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The sincerity of fiction. Rather and the quest for self-knowledge*

“I may have assumed the truth of that which I knew might
have been true, never of that which I knew to be false.”

Rousseau, *The Confessions*¹

In 936, bishop Rather of Verona was imprisoned in the fortress of Pavia on a charge of high treason. He had allegedly betrayed his king and patron, Hugh of Italy, and was sent to prison without a trial.² The bishop decided to make the best of the time he suddenly had at his disposal and, in imitation of Boethius who, like him, had been a prisoner in Pavia, consoled himself by writing. He called his book *Meditations of a Man in Exile* also known as *Praeloquia*: a book of personal musings combined with moral advice, which he directed at all layers and classes of society, from soldiers to kings, from servants to bishops.³ Deprived of the company of books and friends to pass the time, Rather keenly observed the world from which he was now excluded and saw its faults and flaws more clearly than ever. But when he turned to reflect on himself, his vision was less focused. He noticed that it was much harder to scrutinize his own self than to analyse and offer advice to others. Towards the end of the *Meditations* he wrote:

“I had decided to put at the end of the work my reasons for venturing to write this book, yet because a suitable occasion now presents itself, I think they should be more fittingly be given now. Wrapped up in my sufferings, I want to inspect what I have lately been, what I am now, what I have not been, what I am not now, what I ought to be or what I ought to have been, but I am unable to see. I ponder where and how I contracted this blindness ... I am unfocussed by such a film of my own noxious habits that I cannot see what I desire and what I summon to my mind like a fleeting dream.”⁴

Rather attempted to determine the nature of this blindness that obstructed his gaze inwards, pondering whether it was caused by sin (‘my own noxious habits’) and how it might be overcome. The struggle to conquer the blurred vision that frustrated his introspection would dominate Rather’s further career as an autobiographical author. After his release from prison in Pavia in 939 and his subsequent exile in Como, during which he revised the *Meditations of a Man in Exile*, he wrote many more autobiographically inspired books and treatises in which he tried to find out what kind of man he was. In his writings he described his experiences, his troubles and conflicts, his inner thoughts and his assessment of himself. He gave his books self-ironic

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¹ From Rousseau’s prologue to his *Confessions*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*. Translation anonymous, with an introduction by Derek Matravers (*Wordsworth Classics of World Literature*, Ware 1906, repr. 1996) 3.

² Further details on Rather’s life will be given further on in this article. On the political circumstances that led to Rather’s alleged betrayal of king Hugh – a charge Rather never denied – see Louis Francis Lumaghi, *Rather of Verona: Pre-Gregorian Reformer* (PhD thesis, Colorado 1975) 21–29. For a biography of Rather with an extensive bibliography, see Peter Reid’s introduction to *The Complete Works of Rather of Verona*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Peter L.D. Reid (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 76, New York 1991) 3–20.

³ Rather, *Meditationes cordis exilio cuiusdam Ratherii sive praeloquia* 6, 25 (ed. Peter L.D. Reid/François Dolbeau/Bernhard Bischoff, CC CM 46a, *Ratherius Veronensis opera*, Turnhout 1984) 3–196, at 193. The only surviving copy of the text is Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 843, a manuscript dating to the late tenth century.

⁴ Rather, *Meditationes cordis* 6, 25, ed. Reid 46a, 193: *Cuiuscemodi autem gratia rei libellum cudere ausim, in fine operis licet ponere decreverim, tamen quia locus nunc sese ingerit oportunus, dicendum puto convenientius. ... ad haec quae patior devolutus, dum quid dudum fuerim, quid modo sim, quid non fuerim, quid non sim, quid esse debeam, quidve debuerim, conspiciere volo, nec valeo, cecitatem hanc unde, ubi vel qualiter contraxerim cogito. ... tanta noxiae consuetudinis a meipso obnubiler albugine, ut non modo videre, quod cupio et veluti somnium advolans ad mentem reduco.* The English translation is taken from Reid, *Complete works* 205. Throughout this article I will make use of Peter Reid’s excellent translation, with a few alterations of my own.

and dramatic titles like *The Ravings of a Madman*, *Confessions of a Criminal*, or *The Pointless Chattering of Bishop Rather*.⁵ Rather's turbulent life provided him with enough material to write about. Three times he was expelled from the bishopric of Verona, once he was deposed as bishop of Liège and twice he was forced to leave a monastery. He went through different periods of exile, suffered imprisonments and even had to stand trial. The public trial in Verona 30 June 968, at which Rather was charged with having used unnecessary force against his rebellious clergy, marked the end of his episcopal career.⁶

Rather's literary models for his choice of topic are unknown. No full-fledged autobiography has survived from the ages directly preceding him that may have inspired him to write about himself, and it is doubtful whether he was familiar with Augustine's *Confessions*, the work considered formative for medieval autobiographical writing.⁷ In his literary approach to himself, Rather seems to have been influenced above all by the Roman satirists Horace, Persius and Juvenal. His *urbanitas* (an elegant, witty and ironic style of writing), he claimed to have taken from the late-antique author Martianus Capella.⁸ Ovid, Seneca, Cicero, Pliny and, again, Horace – "supreme among satirists" – inspired him to collect his own letters and turn them in a book to document a particular period in his life.⁹ Ovid's letters from exile were apparently of particular interest to Rather, as this is the only one of his literary models that he refers to by title (*in libris quoque, qui pretitulantur Ex Ponto, Nasonem Ovidium*). This explicit reference makes Rather one of the few authors in the early Middle Ages who was acquainted with Ovid's *Letters from the Black Sea*.¹⁰

Characteristic for Rather's autobiographical writings is the relentless and merciless way in which he pictured himself. He described himself as an unpleasant, bad-tempered bishop, who fell out with nearly everyone he met. In the past, much has been made of these self-portraits, without acknowledging the element of irony and satire inherent in Rather's self-descriptions.¹¹ Scholars have even blamed Rather's unfortunate ecclesiastical

⁵ The three autobiographically coloured books that Rather wrote after *Meditations of a Man in Exile* are: *The Ravings of a Madman/Phrenesis* (Mainz 955) (ed. Peter L.D. Reid/François Dolbeau/Bernhard Bischoff, CC CM 46a, *Ratherius Veronensis opera*, Turnhout 1984) 199–218; *The Confessions of a Criminal called Rather/Dialogus confessionalis cuiusdam sceleratissimi Ratherii* (Aulne ca. 960) (ed. Peter L.D. Reid/François Dolbeau/Bernhard Bischoff, CC CM 46a, *Ratherius Veronensis opera*, Turnhout 1984) 221–273; *Conjecture about Someone's Character/Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* (Verona 966) (ed. Peter L.D. Reid, CC CM 46, *Ratherius Veronensis Opera minora*, Turnhout 1976) 117–136. Many of Rather's treatises, invectives and sermons are autobiographical by nature as well, like for instance his *Sermo de Quadragesima* (aut) *Chronographia* (ed. Peter L.D. Reid, CC CM 46, *Ratherius Veronensis Opera minora*, Turnhout 1976) 64–89. The text entitled *The Pointless Chattering of Bishop Rather/Ratherii Veronensis episcopi inefficax ut sibi visum est garritus*, is listed in the library catalogue of Lobbes. François Dolbeau, *Un nouveau catalogue des manuscrits de Lobbes aux XI^e et XII^e siècles*, in: *Recherches Augustiniennes* 13 (1978) 3–36, at 25.

⁶ The only source to describe the proceedings of this trial and the charges brought up against him is Rather's own letter of July 968 to Ambrose, emperor Otto's Italian chancellor. *Die Briefe des Bischofs Rather von Verona* 33 (ed. Fritz Weigle, MGH *Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit* 1, Weimar 1949, repr. München 2003) 183–188.

⁷ François Dolbeau, *Ratheriana* III. Notes sur la culture patristique de Rathier, in: *Sacris erudiri. Jaarboek voor Godsdienstwetenschappen* 29 (1986) 151–221, at 165. Dolbeau considers it highly unlikely that Rather ever read Augustine's *Confessions* as he does not quote directly from this text in any of his writings. Although the absence of quotations is no absolute proof of Rather's unfamiliarity with the *Confessions*, I agree with Dolbeau on this point. As Rather admired Augustine and liked to draw attention to the (dis)similarities between Augustine's work and his own, I think he would have explicitly mentioned the *Confessions*, had he been aware of its existence. See further on in this article.

⁸ Rather, *Liber apologeticus* 30, ed. Weigle 169–178, at 170. In the book *The Ravings of a Madman* (*Phrenesis*), Rather declared his indebtedness to Boethius, Fulgentius and Martianus Capella, in reference to his choice of a style that mixes prose with verse. Rather, *Phrenesis* 6, ed. Reid 46a, 199–218, at 203; Cf. Peter Dronke, *Verse with Prose. From Petronius to Dante. The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form* (Cambridge-Mass./London 1994) 89–94.

