ABSTRACT

PERFORMING THE SELF IN THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY:
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND MEMOIR WRITING,
1770s-1840s

by Yaroslav Prykhodko

The thesis examines the formal transformation of a marginal genre of historical writing in post-Revolutionary America as an indicator of change and continuity in the assumptions about the relationship between public and private, about historical writing, authorship, and the place of the individual in history. It is argued that the democratization of public discourse in the first decades of the nineteenth century did not result directly in a change in the assumptions about historical writing, but in the development of new, “non-historical” forms of speaking about the past. History as a narrative form was for some time left behind.
PERFORMING THE SELF IN THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY:
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND MEMOIR WRITING,
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Introduction

“I confess that I do not see a clear way of distinguishing idiom from individuality,” wrote Robert Darnton in the concluding remarks to his *Great Cat Massacre*.¹ This phrase could be seen as a somewhat pessimistic response, after about two hundred and fifty pages of exploring specific topics and texts in eighteenth-century French cultural history, to his methodological reflections in the introduction: “I do not see why cultural history should avoid the eccentric or embrace the average, for one cannot calculate the mean of meanings or reduce the symbols to their lowest common denominator.”² Relying heavily on the methodological developments in structuralist and poststructuralist anthropology and literary theory, cultural history must deal with the problem of the relationship between the structure and the process, langue and parole, representative and unique, system and agency when it approaches culture as language and text, as a set of discursive rules and a system of meanings that organize people’s perception of the world.

From a certain point of view, for instance, that of poststructuralist literary theory, the problem of idiom versus individuality can be disregarded as unessential. But cultural history, within its disciplinary confines that demand attention to historical specifics, time and place, and that make the scholar constantly question the representativeness of specific utterances, cannot kill the subject and the author so easily. If we assume, like Darnton did, that every cultural action and artifact is individual and should not be reduced to a common denominator, the problem of drawing the line between the individual and the structural (the discursive) still remains an important one. Lack of attention to this problem is fraught with the loss of cultural history’s identity as a historical discipline, for the acknowledgement of every text’s uniqueness in a sense frees the text from contextual specificity of time and place.

Apart from the problem of representativeness, historians also have to consider the problem of historical agency when they contemplate the relationship between discursive structures manifested through actions and texts and the subjects who perform those

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² Ibid., 6.
actions but are presumably formed and controlled by discursive mechanisms. If we question the status of the individual as an independent self-controlling historical agent and explain the subject as a product of discursive power relations, how do we account for the evolution of culture, for the changes in the discursive structures?

The method of the present project is an attempt to address such questions in one specific area of cultural history – the evolution of the discourse of history understood from the syntactical point of view, as a reorganization of the past reality in narrative forms whose structure is defined by the cultural needs of the society in which the discourse operates. In what follows, I shall offer a formal analysis of memoir accounts dealing with the American Revolution and Independence War as texts that belong to an unstable marginal genre of historical writing. These texts reflect especially clearly the uneasy relationship between the culturally legitimate discursive conventions and genre forms and the authors’ intentions and goals in the public discourse that, during the first post-Revolutionary decades, was becoming more and more diverse, inclusive and egalitarian.

The immediate goal of the project is to reveal the mechanisms and contradictions of text production that could complicate our ideas about the evolution of historical writing, historical consciousness, and print culture in post-Revolutionary America. I will analyze this process on the microlevel, in the structure of one specific genre form, and using as many texts belonging to this genre as possible. The key concepts that will direct my approach to the material are those of text, genre, narrative, performance, and discourse; the analysis will be shaped by two pairs of oppositions: between text and genre and between semantic and syntactic definition of discourse.

In a 1980 article, attempting to “rethink intellectual history” as a discipline dealing first and foremost with texts (in his definition – situated uses of language), Dominick Lacapra distinguished between the “documentary” and the “work-like” aspects of the text: “the documentary situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it. The work-like

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supplements empirical reality by adding to, and subtracting from, it.”⁴ The second aspect “involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation, and imagination,”⁵ and makes inevitable a dialogical relationship between the historian, as him/herself a cultural subject, and the text as both operating in the universum of language irreducible to its content aspect. Although the work-like dimension of the text does not fit easily into the content-oriented, documentary historical approach, to deny it would mean to oversimplify the texts on which intellectual history is based, first of all the complex “great texts of the tradition,” with which Lacapra is primarily concerned. Texts must be analyzed as complex entities that emerge in a network of contexts but cannot be reduced to any of those contexts as their simple emanations.

Lacapra distinguishes six contexts most important for analysis: the author’s intentions, the author’s life and motivations, society (social institutions and discursive formations), culture as a system of meanings, the corpus of the writer, and modes (conventions, rules) of discourse. His main argument is that, although these contexts may account for the content of the text, the latter as a fact, an utterance, an “event in the history of language”⁶ is different from all its contexts, is “a network of resistances” to them,⁷ and this has to be taken into account in the act of interpretation.

The approach to the problem of the text as a fact which distinguishes the text from its contexts and contents by positioning it in the realm of language – the same sphere where the interpreter him(her)self operates – does, however, dehistoricize the text, especially given its strong poststructuralist connotations. But the problem Lacapra poses – that of distinguishing the text from its contexts and contents – can be reformulated in a way more appropriate from the viewpoint of the confines and discursive rules of the discipline of history. We could look at the text not only as an event in the history of language, but also an event in the history of social interaction. The text is not reducible to the material it is built from precisely because it is an event, a moment in the specific

⁴ Lacapra, “Rethinking Intellectual History,” 250.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 275.
⁷ Ibid., 274.
process of socio-cultural interaction that appears at the intersection of its contexts, and for which, it might be said, language itself is one of the contexts.

Moreover, the various contexts exist or can be seen as contexts only in relation to the text as an act; discursive universum exists in the process of communication, and this process is fully historical – and fully cultural. The evolution of culture unfolds through texts – whose very existence as real, historical objects is often taken for granted, and whose nature as meaningful cultural acts often passes unnoticed.

One of the ways to problematize text production as a complex cultural activity, a performance in which meanings are not only carried, but also generated and transformed, is the description of how different contexts, forms, chains of meaning meet, collide, correlate with each other in the act of writing (speaking), how in the contradictory and complementary relationships between the author’s intentions and motives, the factual and ideological content, the discourse and genre conventions emerges the text as a structural unity with the distinctive meaning of its own. Put in a simpler way, this means that the analysis of memoir literature on the Revolutionary War in the following chapters will go back and forth between specific texts as historical actions, individuals’ performances in the discursive sphere, and standard genre forms, discursive conventions compliance with which confers legitimacy on individual performances in the print culture.

In my understanding of the concept of genre I will follow the structuralist ideas of Jurij Lotman, who observed that “a text possesses as indivisible textual meaning, and in this respect can be viewed as an integral signal unit. To be a ‘novel,’ ‘a document,’ or ‘a prayer’ is to realize a certain cultural function and to transmit a certain integral meaning.” The word “genre,” applied loosely, is a convenient way to designate such an integral image, not necessarily rigidly defined or explicated by the members of the culture in which such a genre operates, but implying a set of structural features necessary to fulfil its cultural function. According to Lotman, “we can take a group of texts (Russian eighteenth-century comedy, for example) and view it as one text, describing the system of invariant rules which govern it and treating all differences as variants engendered in the process of its social functioning.”

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9 Ibid., 54.
Obviously, such a description would be abstracted from the situational specifics in which each concrete text is produced. Invariant genre structure can be visible, can exist only in its material embodiment – text, which is a variant of this structure, but more immediately, a cultural performance of its author, who has his/her own objectives and intentions. The performance has to correspond to certain cultural needs and vocabulary and thus assume a certain genre form to be justified as a cultural action and to be intelligible as such. The function of every text as a system is threefold: informational (the most basic one), collective, and individual. The last two coincide to the extent to which the author of the text is a cultural subject and can be identified with the worldview and the needs of the community, but diverge to the extent to which the author is an agent pursuing his/her interests and needs within the community, in response to specific circumstances and life experience.

I will assume that the individual function of the text is the most dynamic one, the driving force behind the evolution of the genre forms and discursive conventions as the more rigid component of the text structure. They are less responsive to the historical change precisely because they are essentially a metalanguage for the description of the text, and are connected to historical circumstances in which the text is produced indirectly, through the text as performance.

An important methodological implication of this approach is the necessity to involve as many texts belonging to the group under consideration as possible (ideally – all of them). The invariant of the genre form exists only as the aggregate of all the texts that conform (often only in part) to the image of the genre. The image as a metalinguistic formation, a culturally conditioned discursive system, cannot be equated with the text as an act, a performance; these are phenomena of different natures. The microanalysis, close reading of one text as the embodiment of the genre structure, does not describe the genre. In fact, such a reading elevates the particular text to the status of its own metalanguage of description, thus situating it beyond the historical specifics and producing its linguistic (from the point of view of the opposition language/reality) uniqueness. The text is “doubled” as both a performance and the language in which the performance ought to be described. Through the analytical procedure, it turns into a performatively performative utterance that constitutes its own reality, thus erasing the boundary between language and extra-
linguistic reality, between idiom and individual, performance and structure. Such an analysis is by no means illegitimate, but it is not historical.

The present project does not aim specifically at describing in detail the invariant structures corresponding to the concepts (images) of “a history” or “memoirs” in the late eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth century. The intention is rather to analyze their (changing) mutual position and relationship as determined by the evolving cultural function of the memoir text in the evolving society, as an expression of both individual and collective identity, where the individual is the driving force in the evolutionary process. Every text will be analyzed from the point of view of the correspondence between the author’s intention, motives for entering the sphere of the written discourse, the justification of this act, and the reflection of the intention and the individual function of the text in the text’s structure. The evolution of the genre image will be treated as a result of the accumulation of deviations from the standard. Since the emphasis is on change, and therefore the analysis of the concrete texts where the source of change is located is the priority of this study, the standard will only play the role of the reference point in the consideration of the texts. It will be explicated only to the extent that the deviations from it allow.

However, the change itself can be visible only at the metalevel and not in the specific texts, and therefore the place of every text in the analysis is determined by its relationship to the common reference point. This means that on the level of texts the analysis will not be organized chronologically, as the line of evolution from one text to another. On this level, the texts will be compared as different manifestations of (deviations from) the genre model. The evolution will be represented as a change in the relative positions of different types of deviation.

In other words, I will assume that the texts refer to each other not directly in an unmediated dialogue, but via a common plane of reference – the discourse of (Revolutionary) history as a communal project and a coherent image (this does not exclude internal contradictions and inconsistencies) of the history of the Revolution and Independence War that the post-Revolutionary society was building in the process of day-to-day discursive interaction. This image existed in a narrative form, as a story of the Revolution, the elements of which were arranged in accordance with the integral meaning.
of the Revolution (a part of the post-Revolutionary society’s self-image) that the texts dealing with this foundational event were supposed to refer to and perpetuate. In this process of signification, the Revolution itself assumes the role of the referent, its discursive meaning – that of the signified, and the texts relating the Revolution in that or another form – the signifier.

Here I understand discourse as a construction of the world parallel and in some way corresponding to the extra-linguistic world. It is in the process of such construction that society’s identity is self-generated and perpetuated. The extra-linguistic world provides material for the construction, but plays only a passive role in the process, where it is (re)organized as a meaningful reality. Narrative could be considered the primary form of such meaningful reorganization that makes the world and its relationship to the cultural subject (both collective and individual), in the process of the subject’s formation and transformations, an element of the subject’s identity at any given point in the subject’s discursive existence.10

Thus the communal project of Revolutionary history can be visualized as a narrative whose form, the organization of the elements taken from the extra-discursive world, is determined by the meaning of the Revolution for the society in which this communal project is generated. The meaning, in its turn, is determined by and determines the self-image of the society. The project is perpetuated in specific texts in the process of the day-to-day cultural interaction, and the authors who seek to participate in the creation of the image or consider such participation as a justification of entering public discourse have to determine the structural relationship of their discursive performances to the project as a whole.

However, the complexity of the project and of the collective and individual cultural needs the project serves means that no text can contain the structure and content of the

project in their entirety. Neither can any specific genre form, even though historical writing is normally considered its most complete representation. From this point of view, discourse of history can be considered a semantic rather than syntactic formation. Contemplating the problem of defining discourse, Algirdas Greimas and Joseph Courtes noted that “when one examines the various semiotic systems from the point of view of their syntactic and semantic components, one notices that some of them – for instance, literary semiotic systems – are indifferent vis-à-vis their invested contents, while, by contrast, others are indifferent to the syntactic organizations they might have.”\(^{11}\)

Anything can be appropriated as “literary” content, which means that literary discourse can be defined only based on the way it represents its contents in the realm of the discursive, only based on the syntactic forms. On the other hand, “when thinking about… the semantic fields called “political discourse,” “religious discourse,” etc. – one can say that there exist deep organizations of content which can be formulated as systems of values or as epistemes.”\(^{12}\) These systems can be represented in various syntactic forms, for instance, as elements of content in literary discourse.

Thus the discourse of history can be understood in two ways: as a syntactic form, historical writing (a group of closely related subgenres), and a semantic field, a corpus of utterances (discursive performances) whose content is related to the past (itself organized as a meaningful structure). Historical writing is the main legitimate syntactic form that organizes this subfield of public discourse. Therefore, authors who seek to participate in the communal project or need to relate their performances to the project to justify them but for some reason do not assume the position of a historian with its specific discursive requirements and responsibilities have to determine the formal status of their projects.

The tension between the formal legitimacy of historical writing as the discursive representation of the past and cultural functions of other genres, that, to be fulfilled, require speaking about the past, will in the chapters below play the role of the source of both change and continuity in the syntactic structure of the communal project of the Revolutionary history (that is, in the system of relationships among the genre forms


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 84-85.
dealing with the past as a semantic field), and thus in the cultural function of the project as a whole. It is in this process of change and continuity that the meaning of the genre evolution I intend to trace ultimately resides.

The first chapter will serve the double purpose of continuing the present theoretical discussion on a more specialized level and delineating the historical context for the analysis of the post-Revolutionary American memoir literature. In that chapter, I will discuss the recent literary and historical studies of writing, public sphere and, more specifically, historical writing as a form of discursive representation in the North Atlantic world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The next two chapters will deal with the two modes of memoir writing’s relation to the discourse of history in the post-Revolutionary America, which could be called historical and autobiographical. I will argue that the difference between the two lies first of all in the relationship of two story-lines – that of public history and personal experience, and thus between two identities – individual and collective.

As intermediaries between specific textual performances with their public and personal discursive functions and the discourse of history as a meaningful whole and a site where society’s identity is acted out, memoir writing is itself a site where the relationship between the personal and collective identities and needs is established and negotiated. This genre form deals with the elements of the extradiscursive world that are part of the author’s experience and identity, but also have public relevance. Therefore, the narratives of personal experience produced in this genre and related to the cultural identity of their authors have public relevance too, the degree of which is uncertain to the extent to which the relationship between memoir writing and history (as the legitimate bearer of society’s cultural identity) is uncertain. This uncertainty and potential for variation is what makes a study like this possible and necessary.

Discourse is not only a system of genres or a corpus of utterances on a certain subject, but also a linguistic structure that constitutes authors as subjects participating in the cultural exchange. In some sense, an historian is not someone who speaks about the past; it is someone who produces utterances that a historian is supposed to produce. What does being the author of a history or a memoir text as a discursive (narrative) performance mean for one’s identity? Authorship, participation in the written discourse
as a constitutive part of personal identity and a crucial moment of the interplay between idiom and individuality, is ultimately the subject to which the present project seeks to contribute.
Chapter 1
Public Sphere, Textuality and the Expansion of History:
A Revolution in Writing

In the last decades, structuralism and poststructuralism have changed the study of the discursive. The established distinctions among various forms of writing were challenged, making it necessary for scholars to look upon genre categories from outside, from the point of view of the metacategories of language as an autonomous system or discourse as the realm of socio-cultural communication. In particular, theoretical developments raising the problems of socio-cultural function and the structure of texts have complicated the oppositions between the literary and the historical, fictional and non-fictional that were established within history and literature as discourses with their own analytical superstructures – theory of history and literary criticism. Structure-function analysis allows (or forces) both literary scholars and theorists of history to go beyond the confines of their disciplines, to historicize literary analysis, traditionally based on aesthetic categories, and to formalize the analysis of historical writing, traditionally concerned with the accumulation of facts, veracity, and correspondence to reality.

