like other New England intellectuals, as Philip F. Gura shows in his recent monograph on Transcendentalism.

Brownson's break from Transcendentalism is signaled by his *Mediatorial Life of Jesus* (1842) two years before his conversion. The following year he wrote a series on the "Mission of Jesus." These pieces are Brownson's critique of the Transcendentalists' and Unitarians' understanding of Jesus that denies the Divinity of Jesus, ultimately reached by his reading of German biblical criticism. Brownson's search for a broader Christian church that guarantees the worldwide dimension of its justifiable function as God's instrument of salvation seems to have been seldom mentioned by the authors of his life. This is connected with his rejection of Protestantism, which is divided into sects and cannot guarantee ultimate truth. Ultimately his concern is with ecclesiology. And notable in this connection is Brownson's interest in the Oxford movement. But he never broaches the name of John Henry Newman in his autobiography. Brownson's ecclesiology before his conversion is centered on the church as communion. He had the idea of intercommunion:

I have long been convinced that the church in communion with the see of Rome had been the true body of Christ down to the age of Leo X, and I regarded the apostolic see as the central source of Christian life; but the body seemed to me to have been broken into fragments, and exists no longer in its integrity. The Roman Catholic Church was undoubtedly the largest fragment, the one through which the main current of divine-human life continued to flow; but no man would dare say that nothing of that life is or can be lived outside of her communion, and I had found no Catholic that held there could be absolutely no salvation outside of it. The several sects, when broken off, retained a certain amount of Christian life—that amount which Christendom had already assimilated. (5: 159)

Brownson continues and asserts the centrality of communion. In the spirit of ecumenism he was far more advanced than the Catholic hierarchy and population:

Moreover, all communion of the sects with one another, and even with the Roman Church, has not been absolutely interrupted. There is more or less even of personal intercourse between them, and besides, there is intercommunion through similar laws and institutions, and through common literature and science. They all belong, in some sort, to one and the same family, and all, in a measure, live the one life of Christ. (5: 160)

Thus when still a "Congregational Unitarian" (5: 161), he came to know the Oxford movement mainly represented by Pusey known as Puseyism. Nevertheless, he reminisces:

I never for a moment seriously contemplated joining the Anglican communion, and regarded in itself, Puseyism had no attraction for me. It was far better to go at once to Rome than to Oxford. But I looked upon the movement as one of great importance. It was a promising sign of the times, as indicating a tendency on the part of a large portion of the Protestant world to return to church principles. It would be a great mistake to suppose that the Oxford movement was confined to the bosom of the Anglican communion. An analogous movement was perceptible in the bosom of every sect. Even in the Roman Catholic Communion, there was a return towards higher and more living church principles than those contended in the eighteenth century. . . . In every Protestant sect there was in 1842 a movement party, at war with the fundamental principle of Protestantism, and demanding church union and church authority. It seemed that Protestantism had culminated, that the work of disintegration and destruction had gone so far that it could go no further, and that a reaction in earnest, and not likely to be suspended, had commenced through the whole Christian world against the Protestant reformation. . . . The secret history of my own country for several years prior to 1844 would reveal a Catholic reaction in the more serious portion of the Protestant sects, that would surprise those who look only on the surface of the things. The thing to be done was to encourage this reaction, to strengthen it, and by bringing out, each one from his own stand-point, true church principles for reunion with the Catholic Church in a body. (5: 160-61)

Brownson moved the quarters of his journalistic activities from Boston to New York two years before the publication of his autobiography, and to New Jersey one year before. He became estranged from the Catholic clergy, who had welcomed him and had a high regard for a new significant recruitment, as they felt less sympathetic to his advanced ideas. As for Brownson himself, it was not the idea of the church as communion alone that made him decide to receive Catholic baptism. Above all, as he emphasizes, it is the work of grace that brought him to his decision, but it is grace elevating human nature. The communion is testified to by historical facts which have brought him to “the recognition of the church as authoritative, by virtue of the divine-human life it lived” (5: 163).