⁹ *Phrenesis*, ed. Reid 46a, 203 (the text is mutilated): *apud seculi vero scriptores Tullium, Senecam, Plinium ipsum quoque ... epistolares condidisse et appellesse libros, et osorum ut latratibus ... contraponamus ... satyrographis omnibus preferendum Flaccum Horatium; in libris quoque, qui pretitulantur Ex ponto, Nasonem Ovidium*. For Rather's own letter collection, see München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Clm 6340. This manuscript was composed in the scriptorium of Verona under Rather's supervision. It contains a collection of letters and other texts of Rather's hand, which reflects the period of his third tenure as bishop of Verona between 961 and 968. Weigle, *Die Briefe* 2. The tenth-century manuscript Lobbes III (probably Rather's autograph, now lost) contained a collection of letters and other texts of Rather, which documented the period of his episcopacy of Liège and subsequent period of exile between 955 and 960.

¹⁰ Richard J. Tarrant, *Ovid's epistulae ex Ponto*, in: *Texts and Transmissions. A Survey of Latin Classics*, ed. Leighton D. Reynolds (Oxford 1983) 262–265, at 263.

¹¹ Peter Dronke and Nikolaus Staubach interpreted Rather's writings as works of satire, without, however, extending this view to the modern interpretation of his character as being influenced by his satirical self-descriptions. Dronke, *Verse with prose* 89–94;

career on his controversial and unbending character. They regard him as an eccentric, querulous, disagreeable person who was unable to adapt to the social standards of his time and consider it no surprise that he was banished so often. Without wanting to discuss the validity of this view – Rather may well have been the unpleasant man he said he was – I would like to draw attention to the fact that it was Rather himself who created this unfavourable picture of his character. The modern explanation of Rather's complex personality conforms to an image of himself that he had artfully constructed. An example of the type of self-portraits Rather used to devise can be found in the book 'Conjecture about Someone's Character' (*Qualitatis conjectura cuiusdam*). There he puts the worst possible accusations that could be made against him in the mouth of imaginary opponents:¹²

"How does a man like him (they say) handle the office of bishop? He does not serve the emperor, nor the duchess; he never takes the field, he rarely goes to court, and even then only under pressure. With the leaders of the realm he has no dealings; he does not use their hospitality, makes light of their discussions; he never invites any of them to his own table. ... If any man tries to kiss his foot, he thrusts him back with an exclamation. If allowed he would sit alone all day, would read books or reread them. At times he is very wordy, at times almost dumb; dissolved in laughter one moment, the next morose and quick to pick a quarrel. He is ambivalent to all, and thereby in agreement with none. And from this you can clearly see his unstable temperament."¹³

This is just a small fragment of an extensive self-portrait that Rather wrote in 966, when he was bishop of Verona for the third time and was once again facing opposition, this time from his own clergy. The picture he draws here of himself is that of a moody old bishop, ill-suited for the public and social obligations of the office. He asks the pressing question, which he assumes others are secretly asking behind his back, namely how someone like him, who displays this kind of socially maladjusted behavior, could ever handle the office of bishop? If one were to rely on this portrait there would indeed be no need to wonder why Rather had so many enemies, or why he was exiled so often. From his first autobiographical book to his last, Rather tended to represent himself as someone who deviated from social norms and showed a blatant disregard for social conventions, nicety, courtliness and the manners of the world. Yet unflattering self-descriptions are a hallmark of his writings. Through a series of perplexing and ambiguous self-portraits, Rather revealed and obscured himself and manipulated the image of himself to such an extent that, in his own words, "a proper evaluation of him can scarcely be attempted."¹⁴ Acknowledging his self-portraits to be an intricate game of hide-and-seek, however, does not necessarily imply that we should therefore take Rather's quest for self-knowledge any less serious.

A GENIUS OF REFLECTION

Rather's ruthless way of analysing himself earned him the honorary title 'genius of reflection' by Albert Hauck, Georg Misch and Erich Auerbach. Auerbach considered it no less than a miracle that someone in the tenth century had been able to reach such a high level of self-awareness, while Misch called Rather "aufklärerisch" in his talent for self-reflection. Hauck in turn praised Rather's "scharfgeschnittene Individualität",

Nikolaus Staubach, *Historia oder Satira? Zur literarischen Stellung der Antapodosis Liutprands von Cremona*, in: *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 24/25 (1989–1990) 461–487.

¹² Reid, *Complete works* 427.

¹³ *Qualitatis Coniectura cuiusdam* 5, ed. Reid 46, 120f.: *Dissimilis omnibus honorem curantibus eius est vita. Vestibus non comitur; calceamentis turpatur. ... Quid tali igitur, inquit, episcopatus? Imperatori non servit, duci nequaquam, in exercitum numquam, ad cortem rarissime et, si forte, non sponte. ... Cum primoribus nihil actitat regni, hospitia illorum non adit, colloquia parvipendet; ad suum eorum nullum invitat. ... Pedem si vult aliquis osculari illius, cum magno eum repellit clamore. Solus, si liceret, tota die sederet, libros versaret vel reversaret. ... Interdum loquacissimus, interdum est quasi mutus; risu dissolutus, subindeque tristissimus, rixarique actutum paratus. ... Omnibus ambiguus, indeque nulli concinnus. ... ex quo perspicue instabilitas valet conici eius.* Reid, *Complete works* 430, 431. I have condensed the fragment, as the omissions in the quotation above indicate. The full portrait goes on for many pages and can be read in *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* 2–13, ed. Reid 46, 118–128.

¹⁴ Rather, *Phrenesis* 4, ed. Reid 46a, 201: *Utram vero in partem ita, ut dixi, erat ambiguus, vix cogitari iuste estimationis eius ut valeat status.* "He was, as I have said, so inconsistent in his actions that a proper evaluation of him can scarcely be attempted." Reid, *Complete works* 247. See also *Phrenesis* 3, ed. Reid 46a, 200: *Fefellerit sane plurimos ne eius improvide considerata loquacitas, morum ipsius uti et qualitas.* "Many may be deceived by a careless consideration of his loquacity, as they have been in judging his character (or: the quality of his manners)."

declaring him “ein literarischer Charakterkopf, der seinesgleichen in diesem Jahrhundert nicht hat.”¹⁵ The fact that Rather pictured his unsympathetic character traits so relentlessly is taken to be a sign of high-developed self-awareness. When reading Rather’s self-portraits, one is indeed struck by the apparent sincerity and frankness with which he confronted the more unpleasant facets of his character. It should, however, be noted that Rather’s frank self-descriptions are not without irony. Rather was a satirist who liked to mock and criticize people, above all himself, in order to expose the corrupt morals of his time and the worldliness of his fellow bishops. His confessional, self-critical mode of writing was modelled on the tradition of the Roman satirists to uncover the faults of society, as I demonstrate in my current study on Rather and the rhetoric of free speech.¹⁶ As mentioned before, Rather’s favourite authors were Horace, Persius and Juvenal, whose satirical works gained popularity during the tenth century. They showed him how to use self-examination and self-criticism as a tool for denouncing the vices of society. Often (though not always) his self-portraits criticized his contemporaries, notably his friends and colleagues, the bishops of Italy and Lotharingia. He called himself a ‘second Lucilius’, after the Roman satirist of the second century BC, who was notorious for his biting criticism.¹⁷ Like Lucilius, Rather combined scathing social critique with equally relentless self-analysis, while making his lack of self-knowledge the object of satire. In what seems to be a deliberate ironic gesture, Rather once called himself Chremes, after the old busybody in Terentius’ play *The Self-tormentor*, who considered it his moral duty to confront his neighbour with the truth, but did not even know the truth about his own life.¹⁸ According to Claudio Leonardi, it was this frustration over the problem of attaining the truth that led Rather to write “the first true autobiographical representation in the high middle ages.”¹⁹

The roles Rather took on in his writings were usually those of social outcasts – a criminal, a prisoner, an exile, a madman, or a grumpy old bishop who failed to adapt to the social norms of his peers. These authorial stances, however, did not necessarily correspond to the reality of Rather’s daily conduct as a bishop. Contemporary authors, who knew Rather personally, did not picture him as a disagreeable man at all.²⁰ Instead, they commented on his learning, wisdom and moral integrity. Indeed it is striking that the only sources to criticize Rather’s behaviour postdate Rather and are written by people who knew only his writings, not the man himself. They copy Rather’s self-descriptions verbatim, without paying heed to their irony.²¹ The only later author to

¹⁵ Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* 3 (Leipzig 1896) 294 and at 288: “Ein Genie der Reflexion”; Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* 2, 1: *Das Mittelalter. Die Frühzeit* (Frankfurt am Main 1955) 553; Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1993) 150.

¹⁶ See my forthcoming dissertation: *Licence to speak. The rhetoric of free speech from Ambrose to Rather. Criticizing others through self-criticism, in particular by making a confession, was a well-established rhetorical strategy, see Quintilian, Institutio oratoria* 11, 1 (ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, *The Orator’s Education*, The Loeb Classical Library 494, Cambridge-Mass./London 2001) 50.

