Introduction

The alienation of the American intellectual from politics has long been noted by literary and cultural historians. Dramatizing this separation, studies of American literature have, until recently, emphasized the quest of writers to create "world[s] elsewhere." In the last decade there has been a turnabout in the scholarship, and critics are suggesting that worlds elsewhere cannot be apolitical and are integrally related to the social and political ideas of their times. But whatever the critical turn, it has been recognized that in every generation many American writers have conceived of themselves as vaguely belonging to some oppositional party. I say "vaguely" because there are often similarities in styles of opposition even where there is little similarity in content. Compare, for example, the oppositional stance of the hermit Thoreau and that of the cosmopolite Henry Adams. The politics and ideas that these writers have criticized are related in one way or other to the dominant force in American cultural politics since the revolution—liberalism. But precisely because liberalism has been so pervasive in American culture, many writers who have undertaken radical critiques of aspects of liberal ideology, and who are committed to a radical or revolutionary politics, have found themselves unable to dissociate themselves from features of liberalism which are so entrenched that they have become synonymous with being American. This book is about the politics of form in personal-political narratives by such liberal and reluctantly liberal writers.

American literature has a long history of personal narratives which are highly political and in which writers have positioned themselves as cultural spokespersons whose task is to guide national values. In prerevolutionary America this use of personal narrative as exemplary and as a means of guiding the nation was limited to legislators and priests. Diaries like William Bradford’s Of Plymouth Plantation no less than John Winthrop’s sermon aboard the Arabella, both authored by powerful governors, were designed to consolidate the powers of the theocratic state. Private and public writing was invest-
ed with clerical and political authority. Later, revivalists like Jonathan Edwards and Michael Wigglesworth looked back to this mode of writing. Edwards not only used public sermons to chastise his auditor’s but also used personal narrative to record exemplary Christian conversions and to condemn the immorality of his flock. Personal narrative was thus also a means of social instruction.

The political persuasiveness of Puritan writing depended greatly on the role of the speaker. Thus, whether writing sermons, personal narratives, or exemplary lives of other men as in Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana, Puritan writers emphasized their speaking voices. When writing with a primarily political and argumentative intent, later American writers have favored using prose narrative in similar ways by foregrounding personal experiences, emphasizing their speaking voices, and attempting to address the culture at large. Thus the tradition of using personal narrative for socio-political concerns continued long after the tradition of letters was established in America.

But although there are cultural paradigms like Puritanism under which to examine the politics of these early personal-political narratives, there are no similar paradigms for postrevolutionary ones. I suggest that liberalism is such a useful paradigm. Liberalism emerged as the dominant political ethos during the revolutionary period. The Declaration of Independence made reference to “natural and inalienable rights” which were universal and beyond history, and in the writings of Jefferson and Paine liberal individualism emerged as political dogma. The American constitution, too, was “an authentically Lockean statement” about individual rights. It was not that Puritanism disappeared from the cultural horizon. Sacvan Bercovitch, in The Puritan Origins of the American Self, demonstrated its remarkable persistence. However, the tendency of many scholars, following the lead of Perry Miller, to see all American writers as Jeremians of Puritan origin bemoaning the loss of the original promise of America is problematic because it denies the possibility of any radical or dissentful impulses in American literature. The continuity thesis also ignores the definite political shifts of the revolutionary period. As John P. Diggins points out, “While we see the conscience of Puritanism persisting in certain aspects of American intellectual history, in political history we see the emergence of Lockean individualism. What preoccupied the thoughts of major statesmen from Jackson to Lincoln was not so much the political duty of the citizen as the economic opportunity of the worker and entrepreneur.”

Many American writers from the revolutionary period till the
counterculture sixties were deeply concerned about, and interested in, this ideology of American political life. When they turned to personal-political narrative, they dealt in one way or another with the legacy of liberalism, and their narratives formed an important strand in American letters. We see this debate around liberalism within personal-political narrative in Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography, Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, Henry James’s The American Scene, Henry Adams’s The Education of Henry Adams, Jane Addams’s Twenty Years at Hull-House, James Agee’s Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and Norman Mailer’s The Armies of the Night. Liberalism was both an energizing and limiting ideology for these writers. Radical individualism, paradoxically, gave impetus to critiques of bourgeois homogeneity and the liberal-capitalist consensus while at the same time transcendent individualism or the belief in values beyond historical contingency limited these critiques from affirming radical difference. Literary liberalism within personal-political narratives is thus not a simple acceptance or rejection of the dominant liberal ideology but an agonized debate within it which has taken diverse forms for nearly two centuries.