Thus in literary studies, structuralist and poststructuralist developments, rooted in linguistics and literary criticism, have outgrown the limits of aesthetic analysis and created conditions for the study of what might be called cultural poetics – the rules and conventions of cultural communication that shape, at any historical moment, particular genres and modes of discourse, determine their function and thus form and their mutual relationships and influences. In this, the study of form, traditionally seen as the domain of the literary, becomes historical, determining the discursive conditions that shape imaginative literature but manifest themselves in other forms of writing, as far removed from the aesthetic as travel reports or legal documents.

In early American studies, the trend in scholarship that best reflects these tendencies is the study of print culture in pre- and post-revolutionary America, concerned with such problems as the emergence and dissolution of public sphere, the meaning of print and its place in the ideology of republicanism and democracy, authorship, and the relationship between the self and public sphere. As Michael Warner puts it, print discourse in the eighteenth century can be understood as a cultural matrix in which the definitions of
“individual,” “print,” “public,” and “reason” were correlated with each other and shaped into a set of ground rules for communication. According to Warner, Larzer Ziff, Grantland Rice, and others who study writing rather than literature, the very emergence of literature as a separate category, which coincided with the development of Romanticism in America, was part of the evolution (and dissolution) of a syncretic discursive formation that existed in the eighteenth century – the evolution corresponding to the transition from Enlightenment republicanism to democracy described by historians, in particular by Gordon Wood.

In *The Letters of the Republic*, Warner argues that the widening of the use of print, writing for publication in eighteenth-century colonial America, coincided with, and in part created conditions for, the development of the ideology of republicanism and the notion of public sphere, independent of the private, particular, and indifferent to personal distinctions and situations. When speaking in print, one speaks to an indefinite and impartial public and therefore assumes a voice that is impersonal. Analyzing such written artifacts as Franklin’s autobiography and the Constitution, Warner traces the movement “from a world in which power embodied in special persons is represented before the people to one in which power is constituted by a discourse in which the people are represented.” Representations are separated from individuals as publications are separated from their authors, from particular contexts of speaking. According to Warner, the most important principle of the public sphere is the principle of negativity: what you say in public is valid not because of who you are, but despite who you are. Moreover, bracketing the particularities in the public sphere reinforces the identity of the speaker, because in the conceptual framework of the Enlightenment impersonal and universal reason is the spine of identity; “the personal is founded on and valued within the pure reproduction of the social,” the public.

After establishing the central importance of the idea of public sphere structured around print to political discourse, where agency is exercised by individuals through

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14 Ibid., 39.
15 Ibid., 82, 87.
publication as a self-effacing action, Warner analyzes the symptoms of the dissolution of this impersonal republican model in the imaginative literature of the early national period. The emergence of such literature as a separate and culturally legitimate mode of discourse parallels the transition from Enlightenment republicanism to the nationalism and democracy of the modern liberal state. Warner asks: “What cultural assumptions were necessary before people began to see ‘Americanness’ saturating the cultural goods they produced and consumed?” The answer is that a new way of relating the individual to the general had to be created, that would allow one to have a meaning for “American” distinct from the universalized public sphere: not an impartial action in the print discourse, but imaginary, symbolic personal identification with the nation. Americanness was something that existed in, not above and beyond the personal. “The modern nation does not have citizens in the same way that the republic does. You can be a member of the nation, attributing its agency to yourself in imaginary identification, without being a freeholder or exercising any agency in the public sphere.”

The novel was a print form that reflected this transformation. The new discursive mode of imaginary literature substituted direct public action, an exercise in virtue, with the symbolic. Grantland Rice has recently connected this phenomenon with the growing urge to avoid criticism or skepticism of the social order of the early republic, contradicting the persistent tradition of critical and unpredictable public writing. He argues that post-revolutionary writers negotiated “this circular critical injunction to avoid egotism without engaging critically with the social or political” by using the strategy of metonymic reasoning – deriving a broader, more integral category from a term understood to be its representative embodiment. Thus instead of the personal dissolving in the public, the public comes to be symbolically represented through the personal.

Almost simultaneously with Warner, Larzer Ziff wrote on the relationship between the self and public sphere, radical and conservative, and literary and political in the early period.

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17 Grantland S. Rice, “Cognitive Patterns and Aesthetic Deformations in Post-Revolutionary American Writing: A Preliminary Inquiry,” in Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America, ed. Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 14.
republic. Analyzing the parallels between literary and political representation, Ziff detects “the powerful drift from immanence to representation in both literature and society, from a common belief that reality resided in a region beneath appearance and beyond manipulation to the belief that it could be constructed and so made identical with appearance.” Like Warner, Ziff sees a connection between this shift towards the culture of representation, divorced from the person represented, and the depersonalizing qualities of print as a means of communication, which deprives the author from the power over his or her own words and transfers authority from the speaker to the spoken. But his approach is more social: it is the new situation of social and geographic mobility, when “persons were known principally by what they represented themselves as being,” and the shift in the economic sphere from real, landed, to personal – or represented – property, that were the main factors contributing to the dissolution of immanence in discourse.

Although the spread of the culture of representation – personal, commercial, political – was often perceived as a crisis from the point of view of the culture of immanence, it could also be seen as not just opposed to an immanent world, but also constitutive of that world, not just something that falsified what it purported to represent. Representations possessed a power to create a better world, and this was seen as the main task of all discursive representations; literature was first and foremost a social action in which the personal served public goals.

Ziff uses autobiographies and historical memoirs written by significant public figures – John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin – to demonstrate the difference between the patterns of immanence and representation in public discourse. According to him, if Adams, Rush and Jefferson “sought to complement history with the immanence that eluded its representations,” Franklin “offered the represented self as representative history.” The first three recognized the difference between the public and the private in discourse. In their autobiographies,

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19 Ibid., xi, 55.
20 Ibid., 59.
21 Ibid., 118.
ostensibly marked as private, not for public eye, they could introduce their particular selves as subjects of their own, different from the public record (history) but containing something that record misses, able to correct public history, which is the justification for presenting the private in the public arena. As for Franklin, the difference between public and private for him is the difference between the written and unwritten: only the unwritten can remain private, and even in memoirs one presents a public (representative) self. Representation drives immanence out of discourse.

But as the faith in the republic led to the writing of the self as representative, the immanent self never really disappeared. At odds with the predominantly liberal course taken by political culture, conservative elements in American public discourse, with their affection for the past as the essence of culture and the sense of darker forces beneath the surface of conscious rationality, found expression in literary culture, in the emergent doctrine of literary individualism which implied the presence of the immanent self.22 Thus, in Ziff’s view, the crystallization of literature as a specific form of discourse resulted not from the shifts in the understanding of the discursive or public sphere in general, but from a liberal-conservative split. The new mode of discourse depended upon and unavoidably transmitted conservative values regardless of the author’s beliefs, just due to the formal characteristics it assumed at the time.

Grantland Rice offers yet another model of the transformation of the print culture and the relationships between authors and printed texts from the colonial to early national period. He argues that the understanding of the text as a means of socio-political action emerged much earlier than Michael Warner suggests; it can be traced back to Puritan political writings, and depended on the existence of censorship and repression of the freedom of expression. It was censorship that gave texts their socio-political meaning. While the cultural triumph of the ideology of republicanism from the mid-eighteenth century, “the lapse of censorship and the explosion of print culture in the last half of the eighteenth century may have freed writers from the threat of persecution from church and

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state, they did so only by transforming printed text from a practical means for assertive socio-political commentary into the more inert medium of property and commodity.”

In the classical tradition the role of civic authorship was understood as monitoring the virtue of those to whom the state was entrusted. But by the end of the eighteenth century it was defined as the freedom for individuals to give public expression to their opinions, which together constituted the public realm – an open theater without a specific target, where the majority ruled. Without a target, the text was not a specific action, but an element on the open system of public discourse, an object equal to other objects, taking on a life of their own. When the outside pressure is removed, the laws of demand and supply come into play, and public discourse is structured as a market. In the republican and democratic culture, “the widespread glorification of print discourse… served as a synecdoche for nascent theories of a rational, self-regulating economy,” in which “the circulation of printed texts mirrored that of money; both were figured as rationalized vehicles for bearing the social currency of individuals.”

Republican print culture was a fleeting, unstable moment in the transition to a market culture where, in the system of supply and demand, printed texts became objectified products, alienated from their authors, who, in turn, became professional producers instead of socio-political actors. This is another, more historical aspect of the transition from the Enlightenment republicanism to the modern liberal state and consumer capitalism that Warner pictures through the formal analysis of the early stages of the diversification of the monolithic discursive sphere, where the imaginary literature, attempting at first to enter the public sphere as republican writing, carried the seeds of the new order, and later, as Ziff demonstrates, turned into a reaction against the market and objectifying imperatives of that order by upholding the immanent self in the democratic capitalist culture of representation.

These works, situated between literary studies and cultural history, also correspond quite well to the recent histories of the book and reading practices – cultural histories of the transition to the democratic public discourse based on market principles written from

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24 Ibid., 49.
the other, historical perspective. Richard Brown, David Hall and others have described the changes in the supply and demand and methods of consumption of information in the early national period that can be called a “reading revolution:” the transition from scarcity to abundance, from intensive to extensive reading, and the differentiation of information flows. A result of these developments was the growing role of personal choice in information consumption in comparison with the times when information, with its limited topical range and socially limited access, was a means of social distinction and control.25

Thus literary studies witness a trend toward the historization, attention to the historically specific discursive conventions necessary, in the American case, to understand the pre-Romantic literary documents on their own terms and not as a preface to the Romantic Renaissance. Historiography and theory of history go in the opposite direction: from historiography as a history of ideas and accumulation of knowledge to the structural analysis of historical texts with primarily theoretical goals. In this new branch of scholarship, adhering to the thesis of the non-transparency of historical representations, late Classicist and Romantic historical writing is a convenient example that can demonstrate the complex nature of historical texts, their structural affinities with imaginary literature, and their cultural role as constructions of reality.

Traditional history of historical writing implicitly or explicitly reconstructed the progress of its subject toward the understanding of historical truth, recounting (remediable) social, ideological, personal biases and errors of historians as the elements of this process to be corrected sooner or later. In contrast, structuralist and postmodernist theory of history, especially since Hayden White’s *Metahistory*, has come to understand historical writing as essentially non-transparent, that is, creating, not reflecting (textual) historical reality in the process of writing. *Metahistory* also makes obvious the dehistoricizing implications of this theoretical development.

Although White's study may seem at first sight to be a history of ideas in the customary form of the interpretation of great works, it is based on the conceptual apparatus designed to probe beneath the sphere of consciously articulated theories. Instead of explaining the evolution of the ideas about history out of (or at least in conjunction with) the development of philosophy, theology, political theory, White focuses on the unconscious, preconceptual mechanisms of organizing the world in the text. White argues that the practice of historiography is regulated by the same laws as grand philosophies of history as well as fictional representations of reality. Historical narratives are functions of imagination, which in the text (any text) exercises its power over reality. In *Metahistory* and his later works, White does not deny that historical narratives, unlike, for instance, fictional ones, refer to events which really occurred, but this difference interested him less than formal similarities between historiography proper, philosophy of history and fiction as discursive forms. The similarities derive from the same goal these forms pursue – to render the world meaningful.

The core of White’s analysis of the historical narrative and its structure is in the juxtaposition of reality and imagination, of what he called *historical field* and *prefiguration*, where the latter is the active component. White attempts to show how concrete forms of conceptualization and representation of the historical field derive from certain coherent visions, images of the latter that the historian has *before* he or she speaks of it. Such coherent visions are shaped, on the deepest unconscious level, by linguistic mechanisms represented by the tropes of poetic language – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. White downplays the problem of the correspondence of narrative representations to reality, but he does not deny the existence of real events (historical field). The historical field is passive in the act of representation, but at the same time it does serve as the material that gets shaped and reshaped in the imagination of the historian. White’s theory thus raises the problem of the function of the historical fact (the objective) as a textual element, the text being the subjective construction. Read in conjunction with some of the works of the founders of poststructuralism, in particular Roland Barthes, *Metahistory* can be seen as a way of problematizing the presence of the fact in the discursive space. What is the primary cause of this presence – the extratextual existence of facts, objects, events (which, again, is denied neither by White nor by
poststructuralist theorists) or the needs and mechanisms of communication as a symbolic process, where the elements of content, borrowed from reality or imagined, are no more than carriers of meaning, signifiers?

White was the first among theorists of history to pose this question so explicitly. But, despite its historical form, his analysis, following the structuralist method, is essentially ahistorical, as are the tropes of poetic language he uses as the main instrument. Claiming to study historical narratives, White in fact focuses on linguistic mechanisms as ideal types that exist beyond, or before, the narrative representation as an act. White’s history of historical writing is the cyclic process of the replacement of one linguistic protocol by another, with limited range of possibilities that repeat themselves. This process unfolds independently of any historical contexts and specific acts of representation.

Despite the fact that the subsequent theorists paid more attention to the structure of historical texts themselves than to the structure of historical imagination, and analyzed similarities between history and fiction on the textual level, the ahistorical slant has long been prevalent in the scholarship on Romantic historical writing (mostly that in France and Britain). In returning to the origins of the modern idea of history and historical writing, and approaching the major texts of Romantic and pre-Romantic historiography with the apparatus of textual analysis devised in literary studies, the main goal of such scholars as Peter Cosgrove, Linda Orr, Ann Rigney, and others has been to analyze the variety of ways and possibilities of representing the past through the text. Often these works are styled as responses to some literary theorists’ simplistic structural model of the discourse of history as an ideal type, based on the suppression of the signified and the elimination of the figure of the author and signs of textuality. Once the structural similarities between history and fiction, history’s dependence on the choice of narrative strategies were recognized, literary scholars and historians returned to the late Enlightenment and Romantic historiography, long discredited as too literary and ideological by the positivist standards, as the texts important for the understanding of the nature of history and a realized alternative to the simplistic positivist norms.

Thus Peter Cosgrove reinterprets Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire to reveal the role of intertextuality as a powerful shaping force in the historical text. He
focuses on preexisting standard historical plots and literary conventions and influential forms of fictional representation of history that shape the public presentation of historical events and phenomena, emerging scholarly apparatus – notes that represent the need to fragment historical material in the text that strives to present it as a coherent story – and the incorporation of sources that bring the voices of the past directly into the texts and allow them to compete with the authoritative voice of the historian. According to Cosgrove, these are the mechanisms through which intertextuality disrupts the image of the impartial, distanced narrative referring to the universal truth. At the same time, this inevitable disruption makes the historian at least partially aware of the inconsistencies between the purpose and practice and makes the efforts of organizing the past into an intelligible entity conscious and visible in the text.\(^{26}\)

The title of Linda Orr’s *Headless History* suggests the same impossibility, at least for the French historians of the Revolution who worked in the first half of the nineteenth century, to control their writing and maintain the authority and unity of interpretation of the past in their texts. In the post-revolutionary society without established sources of cultural or political legitimacy, the interpretive possibilities were too wide and uncertain, the meanings of events too numerous. When the historians, whose function is to constitute not only textual, but, consequently, social coherence, follow the old principles of building narrative plots and set up on the first pages of their histories expectations for development, laws and logical schemes, these expectations cannot be carried out. As the modern reader gets lost in these weighty multivolume histories, so the historians themselves often got lost in their own narratives and had to submit themselves to the power of language: in these texts, “events seem to write and read themselves: a headless history.”\(^{27}\) The events create and interpret themselves through the (authorless) text, and the writing of history becomes the actual performance of the Revolution. The nineteenth-century French historiography of the Revolution gives us, according to the author, a


particularly vivid example of the power of performative language over attempts at orderly historical reconstruction. But Orr draws from her analysis conclusions about the nature of history in general as well: history is overdetermined and thus indeterminable; “every work of history needs a moment of uncertainty, a moment given over to the disarray.”

In the *Rhetoric of Historical Representation*, Ann Rigney gives another example of careful, in-depth analysis of the mechanisms through which narrative exercises its power over the past in three particular cases – histories of the French Revolution by Lamartine, Michelet, and Blanc. Agreeing with White that historical works are verbal artifacts that do not reproduce but signify the past, Rigney however takes a more textual approach. She considers the discursive dimension of historical works in the light of their specific function in socio-cultural context – to represent and explain real events of collective significance. Based on the critical apparatus of semiotics and narrative analysis, the close reading of particular historical texts produced in a particular historical situation has a theoretical goal – “to broaden the range of theoretical questions which might be asked of other historical discourses and to bring more clearly into focus the particular constraints involved in historical, as distinct from fictional, narration.”