¹⁷ Rather, *Phrenesis* 2, ed. Reid 46a, 200: *Nulli vero, nisi quem probitas defenderit, videatur parcere, quamvis nemini sepe minus, alter ut Lucilius, sibi quam ipse*. “He spares none but those defended by their own integrity, though like a second Lucilius he is often least sparing to himself.” Reid, *Complete works* 246. Lucilius is known for having included elements of autobiography in his writings, of which only few fragments have survived. George Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace. A Study in the Classical Theory of Imitation* (Hildesheim 1966).

¹⁸ Rather, *Letter to bishop Hubert of Parma* 16, ed. Weigle 71–106, at 80: *Ista dum alter ut Chremes tumido iratissimus ore delitigo*. Reid, *Complete works* 359: “While thus railing furiously with a swelling mouth like a second Chremes”. The characterization of Chremes as an irascible person who inveighs against injustice “with a swelling mouth” is taken from Horace, *Ars poetica* 94 (ed. Eric H. Warmington and trans. Herbert Rushton Fairclough, *The Loeb Classical Library* 194, Cambridge-Mass./London 1970) 450–489, at 458.

¹⁹ Claudio Leonardi, *Intellectual Life*, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History* 3, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge 1999) 186–211, at 208.

²⁰ Liutprand of Cremona (Rather’s colleague bishop and fellow exile at the court of Otto I in the 950’s), Ruotger of Cologne, Folcuin of Lobbes (Rather’s godson) and Eracle of Liège (a student of Rather), commented in a positive way on Rather’s work and his character. For references to the parts in their work where they mention Rather, see the appendix to Reid, *Complete works* 539–547. On Eracle’s admiration for his former teacher, see Hubert Silvestre, *Comment on rédigeait une lettre au X^e siècle. L’épître d’Éracle de Liège à Rathier de Vérone*, in: *Le Moyen Âge. Revue d’Histoire et de Philologie* 58 (1952) 1–30.

²¹ A case in point is Aegidius Aurevallensis’ *Chronicle of Liège*, written in the twelfth century, in which the following description of Rather can be found: “When he attacked the ways of men too biting in both his words and writings and deferred to either high nor low, he was driven from our see.” *Hic dum in mores hominum tam scriptis quam verbis mordaciter nimis inveheretur et nec potenti nec humili penitus deferret ... a sede propellitur*. Aegidius Aurevallensis, *Gesta episcoporum Leodiensium* 45 (ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS* 25, Hannover 1880) 14–119, at 53. Compare this passage in Aegidius’ chronicle to the wording of Rather’s self-

recognize the satirical character of Rather's writings was Anselm, a canon of Liège, who wrote the chronicle of Liège in the mid-eleventh century. He described Rather's writings as being "composed with sharp wit" and added the remark that "even today he prickles the conscience of the listener with his acerbity."²²

Rather's self-portraits contain several clues to indicate that they should be considered fictional creations. He even advised his readers not to believe everything he said about himself. For instance in the opening chapter of *Conjecture about Someone's Character* he forewarned his readers:

"I shall myself provide material for my critics for what they are bent on doing, and shall combine true with false and moot with certain, collecting here all the idle slanders that I can, enough to satisfy you all; forestalling and anticipating what you do say or what you can say about me, and in what sense, I shall attempt to offer an unprecedented explanation of myself. Let him who wishes, then, read on and say something worse about me if he can."²³

Rather explicitly says here that he will combine "true with false and moot with certain" (*falsa veris, opinabilia certis*). Elsewhere he refers to his confessions as a "perjury" or as "inventions" or even as outright lies.²⁴ This avowed element of fiction gives his self-reflections an uneasy twist, at least to a modern reader. We expect autobiography, especially if it is presented as a confession, to reflect the author's experiences more or less truthfully, at least from the perspective of a particular moment. Although in modern literary criticism, autobiographical truth is considered to be a flexible notion that should not be reduced to a simple opposition between fact and fiction, we do expect autobiography to be an authentic reflection of an author's (inner) experiences.²⁵ The attitude towards sincerity and fiction in earlier times, however, may have been different from our own.²⁶ Even Augustine's *Confessions*, generally regarded a hallmark of genuine, authentic introspection, attests to imaginative literary construction by its use of *fictio personae*.²⁷

The question I shall address in this article concerns the relation between fiction and self-knowledge. Does the fact that Rather's self-portraits, upon close inspection turn out to be (partly) fictional diminish in any way their introspective quality? Can we still read his 'autobiographies' as documents of self-reflection, or should Rather be disqualified as the genius of reflection, that Albert Hauck and others took him to be? I should like to suggest that Rather had recourse to fiction, not because he was an insincere intriguer who liked to manipulate

description in *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* 2, ed. Reid 46, 118, and in *Phrenesis* 2, ed. Reid 46a, 200, where the same metaphor of 'biting' to denote the act of criticizing his fellow men in both words and writings can be found. On Rather's refusal to hold his tongue and defer to authority, see: *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* 9, ed. Reid 46, 123, and *Phrenesis* 18, ed. Reid 46a, 213. Aegidius took his description of Rather from the earlier chronicle of Liège (ca. 1040) written by a canon of Liège, Anselm, who had clearly read Rather's *Phrenesis* (see note below) and did recognize its satirical character.

²² Anselm of Liège, *Gesta episcoporum Leodiensium* (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 7, *Chronica et gesta aevi Salici*, Stuttgart 1846) 189–234, at 201: *Cuius Ratherii nonnulla apud nos multa sale condita habentur opuscula; quo hodieque auditorum conscientias acerbe solet confricare.*

²³ Rather, *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* 1, ed. Reid 46, 117: *Cavillatoribus igitur materiem ad id, instant cui agendo, ipse uti ministrem, falsa veris, opinabilia certis, atque coniungam, rumusculos hic congerens pro valentia vestros, quo vos utique exaciem cunctos; quae dicatis quaeve de me, quali quoque sensu, dicere valeatis, per quamdam preveniens anticipationem, huiusmodi, similem cui ante me, credo, de se nullus fecit, de me promere tento ipse relatum. Legat ergo qui volet et de me proferat peius quiddam, si valet.*; Reid, *Complete works* 428.

²⁴ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 4, ed. Reid 46a, 222 (*periurium*); *ibid.* 33, ed. Reid 46a, 249 (*inventiones*); *ibid.* 38, ed. Reid 46a, 259, where Rather, in reference to the confession he has just made, calls himself a "lying compiler" (*compiler mendacissimus*). For more references to the fictional character of Rather's work, see further on in this article.

²⁵ Thomas Couser, *Authenticity*, in: *Encyclopaedia of Life Writing. Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. Margaret Jolly (Chicago 2002), as discussed by Marijke Huisman, *Het leven en de letteren. Nut en nadeel van het autobiografisch genre, 1850–1918*, in: *De Negentiende Eeuw. Documentatieblad Werkgroep Negentiende Eeuw* 31 (2007) 3, 144–168, at 150.

²⁶ Augustine for instance, in his *Quaestiones evangeliorum*, refers to fiction as a means to convey truth, a *figura veritatis*, see the reference in note 93. In Roman judicial oratory, the use of fiction (*fictio*) was an accepted rhetorical means to argue one's point, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5, 10, 95, ed. Russell 415. For a discussion of the *modus fictivus*, see Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study*. (Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 488.

²⁷ Although it would go too far to call Augustine's *Confessions* a work of self-fiction, the text does contain fictional elements. Augustine made use of *prosopopoeia*, also known as *fictio personae*, when giving speech to Continentia, the personification of (his struggle with) continence. On the use of *fictio personae* see Lausberg, *Literary Rhetoric* 370. On the less than straightforward character of Augustine's *Confessions*, see also the insightful article of Burcht Pranger, *The unfathomability of sincerity. On the seriousness of Augustine's Confessions*, in: *Actas do Congresso International As Confissões de Santo Agostinho 1600 Anos Depois: Presença e Atualidade* (Lisboa, Universidade Católica Editora 2002) 193–242.

his audience, but because for him fiction opened up possibilities of reaching a certain truth about himself that he could otherwise not attain, let alone communicate to others.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONTRACT

Rather's work would not be the only autobiography to make use of fiction. In the past, there have been quite a few cases of controversy over autobiographies that turned out to be fictional. In 1912 for instance, commotion broke out among critics following the publication of the "Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man". The book, initially published under a pseudonym, told the story of black man with a light skin, who decided to turn his back on his black past and pass as a white man in order to avoid racial discrimination. Critics interpreted the fictional self-portrait as a genuine portrait of the author and were taken aback when they found out that the author of the book was James Weldon Johnson, a well-known black activist. The literary self-portrait presented in the "Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man" did not correspond with the views and opinions of the author, who was proud of his black identity. Johnson, however, had assumed that the irony of the title of his book would be evident and that readers would realize this was not an ordinary autobiography.