What explains the peculiarities and resilience of liberal thought in America? In order to answer that we need to look briefly at liberal theories and their particular applications in America. Liberalism in Europe was a response to a feudal order which was experiencing dissolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hobbes and Spinoza initiated the theorizing about modern individualism and the belief in governments designed to ensure the liberty of all men. But the most important thinker for American liberalism was John Locke. Locke’s notion of property as a “natural right” that guaranteed liberty to the individual became the basic tenet of liberal thought in America. Behind Locke’s formulation lay three important concepts: individualism, which extolled the importance of a person’s will and responsibility to himself; universalism, which assumed that all human beings had similar rights and concerns irrespective of their historical situations; and capitalism, which in both theistic and patriotic versions glorified the quest for property.

Thus, although liberalism was potentially subversive because of its egalitarian belief in the equal status of all people irrespective of class, it acquired a conserving, stable image in America, where it became a handmaiden to capitalism and competitive individualism, which were idealized as national virtues. One of the earliest and still the most astute of social commentators who analyzed the paradoxical problem of a free, egalitarian society with fixed beliefs was Alexis de
Tocqueville. “As the American participates in all that is done in his country, he thinks himself obliged to defend whatever may be censured in it... America is therefore a free country in which, lest anybody should be hurt by your remarks, you are not allowed to speak freely of private individuals or of the state.” Because America was a free country in which every individual aspired to be a property owner or capitalist, homogeneity of opinion was inevitable. Tocqueville lamented, “I know of no country in which there is so little independence of mind and real freedom of discussion as in America.” This complicity between liberalism, democratic capitalism, and bourgeois homogeneity was later seen by Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America*. Hartz postulated that because America lacked a feudal tradition, it also lacked a revolutionary tradition. In America there was only a “fixed, dogmatic liberalism of a liberal way of life.” Thus, continued Hartz, “liberalism is a stranger in the land of its greatest realization and fulfillment.... Here is a doctrine which everywhere in the West has been a glorious symbol of individual liberty, yet in America its compulsive power has been so great that it has posed a threat to liberty itself.” Along with political homogeneity and the compulsion for consensus, Lockean liberalism also influenced concepts of community. Tocqueville had already foreseen the privatizing and alienating power of capitalism which confined people “entirely within the solitude of [their] own heart[s].” But, more importantly, the uniformity of liberal-capitalist ideas created a new kind of consensual society. As Hartz points out, “a sense of community based on a sense of uniformity is a deceptive thing. It looks individualistic, and in part it actually is.... But in another sense it is profoundly anti-individualistic, because the common standard is its very essence, and deviations from that standard inspire it with an irrational fright.” Another manifestation of this paradoxical consensus is a faith in a radical “American way of life” which has remained unchanged through history. As Daniel Boorstin puts it, Americans have “become exemplars of the continuity of history and of the fruits which come from cultivating institutions suited to a time and place, in continuity with the past.” Instead of community, then, liberal capitalism inspires consensual society or mass society.

Many American writers have been concerned about the unanimity of thought generated by liberal capitalism and have criticized both the uniformity and alienation of American society. However, like Hartz, they have been unable to give up the basic tenet of liberal capitalism—individualism. Hartz criticizes American individualism for being anti-individualistic, but he does not criticize the concept of indi-
individualism itself. However, individualism assumes and prizes an ahistorical, autonomous self that presumes a culture of consensus. Consensual society demands the conformity of its isolated, autonomous members, whereas society as community recognizes the differences and interrelationships among them. That is why the concept of community has always been a liberative one for radical and utopian thinkers, Marxists and feminists alike. For thinkers on the Left, community is a necessary corrective to alienation. Marcuse, for example, views solidarity as a precondition for liberation, and Jameson celebrates the social collective. Feminists like Chodorow and Gilligan, on the other hand, offer models of community based on woman-centered values such as nurturance and interconnectedness as alternatives to an oppressive patriarchy. Feminists, in fact, reveal the ironic truth that individualism, rather than fostering social diversity, is intolerant of it. Herein lies the limiting factor of the quasi-radical yet liberal social critics of America. These critics offer alternative social visions in place of the liberal social consensus, but they are also limited by their adherence to individualism and universalism, a belief in values beyond history and culture.