Brownson candidly describes his intellectual difficulties and hesitations in making the final step for a natural reason. He needed “a philosophy which conforms the order of knowledge to the order of being, the logical order to the order of reality, and gives the first principles of things as the first principles of sciences” (5: 173). Such a philosophy would not substitute for faith.

The concluding chapter of Brownson’s autobiography contains a highly elaborate discussion on how the internal epistemological working of the mind led to the act of faith and the significant role of authority as stated in Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*, as he surveys both the external as well as the internal aspects of analysis of faith. He brings in here the history of the church’s failures and betrayals of the populace by those in authority, secular as well as ecclesiastical, in the old world, and admits the sociological frictions of the beliefs of Catholic immigrants with existing American *mores*. But he draws an optimistic vision for the future of the immigrants’ integration: “In a few years they will be the Americans of the Americans, and on them will rest the performance of the glorious work of sustaining American civilization, and realizing the hopes of the founders of our great and glorious republic” (5: 109). Why does one have to continue to be or become a Catholic? “[B]ecause she (America) is the new creation, regenerated humanity, and without communion with her, we can never see God as he is, or become united to him as our supreme good in the supernatural order” (5: 200). Brownson’s autobiography thus expands into an intellectual treatise.

### **III. *Charles Elwood*—Autobiographical Novel as Hybrid Fiction**

Brownson wrote two works of fiction, each of which claims to be an auto-

biography. These two pieces are his only works of creative imagination. The rest of his vast writings are all journalism. His autobiography *The Convert* is a record of his life up to his conversion in the flow of a narrative. We tend to think that the autobiographical novel has derived from the amalgamation of autobiography and novel (Frye, Baker, and Perkins 55-56). Hence our tendency is to give a chronological precedence to the autobiography over the autobiographical novel. Brownson's two autobiographical novels *Charles Elwood, or the Infidel Converted* and *The Spirit-Rapper; An Autobiography* were written and published before *The Convert*—the former before his conversion, in 1844, and the latter after it. In the case of Brownson's works, it is otherwise. *Charles Elwood* was written and published before *The Convert*, and his son Henry F. Brownson, who collected and arranged Volume IV, suggests this novel's relevance to understanding Brownson's conversion narrative better in his "Editor's Preface" (v). It seems, however, that the autobiography sheds light on these autobiographical novels from a different angle.

*Charles Elwood* was written in 1834 but offered to the reading public in 1840. Brownson was a Unitarian preacher at Canton, Massachusetts before he came up to Boston and began to hold independent services for the Society for Christian Union and Progress, engaging in journalism to improve the lot of workers, and joined Ripley's Brook Farm. The novel is in fact a treatise in the form of a series of dialogical discussions on the problem of God's existence to overcome skepticism. Brownson's mind had already been overshadowed by the problem of God's existence and validity of Christian faith both historical and theological, and the skepticism is not his own, but it had deepened in nineteenth-century American society. New England Brahmins started to disengage from traditional Christianity in America's expanding economy, and they reflected the trends of the European continent that had largely impacted on their world through the inflow of French and German books, which they read avidly. *Charles Elwood* is what we may call a "tract" novel, in and through which the author tries to overcome his own and fellow New Englanders' problems and to affirm the verity of traditional Christian tenets. Perhaps Brownson felt a keen need for such a novel.

The novel is a frame for discussions between Charles Elwood, the "unbeliever" protagonist, and the zealous revivalist preacher Mr. Smith, who tries aggressively to convert him through proselytizing, until he finds spiritual calm when he meets a gentle clergyman Mr. Wilson. His other encounters include those with Elizabeth, his fiancée, whom he eventually marries, Mr. Howard, a

gentle Christian knowledgeable about the history of Christianity, and Mr. Morton who leads him back to the Christian faith while staying at Mr. Howard's estate to convalesce from a nervous breakdown. Charles and Mr. Smith are Brownson's two selves within his mind, like Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In one sense this novel's structure and the writer's technique in drawing the two figures and situational backgrounds are rather flat and one-dimensional, as Brownson himself grants. Interestingly he emphasizes in his "Preface" added in 1840 on the occasion of publication that his book is a fiction:

I do not send it forth as a work of art. I have not studied to conform to the established laws of the species of composition to which it may belong. It has the air of being a work of fiction; but it has been written in an earnest spirit for a serious purpose.