But at the same time, Rigney’s work brings into relief the historical potential of the poststructuralist, as opposed to White’s structuralist, approach to historical writing, less explicit in the works of Cosgrove and Orr. Attention not to the historian’s imagination, but first of all to the text as a site of symbolic communication, signifying construct involves the analysis of other texts to which the subject of analysis is related, and the specific cultural situation in which the text operates, fulfills its historiographical function. “The literary, and specifically narrative, means through which real events in the past can be symbolically reconstituted and invested with a particular significance for a latter-day public” are not abstract constructs and universal mechanisms of thought but historically specific tools of socio-cultural communication responding to specific needs.

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30 Ibid., xii.
Rigney analyzes how the referential function correlated with the literary form in the works of Lamartine, Michelet and Blanc as they tried to influence the present through the representation of the past. These authors fitted their histories in the already customary patterns of narrating the Revolution and at the same time reshaped these patterns to achieve their political goals, evoked the “particular cultural code to which the principal elements of the Revolution already belong[ed],”31 to communicate with their audience, interrupted their narration with personal reflections which were supposed to create a kind of bond between the authors and the audience, explicitly argued with each other to reinforce their historical authority and undermine that of their opponents, and had to include in their accounts the interpretations of the Revolution that went against their own – to neutralize them. Although constantly emphasizing their dealing with the actual events of the past, the three historians did not try to conceal the performative character of their text – their translation of the events into a discursive medium with the purpose of shaping the present by relating the past.

In doing this, according to Rigney, the historians transformed the nature of historical representation itself. As they sought authority through their interaction with a present public as well as their link to past realities, they did that not only via textual mechanisms signifying their presence in the contemporary discourse, but also via relocating the historical reality of the Revolution in the people, represented as sharing essential characteristics with the historians’ public. They thus created a “self-portrait” of the people through narrating the Revolution, where the narrator himself is represented as indistinguishable from his public.

In her next book, Imperfect Histories, Rigney explores the formal aspect of the French and British Romantic historians’ attempts to write a new kind of history – a cultural and social history of peoples rather than states. According to her, the new requirements and expectations made especially obvious the problem of representability of the past: they highlighted the enormousness of the historian’s task. In their attempts to write a total history of nations, historians had to deal with the resistance of the past to any discursive representation, which by definition seeks to discover the meaning of the past reality (or impose a meaning). In the case of a discursive form that claims to represent the

31 Rigney, The Rhetoric of Historical Representation, 40.
past as closely to reality as possible, the problem was especially serious. It led at least some Romantic historians, like Thomas Carlyle, to the recognition of the intrinsic imperfection of history, as a discourse that, in representing part of reality, always hints at the unknown. On the other hand, these tensions generated experiments with fiction as a mode of historical representation, as “the facility offered by fiction is an inverse measure of the difficulties involved in representing the past plausibly as a fully fledged story with human interest, without deviating from the evidence.” For a moment, in the novels of Walter Scott and his followers, fiction became a genre of historical writing and was often treated as such, inspiring the experiments with forms on the part of historians as well, in their attempts to harness the elusive and unrepresentable past.

By analyzing historians’ formal experiments, and in particular the relationship between history writing and fiction in the early nineteenth century, as responses to the emergence of a new public and to changing social and cultural situation, Rigney locates the present-day theoretical concerns with the formal characteristics and fictional elements of the discourse of history in the specific socio-cultural situation of Europe after the French Revolution – something that has previously been done mostly from the point of view of the history of ideas. Mark Phillips’ *Society and Sentiment* represents an even more historical, genre-oriented attempt to analyze the transition from the Enlightenment to Romantic historiography in Britain. This study focuses more on the explanation of the mechanisms of this transition and less on the purely theoretical problems of the formal nature of the discourse of history. Phillips explicitly criticizes White’s approach for its inability to explain changes in historical writing as a discursive phenomenon or to account for their relation to the larger socio-cultural situation. As a possible solution, he suggests analyzing historical writing as not a single, unified genre, ideal type (contrasted with fiction), but a “family of related genres,” that included, in the period under

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33 To compare Rigney’s method with that of traditional history of ideas, see for instance Ceri Crossley, *French Historians and Romanticism*: Thierry, Guizot, the Saint-Simonians, Quinet, Michelet (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

consideration, biography, antiquarian writings, diaries, memoirs, literary histories, some fictional genres. Genre here is a structure created for the purposes of socio-cultural communication, dynamic system that responds to cultural needs, undergoes historical change and can only be understood in relation to other genres, which serve other (often closely related) cultural needs.

Understood in this way, historical writing displays a continuity of questions and interests and the mechanisms of evolution that remain hidden when we concentrate on canonical works and genres that are usually more rigid and change more slowly than minor genres. Thus, for instance, the concern with private human emotions, inner self, everyday life of ordinary people, “structural” aspects on history, often denied to the British historiography of the eighteenth century, was quite vividly displayed in the minor historical works and genres of the century, where the powerful norms of the inherited classical tradition had less influence than in “high” historical writing. This discursive periphery represents the undercurrent of change that slowly undermined the norms, even though the latter remained the customary point of reference.

The works of Rigney and Phillips reveal the prospect of a new cultural history of historical writing, elaborating on the principle of the non-transparency of the text and different from both history of ideas and theory of history based on specific examples. It is possible to write a history of symbolic communication, where texts are basic units, events, related to each other and collectively expressing certain (evolving) structural conventions, and operating in the system of linguistic, social, psychological, economic contexts in specific historical situations.

Certainly, this approach also presupposes the study of historiography proper in the larger context of the “historical sensibilities,” where the analysis of the syntactic qualities of the discourse of history correlates with a more semantically oriented analysis of the place and role of the historical in mentalities of the age, as a response to which the transformations of historiography proper may be seen. Stephen Bann does precisely that in *Romanticism and the Rise of History*, attempting to explain the active interest in history in Europe during the period following the French Revolution, and the birth of historical consciousness itself. In England, Germany, and especially France, historical representations permeated cultural life; they resembled “a flood that overrode all
disciplinary barriers and... became a substratum to almost every type of cultural activity." Following Foucault and Nietzsche, Bann seeks an explanation to this phenomenon not in political or ideological spheres, but on the level of collective psychology, as the expression of the “desire for history.” The latter is, in its turn, the response to the sense of dispossession, of being devoid of history after the great historical ruptures of the age. Historical representation thus becomes “a complex and necessary strategy of recuperation, a way of imaginatively recovering what the humanist tradition had been blithely willing to let pass. ‘History’ is the relentless appropriation, by text, figure, and scenographic representation, of what is already irretrievably lost.”

Romantic historical representations in Bann’s interpretation can be seen as a cultural code in the Barthesian sense, permeating the intertextual space and carried by historical “facts” as signifiers. The purpose of such signifiers is to assure the presence of the past in discourse in response to the collective desire and for its own sake, freed from the necessity of political or ideological connotation. The image of “headless history” can be evoked here again, as it is present in discursive space prior to any interpretation, any attempt to make it usable or organize it into a coherent discourse and structured narrative. Its legitimacy comes from unidentifiable “people,” zeitgeist, and cannot be monopolized.

Peter Fritzsche follows Bann in emphasizing the apprehension of time as non-repeatable and irretrievable as the defining characteristic of modern historical consciousness that emerged after the dramatic transformations of the early nineteenth century. In his *Stranded in the Present*, he analyses the past as a historical and cultural artifact – its discovery, role in Romantic sensibilities and in the articulation of public and private identity in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Once the cataclysm of the Revolution shattered the previously unquestioned assumptions about the stability of human nature, translatability of knowledge across time and space, and the established patterns of historical interpretation, epistemological uncertainty “made historical

36 Ibid., 10.
narratives less authoritative, but also more interesting and many-sided.” Freed from old constraints, history (in both senses of the word) expanded dramatically, in particular from public into private life, as contemporaries saw their lives reflected in it and shaped by it.

Fritzsche pays particular attention to the relationship between the public and private in the Romantic historical sensibilities, as the boundaries between them were undermined in the upheavals of the era. The experience of loss that connected private and public dramas, and the expansion of the notions of historical change into private life and personal development point to important parallels between the development of historical consciousness and the extension of subjectivity in the modern period. It is the genre of autobiography that perhaps best expressed this convergence of the public and private in the discourse of history. It became a form through which the multitude of life experiences could be correlated with the grand narrative of history, enriching it and making historical interpretation more difficult.

Thus cultural and formalistic approaches to the Romantic historical writing demonstrate the potential for complicating the narrative of the emergence of nationalist Romantic historiography with its usable past, more or less established in the history of ideas. Historical writing is (re)constructed as a complex discursive phenomenon embracing a variety of unevenly developing genres and subgenres and experiments with narrative forms. It extends its influence and connections into other spheres of culture, participates in the continuous day-to-day public conversation and constitutes part of the language of culture on a level prior to political and ideological uses of the past. The notion of the non-transparency of the historical text goes beyond situational biases or even basic linguistic mechanisms of prefiguration and leads to the notion of the signification of the past in the contemporary (for the historian) cultural context as the basic function of historical writing, fulfilled through the rhetoric of realistic representation and a variety of genre forms that complement each other in serving cultural needs.

All this impressive conceptual development in the cultural history of Romantic historical writing in Europe, however, remains inadequately reflected in the

38 Fritzsche, Stranded in the Present, 6.
39 Ibid., 9.
historiography of American Enlightenment and Romanticism. Several important attempts to analyze the late eighteenth-early nineteenth-century American historical writing as a cultural phenomenon and as a group of historical and literary documents (as opposed to assessing its value as representations of the past) were made in 1960s-1970s. David Levin’s *History as Romantic Art* was one of the first large-scale attempts to explore the structural similarities between imaginative literature and history in Romantic era and situate the great American historians of the nineteenth century – Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman – in the center of the Romantic movement in American culture.\footnote{40 David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (New York: AMS Press, 1967).}

Levin considers history as one of the most important expressions of Romantic worldview, providing documentary foundation for Romantic ideology and philosophy. But his is the analysis of the literary form and conventions that, reflecting a particular Romantic idea of history as a part of the movement’s worldview, shaped the works of the great historians as timeless literary documents, not events in a historically specific discursive formation.

David Van Tassel and Harvey Wish in their general works attempted to analyze the development of American historical writing in a social and intellectual context, paying considerable attention to the early national period.\footnote{41 David D. van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: an Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607-1884* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960); Harvey Wish, *The American Historian; a Social-Intellectual History of the Writing of the American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).} But they often slipped into the familiar mode of evaluating the credibility and individual biases of historians. George Callcott produced a remarkable analysis of the role and place of history in American culture of the first half of the nineteenth century – its intellectual origins, methods, interpretations of the past, social function and significance, including the development of new cultural attitudes toward history that prompted the emergence of Romantic historiography.\footnote{42 George Callcott, *History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).} Arthur Shaffer examined the works of the first generation of post-revolutionary historians as part of the intellectual history of the early national period – of the change in modes of thought generated by the Revolution – and an aspect of the nation
building in the early republic, carrying out “an important psychological function in a new nation whose sudden and unexpected emergence left it bereft of a past.”

This historiography culminated in 1980 in Lester Cohen’s *The Revolutionary Histories*, a study heavily influenced by Hayden White and foretelling the narratological approach to the European Romantic historical writing. Cohen examined the dissolution of the traditional monistic and reductionist providential mode of historical explanation in the works of the post-revolutionary historians, who were thus able “to free themselves to engage history’s enormous variety and complexity.” With history seen as an “immanent process of self-generating events,” its organizing principle was relocated in the historical narrative, not in the past itself. It required the voice of the narrator to give it shape and significance – and thus the performative power of the historical text was freed for historians to participate in the creation of the (indeterminate) future through narrating the past.

In his work, Cohen demonstrated the potential of the fusion of the traditional for the history of American historical writing concern with the role of the latter in the process of nation building and political controversies of the early national period with the structuralist and poststructuralist developments in the theory of history. But the possibilities remained unrealized. The cultural history of the European historical writing discussed earlier in this chapter originated from the theory-oriented discussions of the nature of history as a discourse and of the non-transparency of the historical text on the basis of the great works of mostly French Romantics. Perhaps American historical tradition, often thought of as provincial and dependent on European intellectual development (even after the appearance of Bancroft, Parkman and other great Romantics), and not having experienced as radical post-revolutionary ruptures as France, has been less attractive in this search for examples than the historical writing in the classic country of Romantic historicism. In the traditional framework of the history of

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45 Ibid.
ideas, with its cosmopolitan tendencies, the evolution of the late Enlightenment and Romantic historical thought in the United States can be at least partly explained by British and German influences (Scott’s novels as prototypes of American historical novels, Bancroft’s education in Germany etc.), which makes the structural analysis of the indigenous socio-cultural situation less imperative. But it is this kind of analysis that lies at the core of genre-oriented cultural history as the history of socio-cultural communication, as the recent works on the evolution of the print culture in America demonstrate.

The segment of the discourse of history of the early national period where recent American scholarship does trace developments connected with the indigenous socio-cultural situation is the public memory of the American Revolution. Robert Cray, Sarah Purcell, and Alfred Young have cast the evolution of the public memory of the Revolution in the first decades of the nineteenth century in terms of democratization and a contest over the legacy of the Revolution between the old cultural elite of the early republic and the “common men” of Jacksonian democracy rising to cultural legitimacy.

Cray and Young examine the changes in the public representation of particular figures of the revolutionary history from lower classes – the three captors of Major John André and one of the participants in the Boston Tea Party, George Hewes.⁴⁶ They analyze how these changes reflected social and political transformations in American society that generated struggles over the meaning of the Revolution. If in the first post-revolutionary decades the dominant groups tried, more or less successfully, to suppress the memory of mass, popular actions during the revolutionary crisis, this became more difficult in the 1820s and 1830s, when the social elites found themselves confronted in the public sphere by politically empowered citizens.⁴⁷

Purcell takes a broader view of the transformations of the memory of the Revolution over five decades, analyzing wide variety of texts not belonging to

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⁴⁷ Cray, “Major John Andre,” 393.
historiography proper but representing the Revolution in the public sphere – newspapers, articles, poems, memoirs, sermons, orations, visual arts, plays. These texts also reflect the democratization and diversification of public sphere in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In the late eighteenth century the Revolution was defined primarily through a limited number of central icons of martyrs, heroes, and battles. In contrast, in the new century the proliferation of small-scale commemorations and representations of smaller figures and events, often subjective and individualistic, undermined the desired unity of the image of the Revolution, but brought together “national themes and the power of individual experience into a more broadly based democratic cultural ideal.”

Purposefully carrying self-consciously subjective and partisan views of the revolutionary past and freed from constraints of objectivity, these public representations were an open field for competitive interpretations of the past and for political struggle by historical means. They complicated the meaning of history in the highly politicized atmosphere of the post-revolutionary era.

But what was the relationship of such marginal, from the point of view of historiography proper, genre forms to the discourse of history as a whole? How was this cultural situation reflected in the development of American historical writing as a socio-cultural phenomenon? One way to understand the discourse of history in its relation to the large-scale cultural changes in the post-revolutionary America, crowned, in the sphere of high culture, with American Renaissance and Brahmin historiography as its essential element, is to look at it as a group of genres of historical signification and representation, structured according to their different functions in public discourse but related to each other in form and content. In what follows, I will attempt to extend the textual approach used by many scholars in the study of historical writing to the developments in the historical consciousness outside that particular subfield. How did the developments in “history proper” and the discussion of historical topics in the wider public discourse correlate with each other on the level of textual form? Is it possible to trace the external connections of historical writing and determine the external factors of its development not only on the level of the history of ideas, philosophical influences, or political

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purposes, but also on the level of formal genre characteristics, interaction among various forms of writing in the continuous information exchange in public sphere?