I particularly choose to deal with liberal discourse in personal-political narratives because in these narratives writers are most conscious of their roles as cultural spokespersons who have the task of guiding the moral values of the nation. Because these texts are, in the largest sense, polemical, the writers emphasize their speaking voices and dramatize their social criticisms by having imaginary debates with their readers. Many of these writers were, in fact, public figures who were accustomed to lecturing their audiences. Franklin was a household name by the time the Autobiography was published; Thoreau had traveled the lecture circuit; Jane Addams had addressed gatherings of labor unions, women, and political leaders; Mailer had always performed for his public and had also run for public office. So when these writers turned to personal-political narrative, they retained many argumentative rhetorical strategies and kept their speaking voices dominant.

The complexities, paradoxes, and limits of the social criticism in these texts can be seen as much in the rhetorical strategies used by the writers as in the manifest politics. Because these writers, in one way or another, oppose forms of cultural consensus, they create different kinds of dispersive rhetorical situations. They attempt to bring in the voices of different Others as challenges to the dominant culture; they often question the autonomy of their own voices; and they address the voices of different textualized readers by centering their own voices.
But, on the other hand, their inability to give up the bourgeois notion of the unified, individualistic subject puts limits on the dispersiveness of these rhetorical strategies. Rhetorically, then, we can see a changing pattern of what we may call “dialogic” dissent in these texts as these writers challenge different forms of the liberal-capitalist consensus.

Because of the controversy surrounding Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic it is necessary to clarify our usage of it here. Dialogism does not simply refer to a rhetorical exchange between speakers (although it can include it) but to a radical, politicized view of language. Dialogic thinking is based on intersubjectivity. It celebrates the Otherness of language, the potential of words to always carry echoes of other words. Bakhtin sees the novel as the most democratic of literary forms because it nurtures this dialogic potential of language. The novelist welcomes speech diversity and the inflections of other voices in his/her narrative. The novel develops the “dialogic essence” by which “fewer and fewer neutral...‘rock bottom truths’ remain that are not drawn into dialogue.” It will be our purpose to see the politics of the dialogic rhetorical strategies in these texts.

An analysis of rhetorical strategies, particularly the modes of address chosen by the authors, the authors’ conceptions of their own voices and subjectivities, and the interaction between the authorial voice and other voices thus reveals the buried politics at work in these texts. At times this politics strengthens the manifest political agenda; at other times it puts it under question. But whatever the relation, the style of the politics is as important as the overtly stated agenda. And this is true not only in literary texts but in the world of everyday politics as well. Advertisements are perhaps the most obvious cases of political persuasion. However, the question of the relationship between form and ideological purpose has been addressed in many diverse areas, particularly by Foucault. Discipline and Punish, for instance, examines the politics of different forms of executions—public or private—and the politics of different kinds of prisons. Foucault’s philosophical endeavor throughout his career was to demonstrate that forms and structures of institutions had as much to do with their political allegiances as did their overtly stated politics.

Although literary theory has always reserved a special place for analyses of form, it is only within the last fifteen or so years that rhetorical and formal analyses have been used for more than comments on aesthetics alone. Both New Criticism and structuralism had attempted to protect a sacred territory of art. Whereas New Critics demarcated the text as an autonomous entity severed from socio-political reality by the aesthetic canons of good taste, many structural-
ists viewed the text as a relationship of signs within a hermetic aesthetic system. They viewed ideology in criticism as evidence of vested interests of which their own methodologies were free.\textsuperscript{15}