The form in which I have chosen to send out the ideas and discussions embodied in this work, has been adopted to please myself, and because it was the most convenient form I could adopt for presenting my ideas clearly and in a moderate space. A regular treatise on the subject here discussed, I have not the patience, if the ability, to prepare, and nobody would read it if I had. (4: 172)

Brownson answers the reader's possible charge that he used the novelistic form for a serious topic as well as that he merely used the novelistic form for expressing his religious views:

It may be objected that I have introduced too much fiction for a serious work: and too little, if I intended a regular-built novel. All I must say is the public must take the work as they find it. In order to have introduced a greater variety of characters and events, I wanted a fertility of imagination to which I lay no claim, and a different purpose in writing from the one I really had. I have introduced as much variety of character and action, as my imagination furnished, or my judgment approved. (4: 173)

"The characters introduced," Brownson remarks, are "fictitious," but he defends himself: "I have myself had an intellectual experience similar to that which Mr. Elwood records, and what he has said of himself would perhaps apply

in some degree to me" (4: 173). He defends his novel in "Charles Elwood Reviewed," written two years later for the *Boston Quarterly Review* for April 1842, in which he says that his fiction is written in the form of an autobiography of a figure of his creation. Nevertheless, the hero's spiritual experience is genuine:

The book is written in the form of an autobiography, and this has led some to infer that the author is the hero of his story. This, except so far as the purely spiritual experience detailed is concerned, is not true. The author has merely transferred to Charles Elwood his own experience as an unbeliever, the efforts he made to get the better of his doubts, his repeated failures, and ultimate success. Beyond this he has nothing in common with him. The characters introduced are fancy sketches, though perhaps not unlike some frequently met in actual life. (4: 317)

Already at the point of the novel's publication Brownson indicates that he has taken a model from the contemporary French philosophical novels (4: 174). His novel, he says, though not as elaborate as a purely imaginative creation, is meant to collate all the intricate workings of the mind of a contemporary intellectual (in that sense realistic):

As a literary production, the work has been objected to, that its story is meager, and its plot without interest. The aim of the author was not to write a story that should possess an independent interest, nor to show his skill in weaving and unraveling an intricate plot. The narratives and incidents introduced are integral parts of the work, essential elements of its discussions, and necessary to its main argument, to which they are designedly subordinated, but to which they contribute, perhaps, more than our readers in general suspect. (4: 317)

The hero, Brownson's creation, is fictional, but he says: "I am willing that what is recorded should have the authority of my own experience" (4: 173). The fictional hero is Brownson's *alter ego*, Charles Elwood, who has probably reached old age and is looking back on the course of the life he has led. He receives a request from his friend K to write and deliver him "the history of his life" (4: 174). Through Elwood's rumination of what the hero should or could gather from phenomenological fragments of one's life, Brownson the author indirectly inti-

mates to us what a human as the *persona* is and his almost lack of significance for others: “Biography is too often the fruit of vanity, is of small value; it for the most part passes away with the individual, and leaves no trace; what there is in an individual. . . . The memory of the good man lives in the virtue which went forth from him, that of the great man in the results humanity obtains from the victories he has helped her achieve” (4: 175). The story of one’s outward life tells little of a person. The real (auto)biography is the history of one’s soul, which makes us familiar with a person’s spiritual experience, inward struggles, defeats, victories, doubts, convictions, ends, and aims. Elwood says: “These constitute the real man, and you become acquainted with him only in proportion as you become familiar with them” (4: 174).