Memoir genre, as perhaps one of the most ambiguous forms of historical representation, suits this analytical purpose very well. It is understood by the author and audience as a source of information for the future historian, but most often implicitly oriented towards the contemporary reader. It is seen as a historical, non-fictional genre, but not history proper – and still deals with historical facts more directly than perhaps any other genre outside historiography. The study of this genre form, existing in between history and fiction, scholarly writing and public memory, may help clarify the nature and concrete forms of interaction between these spheres on the level of genre conventions. How, in what form, with what explicit and implicit intentions and in what relationship to history proper did personal memories enter public discourse, and what can this tell us about how history itself was perceived by culture at large? In other words, how did this marginal genre and its transformations reflect the role and place of history in American culture of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century? How did textualized personal memories relate to the master-narrative of Revolutionary history and thus to society’s self-image? How was the changing relationship between the public and private, whose importance in the process of transition to liberal middle-class culture of the nineteenth century is emphasized by present-day cultural historians and literary critics, reflected in the evolution of this genre form? These are the questions at least some of which the following two chapters will attempt to address.
Chapter 2

Historicizing the Self

At the beginning of his Memoirs of the War in the Southern Departments of the United States (1812), Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Lee expressed regret that “not one of the chief actors in our camp or cabinet, and indeed very few of our fellow citizens, have attempted to unfold the rise, or to illustrate the progress and termination of our revolution.”49 It was in order to repair the effects of this perceived negligence that one of the most famous commanders of the Revolutionary war campaigns in the South, now imprisoned for debt, decided to write memoirs himself. Explaining his choice of the topic, Lee pointed out that Southern campaigns were “that part of the war with which I am best acquainted, and which in its progress and issue materially contributed to our final success, and to the enlargement of our military fame.”50

Lee’s work demonstrates how negligible the difference between historical and memoir text sometimes could be. Not attempting a full-scale history of the Revolution or even a complete history of the campaigns in the Southern states, Lee chose to write about the campaigns in which he had directly taken part, starting with the third year of the war. But he does not emphasize his first-hand knowledge as the raison d'etre for his memoirs and needs to justify his choice of the place and period with the argument of historical significance; he aims at “investing the reader with a full and clear understanding of the operations to be described.”51 And, certainly, Lee does not rely exclusively on his personal knowledge of the events.

I will argue that the assumption behind Lee’s project, common for his time, is that of isomorphism between memoir writing and history, between the personal and public story. Great men should write memoirs because their lives are an essential part of history; in effect, memoirs should be history, since only in the form of the narrative of the public affairs and matters of public significance can an individual life enter the discursive

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
sphere, be narrated. Coexistence of the personal narrative with the historical narrative was the ideal standard form of representing historical information via the text based on personal memory in the late eighteenth – early nineteenth centuries. The personal narrative constituted the basis for the historical one but, from the formal point of view, was subordinate to it and actually served to present it. However, the two stories were innately different, reflecting as they did the experience of different subjects; this difference was in the period under consideration the source of tension in the memoir genre. The main subject of this chapter will be the various ways in which authors of memoir texts coped with the tension, in doing this illustrating the assumptions about history, historical writing and the discursive relationship between the public and private in post-Revolutionary America.

If we accept the idea of convergence, the genre difference between memoirs and history is more a problem of the author’s readiness to assume the responsibility of a historian, and thus a matter of the degree, not of kind. For the early historians of the Revolution and War of Independence, their participation in the events, or at least proximity to the main actors, was a significant incentive and aid. David Ramsay, in his History of the Revolution of South Carolina, when assuring the reader of the accuracy of his account, specifically emphasizes that the author’s “opportunities of information have been considerable, from his being actually a witness to many of the events recorded in the following history.” Only “where his own knowledge was insufficient” did he resort to other sources: “sought for information from those who were immediate actors,” examined battlefields, and studied official and military correspondence. Ramsay’s assertions can be compared with the cases of William Gordon and Mercy Otis Warren, who were well acquainted with the main figures of the Revolution and started collecting materials for their histories during the events themselves, or those of Charles Stedman and Banastre Tarleton in Britain – both historians of the rebellion and former participants in the events they described.

53 Ibid., vii-viii.
It may be argued that another criterion of distinction between memoirs and other forms of historical writing was the more or less explicit presence of the author in the text, the identification of the narrator with one of the characters. Indeed, even in Lee’s memoirs, very close in its form to history, the figure of the author and his personal experience are not eliminated altogether, though somewhat disguised. Lee recounts a relatively minor episode of the campaign of 1777, in which he and his friend were the main actors. They were separated by the enemy, each of them thought the other dead, but this proved to be a mistake – “thus did fortune smile upon these two young soldiers, already united in friendship,” concludes Lee.54 He refers to himself in the third person, but such episodes, though rare, are easily recognizable and do add a certain personal dimension to the text.

Another almost pure case of historical intention realized on the basis of the recollections of personal experience offers a more explicit, self-conscious way of introducing the author-narrator as a historical character. John Stuart’s goal in his Memoir of Indian Wars (the date of composition unknown, probably the last years of eighteenth or first years of nineteenth century) is to compensate for the lack of historical accounts of the conflict with Indians in Virginia in 1750s-1770s. His experience comprises the basis of the account, but the latter is not confined to the former. Stuart starts with an anecdote about how the settling of new lands around Greenbrier River began and eventually led to a conflict with Indians. Then he recounts the early stages of the conflict, and introduces himself only on the sixth page (the Memoir is thirty-one-pages long), as a participant in the expedition under the command of General William Lewis in 1774. Interestingly, the first time the author refers to himself in the third person, naming himself among the officers commanding the volunteers of Botetourt, but in the very next sentence, beginning the actual narrative of the expedition, he switches to the first person.55 Stuart writes himself into the history of the conflict, objectifies himself as an actor, makes his experience and actions part of the story, and thus assumes the authority as a narrator. The

54 Lee, Memoirs, 89-92.
rest of the text is based on what he himself saw and took part in, with the exception of a lengthy digression into the beginning of the campaign against the Indians in 1755: here Stuart argues against the existing references to these facts in general histories, drawing on what he heard from General Lewis.56

*Memoir of Indian Wars* is one of the most clear-cut cases of composing memoirs instead of history and therefore as a substitute for it. A text of this kind may be produced when the author for some reason does not feel entitled to the authority (and responsibility) of a historian, or aims at the correction of or addition to history. But the proper form for such a text is still the form of history. No matter what the purpose of the text is, the author feels compelled to present the whole story. The story should, ideally, coincide with the narrative of the author’s participation in the story – because usually this is how the future narrator got the information he presents to the public. However, the tension between historical intentions and habitual mode of narration, on the one side, and autobiographic content and sources of information, on the other, was often more intense and more evident in the structure of memoir texts than in Stewart’s case.

General William Moultrie, one of the military leaders in the South during the Revolution, justifies the publication of his memoirs as follows: “Having had the honor of acting a very conspicuous part in the revolution of America, in the states of South Carolina and Georgia, and having a great many documents by me, the authenticity of which cannot be doubted, and having read several authors on the subject, and found them very deficient, I have taken upon myself that arduous task, thinking it incumbent on myself to hand down to posterity the particulars of this great event.”57

But the intention to correct and supplement the existing histories of the Revolution using the unique materials he possesses as a result of his participation in the events (“I believe no one else is furnished with such materials,” notes Moultrie58) – cannot be considered the only factor that shaped the result of his efforts. The memoirs begin with

58 Ibid.
the organization of the provincial congress, in which Moultrie participated, proceed to the preparation to the war, and, with the commencement of the hostilities, virtually turn into an archive of the author’s correspondence with the Congress and other officers, where the continuous flow of letters is occasionally interrupted by the author’s comments (as Moultrie puts it in the preface, “whenever the chain shall be broken, for want of documents, my memory can link them together and carry on the subject”\textsuperscript{59}). However, the fact that Moultrie was taken prisoner when Charleston surrendered to the British and that he did not witness or participate in the subsequent part of the war does not prevent him from relating the events of the following campaigns in the South. The flow of correspondence ebbs, containing mostly the letters to and from British military authorities concerning the condition of the prisoners of war, but Moultrie does not abandon the larger picture, and the text consists of the parallel stories of his captivity and of the war. These lines of narration remain separate until the end of the text when, appropriately enough, the narrative is crowned with the British evacuation of Charleston.

Apparently, Moultrie is not only determined to offer his readers the materials “no one else is furnished with” that could supplement and correct the history of the campaigns in the South. He feels it necessary to present these materials, his experience as the actor, \textit{in the form} of history, supplementing \textit{them} with the missing parts of the story when necessary. From the beginning he tries to situate his activities as a military commander within the general picture of the revolutionary history of the Southern states, even though his correspondence obviously dominates the account. And when the two stories – that of the Revolution and of his participation in it – separate (or rather his story separates from the chain of military actions and negotiations that constituted the core of the story of the Revolution in the South, for his activities as a prisoner could be considered as being of some interest for the history of the war), Moultrie chooses to continue both of them – but finishes with the more general one.

A more complicated case, where the authorship, or potential authorship, of memory-based history did not necessarily draw on direct participation and significant

\textsuperscript{59} Moultrie, \textit{Memoirs}, viii.
role of the author in the events of the Revolution, we can find in the diary of William Smith, kept during the years of 1763-1783. The editor of the text in the 1950s, William Sabine, characterizes it as “a diary, private recording of public affairs, and a commentary thereon, whose chief purpose was to assist him [Smith] in later writing a formal history.”\(^{60}\) Smith himself entitled this text *Historical Memoirs of the Province of New York*, perhaps avoiding the either too personal or too official connotations of the word “journal,” as such text would usually be called. But its content by no means can be seen as only a private record of public affairs, or the record of Smith’s participation in the latter. The text is full of quite personal entries, and all the usual elements of a personal diary (which Smith’s text often can hardly be distinguished from), up to the observations of weather. This is especially true for the years after 1776, in particular for the period of July 1776 – July 1778, when Smith left a public career and lived in the countryside. Whatever the original purpose of the text was, the bulk of it can be described as a personal diary. But, on the other hand, it reflects the highly important role which attention to public affairs played in Smith’s everyday life, in his self-perception and self-fashioning. Even during the years of 1776-1778, when far away from the main scenes of events, Smith diligently notes every bit of news about the course of the conflict with Britain and records his comments on them. But these elements are so interwoven into the fabric of the personal diary that the text as a whole leaves the impression that Smith is writing history for himself, and as a part of his self – its public part.

Furthermore, *Historical Memoirs of the Province of New York* can be seen as a part of the sequence of historical texts written by Smith. He had previously published a history of New York until 1732, and in 1776-1778 was engaged in writing the “Continuation” of that history, covering the years 1732-1762. *Historical Memoirs* can be regarded as part of this historical project, a continuation of the “Continuation”\(^{61}\). But the latter was not intended for publication, at least in the nearest future; it was to serve the purpose of the education of Smith’s son, born in 1769. Smith writes:


\(^{61}\) Ibid., 2: xi-xii.
What precedes this Year [1762] to where the printed Volume ends in 1731 I arranged at the Manor of Livingston in 2 Months before the 20 March 1777 arranged from notes formerly collected…

The Work was composed for the information of my Son, for the Liberties I have taken with my Contempore Characters and which I could not suppress consistant with Truth and Impartiality, will not admit of its being printed. It may however at some distant day be of use.

In Smith’s historical writing, we see the gradual transition from history printed for the public to the history still organized, composed in proper form but only for family use, to the notes and comments in his private diary, hastily written down. Some day in the future these notes will be the basis for history, but at present they are the stuff of Smith’s everyday life and thought. The necessity of this transition is determined by the ideals of truth and impartiality and by Smith’s needs as a public man. He not only must compose history in accordance with these ideals, which means the increasing (as the narrative gets closer to the present) impossibility of making it public, but also feels the need to interiorize history, to write public affairs of historical importance into his own self. The self is shaped out of the stuff of history, but it also becomes the ideal locus of truth and impartiality out of which, and out of which only, future history can be created (and it is history that was supposed to help Smith mould his son by the same model of public man). The two narratives merge in more than one way.

Smith intended to write a history of the Revolution, for which information derived from personal experience was not necessary, although it was commonly seen as highly desirable at the time when the project was conceived. But we cannot say that writing a quasi-history, or history proper, was the only way to introduce personal experience into the public discourse. It was not impossible to publicize the information the would-be author possessed as deserving attention due to the very fact that it related to the Revolution, even if this information could not possibly meet the requirements of the historical narrative form. Such cases may be especially interesting, for here the historical mode of narration, although ostensibly rejected, insinuates itself into the text as a possibly unconscious form of legitimization for the text’s presence in the public discourse. We can observe the way historical elements not directly related to the author’s immediate experience function in such texts on the example of the memoirs of Major-

General William Heath. First published in 1798, they exemplify a number of textual strategies employed to introduce a “personal record” of the War of Independence into the public discourse on it.

In a brief “Advertisement” on the verso of the title page, Heath states that to publish the memoirs during his life-time was not his intention; they were written down “for his own review, and the information and satisfaction of his own family, as well as posterity.” Indeed, the text is based on a personal journal that Heath, like many other officers, kept during the war. The journal was mostly filled with details of what happened immediately around Heath, and also with the information he was receiving at the time about what was going on beyond his reach. (Compare it to other such texts, for example, the journal of Lieutenant Isaac Bangs, also not intended for publication, and the author’s explanation of its purpose: “In some future Time it may perhaps afford Pleasure to recollect past Toils; and being sensible of the Treachery of my Memory in recollecting past Events, I think it advisable to keep a few Minutes to assist a bad Memory… in bringing to Mind past Events.”) The objective of the publication (which appeared due to “the pressing importunity of very many”) was “to preserve and perpetuate a daily Journal of occurrences through nearly the whole of the late American war,” not to write a history.

But from the very beginning of the text we can detect a number of strategies aimed, consciously or not, at establishing the discursive authority of the narrator and making the text a part of the public “story” of the war, with its easily recognizable for the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century reader elements. It is not just a heap of authentic facts valuable to posterity as “every [other] remaining vestige” of the Revolution.

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65 Heath, Memoirs, 4.
66 Ibid., x. Hereafter italics by the authors, unless otherwise stated.
67 Ibid.
Heath begins with a self-description consistent with the norms of the genre of biographic “memoirs” of distinguished individuals, widespread at the end of the eighteenth century and mostly written not by those persons themselves. Notably, throughout the text Heath addresses himself in third person, usually as “our General.” Along with the information on the time and place of his birth and his love of military exercises, he provides a short physical self-description: “He is of middling stature, light complexion, very corpulent, and bald-headed, which led the French officers who served in America very frequently to compare him to the Marquis of Granby”; and here a footnote follows: “Chastellux’s Travels.”68 This passage with a footnote, unique of its kind in the text (in a sense that the note refers to Heath himself figuring in somebody else’s printed work), may be interpreted as Heath’s attempt to take his place in the printed discourse. The imitation of a standard biographical description serves the same purpose. Heath wants to ascertain his legitimacy as a discursive object (since his has already acquired existence “on paper” – the footnote proves his right to be there), as an actor in the past (since he exists in discursive space, narrating his actions would not be redundant in that space), and as an author in the present, for the same reasons – note the use of present tense in the passage, unique for this section of the text.

We can also note another attempt by Heath to establish himself as an historical actor – one of the many, and thus even more “plausible,” more historic – at the beginning of his narrative, when he cites the resolution of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts appointing a group of officers, including Heath, General Officers of the province’s militia.69 Structurally, this resolution serves as a starting point for the account of Heath’s actions in the War of Independence, after introductory remarks on his previous career.

Introduced in such a way, the bulk of what follows consist of journal entries recounting the minutiae of military life. A typical example would be: “[September] 10th [1775]. – A strong work at Lamb’s Dam, in Roxbury, was completed, and mounted with four 18 pounders. The same day, a shot from the British destroyed three muskets at

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68 Heath, Memoirs, 1.
69 Ibid., 3-4.
Roxbury.”70 A less typical entry, but one illustrating the original personal dimension of the text: “[April] 27th [1776]. – Our General, having been inoculated with the small-pox, went to Montresor’s Island, where he went through the operation of that distemper.”71

But there are also a significant number of entries in the journal, usually beginning with the words “intelligence was received,” “there was a report” etc., that link Heath’s daily proceedings to the larger context of the war, and sometimes even of remarkable events that do not relate to the war at all – from the capture by the British of the Hon. Henry Laurens, sent on a mission to Holland,72 to a big fire in Constantinople in 1782.73 In many cases such entries do not go beyond presenting the perspective of the author of a journal, a soldier “who was an eye-witness to many facts which are related, and who collected the others from the best information the then moment and circumstances would admit.”74 But not always can he stay within the boundaries of the journal form, often digressing into extended accounts of events he did not witness, given from the viewpoint of the omniscient narrator. Consider the example of the battle of Brandywine, September 1777 (pp. 116-117). Heath begins here with the standard “the disagreeable news was received,” but then slips into the general description and analysis of the battle, where, in the phrase beginning with “It is said that after the Hessian Grenadiers had crossed the Ford… [etc.],” the (untypical) use of the present tense again suggests Heath’s reliance on the later discourse on the war and his seeing himself operating within that discourse as the author. The description ends with the conclusion on the meaning and significance of the battle.