In poststructuralist thought, however, ideology both in literature and criticism has been viewed with less than suspicion. Ideology has been reinscribed into the text, but without resort to the problematic classic concept of the subject and the reflection theory of art (both of which structuralists also repudiated). Poststructuralists have demonstrated that there is no writing that is ultimately free of ideology. Critical neutrality has thus become a dated notion. However, the reintroduction of ideology into criticism has taken varying forms. Here it will suffice only to mention two camps: that of Marxists both American and British, and those that are referred to as Continental theorists. Marxists like Jameson begin with the premise that “there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed that everything is” in the last analysis “political.”\textsuperscript{16} Unlike classical Marxists like Lukács, however, these thinkers do not posit a direct, unmediated relation between text and referent. “The notion of a direct, spontaneous relation between text and history,” Terry Eagleton points out, “belongs to a naive empiricism which is to be discarded.”\textsuperscript{17} The idea of reflection or homology is challenged for Williams by the concept of mediation and for Jameson by dialectics itself.\textsuperscript{18} For these Marxists, then, the aesthetic act is ideological, and “form,” even more than content, is the bearer of ideology.\textsuperscript{19} Jameson’s concept of ideology of form is a way of seeing texts as socially and culturally significant because of the way they are constructed. Jameson sees “formal processes as sedimented content in their own right...carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works.”\textsuperscript{20} The text refracts ideology, although it cannot be reduced to it. Such critics have been contrasted with those that supposedly fetishize the text (and by implication ignore ideology), notably Jacques Derrida, Paul DeMan, and Gilles Deleuze.

To postulate, as many critics have, a crude extrinsic-intrinsic opposition between the schools, however, is to oversimplify a complex critical picture. The so-called textualists also begin with the presumption of ideology. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari’s endeavor throughout \textit{Anti-Oedipus} is to question and bring to light ideologies and power relations in psychoanalysis which remain hidden from its surface formulations. Similarly, Derrida’s deconstructing of philosophy involves working through its concepts to see “what this history may have concealed or excluded, constituting itself as history through this repression in which it has a stake.”\textsuperscript{21} Derrida demonstrated the
metaphysical presuppositions in philosophical works by treating these works like literary texts. The analysis of language was in fact an analysis of logocentrism and ethnocentrism. The differences between the two camps lie elsewhere. Most importantly, the textualists are marked in their refusal to view any social vision as absolute. If anything is venerated, it is the process of deconstruction. But that process itself continues to undercut its own discourse. The formulation of some kind of utopia or positive hermeneutic is therefore alien to textualism. Marxists, however, are able to postulate a utopia and an absolute methodology. Marxism, for Jameson, is an untranscendable horizon. No less significant, possibly, is the fact that though the textualists see themselves as implicated in ideology, even in the very act of criticism, they (particularly Derrida and DeMan) seldom deal overtly with ideology. They therefore give the appearance of being concerned with language only.

In the context of this ideological-linguistic problematic, Mikhail Bakhtin is an important figure. At once a Marxist and poststructuralist, Bakhtin is “a paradox from the standpoint of literal dating.” One of Bakhtin’s major accomplishments is his ability to combine a textualist awareness of the linguistic (textual) nature of all value systems with a Marxist awareness of the social nature of language. “The study of verbal art,” Bakhtin insists, “must overcome the divorce between an abstract ‘formal’ approach and an equally abstract ‘ideological’ approach.” His own works are successful attempts at doing so. Like the sophisticated Marxists, Bakhtin emphasizes the ideology of form but retains the textualist emphasis on relativity and difference. He examines the various nuances of a single word, but his unit of study is not a linguist’s sentence but language in social use—an utterance; he emphasizes the socio-political bases of words but insists that words are not transparent reflections of a “reality” beyond language. David Carroll sees Bakhtin’s importance in his deconstruction of the intrinsic-extrinsic problematic, in his refusal “to accept the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as separate and uncommunicating opposites at all.” It is no wonder that Bakhtin used his literary criticism—his analysis of Rabelais and Dostoevski, and his theories of the novel—to express his anti-authoritarian values and his belief in the social nature of the self. Celebrations of the polyphonic novel and carnival are obviously political. In order to make stylistic analysis ideological, Bakhtin begins by socializing linguistic concepts themselves. Instead of a study of “language,” a grammatical category, he substitutes “discourse”; instead of analyzing the linguist’s “sentence,” he analyzes the “utterance.” Language and ideology, in other words, are not contestatory but mutually
constitutive realms because each is implicated in the other. As V. N. Volosinov/Bakhtin points out, "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present too. Everything ideological possesses semiotic value."^28

The significance of the linguistic-ideological equation becomes clear when we realize that 'ideology' as used by Bakhtin is a liberating rather than a repressive concept. Ideology does not refer to the false consciousness of the bourgeoisie, to doctrinal illusions that must be exposed and eradicated (the vulgar Marxist usage); neither does it refer to a repressive structure as evident in Barthes's statement "Ideology can only be dominant."^29 Ideology in Bakhtin's works refers primarily to the omnipresence of social organizations, to the fact that signs are always constructed only within such organizations. Because Bakhtin sees individual subjectivity as constituted by the social, signs cannot be autonomous. A word means something because of its socially constituted nature, and every word is contextual. Ideology in Bakhtin's usage can be explained as an idea system, socially determined, "something that means."^30 Susan Stewart emphasizes the dynamic nature of Bakhtin's concept of ideology, both a "product and producer of social practices." "One's speech both reveals and produces one's position in class society."^31 No text, in this sense, can be separat-ed from ideology, although every text is ideological in a different way.