Another case of controversy was the publication in 1984 of the autobiography of Chuck Barris, host of "The Dating Game" and "The Gong Show," television game shows that were popular in the 60s and 70s. Barris, nicknamed the "baron of bad taste" was often criticized for the – 'immoral' – shallowness of the shows he hosted. In his autobiography, called "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind. An Unauthorized Autobiography," Barris claimed that his work for television had merely been a cover up; in reality he had been a hitman for the CIA. Critics took Barris' secret life as a contracted CIA assassin as a figment of his imagination and pressured him to confess that his autobiography was fictional. Up to this day, Barris neither denies nor admits that the adventurous past he devised for himself – a past that was of a far more dubious moral nature than the game shows for which he was criticized – was a work of fiction. Speculations and discussions over the truthfulness and ambiguous character of his autobiography continue to this day.²⁸ In the opinion of one recent critic: "There are a lot of ways to tell the truth, and Chuck Barris has avoided most of them."²⁹

These cases of controversy show that we expect autobiography to be – at least in essence – truthful and sincere.³⁰ The writer of autobiography enjoys the prerogative to be taken at his word, provided that he does not break the 'autobiographical contract'. In the eyes of the agitated critics in the controversies described above, this was precisely what the authors had done, even though they had given their readers a fair warning through the ironic titles of their books that their work should not be taken at face value. In narrative theory, the term 'autobiographical contract' refers to an understanding between writer and reader that the author tells the truth about his life and that the person of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist are identical.³¹ To this notion Linda Anderson added the critical note that the 'identity' between author, narrator and protagonist can never really be established except as a matter of intention on the part of the author.³² In 1977 the literary critic and writer Serge Dubrovsky coined the term 'autofiction', by which he meant a special kind of autobiographical narrative that uses the devices of fiction and metafiction while still respecting the autobiographical contract.³³ According to Dubrovsky, himself the author of the autofictional novel "Fils," autofiction is bound by a double author-reader contract: while the autobiographical contract demands that the author tells the truth about

²⁸ In 2002 a new impulse was given to discussions when George Clooney directed a film version of Barris' autobiography, based on a script by Charlie Kaufman. George Clooney/Andrew Lazar, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002).

²⁹ Joel Stein, *Chuck Barris: Lying to tell the truth*, in: *Time* 7 January 2003. Stein draws the conclusion in this article that sometimes "the most truthful way to cover moral confusion is with a lie". The 'moral confusion' Stein mentions refers to Barris' puzzlement over being "crucified by critics for entertaining people and getting medals for killing them."

³⁰ See for instance the opinion of Gerard Genette in his *Fiction and Diction*, where he declares autobiography that makes use of fiction to be false and dishonest: Gerard Genette, *Fiction et Diction* (Paris 1991) 86–87. On the confidence of the reader in the sincerity of the autobiographical author describing the inner workings of his mind and soul, see Pranger, *The unfathomability of sincerity* 194.

³¹ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (Collection Poétique, Paris 1975) 31. For the contractual condition that the author should tell the truth about his life, see *ibid.* 36.

³² Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (The New Critical Idiom, London/New York 2001) 2.

³³ A well-known modern example of autofiction is Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (Paris 1975).

his life, the fictional contract permits him to be ‘inventive’.³⁴ Some critics have observed that the authors of autofictional narratives are often members of social minorities. They suggest that “it is precisely this paradoxical genre that allows for the creative reconfiguration of minority identities.”³⁵

A TROUBLED SENSE OF SELF

Rather’s writings defy classification. In the words of his most recent editor, Peter Reid, his work cannot be examined “according to any of the canons of criticism by which we usually evaluate classical or medieval works”.³⁶ As Rather’s writings do not conform to our modern notion of autobiography, he is usually not mentioned in historical overviews of the autobiographical genre.³⁷ The definition of autobiography, current in literary studies today, is the one devised by Philippe Lejeune in 1982, who defined autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality.”³⁸ Naturally, Rather himself was not concerned with modern assumptions about true autobiography. He did not call his writings autobiographies, as he wrote long before the term autobiography was coined. Instead, he referred to his work as *chronographia*, a highly unusual term by which he meant a form of contemporary history writing combined with social criticism and self-critique. By writing about himself, he criticized the morals of his time and the corrupt ways of his contemporaries “who lived just like him”.³⁹ This combination of self-criticism and criticism may seem to be an unusual phenomenon for the period in which Rather was writing, a literary anomaly created by a ‘lone genius’ who was, or at least claimed to be, insensitive to social norms and literary conventions. Although Rather’s use of the term *chronographia* to designate his own work is indeed unusual, the combination of autobiography and criticism, or to be more precise: the strategy to offer criticism from a personal authorial stance was not that exceptional within early medieval literature.⁴⁰ Many of the other ‘ego troubled’ authors discussed in this volume – Alcuin, Agobard, Paschasius, Thietmar, Bruno – wrote about themselves in texts that were meant to convey criticism.⁴¹ Apparently, implying one’s self in a critical discourse was considered to be a good way to offer criticism to others.

If Rather’s negative self-portraits were indeed meant as an indirect criticism of the faults of others, as his eighteenth century editors, Pietro and Girolamo Ballerini, surmised, how serious, then, were his self-reflections?⁴² Michel Banniard, in an article on confession literature of the early and high Middle Ages, de-

³⁴ Frank Zipfel, Autofiction, in: Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, ed. David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (London 2005) 36–37; Marie Darrieussecq, L’autofiction, un genre pas sérieux, in: Poétique 27 (1996) 367–380.

³⁵ Zipfel, Autofiction 37.

³⁶ Reid, Complete works 267.

³⁷ A notable exception is Misch, Geschichte der Autobiographie, chapter 4: Bischof Rathers autobiographische Schriften 519–650.

³⁸ Philippe Lejeune, The autobiographical contract, in: French Literary Theory Today, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge 1982) 192–222, at 193, quoted in Anderson, Autobiography 2.

³⁹ Rather, Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam 2, ed. Reid 46, 118: *Quae dicit, scribit legendaque posteris, presentibus ut derogent, linquere gestit. Chronographiam (grecissando vanus, cum nec sit saltem Latinus) huiusmodi sui temporis vocat scripturam, quae utique contemporaliū sibi contineat vitam; se primum, se mediastino, se rodens ipsum postremo, inde omnes suo pte more viventes.* “What he says, he writes and tries to leave it to posterity to read, so that it might put his contemporaries in a poor light. He calls this writing the *Chronography* of his time (using a Greek word in his vanity, though he is not even Latin) containing as it does the life of his contemporaries. Beginning, middle and end, he gnaws first at himself, then at those who live after his fashion.” Reid, Complete works 428.

⁴⁰ Although Rather’s use of the term *chronographia* is rare, the term itself is not. Its derivative *chronographus* is sometimes used in early medieval texts to indicate a person who reckons time or writes a chronicle. The only other Latin text that uses the term *chronographus* in a sense close to Rather’s definition is the eleventh century Life of Gerard of Brogne. Here, the term *chronographus* is used in reference to Liutprand as the author of the *Antapodosis*. Vita Gerardi Broniensis (ed. Lothar von Heinemann, MGH SS 15, 2, Hannover 1888) 655–673, at 665.

⁴¹ See the contributions of Stuart Airlie, Mayke de Jong, Ian Wood and Hans-Werner Goetz in this volume, and notably the article of Mary Garrison, who explores the relation between the personal authorial stance and admonition in the letters of Alcuin of York.

⁴² Pietro Ballerini/Girolamo Ballerini, Ratherii episcopi Veronensis opera nunc primum collecta (Verona 1765), repr. in PL 136, 142, discussed by Reid, Complete works 266. Since the Ballerini brothers read Rather’s writings as works of criticism, they concluded that his confessions could not be true or genuine.

clared Rather's self-revelations to be false for precisely this reason: he was not serious.⁴³ Banniard suspected that Rather actually felt far superior to the flawed self he pictured in his writings. His self-incriminating confessions, were intended to provoke his readers into confessing their own sins and to make them feel mediocre compared to his own intellectual and moral eminence.⁴⁴ To many scholars the genuine character of Rather's autobiographies is furthermore in doubt, because they find something essential is lacking in his self-reflections. Georg Misch, for one, found fault with Rather's sense of self. He was of the opinion that Rather's self-expressions did not arise from a homogeneous, integrated identity.⁴⁵ Rather's self, according to Misch, was "ungeschlossen", divided and fragmented (a judgment that poststructuralists nowadays would rather consider a pro than a con to qualify for the epithet 'true' autobiography). One could wonder, however, whether Rather's fragmented self-presentation was pure fiction, or whether he really experienced his identity as divided.⁴⁶ To find an answer to this question, I shall take a closer look at Rather's strategies of self-revelation in connection to the internal conflict that forms the leitmotiv of his autobiographical writings, namely the conflict between his episcopal and his monastic identity. To explore the significance of this tension in Rather's writing, I first need to relate a few details about his background.