The Canadian expedition of 1775-1776, and especially the captivity of Ethan Allen can serve as another example of this kind. Here, following a brief account of the expedition, Heath introduces the story of Ethan Allen with the words “some time before this” (apparently, the story was absent from the original journal and was not then

70 Heath, Memoirs, 21.
71 Ibid., 38.
72 Ibid., 246.
73 Ibid., 333, 334.
74 Ibid., x.
“received” as “intelligence”), and ends it noting that “his [Allen’s] narrative was long since published.”75 Neither Heath’s acquaintance with any specific details of the story, nor his hearing about it at the time when it happened, but rather the fact that Allen’s narrative was published, was widely known, and was therefore part of the public knowledge of the war became the reason for its inclusion into the text. Widely known, ideologically and emotionally charged events and stories of the war (such as Arnold’s treason and the story of Major André), together with significant battles and actions, from Concord to the surrender of Cornwallis, penetrate Heath’s journal. Far from being a simple vestige of events, it is, consciously or not, turned into a latent history of the revolutionary war, reproducing its “story-line” as it existed in the public discourse of the late eighteenth century.

It may be asked whether the elements of history were written into Heath’s Memoirs when the text was first composed not for public eye or they appeared when text was being prepared for publication, if, indeed, it was not originally written for the public. Not having enough data regarding the history of the text, it is impossible to answer this question, but the likelihood of the Memoirs being written for private consumption in the same form in which they were published does not necessarily change the interpretation suggested above.

We can compare Heath’s memoirs to a remarkably similar text published in 1823, A Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War by James Thacher. This work (especially the preface, much more elaborate than Heath’s) further elucidates a consistent relationship of symbiosis between personal and public record in historical memoirs despite the time distance of 25 years.

Thacher is certainly conscious of the limitations of his war-time journal, filled with occurrences “of minor import and penned for temporary amusement,” from the historical point of view: “The subordinate station which I sustained did not permit access to the great source from which all important events derived their origin; nor was I made

75Heath, Memoirs, 21-22.
acquainted with the views and motives of the action.”76 But every detail of the great event is interesting; and although the journal deals mostly with details of military transactions and camp life, “no circumstance pertaining to our country’s emancipation, but should be embalmed in the memory of our children and transmitted to the latest posterity, as among the most interesting transactions recorded in the annals of man.”77 Every minor incident is worth recording because it is associated with the principles of the rights of man established by the Revolution. And although Thacher does insist that the details recorded in his journal “may serve to augment the stock of information” about the war,78 the relationship between the factual details and the epochal event part of which they comprise is noticeably reversed here. First and foremost, the details are worth publication because they are related to the meaning of the Revolution; only secondly might they be important because they add something new to factual knowledge about the Revolution. The relationship of Thacher’s journal as a group of signifiers to the Revolution as a signified is more important than its relationship to the Revolution as a referent. Because in a historical text the former relationship cannot be perceived as sufficient or substantial enough without the latter, Thacher has to compensate for the lack of referential quality by adding to the journal extra material. He turns, in the same way as Heath does, a collection of minor details into a quasi-history of the Revolution. Thacher is more conscious and outspoken about this transformation than Heath; he writes that “this production may moreover subserve the purpose of an epitomy [sic] of the history of the revolutionary contest, and abridge in some measure the labor of the youthful mind in the study of the more elaborate and technical histories of that ever memorable epoch. With this view I have prefixed a short sketch of interesting transactions prior to the actual commencement of hostilities.”79

The task of presenting the journal as a chronicle or “epitome” of the Revolution, containing its basic facts without the elaborate analysis of a proper philosophical history

76 James Thacher, *A Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War, from 1775 to 1783, Describing Interesting Events and Transactions of This Period, with Numerous Historical Facts and Anecdotes, from the Original Manuscript* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1823), v.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., vi.
(as, we should remember, Thacher did not have an access to the origins of and motives for actions) is made easier by the fact that, similar to Heath’s diary, Thacher’s already contains most of them in the form “intelligence” received at the time. The wealth of such general information, whether recorded at the time or added for publication, almost completely subsumes the particulars of Thacher’s own experience, which often serves, in the published text, as a vehicle for introducing the historically important:

26th. – At three o’clock this morning, an alarm was spread throughout our camp… It was soon ascertained that this sudden movement was in consequence of the discovery of one of the most extraordinary events in modern history, and in which the interposition of Divine Providence is remarkably conspicuous. It is the treacherous conspiracy of Major General Arnold, and the capture of Major John Andre, adjutant general to the British army.⁸⁰

What follows is the detailed description of the whole case, filling about 25 pages and only twice interrupted with dates of diary entries introducing Thacher’s own experience.

The status of the history (public story) of the Revolution varies from project to project, but its presence is inevitable, whether the memoir text is written with a “public” or “private” intention. If William Heath and James Thacher are concerned with finding a place for the personal record in public space, the memoirs of Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge represent an attempt escape the historical mode in a private text. If in the first case historical elements validate the projects as public, in the second they become a digression from the plan and even a source of certain anxiety for the author, which has to be addressed to be neutralized.

Written in the late 1820s or early 1830s (as testified by the author’s remark that the scene of Washington’s farewell with the army is still vivid in his memory after more than forty-five years⁸¹), Tallmadge’s memoirs is another instance of rewriting journal notes kept during the war. It consists mostly of the episodes of his military life, and is written for his family. Starting briefly with his birth and childhood, Tallmadge ends the narrative at the moment when he is about to commence a civil career, and writes down several “reflections” summing up his participation in the revolutionary war: on the miraculous character of the victory over Britain, on his passing unscathed through all the hardships

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⁸⁰ Thacher, Military Journal, 256.
and dangers, for which he thanks God, on the attention paid to him by Washington, of which Tallmadge is proud, and on the fact that while he never during the war committed the sin of dueling, nobody thought him to be a coward. Unlike Heath’s memoirs, at least in their published version, this text is a realization of private, family intention, but the traces of history are evident here as well – with the difference that in Tallmadge’s memoirs they stand out as elements even alien to the author’s intention and suppressed. Quite often Tallmadge has to revoke the historical context of his military pursuits, especially when he comes to the end of one campaign and sets the stage for another, and these are the places where the danger of history is the most imminent.

Consider Tallmadge’s description of the end of the campaign of 1776 and the start of that of 1777. Here, after reflecting on the “confusion and dismay” Americans found themselves at the end of the year, he notes:

If I was writing a history of the revolutionary war, I should not fail in this momentous period of our revolution to notice the events which transpired in the Northern army and on the lakes.

The attacks on Charleston, South Carolina, at the South, and the lodgment of a British force at Newport, Rhode Island, in all which places, except before Charleston, disasters and dismay seemed to be the portion of America. But, as I was noticing only some of the prominent events of my own life, and those which took place where I have been providentially placed… I will not enlarge.

After this digression, Tallmadge concentrates on the military situation in New England and the decision to raise new troops, in which he enlisted. We can see in this episode how the need to outline the immediate context of the author’s actions contains the possibility of the ever-broader contexts that loom large behind the New England situation. This chain of contexts threatens to drive the author from his autobiographical family narrative into history writing, recentering the text around the story of the Revolution instead of his personal experience in the Revolution. Tallmadge has to confront this possibility and dismiss it by directly addressing it and explicating the design and intention of his narrative.

In much the same way he deals with Major Andre’s case, this time facing the temptation of directly relating his text to the public story of the revolution. Tallmadge

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82 Tallmadge, Memoir, 67-69.

83 Ibid., 15-16.
witnessed the whole case, from Andre’s capture to his execution, and was a direct participant in one of the story’s episodes, which he recollects as follows: “After dinner, on the 24th, perhaps by three o’clock P.M., he [Andre] asked to be favored with a pen, and ink, and paper, which I readily granted, and he wrote the letter to General Washington, dated “Salem, 24th September, 1780,” which is recorded in most of the histories of this eventful period.”

Here the history of the Revolution and Tallmadge’s life-story conjoin, and the latter almost automatically submits to the former. Note the almost obsessive exactitude in indicating the time of the episode and the repetition of the date. It is the document, Andre’s letter, “recorded in most of the histories” of that time, that possesses the authority of establishing the date of the episode; Tallmadge’s narrative asserts its historical validity, and the author’s role as a participant, by pushing the degree of precision further. But, although he “might enlarge greatly in anecdotes relating to this momentous event in our revolutionary war, and especially those which relate to this most accomplished young man,” Tallmadge refrains from doing so, for it would not comport “with the plan of these memoranda.” And even those “confidential communications” with Andre that are recorded in his narrative, and serve “to mark the ingenious character of the man,” do not require “being noticed at this time,” which perhaps means they are not intended to become part of public history.

Finally, one more momentous document of the Revolutionary war found its place in Tallmadge’s memoirs – the farewell address of General Washington to the armies of the United States. But Tallmadge is careful to indicate that it is the literary and moral qualities of the address that prompted him to include this much-publicized document, part of the revolutionary history by definition, into his personal narrative: “his [Washington’s] language was so impressive, and his advice so appropriate, that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of transcribing them into my journal.”

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84 Tallmadge, Memoir, 36.
85 Ibid., 38.
86 Ibid., 57.
As we could see, the history (public story) of the Revolution is always an organizing force, whether in positive or negative sense, in these memoir texts written by Revolutionary officers on the basis of personal journals. However, the first decades of the nineteenth century saw the erosion of the “history-like” pattern (or imperative) of memoir writing. As the history of the Revolution was increasingly perceived as already written, memoir writing’s function of only supplementing it more and more openly contradicted the standard form of historical narration in which memoirs should have been composed. The narrative of personal experience was gradually being liberated from the “burden of history.”

The memoirists’ perception of the contradiction between form and function may be observed on the example of probably the last author to write in the history-like mode – John Drayton. His \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution} (1821) were composed from the papers and notes prepared by the author’s father, William Henry Drayton, who himself was going to write a history of the American Revolution on the basis of his own knowledge of events, but died in 1779. Explaining the decision to publish his father’s manuscripts as “memoirs,” John Drayton wrote:

\begin{quote}
As these books and papers contain matters relating to the early part of the American Revolution in the Southern Colonies of the Union, which have not been published in any histories hitherto written, I have been induced to submit them to the public, under the form of Memoirs; that being the only mode which would permit me to use my father’s manuscripts and papers, with any satisfaction to myself. For his manuscript volumes, being written hastily as events occurred; were collections of facts, neither sufficiently digested for history, nor distributed into that order, which, had he lived, would have been done, before presentation to the public eye.\footnote{John Drayton, \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution, from Its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive; as Relating to the State of South-Carolina: and Occasionally Refering to the States of North-Carolina and Georgia} (1821; repr., New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1969), vii-viii.}
\end{quote}

This passage exemplifies perfectly the role of the memoir genre as a substitute, as a preliminary and somewhat casual form of the presentation of historical knowledge. And, again, Drayton offers the reader an integral picture of the early period of the Revolution – from the distant origins (including the sketch of the character of George III) until the Declaration of Independence – supplemented with outside sources where parts of the story are missing. William Drayton’s actions and circumstances obviously occupy
disproportionate place in the account, if we read it as a history of the Revolution. But the
author strives to “contextualize” them, to justify their presence in the text, as he does in
the case of the story of his father’s dismissal from the position of assistant judge by the
colonial administration: “Thus, ended this contest; which was both of a political, and
personal nature. [But soon] the King’s Judges were obliged to give way, to others who
possessed the confidence of the people. And William Henry Drayton, who had been
superseded as a King’s Judge, was evaluated to the seat of Chief Justice; not of a King’s
province – but of South-Carolina, one of the United States of America.”88

Certainly, the text can be interpreted the other way round, as an unintended,
“unconscious” biography of the father as a public man, with an enlarged historical
context. The presence of the short biographical sketch of William Drayton in the volume
makes such an interpretation even more possible. Still, whatever the unconscious
purposes of the memoirs might have been, John Drayton shaped his work as history – but
an inferior and supplemental kind of history. Ending the narrative with the Declaration of
Independence, he summed up:

After this manner, the year was brought to a close, in South-Carolina; leaving the State in the
full possession of a government chosen by the people, and administered by her confidential and
imminent citizens. How she thenceforth moved in the orbit prescribed for her, first by the
Confederation, and afterwards by the Constitution of the United States of America – is not for the
Memoirs to spread forth, but for Histories to declare: and, this has been already done, in bright and
honorable pages, by Ramsay, Marshall, and other historians.89

In the case of Drayton’s memoirs, the very difficulty, or even impossibility, of
definite interpretation, of determining whether the text is a historicized biography or a
quasi-history with a strong biographic element, or both, is significant. As the incident
with Drayton’s dismissal demonstrates, the personal story of a public figure’s suffering
from British injustice is a public story. It is perhaps the existence of the “real,”
“professional” histories of the Revolution that made it possible to publish (or, indeed,
even to compose) texts like Drayton’s memoirs, since the inseparability of the personal
and the public story in such cases would mean, considering the eighteenth-century

88 Drayton, Memoirs, 153.
89 Ibid., 399.
conventions of historical writing delineated earlier, that significant participants would have to write full-scale public histories based on their personal experience if they wanted to introduce this experience to the public discourse – an enterprise that would automatically be suspected of bias and vanity. Supplementing already existing histories, enriching them with personal details important for understanding the hidden springs, motives and spirit of events was perhaps the only way out of this impasse for figures of the caliber of John Adams or Thomas Jefferson. Moreover, it was a necessary and urgent task. As Jefferson wrote to Adams in 1815, a decade before he composed his memoirs, on the subject of the history of the American Revolution, you ask who shall write it? Who can write it? And who ever will be able to write it? Nobody, except merely its external facts. All its councils, designs, and discussions having been conducted by Congress with closed doors, and no member, as far as I know, having even made notes of them, these which are the life and soul of history must for ever be unknown.90

Debates, opinions and principles of historical actors were the life and soul of history, and they constituted the main part of memoir notes written by Adams in 1802-1807 and by Jefferson in the early 1820s, ostensibly for their families. Beginning his project, Adams wrote: “It is not for the Public but for my Children that I commit these Memoirs to writing: and to them and their Posterity I recommend, not the public course, which the times and the Country in which I was born and the Circumstances which surrounded me compelled me to pursue: but those Moral Sentiments and Sacred Principles, which at all hazards and by every Sacrifice I have endeavoured to preserve through Life.”91

This does not mean that the “public course” Adams pursued and elements of political history are absent from the memoirs; on the contrary, in the section of the text devoted to his activities in Continental Congress, Adams for the most part simply copies the Journal of Congress. The original part consists of his comments on the proceedings


and opinions that he held at the time, and explanation of the principles that compelled him to take that or another course of action. To trace the origins of these principles, including the devotion to the cause of American independence, is also the main task of the first section of the text, describing Adams’ education and early professional career. This personal story-line is juxtaposed with the already known public record (the Journal of Congress had already been published by the time Adams wrote his memoirs) and functions as a commentary and correction to it. But at the same time, the public record serves as a commentary on Adams’ public life; only together can the two records undo the misrepresentations of Adams as a public man, and thus the misrepresentations of history. At one moment, Adams notes:

I have been particular in transcribing the Proceedings of this day 25. of November 1775, because the[y] contain the true Origin and Foundation of the American Navy, and as I had at least as great a share in producing them as any Man living or dead, they will shew that my Zeal and Exertions afterwards in 1798. 1799. and 1800, at every hazard and in Opposition to a more powerfull Party than that against me in 1775, was but a perseverance in the same Principles, Systems and Views of the public Interest.92

The two story-lines are in fact one. However, they are not supposed to exist in the same space and need to be mechanically separated into the public and private spheres via the use of different genre forms, ostensibly intended for different audiences. The private intention of Adams’ (of Jefferson’s) memoirs are often doubted. Indeed, when Adams writes that “as the lives of Phylosophers, Satatemen or Historians written by them selves have generally been suspected of Vanity, and therefore few People have been able to read them without disgust; there is no reason to expect that any sketches I may leave of my own Times would be received by the Public with any favor, or read by individuals with much interest,” 93 these caveats may be understood as the desire to represent the text as functioning in the private space, but not exclusively for private consumption (consider, for instance, the wide circulation of private letters in the eighteenth century). However, this could legitimately be expected only from a text treating personal matters or personal

92 Adams, Diary and Autobiography, 349.
93 Ibid., 253.
relationship to public matters (like Adams’ moral sentiments and principles). If I am correct and in the case of statesmen like Adams the “personal” and “public” story-lines were essentially inseparable, then only the availability of the public record in the printed discourse could spare Adams from writing a full-blown personal version of the history of the Revolution (and the degree of disgust on the part of the potential reader in that case can only be imagined), and at the same time necessitated the recording of the personal aspect of the story (safely, if mechanically, separated from the public) to correct the public record inherently flawed without his perspective. One could argue that it is the public availability of the proceedings of Congress that made it safe for Adams to transcribe them into his personal memoirs. As they already were part of the communal project of the history of the Revolution, the effect would be the same if he had simply referred to it, as Jefferson did at one point in his memoirs: “The splendid proceedings of that Congress at their 1st session belong to general history, are known to everyone, and need not therefore be noted here.”