For our purposes, here, the most important of Bakhtin's concepts is that of 'voice'. Because language for Bakhtin is not a set of grammatical categories but a system in social use, he conceives of words as inseparable from the speaking voices that utter them. Caryl Emerson explains, "For Bakhtin, words cannot be conceived apart from the voices who speak them; thus, every word raises the question of authority."^32 This notion of the speaking voice is far more complex than (although it includes) related concepts used by narratologists and reader response critics. At times voice can simply refer to the words of a character or the implied voice of the author. But voices and speakers, for Bakhtin, are not compositionally marked. "Voice zones," for instance, may only be stylistically designated. Shifts in syntax and tone may indicate different voices even within passages demarcated as direct speech. On the other hand, because a word is "born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it," there are different interacting voices within each word. Each word participates in a network of social interactions. Voice thus refers to an ideological speaking presence in the text, whether broadly thematic (though these are not synonymous) or minutely lexical. At no point, however, is it pos-
sible to identify all the voices in a text or an utterance so that it has a
definite social or ideological referent. But language is not merely
communicative but polemical, and hidden polemic is pervasive in lit-
erary speech. “Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its
own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objec-
tions, evaluations, points of view.” Dostoevski’s works, “taken as
utterances of their author, are the same never-ending, internally unre-
solved dialogues among characters (seen as embodied points of view)
and between the author himself and his characters.”

Hidden and overt polemic are central features of the personal-
political narratives we are discussing here, because in these narratives
writers are engaged in a liberal polemic with forms of cultural authori-
tarianism and standardization that they seek to dialogically question.
Rhetorically, this polemic manifests itself in different ways. At the
most fundamental level the polemic is present in parodies and subver-
sions of cultural unanimity. It is also present in the writers’ methods of
including political and cultural difference into the narrative, the man-
ner in which voices of Others are included. Although, in the Bakhtini-
ian sense, language is always fundamentally dialogic, that does not
mean that language cannot be used in a coercive or authoritative man-
ner. Whether the voices of Others are included in order to be marginal-
ized or whether these voices create a productive indeterminacy will
therefore indicate an extremely different politics. Finally, the polemic is
implicitly present in the way the authorial voice is presented. Because
a textual voice is an important way in which subjectivity is represent-
ed, modes of authorial voicing are in themselves significant political
statements about conceptions of self, society, and community.

The study begins with an analysis of Benjamin Franklin’s Auto-
bigraphy. Franklin chronicles his life story in order to emphasize the
unique development of self and society necessary for the founding of
the new country. He continually subverts the privileges attendant
upon heredity and acquired culture and proposes a society based on
republican simplicity and a sense of self based on individual success.
The rhetorical strategies of the text reflect a need to consolidate and
unify a new world citizenry. Franklin speaks as a moral purist, a bold
adventurer, a cunning businessman, and a respected statesman; he
brings in voices of various others—litterateurs, poets, actors, priests,
educators—and uses this multiplicity to polemically institute an indi-
vidualistic self conducive to a society of emergent capitalism.

Literary liberal discourse in the mid-nineteenth century begins
the critique of the business and commerce culture that continues till
today. Thoreau questions the capitalist consensus legitimiz by
Franklin and envisions a culture constituted by differences and a radical individualism. He undermines the culture of work and success by parodying its slogans, proverbs, and language, and thus creates a double-voiced discourse that shatters the hegemony of a singular culture. It is in Walden that we also see the emergence of an aesthetic culture based on a separation of the material and the spiritual which makes problematic the politics of difference that liberal discourse takes as its agenda.