When Charles Elwood finishes the nonetheless internally turbulent history of his life, he finds himself an old man—all his friends and acquaintances are gone. Even Elizabeth, his wife, passed away years ago. His life, as he concludes, is something like having “planted wild flowers on her grave and watered them with [his] tears” (4: 316).

Charles Elwood concludes the account of his life: “I have now gone through with what I had to say respecting my intellectual struggles, in passing from infidelity to an unwavering belief in God and the supernatural origin of Christianity. I have detailed with some minuteness and with as much accuracy as I could, the various arguments and views by which my recovery was effected” (4: 313). His recovery is from the sickness of what the hero describes as “infidelity.” Ten years before his conversion, Brownson has integrated a wide-perspective apologetics in a narrative frame. He lets Charles Elwood say: “The Christianity here set forth is the Christianity of the universal church” (4: 315). Brownson’s embryonic ecclesiology already has at this stage what we nowadays commonly meet with in ecumenical dialogues; it is meant to overcome the sectarian narrowness of the historical reality of Christian churches.

#### **IV. *Spirit-Rapper*—Neither Novel Nor Romance — Amalgamation into Self-Narrative**

Brownson brought out what we may call his second autobiographical novel, *The Spirit-Rapper; An Autobiography*, in 1854, ten years after his conversion and three years before his autobiography *The Convert*. Curiously, although subtitled

as an autobiography, the author denies that it is an autobiography at the outset. Brownson declares that the piece cannot be determined "by any recognized rules of art" (9: 1). If the critics are unable to tell, he himself does not know: "I am sure puzzled myself to say what it is. It is not a novel; it is not a romance; it is not a biography of a real individual; it is not a dissertation, an essay, or a regular treatise; and yet it perhaps has some elements of them all, thrown together in just such a way as best suited my convenience, or my purpose" (9: 1).

Brownson denies on the surface that his work is a novel or a romance, but it is a modern Gothic romance. According to the author, his intention was not to throw out to the book market a textual jumble. The book is to be a book "on the new superstition, or old superstition under a new name, exciting just now no little attention at home" (9: 1). As he claims, "the book, though affecting some degree of levity, is serious in its aims, and truthful in its statements. There is no fiction in it, save its machinery. What is given is fact, or at least so regarded by the author. The facts narrated, or strictly analogous facts, I have either seen myself, or given on what I regard ample evidence" (9: 1). The author thinks that mesmerism, which he thinks of as a type of spiritualism, has connection with "modern philanthropy, visionary reforms, socialism, and revolutionism" (9: 1). And he says his view is endorsed by the French sources he has investigated. His intention in writing a book he claims belongs to no literary genre is to expose the danger of mesmerism, which was widely disseminated in contemporary society; one famous contemporary author addicted to this pseudo-science was Nathaniel Hawthorne, who understood himself as a romancer (Coale 1-27).

Like *Charles Elwood* this story is a story of a skeptic's conversion to the Christian faith narrated, as in any autobiography, by the fictive "I," the Spirit-Rapper. The difference consists in the fact that this time the autobiographical hero goes through the travail of spiritual doubts in an age of science and scientism. The climate of this age is dominated by scientism. Darwin's Evolutionism loomed large and dominated the spiritual horizons of society. Scientism represented by Auguste Comte, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spenser, and others created an atmosphere which threatened to push the place of religion to the margins of daily life. To fill the empty spiritual space all kinds of pseudo-scientific or quasi-psychological cults spread among the populace, such as phrenology, mesmerism, spiritualism and pseudo-religions. In volume IX of Brownson's *Complete Works*, one may find his critical treatments of these tendencies together with the novel we are now considering. Brownson wrote the novel to meet popular skepticism on

its own ground. The Spirit-Rapper goes through the experience of witnessing cases of mesmerism and finally regains the Christian faith.