Referring to his becoming the Governor of Virginia, Jefferson writes: “Being now, as it were, identified with the Commonwealth itself, to write my own history during the two years of my administration, would be to write the public history of that portion of the revolution within this state.” In Larzer Ziff’s interpretation, this means that for Jefferson private life was “the account of his political and intellectual pursuits which either did not appear in the public record or which separated him from the course the events took. When his private sense of matters was identical with his public performance… he had no ‘own history’ to record in his autobiography.”

But Jefferson continues: “This has been done by others, and particularly by Mr. Girardin, who… had free access to all my papers… and has given as faithful an account

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95 Ibid., 79.

96 Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 117.
as I could myself. For this portion therefore of my own life, I refer altogether to his history.”

It seems clear that this portion of Jefferson’s life is not included into the memoirs not because he did not have a life of his own at that period, but because it has already been written (and on the basis of Jefferson’s own papers), inseparable as it is from the public record. The main theme organizing Jefferson’s memoirs (and therefore his life) may be reconstructed as the progress of reason and republicanism, in which Jefferson either actively participates or which he at least witnesses – whether in Congress, or in Virginia legislature, or as a governor (the already recorded portion), or in France during the French Revolution. This theme is hardly separable from “public” history.

If the reference to an external source instead of an account of Jefferson’s governorship is one example of the easy collapse of the distinction between the personal story and the public one, the lengthy account of the events of the French Revolution, which Jefferson himself feels to be not quite appropriate in his autobiographic text, is another. Finishing this section of the text, Jefferson writes:

The minuteness with which I have so far given [the revolution’s] details is disproportioned to the general scale of my narrative. But I have thought it justified by the interest which the whole world must take in this revolution… The appeal to the rights of man, which had been made in the US. was taken up by France, first of the European nations. …

I have been more minute in relating the early transactions of this regeneration because I was in circumstances peculiarly favorable for a knowledge of the truth. … My information was always and immediately committed to writing, in letters to Mr. Jay, and often to my friends, and a recurrence to these letters now insures me against the errors of memory.

This example with a foreign revolution highlights once again the strong gravitation of memoir texts towards historical mode of narration in the cases when publicly available information on the subject was limited and the author had sufficient information at his disposal. None of the texts discussed in this chapter, with the possible exception of Lee’s memoirs, comes close enough to the standards of historical narrative from the point of view of their authors. But the authors, realizing the inferior quality of their writings in relation to the genre conventions of history, still seek for them a place within these

98 Ibid., 156.
conventions – as substitutes or supplements for history. Thus, despite the marginality of
the genre and the uncertain place of the personal experience in the narratives oriented
towards the classicist model of history, the memoir genre understood in this way
compelled the authors to establish themselves as parts of the historical process, shape
their experience as historical within the narrative structure.

Such attempts were most successful in the cases of the revolutionary leaders who
could identify their personal life story with the public story of the Revolution most
persuasively, based on the common organizing principle. As for the less significant
figures, the form of journal proved to be quite convenient for introducing one’s
experience to the printed discourse, one might argue, precisely because of its fragmentary
nature, disconnectedness, the absence of an explicit narrative structure of its own, and
thus malleability when facing the needs of historical representation.

As the cases of Drayton and Thacher demonstrate especially clearly, the very
existence of “real,” “professional” histories of the Revolution could undermine the
legitimacy of historical memoirs as integral, complete historical narratives and further
marginalize the genre. It made obvious the fragmentary and incomplete, from the point of
view of the conventions of historical writing, character of memoir texts. On the other
hand, for Adams and Jefferson writing memoirs as supplements to, not substitutes for,
history meant explicitly reconcentrating the narrative around their life story instead of the
chain of historical events. Their memoir writings could still be considered historical in
the traditional sense due to the direct connection that existed between their personal lives
and public history. But this reconcentration also carried a latent possibility of the
legitimization of the personal story as the structural basis of the historical memoir text
without a direct connection to the “grand narrative” of the Revolution. The uneasy
process of the realization of this possibility will be the main subject of the next chapter.
As we saw in the previous chapter, the early nineteenth century witnessed the gradual fragmentation and erosion of historical memoirs as a complementary genre of historical writing, at least in part due to the progress of the communal project of the history writing of the American Revolution. As the public increasingly considered the history of the Revolution already written, the discrepancy, structural incompatibility between narratives of individual experience and historical narrative was becoming more and more obvious. From the point of view of the discourse of history this incompatibility meant essential incompleteness of the life-story and any individual perspective, and its inability to reflect or (re)produce the coherence of impersonal, general historical narrative.

However, this incompatibility also meant liberation of the narrative of individual experience from the depersonalizing confines of the historical form. In the time of the increasing democratization of American culture and public discourse in the decades after the War of 1812, the need and desire to produce personal narratives did not disappear, and the veterans of the Revolutionary War were perhaps the most active group of memoirists. Since the cultural restrictions on introducing personal experience to public discourse for its own sake remained active, new authors had to determine the cultural function of their discursive performances (very often responses to socio-economic necessity). In this chapter I will follow the authors’ search for new sources of legitimacy, which in the case of Revolutionary War veterans usually meant new ways of relating their personal narratives to the communal project of Revolutionary history.

As the grand narrative form was relinquishing its grip on eyewitnesses and participants, the period of the 1810s-1830s saw a number of memoir texts written mostly by officers whose intention was only to describe a certain episode, a moment of the Revolutionary war, or to correct a mistake or add a detail to the existing history.99 These memoirs...

memoir essays, appearing at the time of a renewed interest in the military history of the Revolution caused by the new conflict with Britain, are obviously only footnotes to history and not quasi-historical works. As one of the authors put it, “for near 30 years, I have been waiting with hopes that some person fitly qualified both in abilities and knowledge of facts, would have undertaken to rectify some great mistakes, which have been made by the historians who have wrote [sic] on the revolution in So[uth] Ca[rolina].”

A necessary cautionary note follows:

And I do declare to the readers, that it is not from any peculiar motive or design of the author to be known as a historian (as I am conscious I am not qualified for the task) – I can relate facts (which I know of my certain knowledge) in the naked dress of truth – and it hath so happened that there is not now alive any other person, that can write so fully of so many facts as I can…

Even this task of footnoting the history of the Revolution was seen as limited and rather easily achievable, given the assumptions about the role and proper structure of history. Having gathered, in the early 1830s, in one publication several eyewitness accounts of the battle of Bunker Hill in order to compare them and establish the right version of the event, the amateur historian Charles Coffin concludes that “from the foregoing accounts it may be presumed that all the facts relative to this important day, of sufficient magnitude to be transmitted to posterity are to be found.” The project of creating the history of the American Revolution could be seen as either complete or nearing the completion within the old Classicist paradigm, with its ideas of significance and criteria for the selection of facts. Consequently, the quasi-historical form of memoir texts could be now perceived as redundant.

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100 Hill, Memoirs, 4.

101 Ibid.

102 History of the Battle of Breed’s Hill, 400.
We can refer to the memoirs of one of the significant figures of the Revolution, the former President of the Continental Congress Elias Boudinot, as a characteristic expression of this change in the perception of the genre. Like many other writers, he regrets that “a great many interesting anecdotes, that happened during the American Revolutionary War, are likely to be lost to Posterity, by the negligence of the parties concerned, in not recording them, so that in future time they may be resorted to, as throwing great light on the eventful Crisis, of this important Æra.”

But this lamentable fact does not prompt Boudinot to write a historical narrative on the basis of his recollections of the time when he was one of the political figures of the Revolution. “I shall therefore without any attention to order, but merely as they arise in my memory, set down those [events] I have had any acquaintance with, attending principally to the Truth of the facts,” describes Boudinot his design; this plan (or the absence of such) corresponds quite well to what the reader will find in the text. In a way, the *Journal of Historical Recollections* can symbolize the end of the historical memoirs on the revolutionary topics as a “history-like” narrative genre and its turning into an openly subordinate form of historical representation, not bound by the necessity to imitate history.

However, the erosion of the imitative form of narrative did not mean the disappearance of historical memoirs as a big narrative form; rather, it signified their transition to another level of discourse. The authors continued to present to the public their life stories tied to the events of the Revolution, but found themselves in a dubious position as to the historicity of their writings. They had to look for new sources of legitimacy that would allow them to present coherent stories of their personal experience of war to the public.

In early America, one of the most significant genre forms in which personal experience could be introduced into printed discourse as a coherent story was the captivity narrative. Texts of this genre constitute a considerable part of the body of memoir literature related to the Revolution, especially for 1770s-1810s. It could be

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104 Ibid., 2-3.
argued that the captivity narrative, with its account of extraordinary personal experience, was among very few fully legitimate forms of autobiographical writing during that period, regarded without suspicion of personal vanity on the part of the author and/or disdain for unimportant subject matter.

Reinforcing Christian community by building the image of a cruel and savage Other and giving the examples of the miraculous deliverance was among the most important cultural functions of the narratives of Indian captivity. Such elements as the cruelty and savagery of the enemy and the grace of God certainly play their role in the narratives of captivity by the British as well. But here I will focus on another aspect of the genre important for the problem of the discursive performance of the self – its concentration on the extraordinary events that disrupt blissful and unremarkable everyday existence and expose the future author to the new experience, unexpected, unusual, and prompting reflection, even if in most cases painful. Not all the British are cruel. On the contrary, the juxtaposition of the “good” and “bad” British, accompanied by musings on human nature, are a commonplace in the narratives of British captivity. As one of the authors put it, “the difference in mankind never struck me more sensibly than while a prisoner. Some would do every thing in their power to make me comfortable and cheerful; while others abused me with the vilest of language.”

Apart from the personal value of enriching experience and teaching such philosophical lessons, captivity possessed another important quality – it was narratable. For one thing, it was backed up by a long genre tradition, which gave potential authors a legitimate form for writing themselves into the discursive space. In a sense, captivity prompted the act of writing itself, as a way to preserve on paper the extraordinary experience at the time when ordinary, orderly human life was not deemed a subject worthy of recording. From the structural point of view, a narrative is always an account of disrupting a certain status quo and subsequent restoration of order (even if not necessarily in the original form). In some instances it was the fact of British captivity that prompted a person to start a diary – as it was the case with the sailor Charles Herbert,

who then went to great pains to keep his diary, almost without interruptions, during his imprisonment in Britain in 1776-1779.106

However, there is a difference between the two aspects – the narratability of unusual personal experience resulting from the general laws of text production and historically specific genre legitimacy that the captivity narrative possessed. Although started at the beginning of his captivity, Herbert’s diary does not end with his release from prison. It extends to his subsequent service under the command of Commodore Paul Jones and stops only after Herbert’s return home. The Revolutionary war itself, for those who participated in it, was an extraordinary enough experience. There exist hundreds of wartime diaries kept by officers and soldiers who had never kept personal diaries before and never did so afterwards.107 But, in the absence of an appropriate genre form that would allow them to publicize their wartime experience, such diaries remained, with the few exceptions discussed in the previous chapter, private interiorizations of the war, a subject of interest only to their families. It took time for such personal experiences to become not only narratable, but publishable. The already established genre conventions of the captivity narrative, with their hardships, dangerous adventures and eventual deliverance, helped legitimize the personal, but at the same time they implicitly prevented it from directly relating to the war as a public event.

True, the first war-time texts of the genre devoted to British captivity, including the widely popular narrative of Ethan Allen (1779), directly relate to the meaning of the Revolutionary war, and present their authors’ experience in the hands of the enemy as a metaphor for their country’s struggle for liberty. “Ever since I arrived to a state of manhood, and acquainted myself with the general history of mankind, I have felt a sincere passion for liberty,” opens his narrative, which today’s scholars interpret as a story of Allen’s attempts to assert his gentlemanly status based on personal qualities and

not on the right of birth or even education. In the same vein, less well-known Indian agent John Dodge sums up his 1780 “entertaining narrative of the cruel and barbarous treatment and extreme sufferings”:

I leave it to the world to judge whether I have not a right to revolt from under the dominion of such tyrants and exert every faculty God has given me to seek satisfaction for the ill usage I received than if I had ten thousand lives, and was sure to loose them all: I think should I not attempt to gain satisfaction I should deserve to be a slave the remainder of my life.

In these cases, the genre traditionally employed to construct the Other was appropriated both for the purposes of wartime polemic and personal advancement. Allen used his narrative to boost both the fame of his victory at Ticonderoga (already an unorthodox use of the genre) and the flagging spirit of Americans in the hard period of war. Dodge sought redress against his captor and personal enemy, the British Lieutenant-Governor of Detroit Henry Hamilton. He succeeded, for his testimony became the crucial factor in Virginian legislature’s decision to subject the prisoner Hamilton to harsh treatment as a retaliation for the British treatment of American prisoners of war. In both cases, the authors’ efforts to relate their experience to the larger meaning of the Revolution demonstrate their political awareness and the skills of self-promotion rather than a desire to contribute to the writing of the history of the conflict.

Once the heat of anti-British polemic subsided after the war, the captivity narrative returned to the sphere of the personal – to stories of adventures, vicissitudes, and deliverance occasionally spurring “suitable reflections on the changes of life,” as one of the authors, Lemuel Roberts, put it in the title of his work. Thus the 1788 narrative by John Blatchford, republished in 1865 by Charles Bushnell as “Detailing His Sufferings in the Revolutionary War, while a Prisoner with the British,” does not mention the war either in the original title or in the text. This “narrative of remarkable

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109 Narrative of Mr. John Dodge During His Captivity at Detroit (1780; repr., Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1909), 56.
110 Dodge, Narrative, 22.
occurrences” has a standard opening – the author leaves home and gets captured already in the second sentence – and a standard closure restoring the status quo: “I immediately set for Cape-Ann, went to my father’s house, and had an agreeable meeting with my friends, after an absence of almost six years.”112 In between, Blatchford is not very keen on describing British cruelties, and mostly details his adventurous escapes and wanderings all over the globe, including meeting a naked native woman when lost in the jungle of East Indies and other entertaining matters.

_Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts_ (1809), on the other hand, represent a more ambiguous case. “But few things are more frequent, perhaps, than for men to conceive, that the occurrences of their lives have been singular, and that they possess a sufficiency of interesting incident, if understandingly communicated, to excite surprise, produce pleasure, and probably be of some service to mankind; in displaying the changes of life, and the bounty and care of a kind superintending providence”– thus Roberts starts his narrative.113 Apparently, it is the story of “captivity and sufferings,” in the words of the standard formula, that gave him reasons to consider his story potentially interesting to the public, as fitting into the traditional patterns of reflection about human life. However, even though centered on the story of captivity and escape, this text goes beyond the customary form of captivity narrative, paying as it does much more attention to the figure of the protagonist. Roberts makes long digressions into his early years, ostensibly, as he writes, “to give the reader an idea of my boldness, perseverance and strength, from early youth until the time I entered into the service of my country,”114 and thus to explain the subsequent events. Following this explanatory strategy, he also brings up the historical context of his decision to enlist into the Continental Army:

> At this period the revolutionary war in America commenced; in the spring of the year 1775, the tyranny of Britain became insufferable; her fleets appeared on our coasts in most hostile array; her armies were quartered in our most populous cities, against the will of the inhabitants; the most

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113 Roberts, _Memoirs_, 3.
114 Ibid., 21.
bitter animosities became prevalent, and at length, so early as the 19th of April, the blood of the sons of Liberty was wantonly spilt by the British, at Lexington.\textsuperscript{115} The possible meaning of this invocation of the context becomes clearer at the end of the narrative. Like many subsequent authors-veterans in the 1820s-1830s, Roberts does not neglect to point out, in his “closing observations,” that it is by his suffering in the public cause that he is, “as early as [his] fifty ninth year, reduced to the inability of seventy or upward,”\textsuperscript{116} and that he has not received any payment from Congress for his service. However, in the course of the narrative the theme of public service and the context of the Revolutionary war (apart from the above quotation, brought up only one more time\textsuperscript{117}) do not supercede the plot of captivity as a vehicle for autobiographical narrative. In the interplay of the captivity form, autobiographical content, money-making intention and public context, the latter remains an ancillary source of meaning, brought in with a practical purpose. Remarkably, even though this practical purpose may be the raison d’être of the text, structurally the reference to the historical context is undeveloped and subordinate to the traditional rhetoric of the “changes of life and the bounty and care of a kind superintending providence” as the source of meaning.