In the early twentieth century the debate within liberalism becomes more self-conscious and conflictual but takes diverse forms even though the participants are three patricians: Henry James, Henry Adams, and Jane Addams. In The American Scene, James uses the separation between the material and spiritual in order to work out his conflictual liberal politics. He positions himself against the standardization of American capitalist democracy and astutely analyzes the reification of human relationships within capitalist society. On the other hand, James is ambivalent about giving up the consensual notion of a cultural and national identity. James speaks through a narrative voice that takes on multiple identities and protean qualities even as he fears the radically disruptive voices of the immigrant and the Jew which challenge the idea of an essential and singular American identity.

Adams’s liberalism works by radicalizing and relativizing intellectual inquiry. Although Adams in the Education presents himself as a lone survivor of eighteenth century rationalism seeking certitudes in the world of twentieth century multiplicity, he delineates a process of education that is motivated by a search for caveats within seemingly proven systems of knowledge. Instead of staying within the rhetoric and language of a particular discipline, Adams questions the validity of disciplinary boundaries. Evolution, physics, history, politics, and religion are not autonomous modes of inquiry that the author follows but voices that dialogically interact, intersect, interpret, and thus modify each other.

Jane Addams is the most radical of the three patrician liberals and the one with the most agonized and divided political voices. Twenty Years at Hull-House begins as a narrative of Addams’s marginalization as a bourgeois woman and becomes a narrative of an objective social scientist. Addams emphasizes the primacy of economic and cultural differences and simultaneously retains the concept of universal cultural values. But despite these dichotomies, which reflect Addams’s paradoxical position as a bourgeois resident of the inner-city slums, Addams makes important contributions to the political
effectiveness of radical, liberal discourse. Hull-House, both as project and metaphor, breaks the boundaries between culture and the masses and culture and the market which plagued thinkers like Thoreau and James and would again surface with James Agee’s documentation of tenant life.

With Agee and Mailer we see two politically different versions of liberalism after the introduction of modernist aesthetics. In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, a highly subjective documentary about three tenant families, Agee attempts to depict the tenants in all their variety and not simply as economic integers within capitalist society. What emerges is a problematic aestheticization of human subjects that results from a separation of the religious-aesthetic from the political. By asserting that a quasi-divine truth about the tenants exists prior to socio-ideological violation, and by claiming a mystical insight into this divinity in the tenants, Agee effectively depoliticizes the tenants and denies them a voice. Mailer, on the other hand, uses postmodern politics and aesthetics in The Armies of the Night to radicalize the liberal critique of consensus. Although he tends to romanticize a past of absolute virtues, Mailer, like Adams, welcomes the entry of other voices into his political analyses. Convinced of the necessity of a politics of difference, Mailer both celebrates the dispersive politics of the New Left and speaks through a voice that questions its own autonomy and singularity.

In contrast to the writers who participate, even if ambivalently, in the liberal consensus, Kingston offers a compelling instance of the fact that personal-political narratives of radical writers, who speak consciously from positions of marginality, dramatically reformulate conceptions of selfhood and authority. Marginal writers who seek to be radical have to question concepts of unity and coherence because their own political efficacy depends upon forcing a recognition of the values of difference and diversity upon the dominant culture. In The Woman Warrior Kingston writes polemically as a Chinese-American woman battling with a patriarchal, white American culture but does so from a radically unstable position. She writes as a woman but destabilizes the concept of gender; she speaks as a Chinese-American but questions racial definitions. The authorial voice in The Woman Warrior is thus highly provisional, always full of echoes of other voices, and never autonomous.

By analyzing the politics of voice in these texts, we see how ideologies such as liberalism are not simply present or reflections of inherent “American” values but exist in a state of struggle and tension that must not be overlooked. The problem, as Cecil F. Tate rightly
points out, is that many works in American studies follow the dictates of "holism" (which in turn generates cultural monoliths), which is viewed not only as methodological but ontological. Concepts such as 'the American tradition' or 'the American dream' or 'the American myth' are taken as self-evident, as if they indeed do represent the history and beliefs of an entire people, while the social conflicts, power struggles, and dominance exerted in order to maintain such cohesive social myths are neglected. In an examination of the totalizing impulse in studies of American literature, Russell J. Reising aptly observes that these "symbolic" analyses "deny the possibility...of studying American literature as a vehicle of social knowledge." However, in recent years, American literary scholars have recognized that the very notion of a cultural center is in itself ideological and cannot be accepted as naturally present. Cathy N. Davidson, for instance, describes the constructed nature of literary tradition and points out the pernicious effects of a reductive theory of American identity on pedagogy. John Carlos Rowe and Myra Jehlen have questioned the assumptions of coherence and unity that underlie many studies. My study, having no investment in maintaining a homogenous American identity, gestures in a similar direction. It questions the idea of an accepted cultural center and a singular "American" identity in several ways: by examining highly politicized texts of major writers as quasi-radical critiques which exist in tension with the writers' participation in the dominant culture; by dramatizing the confrontation of major American writers with issues of otherness, difference, and social diversity; and by emphasizing the conflictual rhetorical strategies in these texts.