BISHOP OF VERONA, BUT MONK OF LOBBES

Rather had been raised as an oblate in the monastery of Lobbes in Lower-Lotharingia. He left the monastery at the age of 37 to pursue an ecclesiastical career in Italy. Rather often referred in his writings to this crucial moment in his life, the moment he decided to leave the monastery and broke his monastic vows in order to become a bishop. Though it was perfectly acceptable for a monk to leave a monastery with the permission of his abbot, Rather considered breaking his vow of *stabilitas loci* as a major sin, and would come to regard it as the deeper cause behind the misfortunes he would encounter as a bishop, which would turn him into a wandering gyrovague. Rather's autobiographical writings could be called 'exilic', as they were nearly all written during a period of exile, a circumstance Rather never failed to stress. Only his last book, *Conjecture about Someone's Character* was not written during exile. Rather composed it during his third tenure as bishop of Verona, about two years before the court case that would mark the definitive end of his episcopal career in 968. The literary form that he chose for his last autobiography resembles that of a judicial trial, which could be an indication that in 966 Rather already expected to be submitted to a trial. Rather's last book is therefore not 'exilic' in the sense that it was written during an actual period of exile, but it was composed in the expectation of impending exile.

Although exile was not a rare phenomenon in tenth-century politics, Rather may well have been the most often expelled bishop of his days. He was banished from his bishopric four times, but if we also count the times he was chased away from a monastery, the sum of his exiles would amount to six. Throughout his troubled career Rather, who continued to refer to himself as "bishop of Verona but monk of Lobbes" (*Ratherius episcopus Veronensis sed monachus Lobiensis*) kept in touch with his home monastery and often returned to Lobbes at times of crisis. Rather used the self-designation "bishop of Verona but monk of Lobbes" as an authorial signature to sign his autobiographical writings. For instance *The Meditations of a Man in Exile*, the book he wrote while imprisoned in Pavia, was called in full: *The Meditations in Exile of a Man Called Rather, Bishop of the Church of Verona but a Monk of Lobbes (Meditationes cordis in exilio cuiusdam Ratherii Veronensis quidem ecclesiae episcopi sed Lobiensis monachi)*.⁴⁷ In his letters and autobiographical writings, Rather regularly ex-

⁴³ Michel Banniard, *Vrais aveux et fausses confessions du IX^e au XI^e siècle: vers une écriture autobiographique?*, in: *L' Aveu. Antiquité et Moyen-Âge*, ed. L'École française de Rome (Rome 1986) 215–241, at 224–231.

⁴⁴ Banniard, *Vrais aveux* 230.

⁴⁵ Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* 648–650.

⁴⁶ For a thought-provoking exploration of a 'divided self' in two medieval writers of autobiography, Otloh of St. Emmeram and Peter Abelard, see Willemien Otten, *The bible and the self in medieval autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142)*, in: *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune/John McCarthy (New York 1997) 130–157.

⁴⁷ The full title is even longer: *Meditationes cordis in exilio cuiusdam Ratherii Veronensis quidem ecclesiae episcopi sed Lobiensis monachi, quas in sex digestas libellis volumen censuit appellari praeoquiorum, eo quod eiusdem quoddam praeoquantur opusculum, quod vocatur agonisticum*. Most likely Rather himself gave his work this title, see Valenciennes, *Bibl. mun.* 843, a manuscript dating to the late tenth century, which records this title. François Dolbeau, *Ratheriana II. Enquête sur les sources des Praeloquia*, in: *Sacris erudiri. Jaarboek voor Godsdienstwetenschappen* 28 (1985) 511–556, at 552. The chronicle of Lobbes, written by Rather's

pressed the wish to return to his monastery for good, if he were only allowed to abandon his episcopal see. In the epitaph that he wrote for himself towards the end of his life, he expressed the wish to be buried in Lobbes after his death. In this epitaph he called himself: “Rather, bishop of Verona, but thrice an exile. Once a monk, and finally, Lobbes, yours again.”⁴⁸

The self-designation “Rather, bishop of Verona but monk of Lobbes”, with which Rather signed most of his autobiographical works, indicates a union to two different communities, the congregation of Verona and the monastic community of Lobbes. The one community representing his present, the other his past, and – and if God would only allow it – his future. The conjunction *sed* however (*episcopus sed monachus*) also invokes a dramatic tension between two states of being: bishop and monk. This tension formed a dominant theme in Rather’s writings, in which he reflected on the possibility of remaining a monk, while carrying out his office as bishop, or whether he should decide to give up his high position and return home. The problem that seems to have vexed Rather more than anything was not, as one would expect, the many misfortunes he suffered as bishop of Verona and Liège, but rather the inner difficulties he experienced in reconciling two states of being, bishop and monk. The passages in which he expressed his longing to go home, belong to the most dramatic and poetically phrased parts of his work. But one may wonder how much of this ‘poor monk wishing to return home’ theme was a literary topos, and how much of it was the sincere expression of a deeply felt wish? It was part of a long-standing literary tradition to express a friction between the active and the contemplative life, and a longing to return to the ‘peace and quiet’ of the contemplative life of the monastery as for instance eloquently expressed in the writings of Gregory the Great.

In his autobiographical writings, Rather constantly harked back to and explored the tension between the monastic and the episcopal life, as his self-designation *Rather, episcopus sed monachus* adumbrates. As mentioned before, there has been a good deal of discussion about whether or not his writings can be called autobiographies. Technically speaking ‘auto-testimonies’ would be more precise. Rather does not so much narrate his life, so much as give an account of his character and of the inner conflicts that troubled him. The literary setting in which he does this reminds one of judicial proceedings, as we have seen in *Conjecture about Someone’s Character*, the book in which he put his own character on trail.⁴⁹ He tried to look at himself from different angles, from within and without, contrasting other possible perspectives of him with his own tentative views of himself. He deployed a mixture of true and false facts about himself in a dialectical quest for self-knowledge. Rather’s way of attaining self-knowledge was essentially a *textual* process. He did not have a well-rounded view of himself in advance, which he subsequently put down in writing, but his self-awareness was given shape through a process of reading and writing. As he stated at the end of his book *The Ravings of a Madman (Phrenesis)*, written after he had been expelled from the bishopric of Liège in 955, the experience of suffering misfortune and exile inspired him to write. Misery drove him to “take refuge in books, libraries and the ideas of the ancients” (*ad libros, ad armaria, ad priscorum confugerit iudicia*). Whereas others in similar circumstances would have had recourse to arms and to powerful friends in order to defend themselves and have

godson Folcuin around 980, mentions that a copy of the ‘Meditations’ is kept in the monastery’s library and that it was Rather who gave the book this title: *editit librum quem appellavit Agonisticum, cui et talem praeposuit titulum: Meditationes cordis in exilio cuiusdam Ratherii Veronensis quidem ecclesiae episcopi sed Lobiensis monachi* etc. Folcuin, *Gesta abbatum Lobiensium* (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 4, Hannover 1841) 52–74, at 63f. There is some discussion over whether this long title refers to one work or is a conflation of two different texts of Rather, one called *Praeloquia* and the other, a lost work, *Agonisticum*, see Dolbeau, *Ratheriana* II, 552, Nr. 33.

⁴⁸ Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 843, tenth century, fol. 127r (ed. Karl Strecker, MGH *Poetae latini medii aevi* 5, 1, Leipzig 1937) 557: *Veronae presul, sed ter Ratherius exul. Ante cucullatus, Lobbia postque tuus*. Rather mentions in his epitaph that he was exiled thrice, which could be an indication that he wrote the verses when he was still bishop of Verona, before he was forced to leave his bishopric for the fourth time in 968. However, the last time he had to leave Verona, he was technically speaking not exiled. Rather left the see of Verona of his own free will to return to Lobbes, when his situation in Verona had become untenable after his trial in 968.