The gradual realization of the potential of the form to accommodate digressions into the personal and the public and serve as a justification for more autobiographic endeavors is also illustrated by several editions of another captivity narrative by a war veteran, Ebenezer Fletcher. Starting from the fact of the author’s enlistment into the Continental army, in the first edition of 1798 the narrative immediately proceeds to the battle in which the author was wounded and captured, and then goes on through the usual account of the sufferings, escape, wanderings in the woods, uncertainty and deliverance to the final return home: “After a journey of a few days, I safely arrived at New-Ipswich, and once more participated in the pleasure of feeling and enjoying my friends and acquaintance, \textit{having no enemy to make me afraid}.”\textsuperscript{118} However, the second edition of 1813 complicates the happy ending: “Not long ago afterwards, an officer from the army hearing of my return ordered me to be arrested and returned to the main body of the

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 27-28.
\textsuperscript{118} Fletcher, \textit{A Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings}, 26. Italics by the author.
American army, although my wound was scarcely healed. In a few weeks, I joined my corps, then stationed in Pennsylvania; having yet two years to serve my country in the tented field.” Fletcher then devotes a few sentences to an expedition against Indians he took part in, after which “nothing more of importance, to me or the reader, occurred, until the three long years rolled away, and I obtained my discharge.”

Added to the ending, this less than a page-long continuation changes the meaning of the narrative. Considered together with the first phrase (“I, Ebenezer Fletcher, listed into the Continental Army, in Captain Carr’s Company, in Colonel Nathan Hale’s Regiment, as a fifer…”), it implicitly turns the text from a captivity narrative into an account of Fletcher’s army service. Potentially, the addition hints at the possibility for the whole Revolutionary war experience of Fletcher to be a subject worthy of narration, even though the rest of the text deals exclusively with the captivity.

The fourth edition of 1827 goes a step further and, leaving the account of captivity intact again, gives a few more details about the expedition against Indians. But more important may be the addition to the closing phrase quoted above: “Nothing more of importance, to me or to the reader, occurred, until the three long years rolled away, except when in Pennsylvania, I had the honor of being acquainted with Gen. Washington and Gen. Lafayette, and then I received my discharge.” Made shortly after the enthusiastic nation-wide celebration of Lafayette’s visit to the United States in 1824, with its suddenly skyrocketing public attention to the Revolutionary war and its veterans, this addition, insignificant as it may seem, by virtue of its very presence establishes a connection between Fletcher’s war-time experience (of not only captivity, but service in the Continental Army in general) and the Revolution as a global historical event.

The same tendencies are even more explicit in the 1825 *A brief narrative of the captivity and sufferings of Lt. Nathan’l Segar*. Under this title, Segar “smuggles in” the

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120 Ibid., italics by the author.
121 Ibid., 3.
123 See Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*.
account of his whole military service in the Continental army and militia and public service in founding a new settlement in Bethel, Maine. In the 32-page-long narrative, the captivity itself takes up sixteen pages, and the description of the joy of the family at both Segar’s return from captivity and the simultaneous end of the war could be seen as an hidden reference to the larger symbolic meaning of the author’s sufferings. Moreover, the standard for captivity narratives, rhetoric of suffering and safe return is applied to military campaigns in what can be seen as an attempt both to justify their presence in the text and express the personal meaning of the war experience:

   My journey reminds me of the prodigal son, when he returned to his father’s house in poverty and distress; though I had not spent my time and property in riotous living and with harlots, but in the service of my country. I returned home in poverty and want, yet I found my friends as ready to receive me, and to administer to my necessities, as his were. I had none to reproach me; but we all rejoiced together in that I returned alive, after this fatiguing and distressing campaign.124

   The purpose of the whole enterprise, with its reflections on the service Segar had done to his country,125 is made clear by the 2-page-long plea for compensation for Segar’s service that ends the narrative. However, a certain L.E. (publisher?) in his introduction to the narrative completely disregards both its connection to the Revolution as an event meaningful both publicly and personally, and the relationship Segar attempts to establish between his personal story and the war at large. Trying to determine the possible significance of the narrative and justify its presentation to the public, L.E. focuses on the level of state history: “The publication will derive its principal interest from the account it contains of the Indian captivity,” in large part because “the instances of captivity of inhabitants of this State, by the Indians, and of dreadful sufferings inflicted by their cruelty, have been frequent, but the particulars have but rarely been preserved. Mr. Segar’s case is more memorable as being the last, and marking, as a distinct monument, the termination of that long line of barbarities which commenced at the memorable era of Philip’s war.”126

125 Ibid., 12.
126 Ibid., 4, 5.
In addition to this, Segar was one of the first settlers of Bethel, and thus will take his place in the history of the settlement of Maine. He and his experience are representative of the character of the Indians that inhabited the country and of the “station of the settler, the pioneer of the forest.” But this representativeness falls within the traditional limits of the genre in which he is writing. In order to have real historical significance, it has to be combined with historical uniqueness, which Segar’s experience apparently does not possess, in the eyes of L. E.

A very different view on the problem of the public significance of personal stories is reflected in the writings and collecting activities of Josiah Priest, who in the 1830s-early 1840s recorded the words of participants and witnesses and published several stories of Indian captivity during the Revolutionary War. Much like James Thacher, but on a larger scale and more persistently, Priest employs the rhetoric of the preservation of the slightest shreds of the Revolutionary past that derive their significance from the global significance of the Revolution:

Thus in giving an account of the Low Dutch Prisoner, and some traits of the lives of others, we have added an item to the vast history of personal sufferings which the Revolutionary heroes endured in that memorable conflict for human rights and rational liberty: which rights and which liberty are better understood and appreciated by Americans, than by any other people on the globe, and which they are ever ready to defend and maintain.

As this fragment demonstrates, the evocation of the meaning of the Revolution goes hand-in-hand with the assertion of the necessity to defend its legacy. Giving Americans the inspiration to do so is perhaps the most important function of the stories Priest collected and published. As he notes in the preface to the narrative of the captivity of Freegift Patchin, by presenting this story to the public “we snatch from oblivion one of those beacon tales, that shall light to victory in some future struggle for the rights of Americans.” Apparently, it was the personal story, with its emotional tension, entertaining details, and the possibility of the reader’s identification with the hero, that

Priest considered most effective in fulfilling this function. He repeatedly emphasizes the emotional import of the stories he records, sometimes by describing to his reader the reactions of the story-tellers: “At the commencement of his story, [General Patchin] used those words – while, by the curl of his lip, the starting tear, and the tremor of his aged limbs, he showed extreme agitation, – ‘This day is fifty years since I was taken by the Indians! O, it was a day of trouble, a day of trouble!’”¹³⁰

What follows is a traditional captivity narrative, full of dangers and deprivations. One threat of death is immediately followed by another, and the examples of cruelty coexist with rare instances of the enemy’s kindness (at one such moment, again, “the old General wept, at the recollection of so much kindness, where he expected none”¹³¹). It contains few references to the Revolution as an event or a concept; such a link is assumed, self-evident. The story of an extraordinary personal experience, the essence of the captivity narrative as a genre form, now serves the goal of strengthening the community in a new way. Its connections are twofold: firstly, to the meaning of the Revolution as the foundational event for the community based on its ideals of liberty and patriotism, and, secondly, to the emotions of the members of the community based on personal identification. This accomplishes the goal of establishing a personal relationship between the reader and the meaning of the Revolution.

This goal, itself a product of the reorientation of the culture towards the personal, allows the captivity narrative as a narrative of the personal to be represented as a narrative of the historical by establishing a symbolic instead of direct factual connection with the Revolution. Priest follows the new cultural configuration in presupposing that making a connection with the communal meaning of the Revolution on the part of the reader requires personal identification and thus a story of a personal experience. In this emerging framework, the perceived necessity to invoke the Revolution as a cultural concept on the personal level, in the form of emotion, questions the rigid connection between this concept and its referent. (By referent I mean here the narrative of the Revolution as an established sequence of events that constitutes the gradual unfolding of its meaning and in which the whole community is the actor.)

¹³⁰ Priest, The Captivity and Sufferings, iv.
¹³¹ Ibid., 24.
To make a direct, not mediated by the community, personal identification with the Revolution possible, the concept of the Revolution as referring to the single event in the national history (act of the community), with its cultural connotations, is dislocated from the narrative referent of the Revolution as a sequence of events. The meaning of the Revolution is transferred into the personal sphere, where it attains a separate existence as an independent signified. This signified then can be attached to another narrative, not necessarily possessing the referential quality in relation to the Revolution as a sequence of events. Such a narrative only needs to be located within the Revolution as a single event (the actor is a member of the community) in order to be able to claim a relationship to the concept by default.

Even if the sequence of events to which the narrative refers is not the referent for the signified “the Revolution,” then while the narrative that (re)constructs this sequence does not refer to the Revolution, it still can signify it. Thus what happens is the “literarization” of such particular, personal narratives located within the Revolution. They do not tell something about the Revolution as a series of events that happened in reality, but strive to relate to the reader the concept of the Revolution, capture it as a whole on the symbolic level by representing its part. This representation is not supposed to add to the sequence of events that constitute the referent of the Revolution, and thus is free from the “burden of history,” connected as it is to the historical narrative only indirectly through the relationship to the Revolution as a signified. (As we will see later, this indirect connection, which means that the narrative is both related to and distanced from history, did cause a problem of legitimacy for the authors.)

As the Revolution ceased to be restricted to only one narrative within which the memoirist had to position himself to represent his narrative as publicly valuable and meaningful, the captivity narrative was a convenient traditional form that could lend its legitimacy to the narratives of the personal that could then be symbolically connected to the Revolution. But the symbolization of the relationship between individual experience and the grand historical event became in itself a sufficient source of legitimacy (among a few) for those who wanted to make their narrative performances public for whatever reasons, including pecuniary considerations.
Beginning with the late 1820s, the most conspicuous development in the memoir literature dealing with the Revolutionary war was the emergence of a subgenre of autobiographical accounts written by officers, soldiers and sailors of low ranks who were not concerned with the “history proper” of the Revolution at all and, indeed, sometimes even shunned it. Most of these texts, both intended for publishing and not, were written at the request of the children, grandchildren and relatives of the authors (as one of the most colorful among them, Ebenezer Fox, presents it, “all seven [grandchildren] joined in one grand chorus, though not in unison, and the burden of the song was, ‘Do tell us your revolutionary adventures’”). Many were published to back up the authors’ demand for war pensions, or to profit from the sales. The outpouring of such personal narratives in the period under consideration follows both the rise of public interest in the Revolutionary topics during the new conflict with Britain and up to the years of the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution, and the imminent extinction of the last veterans of the epoch. The role of these texts as an intersection of intrafamily relationships and public discourse still awaits its researcher. The growing demand for the information about the Revolution, despite the existence of several narrative accounts of it, coincided with the growing legitimacy of personal narratives in the culture of Romanticism. The remaining cultural restrictions on presenting one’s life to the public could no longer overcome the incentives to do so. As Andrew Sherburne, an autobiographer, put it, he “was… aware of the apparent indelicacy of a person’s publishing his auto-biography. Such a thought probably would be revolting to some persons of virtue and refined taste, while possessing competence, who, if reduced to poverty, with a dependant and helpless family, would dispense with their (possibly) false delicacy, for necessity has no law.”

However, at the time when the innate uniqueness of an individual was not a sufficient reason to put one’s personality on public display in the printed discourse, external reasons had to be found; the uniqueness of the experience of war was one of them. Sherburne, who wrote in fact a full autobiography not confined to the war years,

132 Ebenezer Fox, The Adventures of Ebenezer Fox, in the Revolutionary War (Boston: Published by Charles Fox, 1848), iii.

justified its publication with a mixture of references to the war and rhetoric of the captivity narrative:

The author of this narrative is in the junior class of the survivors of the Revolution, as he was only ten years of age when the conflict began, and entered the naval service, at the age of thirteen. The complicated character of his trials, and sufferings in the United States navy – his capture – and forcible detention in the British navy – shipwreck and sufferings in a wilderness in Newfoundland, in prison ships and hospital ships, were almost unparalleled.134

The responses to the book, written mostly by Baptist pastors and printed in the second edition, tend, much like Josiah Priest, to make a connection between the individual experience of providential deliverance and the meaning of the Revolutionary war: “It [the book] gives a more circumstantial detail of the sufferings and deliverances of our naval prisoners, during the revolutionary conflict, than I have seen in any other book, and in connexion therewith serves greatly to illustrate the minute and wonderful operations of Divine Providence.”135 Or even more explicitly: “Many interesting details relative to the period that “tried men’s souls,” must necessarily perish with those who witnessed them. An attempt to preserve from oblivion, facts which show the interposition of the Lord of Sabbaoth, in favor of the oppressed, and the unconquerable firmness of those who fought in the great cause of freedom and of man, cannot be uninteresting to the pious and the free.”136

Another theme in the favorable responses to the book, independent from the “captivity and sufferings” theme, is the neglect of the experience of the ordinary soldiers in the war, which history on the large scale cannot relate. In a reviewer’s words, “private individuals are overlooked in the glare of attraction that surrounds the great. … Those who have shared in doing and suffering for their country, deserve grateful recollections.”137 A constant refrain in prefaces and responses to memoir texts, this call to resurrect individual narratives of the war experience not fitting into the standard plot of

134 Sherburne, Memoirs, iii-iv. As a side note on the possible force of the stereotype of captivity narrative – to the best of our knowledge, only those among the Revolutionary sailors who had been at some point captured by the British later published their wartime memoirs.
135 Ibid., xi.
136 Ibid., ix.
137 Ibid., x.
the revolutionary history gave the much needed legitimacy to autobiographical accounts of the Revolution that did not correspond to the customary ideas of the extraordinary.

The phenomenon of these texts as a group, particularly the fact that so many of them were published immediately or soon after they were written, has already been discussed by Sarah Purcell in the context of her argument about the gradual democratization of the public memory of the Revolution. Here I intend to take a closer look at their authors’ view of their place in the discourse of the revolutionary history, and the structures of the textual representation of the Revolutionary era in which these views were reflected.

What the reader can notice from the very beginning of each text, usually in the preface, is the necessity felt by each memoirist to justify the publication of his work. All the published or intended for publication texts of this subgenre have prefaces composed with precisely this purpose – as opposed to the ones not intended for the publication by the authors. And when it comes to the ways of doing this, very few of the authors recommend their creations as containing information that could be added to the history of the Revolutionary War, having historical significance in the factual sense. Although the authors do position themselves, and are positioned by others, within the discourse on the Revolutionary war, they usually refrain from directly claiming the importance of their memoirs for the historical understanding of the war, and seek other ways of justifying the penning of their war-time recollections.

For instance, John P. Becker, the probable author of *The Sexagenary, or Reminiscences of the American Revolution*, agrees that “the principal events of the war of independence are well known, and their happy conclusion has made us justly proud of that remarkable era. Yet who does not regret that so few of the actors on that busy stage have left behind them the written records of their various fortunes.” However, the main regret turns out to be about the absence of memoirs by the political and military readers of the Revolution, which would help to “rescue their motives, their actions, and their

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138 Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*.

characters, from the biting tooth of time.”¹⁴⁰ Having established a connection between memoir literature and history, without directly claiming such connection in his own case, Becker slips into more orthodox references to the importance of the great men’s memoirs. When he has to return to his own project, he notes that biography “is more directly addressed to our individual sympathy,” and “it was an opinion of Dr. Johnson that there has rarely passed a life, of which a judicious and faithful narrative would be without advantage.”¹⁴¹ Only then does he return to the historical context and expresses his confidence that “many persons at the present day would be pleased to know, and if possible, to realize the feelings and reflections of ordinary individuals during our revolution,” and evokes again the image of details and “secret springs.”¹⁴² Becker, a humble wagoner during the Revolution, is obviously concerned with the legitimacy of his project. Having read Johnson and the memoirs of Gibbon (and perhaps not only them) in order to “learn the character of this species of authorship,” he oscillates between the two ways of justifying the memoir text, and his attempt to integrate them remains inconclusive.