Some of the personal-political narratives under discussion here have been analyzed under the rubrics of other generic categories. Despite the fact that these categories are largely formalistic and ignore the politicized nature of these texts, it is necessary to examine the theoretical premises of these categories and explain why I have chosen not to operate within them. By far the most numerous attempts at classifying these texts have been what we might call the "mixture" theories. Responding primarily to the works of Capote, Mailer, and Wolfe, critics have formulated theories to explain what has been variously termed the "New Journalism" or the "Nonfiction Novel." Observations common to these critics are the following: that around the sixties there appeared a number of works embodying a new genre—the Nonfiction Novel or the New Journalism; though there were precedents to these works of the sixties (in works like Life on the Mississippi and Walden), the earlier works were of an essentially differ-
ent nature, these works were not merely "documentary" but employed "fictional" techniques. It is the use of conventions of "fiction," yet the "documentary" nature of these works, that has most preoccupied the critics. While describing them variously as mixtures of fiction and journalism (Holowell), "fables of fact" (Hellman), "literary nonfiction" (Weber), or "factual" (Zavarzadeh), critics have attempted to quantify the generic mixture of these "hybrid" texts.

Obviously such criticism relies on and thus reifies several traditional taxonomies. Most importantly, it assumes the purity of forms such as "fiction" and "journalism" which are intermixed in the works of the sixties. Genres, in other words, are seen not as constructed categories but as essences. But the concept of a pure, inviolate genre is extremely problematic. Because texts always exist in social, cultural, and aesthetic relationships to other texts, the semantic and generic boundaries of any work are far from clear. To base an analysis on generic mixtures is therefore to invoke a purity that does not exist.

Moreover, most of these critics continue to invoke terms like fact, fiction, and mimesis without adequately questioning them. A major portion of these studies is still devoted to proving that, despite their being based on "real" experiences, these works are not really documents. Again, one is compelled to ask what a "mere document" really is. Narratologists like René Wellek, Robert Scholes, and Northrop Frye have, of course, offered classifications based on the fact-fiction dichotomy. However, the very concepts of fact and fiction confidently used by narratologists and mimesis theorists have been effectively challenged both by historians and speech-act theorists. To categorize texts according to factuality and fictionality is therefore to oversimplify language. Further, because any transcription of an experience involves selection, order, and weighing, the value of such an approach to genre is questionable.

Another category used to classify some of these works is that of autobiography. Although studies of autobiography are more diverse than those of the New Journalism, most are also dependent on assumptions of generic purity or cultural continuity. Robert F. Sayre, for instance, emphasizes the need to analyze distinctions between "fiction" and "truth." He defines autobiography according to breadth of perspective and the importance given to childhood. Albert E. Stone views autobiography as a means of exploration rather than definition but still invokes differences between autobiography and "art" and uses formalized content definitions or "occasions" to examine the genre. Adams's Education thus takes as its occasion an old man looking back at a long career. G. Thomas Couser, on the other hand,
emphasizes cultural continuity. He sees the American autobiographical enterprise as a sacred one, a continuation of the Old Testament prophetic tradition. In all cases, autobiography is seen as a way of creating unity, and genre is treated as an essence.\textsuperscript{52}

My decision to focus on liberal discourse within personal-political narratives has been dictated by the fact that in these narratives the clear foregrounding of an authorial voice and the strong political emphasis provides excellent grounds for the study of the ideology of form. There are obviously many works of fiction that are vehicles of liberal discourse and also many personal narratives that are not as overtly political as the ones discussed here.\textsuperscript{53} My purpose in the following chapters is to deal with personal-political narratives in terms of both relationships and differences. I will focus both on their major characteristics and on the changes created among them by the varying relationships of voices in the texts.