⁴⁹ Rather, *Qualitatis conjectura cuiusdam*, ed. Reid 46, 117–132; Laon, Bibl. mun. 274, fol. 70v–82, tenth century. Reid translates *coniectura* as ‘examination’, but another translation is: ‘an opinion founded on a comparison of facts’ (conjecture) or ‘element of rhetorical representation founded on conjecture.’ Charlton T. Lewis/Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford 1879, repr. 1996) 422. The term *coniectura* figures in judicial speech, notably in the speeches of Cicero. The title of Rather’s last autobiography *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* can therefore be taken as a reference to the terminology of judicial speech, which corresponds to the literary form he chose for the work, namely a trial of his own character. Rather’s choice for the term *coniectura* furthermore indicates that the description he gave of his character was a conjecture and not a plain statement of facts.

their honour restored to them, he says, he had taken comfort in the wisdom of classical and patristic authors.⁵⁰ Maybe, he continued, this was *phrenesis*, madness, but if so, it was a *phrenesis litteratoriae*, a literary madness, which had led to a “surer practice and a surer recognition of myself” (*exercitatio interim meique ipsius recognitio certior*).⁵¹ The fact that this statement follows directly on the passage quoted above, shows that to Rather reading the ancients was connected to the process of gaining a better knowledge of himself. Rather’s use of the word *recognitio* is in that respect interesting, since *recognoscere* can both mean ‘to read’ as ‘to examine oneself’.⁵² Rather also speaks of a “practice” within himself (*exercitatio interim mei ipsius*), a phrase that is reminiscent of *askesis* in a classical philosophical sense, rather than of Christian asceticism.⁵³ Moral *askesis* in Greco-Roman philosophy was concerned with establishing a specific relation to oneself – “a relationship of self-possession and self-sovereignty”.⁵⁴ I do not want to suggest that Rather was acquainted with the exercises of antique *askesis* (although he may have been, considering his vast knowledge of classical literature), but it is clear that he was no ascetic in a Christian sense, who strove for self-renunciation. His aim was not to renounce his self, but to discover the truth about himself.⁵⁵

Rather’s choice of the term *recognitio* to indicate self-examination or self-knowledge is exceptional. In the Middle Ages the term *recognitio* was used for establishing the authenticity of a charter, to denote an inquest by jury, or to refer to the Day of Judgement (*dies recognitionis*), but not to describe the practice of self-examination.⁵⁶ Seneca, however, did use the term *recognitio* for self-examination in his treatise *On Anger*.⁵⁷ In this moral-philosophical discourse on control of anger, Seneca borrowed words and images from judiciary practice to describe a type of self-examination that is close to the Christian confessional. Seneca recommended to examine one’s conscience daily and to summon oneself to a court in which one is both the judge and the accused.⁵⁸ “Anger will cease and become more controllable if it finds that it must appear before a judge every day. How delightful the sleep that follows this self-examination (*recognitio sui*) ... when the secret examiner and critic of self has given report of its own character! I avail myself of this privilege and every day I plead my

⁵⁰ Rather, *Phrenesis* 2, ed. Reid 46a, 200: *Amplexus ille cum convicio reaccensum, sopitus qui iam fuerat, scribendi aliqua rursus ardorem, presentem, quem cunctis proponeret, condere contra eos maturavit libellum, cuius summam appellat, eorum iuxta sententiam, Phrenesim, seque ipsum Phreneticum, qui inusitato utique tunc temporis more non ad nummos tali in discrimine, non ad arma, ut quidam, non ad copiam amicorum, sed ad libros, ad armaria, ad priscorum confugerit iudicia*. Ibid. 22, ed. Reid 46a, 217: *Id est Phrenesis litteratoriae, vitio, nummis quam libris utique nitens, armis quam armariis, copia amicorum quam iudicio priscorum*.

⁵¹ *Phrenesis* 22, ed. Reid 46a, 217: *Nascebatur enimvero mihi et exercitatio interim meique ipsius recognitio certior*. “For in the meantime there arose within me both practice and a surer recognition of myself.” Reid, *Complete works* 262.

⁵² Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs chrétiens* (Brepols 1954, repr. 1967) 700: *recognoscere*: lire, relire, apprendre en lisant; Lewis/Short, *Latin Dictionary* 1534: *recognitio sui*: self-examination

⁵³ For the translation of *exercitatio* as ‘practice’, I follow the translation of Reid, *Complete works* 262. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français* 327, 328, mentions ‘practice’ as a possible translation, but also points to meditation, reflection (on sins) and to ἀσκησις. On the difference between Christian asceticism and *askesis* in Greco-Roman philosophy, see Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (ed. Joseph Pearson, Semiotexte, Los Angeles 2001) 142–145: Techniques of examination.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Fearless Speech* 144.

⁵⁵ Cf. Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* 553, who draws a comparison between Rather’s quest for self-knowledge and the Greek philosophical view of the self and the world: “bei ihm mag eine Spur von der antiken, weltoffenen Denkweise zu finden sein, die bei der Verbindung der griechische Philosophie mit dem Christentum anfänglich vorherrschte.”

⁵⁶ Jan F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden/Boston 1976, repr. 2005) 888, recognition of superior ownership, inquest by jury, to recognize the authenticity of a charter (*ipsam cartam veram et legitimam recognovit*); Charles du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* 7 (Graz 1954, repr. of the 1887 edition) 49: *recognitio*: *extremum iudicium, dies recognitionis*.

⁵⁷ Seneca, *De ira* 3, 36, 1 (ed. T.E. Page/transl. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library 241, Cambridge-Mass./London 1928, repr. 1958) 340f. This passage in Seneca’s *De ira* is the only instance to which Lewis/Short, *Latin Dictionary* refers for *recognitio* in the sense of self-examination. See, however, also Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae* 1, 24 (ed. Augustus Engelbrecht, *Claudianus Mamerti Opera*, CSEL 11, Wien 1885, repr. New York/London 1966) 18–179, at 84; *Anagnorisis/recognitio* in Aristotelian tragedy refers to a sudden transition from ignorance to knowledge, when the tragic hero discovers some truth about his identity; see also Pseudo-Clemens, *Anagnorismoi/Recognitiones*, a third century Greek text ascribed to Pope Clemens I that was translated by Rufinus, PG 1, 1201–1474. Rather may have been familiar with Rufinus’ translation of Pseudo-Clemens’ *Recognitiones*, as the text is mentioned in Lobbes’ library catalogue of 1049.

⁵⁸ Seneca, *De ira* 3, 36, 1, ed. Page 340f., discussed by Foucault, *Fearless Speech* 148; Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982* (ed. Frédéric Gros and transl. Graham Burchell, New York/Basingstoke 2005) 481, 482.

cause before the bar of self.”⁵⁹ Benny Reece has established that Rather was familiar with the work of Seneca and was generally well-read in classical literature.⁶⁰ During periods of exile Rather wandered across Europe and visited many libraries, where he had access to classical texts that were not always available to other scholars of his age. Although it is not evident from the passage I quoted above, which “ancients” (pagan or Christian) Rather precisely turned to at a moment of crisis, it is nonetheless clear that, in his thought, there is a link between reading and gaining self-knowledge, as his choice for the word *recognitio*, with its double meaning of reading and self-examination, already indicates.⁶¹

The other part of the textual process of attaining self-knowledge, or to put it in Rather’s terms, of self-recognition was through writing. To illustrate this process, I want to take a closer look at the book Rather wrote shortly after he had finished *The Ravings of a Madman*, during the period of exile that followed his deposition from the episcopal see of Liège, namely, the book titled *Confessions of a Criminal*.

THE CONFESSIONS OF A CRIMINAL

Rather wrote his *Confessions* around 960, while he was staying in Aulne, a dependency of Lobbes. Archbishop Bruno of Cologne, whom Rather had sharply criticized in *The Ravings of a Madman*, had given him the abbacy of Aulne as a recompense for the loss of the bishopric of Liège. Rather profusely thanked Bruno for his generosity in a letter and declared that he “had been transformed into a new man and by renewal of mind and spirit had been changed into a better condition.”⁶² The *Confessions of a Criminal* show how this transformation had come about. The text is one of the rare instances when Rather wrote in the first person singular. Elsewhere, as in *Conjecture about Someone’s Character*, he described himself as if through the eyes of his enemies. In the *Confessions of a Criminal* he used a seemingly less distanced approach to write about himself. This does not imply that he gave a more straightforward account of himself. On the contrary, the relation between truth and fiction is here, if possible, even more complicated than elsewhere. Later, he would refer to this text as follows:

“Whoever wants to know him, let him read through the whole of his book of Confession. For if he really is as he says here, no one in the world is worse. But if he is making things up in claiming that he is so, then he is proven to be a thorough liar.”⁶³

This is a paradox that offers no escape, either to the reader or to Rather himself.⁶⁴ Whichever way one chooses to read his book of Confession, as a true confession, as a fiction or as a literary construction, its au-

⁵⁹ Seneca, *De ira* 3, 36, 1, ed. Page 340–341: *Desinet ira et moderatior erit, quae sciet sibi cotidie ad iudicem esse veniendum. ... Qualis ille somnus post recognitionem sui sequitur ... cum speculator sui censorque secretus cognovit de moribus suis! Utor hac potestate et cotidie apud me causam dico.*

⁶⁰ Apart from borrowing quotations from Seneca’s writings, Rather mentioned Seneca’s name five times in his work (although in two instances he was actually referring to a work of Martin of Braga, commonly ascribed to Seneca in the middle Ages). Benny R. Reece, *Classical quotations in the works of Ratherius*, in: *Classical Folia. Studies in the Christian Perpetuation of the Classics* 22 (1968) 2, 198–213, at 200. It is, however, not very likely (although not impossible) that Rather ever read Seneca’s *De ira*, as no author is known to have read or used the text between the sixth and late eleventh century, see Leighton D. Reynolds, *The younger Seneca, Dialogues*, in: *Texts and Transmissions. A Survey of Latin Classics*, ed. Leighton D. Reynolds (Oxford 1983) 366–369, at 367.