As he says about himself, the narrator has a Puritan immigrant pedigree; his parents were farmers, and they were “intelligent, moral, industrious, and economical, and as matter of course, soon prospered, and became able to give their only son the best education the State could furnish, and leave him a competent estate” (9: 3). However, as he says, he grew up “without any decided religious doctrines” and “a sort of rationalist, accepting Christianity in name” (9: 225). He reflects on the tendencies of his youth:

My early predilection was mathematical and physical sciences. The moral and intellectual sciences were not much to my taste. I took no interest in them. They struck me as vague, uncertain, and unprofitable. I preferred what M. Comte has since called *Positive Philosophy*. I soon mastered mathematics, mechanics, and physics, as far as they were taught in our college, but I found my greatest delight in chemistry, which, by subtle analyses, seemed to promise me an approach to the vital principle and to the essences of things. (9: 3)

In a sense he is a typical educated man in an age of science. Eventually he studied medicine. After taking a medical degree, he went on to make further studies in all kinds of fashionable natural “-ologies.” He is acquainted with Transcendentalism in Boston, but is told by the Transcendentalist Brahmins he is not spiritual enough; he is “too much under the despotism of the understanding to be able to rise to those empyrean regions where the soul asserts her freedom, and sports with infinite delight in all the luxuries of the unintelligible” (9: 4). He was on his part very little enlightened by “their dark utterances” (9: 4). This hardened young physician easily believes a mesmerist, Dr. P—who came up “from the French West Indies, where he was a Saint-Simonian, and a chief of the *savants* of the new religion” (9: 4). Soon he is recruited in Philadelphia, the City of Love, to the mesmeric group composed of Quakers, Unitarian, and Swedenborgians, which is a new religion of the affluent class who combine it with philanthropy and world reform. With the reform-minded Madame Priscilla, the patroness of the Mesmerist-Reformist salon, the hero goes on a mission tour for world reform all over Europe, from England and Scandinavia in the north to Italy in the south. In Italy they discuss the situation of national unification with Italian leaders. But the

project of reform is not realizable in the near future. Meanwhile he learns about the Catholic faith and the historical background to the present condition of the Church. He comes back disappointed but a wise man. As in *Charles Elwood* Mr. Morton is the Christian adviser who leads him to recognize a reality wider than the hero's simple, positivist understanding of the world: "An unreasonable scepticism is as far from true wisdom and virtue as an unreasonable belief. Modern science is sceptical; and it is more important just now to guard against scepticism and its irreligion than it is to guard against superstition" (9: 191).

## Conclusion

The genre of autobiography has a long history starting with Augustine's *Confessions* (Weintraub 48). In modern literature the distinctions between genres have become flexible; they mix and new hybrids have been born. The novel, the newest genre, is the most capable of assimilating other genres. Autobiography precedes the autobiographical novel in the evolution of literary genres as we understand them. Autobiographies are "self-narratives." They start as such in American Puritan literature (Bercovitch, *History* 1: 206-11) as accounts of personal religious experiences represented by Cotton Mather and John Woolman. In Paul John Eakin's *American Autobiography* several scholars survey autobiographies from the colonial period to the present time (3-120). American biography is in a sense personally involved American history, as Alfred Kazin points out (Stone 32). It would be good to know exactly who it was that generated this kind of American self-consciousness, with its typical anxiety.

Autobiography began to dissociate itself from the delineation of highly religion-charged experiences in the New World from the time of Franklin's *Autobiography*. Autobiographical novels may be regarded as the application of the technique of autobiographical writing to fiction. Ignoring the chronology, Brownson's novels exemplify how it is applied to fiction. Brownson wrote his autobiography *The Convert* as an apology over the suspicion and charges of the Catholic hierarchy as to the sincerity of his allegiance to his Church. If there had been no need in this direction, he would not have had to write an autobiography. As he suggests, he had examples in French sources to inspire two autobiographical novels both of which are fictive personal conversion narratives. Although in Brownson's time the genre of autobiography was moving away from religion, we

surely cannot ignore his own works. They indicate much about the problems, both epistemological and technical, of inscribing the self on the text and of transferring and transforming facts into fiction.

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