In another case, Christopher Hawkins, writing in 1834, clearly sees his individual experience as a sailor during the war, which he wants to transmit to his descendants, as part of the broader picture of the Revolution, which he hopes the descendants will see when reading his memoirs: “My intention in publishing this narrative is confined to the attention of my children, grandchildren and their descendants, with the hope that they will duly appreciate not only my own sufferings, but those of my contemporaries in the arduous struggle of my country for independence, in which, success crowned the efforts of those who embarked in the American cause.”¹⁴³

Here Hawkins ascends from his “sufferings” to the context of the Revolution as a historical fact, and apparently represents himself as part of history. His aiming the text at his own descendants only does not look convincing, considering the very fact of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 7.
¹⁴² Ibid., 9.
publication. It may be said that in the family context publication of this text would rather mean transcending the limits of family circle and returning there in a new quality – as an element of public discourse, part of the family but part of the publicly recorded history as well. The descendants are to perceive their ancestor’s story (and, therefore, family history) as a legitimate element of the collective past, through which they are able to partake in this past, even appropriate it. Hawkins dedicates (not restricts) his narrative to the descendants and his “fellows,” as whose representative he apparently sees himself.144

Still, there remains a certain difficulty related to Hawkins’ historicity as a narrator, which he has to address: “I am well aware that a correct and minute history of the American revolution has been published. In the meantime I cannot conceive that such a work shall supercede personal narrative which has connection to that event. My principal design is to amuse and inform my friends and descendants with the sufferings of my youth.”145

Apart from another indication that Hawkins perceives his work in the context of public discourse on the Revolution and has to relate it to what is already known to the public, the passage shows how this necessity, and the following acknowledgement of the redundancy of his work from the historical point of view (the history of the Revolution is already known enough without Hawkins’ narrative), make Hawkins step back and in fact relinquish his claims to historicity, reiterating only the “personal” part of his intention. He stubbornly defends his right to publish his story, which cannot be superceded by the history of the Revolution, but now refrains from bringing up its historical context and significance. His “personal narrative,” distinguished from properly historical ones, is made accessible to the public, but it can comfortably be situated only in the family space, and address the public only from there.

References to the history of the revolution as something already well known can be found in the texts of this group quite often, usually when the authors have to contextualize their stories, and are often used to keep such contextualizations as short as possible. Ebenezer Fox states: “No one, who is at all acquainted with the history of our country, needs to be reminded of the events that followed the next year, the memorable

144 Hawkins, Adventures, x.
145 Ibid.
1775, which dates the commencement of our Revolution.” 146 Fox again: “From this rapid sketch of the period immediately preceding our Revolution, the facts of which are no doubt familiar to every reader of American history, it will be seen, that my childhood was passed in the midst of excitement…” 147 Enoch Anderson, in the memoirs written as letters to his nephew: “General Washington had crossed the North River below us, and now commenced the memorable, the distressing retreat through Jersey of which you have, must have, read.” 148

But such references to the common knowledge of the Revolution by no means serve to connect the texts to the existing historical discourse in order to participate in its creation. This certainly does not mean that these authors never added any factual details to the history of the revolution; they did, but for them enriching the factual history of the revolution was an unintended consequence, not the goal. They related the personal narratives to the history of the Revolution as to something given; the authors may have even derived from it their authority as narrators of the stories situated in the Revolutionary war, but their stories unfold on a level different from that of history.

Consider again the case of Ebenezer Fox, whom Jared Sparks praised for presenting “some remarkable incidents of the war, and particularly the sufferings on board the Old Jersey Prison-Ship.” 149 Fox gives a detailed account, on more than a dozen pages, of the conditions of the prisoners’ life on board of the notorious ship, but concludes it with the following passage:

That the reader may not think I have given an exaggerated account of our sufferings on the board of the Jersey, I will here introduce some facts related in the histories of the Revolutionary War [here Fox gives a footnote: “See Gordon’s, Ramsay’s, and Botta’s Histories of the American [sic] Revolution”]. I introduce them as an apology for the course that I and many of my fellow-citizens adopted to obtain a temporary relief from our sufferings. 150

146 Fox, Adventures, 13.
147 Ibid., 14.
149 Fox, Adventures, ii.
150 Ibid., 135-136.
After this, Fox gives, again, a six-page account of the life on Jersey, often repeating the same details, but now based on the works named above. As it turns out later, Fox was among the prisoners who enlisted for British military service in order to leave the ship. His meticulous description of the latter looks in this context more like an attempt to justify his action than as efforts of an eyewitness to preserve valuable historical information for posterity. Consequently, the historians he cites are to back up his private and biased account with the authority of the already existing “correct and minute history of American revolution,” in Christopher Hawkins’ words.

On the other hand, the mention of Fox’s “fellow-citizens” in the passage quoted above hints at Fox’s regarding his personal experience as representative; like Hawkins, he speaks (or rather writes and, more importantly, publishes) on behalf of the many. But such views are marginalized, especially when it comes to claiming for the project a place in public discourse.

The oscillation between asserting the historicity of one’s project and feeling the necessity to find justification for it elsewhere can also be observed in Joseph Plumb Martin’s Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier (1830). Martin expects his readers to ask a natural question: how a man of common sense could spend time on writing down the daily transactions of a private soldier – “such a rhapsody of nonsense” – and replies that “every private soldier in an army thinks his particular services as essential to carry on the war he is engaged in, as the services of the most influential general: and why not? What could officers do without such men? Nothing at all. Alexander never could have conquered the world without private soldiers.”

But such a democratic claim is by no means followed by the assertion that the information a private soldier (Martin) can offer to the public and his view of the transactions of the army would add to the narrative, historical picture of the Revolutionary war. Martin continues his dialogue with the skeptical reader: “But, says the reader, this is low; the author gives us nothing but everyday occurrences; I could tell as good a story myself. Very true, Mr. Reader, everyone can tell what he has done in his

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151 Joseph Plumb Martin, Private Yankee Doodle; Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier, ed. by George F. Scheer (Boston: Little and Brown, 1962), xxiv.
lifetime, but everyone has not been a soldier and consequently can know but little or nothing of the sufferings and fatigues incident to an army.”

Not by offering the experience of the Revolutionary war or the hardships of the soldier of the Continental army does Martin expect to attract the reader’s attention to his work, but by presenting a slice of life everyone could experience but not many actually did. “Human condition,” not the history of the Revolutionary war, is the subject of his memoirs, which are much more autobiographical than historical. Martin’s insight into the historical significance of the experience of ordinary people, which may seem to anticipate present-day historians’ interest in such topics, does not develop into a historical approach. It does not lead him to situate the story of his experience as a soldier within the larger story of the Revolutionary War as a functional element of the war’s “plot.” It is still this larger story that in the system of assumptions behind Martin’s project remains the history, within which his personal story’s place is uncertain at best.

In a similar fashion, Ebenezer Fox resorts to entertainment as a way of justifying the public appearance of the memoir text about the great events that does not contain facts important enough for the reader: “Should it be thought that my simple narrative does not contain matter of importance sufficient to interest the reader, I can only say, that the partial judgement of friends, and my belief that any circumstances relating to the most interesting period of our history, would prove entertaining to the young, must be my excuse for presenting it to the public.”

Instead of inscribing to the annals of history the events of “sufficient magnitude to be transmitted to posterity,” in the words of Charles Coffin, here any event deserves to be publicized by virtue of the very fact that it belongs to the great epoch, signifies it, and as such can be of interest. However, this criterion, which still has much to do with history, only partially accounts for the fact selection and narrative building in the texts under consideration. Relating their stories first in the family circle, the authors (including Fox) usually constructed them as narratives of adventure, danger and action. “All the rest of my time in the army would be quite uninteresting to you, – such as marching and countermarching, scouting parties, guards, &c., – all bloodless and woundless,” writes

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Enoch Anderson to his nephew.\textsuperscript{154} Josiah Priest, apart from captivity narratives, also collected other kinds of small entertaining stories of adventures and audacity set in the Revolutionary times.\textsuperscript{155} As an example, we could refer to “The Extraordinary Feats and Escapes of David Elerson, in the Revolutionary War,” appended to the narrative of Freegift Patchin. The principal episodes of this text – stealing General Clinton’s phaeton from under the nose of the British army and escape (alone) from a party of a dozen Indians – are related in a fitting style: “The sharp, shrill report of the rifle echoed up and down the shores of the channel, and struck the ear of some artillery men, who, ere he was aware of it, planted a cannon shot near his feet, but fortunately did not injure him. In a moment or two, a flash admonished him that he had better dodge, as another pelter must be on its way.”\textsuperscript{156}

It may be argued with sufficient confidence that it was such literary orientation, apart from their belonging to the history of the Revolution (and maybe even in the first place), that made many of the texts discussed in this chapter worth public attention in the eyes of their first readers and hearers – families and friends. Submitting to the public the narratives of quite dubious historical significance from the point of view of the period’s idea of history and the structure and content of historical narrative was followed by the implicit diminishing of the role of the referential quality, essential for the discourse of history. Such an act needed additional means of justification. Even if those means might have been seen as additional by the authors themselves, they were becoming of primary importance among the arguments actually offered to the public, and determined the structure of the texts themselves. The fragment of reality the texts were related to remained the same, but relationship itself changed radically. Liberated from the burden of historical narration by the progress of the professional historiography and responding to the reorientation of the worldview towards the personal, the proliferating genre became more literary than historical, although retaining its historical connotations. Perhaps

\textsuperscript{154} Anderson, \textit{Personal Recollections}, 59.


paradoxically, this also meant certain estrangement of the individual from history: unlike the memoirists of the “old school,” who strove to write themselves into the historical narrative or even had to resist the gravitation towards it, the new democratic authors found themselves in a sphere separate from the discourse of history. The connection of their personal narratives with the communal project of Revolutionary history was uncertain and constantly questioned even (or maybe in the first place) by the authors themselves.

It should also be noted that the argument about the transition of the memoir genre as a form of representing the American Revolution from auxiliary referential relationship with the Revolution to the indirect relationship of signification does not imply a rigid chronological sequence of change, or the replacement of one mode by another in the strict sense. Different forms could coexist in time. The essence of the argument presented here is not in the disappearance of one subgenre and the emergence of another, but in the gradual and complex transfer of discursive power from one to another as the most widely accepted and used way to represent the war in public discourse. I also do not imply that the relationship between historical writing and the past is naturally referential, and that between imaginative literature and the past – signifying. These two modes are understood here as discursive (rhetorical) functions rather than ontological characteristics.

As for the discourse of history as a whole and its evolution in the post-Revolutionary America, the analysis of the textual mechanisms and the actual process of this transition – through the collisions of personal and common, private and public, intricate contradictions of intentions and discursive norms, and simple imperatives of the supply and demand of information – seems to suggest a picture of this evolution different from that offered before. Instead of the continuous widening of the circle of participants in the discourse, the even process of the democratization of the memory of the Revolution and of the picture of the Revolution existing in public memory, we see a qualitative rupture. The old way of telling Revolutionary history by its participants (not professional historians) exhausts itself; the power to generate new texts within this discourse transfers to a different level, literary and autobiographical, within which and

only within which the new democratized vision of history can operate. But this transition
does not mean the automatic transformation of historical legitimacy. It still resides with
the traditional form of historical writing, and new democratic authors, although
perceiving themselves as acting within the discourse of history, have to seek circuitous
ways of justifying their projects. They usually find justification outside the discourse of
history.
Epilogue

“All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no History; only Biography,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay “History.” For Emerson this observation is metaphoric, derived from his understanding of the essence and form. It means that history must speak directly to the individual human experience, for it is the record of the works of the universal mind, and “there is one mind common to all individual men.” External forms, facts of history and of individual experience conceal the essence, the general principle that governs everything; the distinction between individual and common, private and public is nothing but appearance. Thus “the student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary.”

Yet the process of genre evolution traced in the preceding chapters presents this metaphorical merger, for Emerson a matter of reading, as a real realignment of structural relationships within the post-Revolutionary discourse of history and a change in the forms of writing at least in one of its segments – the communal project of Revolutionary history. Within the limits of one genre, what was the record of public events became the record of personal experiences; history became (auto)biography.

Emerson observed:

The instinct of the mind, the purpose of nature betrays itself in the use we make of the signal narrations of history. Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of facts. No anchor, no cable, no fences avail to keep a fact a fact. Babylon, Troy, Tyre, Palestine, and even early Rome, have passed or are passing into fiction. … Who cares what the fact was when we have made a constellation of it to hang in heaven an immortal sign?

The dissolution of fact in meaning, the turning of history into fiction, is for Emerson a problem of perception and human nature. In the present work, it has been analyzed as a historical change in the forms of discursive legitimacy of parahistorical

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159 Ibid., 3.
160 Ibid., 5.
161 Ibid., 6.
writing and a part of the continuation of the communal project of Revolutionary history in a new socio-cultural situation. Emerson’s essentialist and deeply literary reading of history exemplifies high culture’s potential for metaphorical transformation of the world and for “push[ing] a language to its limits”\textsuperscript{162} in demonstrating the logical possibilities of this discursive transformation. In a few phrases, it makes the meaning and nature of the change in memoir writing especially clear in the context of the new cultural situation of romantic American Renaissance. In doing this, Emerson’s radical reinterpretation of the historical discourse as a whole also suggests the limitations of the new legitimacy as to the position of the genre in the system of historical writing.

In 1834, critics praised George Bancroft for the first volume of the History of the United States: “He is the instrument of Providence”; “He is worthy of his country and his age”; “At length we Americans are to have a history”; “We have come of age!”\textsuperscript{163} The new historical writing was born that the new cultural situation needed. But there was little place among Bancroft’s sources (listed, for instance, in the preface to the sixth volume) for the likes of Christopher Hawkins or Ebenezer Fox. At one point, the author assures the reader: “The abundance of my collections has enabled me, in some measure, to reproduce the very language of every one of the principal actors in the scenes which I describe, and to represent their conduct from their own point of view.”\textsuperscript{164} One can easily picture here Bancroft using the memoirs of John Adams, but not the recollections of John Becker or Andrew Sherburne. His history on the grand scale was new in conception, new in style, new in the ways it prefigured the historical field (if we use Hayden White’s terminology), but not in its external syntactic form.

On the other side of the Atlantic, also in the 1830s, François René de Chateaubriand wrote in his memoirs: “If, in the novels which I have written, I have drawn upon my own history, in the histories which I have told I have placed memories of the living history in

\textsuperscript{162} Darnton, \textit{The Great Cat Massacre}, 6.

\textsuperscript{163} Quoted after Callcott, \textit{History in the United States}, 23.

\textsuperscript{164} George Bancroft, \textit{History of the United States, from the Discovery of American Continent}, vol. 6 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1854), x.
which I took part."¹⁶⁵ The difference between the novel and history in their relation to individual experience, as two different forms of translating the latter into written discourse, appears here as that between integration and fragmentation. The novel reflects the totality of one’s experience as an integral part of one’s self; history uses fragments of that experience to construct its own story, the one in which the individual only took part. (Almost a hundred years later Marcel Proust would say that, as a writer has only one life, there can be only one novel.)

For John Marshall three decades earlier, the life of George Washington became a form in which the whole history of the Revolution could be conveniently presented.¹⁶⁶ But American Romanticist historiography did not produce anything resembling Jules Michelet’s La sorciere or other French formal experiments with shaping the historical after the personal, leaving this task to novelists.¹⁶⁷ Two forms of narration remained essentially separate if they could not merge together in a life of a statesman, and this separation became obvious in the newly born functional opposition between symbolic and referential representation. History did not become Biography, and, when viewed from the point of view of historical discourse, lives put into writing remained a commentary on the text of public history.


¹⁶⁷ See a detailed analysis of several such experiments by French Romantic historians in Ann Rigney, “Representability: Cultural History and the Fear of Long Books,” chap. 2 in *Imperfect Histories*, 59-98.
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