⁶¹ On the interdependence of reading and writing and developing a personal ethics, see Alcuin, *Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus* 44 (ed. Carl Halm, *Rhetores latini minores*, Leipzig 1863) 525–550, at 548, discussed in Irene van Renswoude, ‘The word once sent forth can never come back’: Trust in writing and the dangers of publication, in: Petra Schulte/Marco Mostert/Irene van Renswoude, *Strategies of Writing. Studies on Text and Trust in the Middle Ages (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 12, Turnhout 2008)* 379–399, at 287–393.

⁶² Rather, Letter to archbishop Bruno of Cologne 12, ed. Weigle 66: *in virum alterum transformatum et renovatione mentis et spiritus in melioris status efficaciam commutatum*; Reid, *Complete works* 263. Rather’s original letter to Bruno is lost. The quotation is taken from an extract of Rather’s letter, transmitted by an anonymous *Life of Bruno*. According to Weigle the extract shows “unverkennbar Rathersche Wendungen”, wherefore he included it in his edition of Rather’s letters.

⁶³ Rather, *Qualitatis coniectura cuiusdam* 8, ed. Reid 46, 122: *Qui vult eum cognoscere, studeat librum Confessionis illius totum perlegere. Nam si talis, ut illic recitat, est, peior illo nemo in seculo est; si vero mentitur se talem esse, mendacissimus convincitur fore.* Reid, *Complete works* 433.

⁶⁴ I thank Patrick Geary for pointing out to me that Rather’s conundrum resembles the Cretan paradox.

thor will be a lost cause anyway. Rather's conundrum resembles the 'liar paradox', also known as the 'Cretan paradox', in reference to the famous saying of the philosopher-poet Epidevedus, who, himself a Cretan, had said: "All Cretans are liars." The cleverness of Rather's paradox lies in the fact that it involves the reader's suspended disbelief in the truthfulness of his confessions. The title of Rather's confession runs in full: "Excerpt from a confessional dialogue of a certain criminal, strange to say, Rather, bishop of Verona but monk of Lobbes."⁶⁵ The title, which carries Rather's specific double-identity signature, already indicates that there is something odd about this so-called dialogue: it is a dialogue of just one person. Its structure is reminiscent of Augustine's Soliloquia, except that where the Soliloquia consists of two voices, one of which is unmistakably the author's voice and the other a voice either inside or outside himself, Rather's Confessional Dialogue is a cacophony of many different voices that all belong to the author.

Although it is doubtful, as mentioned before, whether Rather ever read Augustine's Confessiones, he was certainly familiar with Augustine's Soliloquia.⁶⁶ When, in 936, he was sent to prison after his betrayal of King Hugh, he brought a codex along with him that contained Augustine's Soliloquia. The manuscript with Rather's handwriting in the margins is still extant and is now kept in the Trier Stadtbibliothek.⁶⁷ Next to Augustine's prayer at the beginning of the Soliloquia, Rather wrote his own confession of faith in the margin, making Augustine's words his own, while stressing his unworthiness to address God.⁶⁸ Rather admired Augustine more than any other Christian author and often pointed to similarities between Augustine's writings and his own.⁶⁹ He also noted, however, the disparity between their personalities. Rather felt that his own "fickle character" (*levitas animi*) could not compare to Augustine's patience and constancy – qualities of mind that gave Augustine the right to speak freely to God and confess his faith in a way that he, Rather, could not.⁷⁰ When he was writing the Confessions of a Criminal, Augustine's Soliloquia may have served as a model of contrast: a distorting mirror in which he saw a deformed reflection of himself.⁷¹

In Rather's Confessional dialogue, two characters stand out: the criminal, who is an incorrigible sinner, and the confessor. Sometimes this confessor is envisioned as an elder monk, sometimes as a priest, at other times he is the reader, but most of the time he is the voice of Rather's conscience. We also encounter other voices, such as that of the jester (*cavillator*), the inner critic of Rather's actions and thoughts, a figure that appears in almost every one of his works.⁷² A narrator introduces the speeches of the characters with "I say" alternating with "you say". The fact, however, that the introductions are written in the present tense gives an impression of immediacy, as if the dialogue takes place this very moment without the intervention of a narrator reproducing the conversation in retrospect. Rather often blurs the boundaries between the voices of 'I' and 'you'. Usually the criminal is 'I' and the confessor is 'you', but when the characters switch roles, the confessor becomes 'I' and the criminal 'you'. This shows that there is no simple equation between Rather the author, the narrating 'I' and the criminal. Other interlocutors in the dialogue can assume the role of the narrating 'I'

⁶⁵ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis*, ed. Reid 46a, 221: *Excerptum ex dialogo confessionali, cuiusdam sceleratissimi, mirum dictu, Ratherii Veronensis quidem episcopi sed Lobiensis monachi*; cf. Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 843, tenth century, fol. 128. In the library catalogue of Lobbes, however, the work is simply referred to as *Eiusdem confessionum*. Dolbeau, *Un nouveau catalogue* 25.

⁶⁶ The library catalogue of Lobbes of 1049, which likely contained manuscripts that originally belonged to Rather's personal collection, does not include a copy of Augustine's Confessions. A copy of the Soliloquia, however, was part of the collection. Dolbeau, *Un nouveau catalogue* 20; id., *Ratheriana I*, 546, Nr. 19. I thank François Dolbeau for sharing his views with me on the relation between the library catalogue of Lobbes and Rather's personal manuscript collection.

⁶⁷ Trier, Stadtbibliothek 149/1195 8, ninth century. Rather's marginal notes are edited by François Dolbeau in *Ratheriana III*. The other patristic texts contained in this codex all have bearing on the status of the soul.

⁶⁸ Rather's adaptation of Augustine's prayer in the margin of the manuscript of the Soliloquia is edited by Dolbeau, *Ratheriana III*, 178, 179. Dolbeau noted that Rather changed Augustine's indicative mood into a subjunctive mood (*te solum amem, te solum sequar, te solum queram*) to underline his own humility and feeling of unworthiness to declare his faith in God. Cf. Augustine, *Soliloquia I* (ed. Gerard Watson, *Saint Augustine, Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul*, Warminster 1990) 28: *Iam te solum amo, te solum sequor, te solum quaero*.

⁶⁹ For instance Rather, *Meditationes cordis* 1, 31, ed. Reid 46a, 32: *Lege librum Augustini Soliloquiorum, et ibi evidens, huic tamen nostro non dissonans, inveniens super isto consilium*; Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 33, ed. Reid 46a, 250.

⁷⁰ Rather, *Meditationes cordis* 3, 31, ed. Reid 46a, 103; Van Renswoude, *The word once sent forth* 395. See also Rather's marginal notes to Augustine's writings in Trier, Stadtbibliothek 149/1195 8, fol. 73v, ed. Dolbeau *Ratheriana III*, 207: *O insuperabilis in sancto viro patientia*.

⁷¹ I thank Christina Pössel, who made this suggestion to me during the Ego trouble workshop in Vienna.

⁷² Reid, *Complete works* 267.

as well and resume speech after the introduction ‘I say’. This switching of roles creates a tension within the text that undermines the integrity of the ‘I’. Peter Reid, the most recent editor of the Confession of a Criminal called the dialogue “an oddity in literature” and was grateful that none of Rather’s contemporaries had ever tried to imitate his new style of writing. He considered the work to be as “inconstant and fickle as Rather’s own temperament”.⁷³

A PERJURED CONFESSION

“I am willing to accord with your desire and to tell about myself such awful and unheard-of acts and inventions – but only if you are willing to consider their madness – as to render you burdened with my sins, even if you have none of your own, so that in this Lent you may have something to weep for, since you are almost always remote from such sins. Do not think that this perjury which you have forced upon me is not a sin of your own.”⁷⁴

These words are from the opening chapter of the Confession of a Criminal. Here, Rather directly addresses the reader and makes him the accomplice of the “perjury” he is about to commit by accusing him of forcing to confess. Rather gave his dialogue the contours of a confession and, in conformity with the conventions of this sacrament, placed it in the period of Lent. Lent is a period of turning inwardly, of confessing one’s sins in preparation of a worthy celebration of the Eucharist, in answer to the command of Paul in the letter to Corinthians: “A man must test himself before eating his share of the bread and drinking from the cup.” (1 Cor 11, 28). Rather further stressed the liturgical character of his ‘Confessional dialogue’ by attaching the treatise of Radbert of Corbie, also known as Paschasius Radbertus on the Eucharist (*De corpore et sanguine Domini*) to his dialogue, followed by an exhortation and a set of prayers, taken partly from Rather’s hand and partly from older sacramentaries.⁷⁵ He perceived this collection of texts as a whole, and even devised new chapter headings for Paschasius Radbert’s treatise in order to link it up smoothly with his own text.⁷⁶ This interweaving of his own confession with Radbert’s treatise caused some confusion in later centuries, when this tract on the Eucharist was ascribed to the non-existing author ‘Paschasius RATHERIUS’.⁷⁷

The text of the Confession of a Criminal is interrupted in several places by the phrase *Item post quaedam*, “again after a while”, after which the dialogue is taken up again. This has been interpreted as a sign that the text as we have it is a collection of fragments excerpted from an original Confessional dialogue, which is no longer extant. This conjecture seems to be corroborated by the first word of the title of the text: Excerpt from a Confessional Dialogue of a Certain Criminal called Rather (*Excerptum ex dialogo confessionali cuiusdam sceleratissimi RATHERII*) which suggests that we are dealing with an extract.⁷⁸ The fragmented presentation of

⁷³ Reid, Complete works 267, and Rather, Liber apologeticus 30, ed. Weigle 169–178, at 170: *Cavillatori non modo actuum atque sermonum, sed et intentionum suarum.*

⁷⁴ Rather, Dialogus confessionalis 1, ed. Reid 46a, 221: *Volo te hoc desiderio satiare et talia, tanta, tam inaudita gestuum et inventionum (si tamen considerasse tibi datum fuisset ipsorum insaniam) de me ipso referre, ut oneratissimum te meis, etiamsi nulla propria tibi essent, reddam sceleribus, ut habeas utique in ista Quadragesima quod plangas, dum es pene omni tempore a talibus otiosus. Sed ne ipsum, quod impulisti, periurium non esse estimes tuum;* Reid, Complete works 271.

⁷⁵ Dolbeau, RATHERIANA I, 417–420 has identified different parts of the prayers.

⁷⁶ Rather encountered the manuscript of Paschasius Radbert’s treatise on the Eucharist when he visited the monastery of Bobbio, after he was exiled from Verona for the second time in 948. In the margin of the ninth-century manuscript (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5767) Rather made notes and divided Paschasius’ treatise in 99 chapters. He subsequently made a copy of the text, which he brought back with him to Lobbes. Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini* (ed. Paulus Beda, CC CM 16, Turnhout 1969) XXIf. François Dolbeau wonders whether it was Rather who divided Paschasius’ treatise into 99 chapters, or whether someone else had already done so when Rather came across the manuscript in Bobbio around 948. He suggests that a new study of the notes in Vaticanus latinus 5767 should be undertaken, to see whether it is really Rather’s handwriting. Dolbeau, RATHERIANA I, 396–397.

⁷⁷ Paris, BN lat. 12300, fol. 240 ‘Paschasius RATHERII’, see also Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 498, fol. 69v: ‘Relatio RATHERII’, and Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 5051, fol. 52: ‘Relatio RATHERII’; Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpore et sanguine Domini*, ed. Beda XXII and XXIV.

⁷⁸ This title was apparently given to the Confessional dialogue in the one manuscript that is known to have contained Rather’s *Dialogus confessionalis*, Lobbes III, possibly an autograph of Rather. The manuscript was lost in the burning of the monastery of Lobbes in 1793. Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 843, fol. 127v is a damaged fragment of the Confessional dialogue, without a title. The library catalogue of Lobbes (1049) merely refers to the text as *Eiusdem confessionum lib I, cum quo Paschasii Ra[t]berti de corpore et sanguine Domini*. Dolbeau, Un nouveau catalogue 25.

the text could, however, also be a deliberate literary construction, meant to suggest that a conversation had taken place in reality, of which only fragments were recorded in writing.⁷⁹ The recurring phrase *item post quaedam* could be seen as a theatrical marker, separating the different scenes from one another, like in a play. Georg Misch already noted that the narrative structure of the Confession of a Criminal resembled that of a comedy; an observation that, considering Rather's familiarity with the comic playwright Terence, is not at all unlikely.⁸⁰

The Confessional dialogue of a criminal called Rather starts off with a certain sinner, one Rather, confessing to a long catalogue of very serious sins, like murder, adultery, fraud and admitting character faults like quarrelsomeness, hot temper and mockery of others. This initial confession is but the first in a series that the criminal is about to make. As François Dolbeau has shown, words and phrases in this first confession have been lifted directly from an existing manual for penance.⁸¹ Yet, before the criminal starts to confess his "awful and unheard-of acts", the narrator has already indicated that the confession is going to be a perjury, casting doubt in advance on the seriousness of the undertaking. The interlocutors of the criminal seem to be aware of this and at several points in the dialogue they urge the criminal to stop playing games, and to start being sincere and truthful for a change. Each time the criminal makes a new confession, his interlocutors confront him with the pointlessness of the act. As long as he is not ready to return – either to God, the monastic way of life, or to self-recognition (three types of return that in Rather's thinking are intricately connected) – there is no point in confessing. If he cannot bring himself to be sincere and to face what is keeping him from a true conversion, he might as well give up. Eventually the criminal called Rather realizes his hopeless situation:

"If I were sentenced to two hundred and sixty years of penance, who would give them to me? What would I do, since I am already a septuagenarian?"

The confessor would say, I know (if he was of any worth):

'You cannot do this as the time is too short; hand yourself wholly over to God and abandon the world; lo, all is forgiven because you have committed everything to God who is merciful.'

'But I am a monk, both in habit (only barely) and in law, but a runaway from the rule to which I made my vows. Even if I did fulfil so many years of penance, even if all were to be dismissed, there would still remain this one fact that I irrevocably ran away from my rule. Don't you think that for this alone I will be damned?'

'Yes. For this alone.'

'I can atone for all those other sins with all these years, but I cannot atone for this single one.'

Again, after a space:

By these steps of the mind, I arrived at the point where it seemed to me that unless God granted that I end my life as a monk as I had promised, it had been pointless to have abstained from this and all other sins."⁸²

At first glance, this sounds like a sincere confession. The impression of sincerity is enhanced by the fact that Rather has resorted to a simpler style, which after the baroque force of his habitual complex style seems almost like silence. Yet, his interlocutor does not think that Rather is sincere at all. He confronts him with the suspicion that he does not *really* want to return to the monastery. Because if he really wanted to do so, then why did he not just do it? Instead he is just "weaving delays".⁸³ He thinks that Rather is not ready to give up his ambition and accuses him of being too proud to live the simple life of a monk. Rather admits that this is true and that he first needs to undergo an inner conversion, before he is ready for his actual return. The confessor, however,

⁷⁹ Cf. Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* 603.

⁸⁰ Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* 599 and 603.

⁸¹ Dolbeau, *Ratheriana I*, 410, referring to the *Confessio Penitentis* (ed. Michel Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut moyen âge 5*, Louvain 1961) 112–114.

⁸² Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 21, ed. Reid 46a, 236f.: "*ducenti sexaginta quinque anni si mihi indicerentur, a quo donarentur? Septuagenarius iam quid eram acturus?*" *Dicturus, scio, erat patronus, si tamen pretii alicuius: "Non potes ista facere, quia deest spatium; trade te Deo totum, et relinque seculum; ecce omnia dimissa, quia pio Deo commissa."* "*Monachus sum et vix habitu et lege, sed refuga legis promissae. Fac tot annos in penitentia expleam, dimittantur omnia, restet hoc unum, quod legem utique meam inconvertibiliter refugi; nonne tibi videtur pro hoc solo me dampnabilem fore?*" "*Hoc igitur solo.*" "*Omnia illa illis omnibus, hoc solum non possum sanare.*" *Item post quaedam: Quibus igitur quasi passibus mentis illo perveni, ut et eo et ceteris omnibus visum mihi fuerit inaniter abstinuisse, si monachum me, ut promisi, non fuisset a Deo datum, finiri.*

⁸³ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 28, ed. Reid 46a, 245: "*Quid ergo, quid moras*", *inquis, "innectis?"*, "'Why, then', you say, 'do you weave delays?'"', quoting from Statius, *Thebaid* 5.743.

does not accept this. He is not at all content with the way the confession is proceeding so far, because he senses that Rather is not being honest with him. He says:

“You seem to me to shift about too much, and like the neck of Ennius’ peacock to change your colours as you move. Now you seem to tell me everything candidly, now hypocritically and in making your miserable confession you hide certain things. To whom and for what reason do you confess if you are anxious to conceal it?”

And a little further on:

“[... You think that] it can perhaps benefit your readers, when they recognize in themselves things which they think you have sincerely confessed about yourself [... but] you can be sure that they realize you have done all this out of ostentation and love of applause and out of your mental instability, as I have pointed out, and habitual love of your own inventions.”⁸⁴

What Rather is missing, according to the confessor, is “the voice crying within.”⁸⁵ He lacks the inner capacity to feel true remorse and to shed tears over his own trespasses and those of others, as the prophet Jeremiah had done. He confesses his sins only with his mouth and does not feel remorse in his heart: “From your own writings and words I surmise that you do not feel with a sincere heart what you pretend to feel.”⁸⁶ What hinders him, according to the Confessor, is his love of language. Rather admits this is true. As soon as he tries to express regret, he gets carried away by the well-phrased beauty of his own words. Language has come to stand between confession and remorse, between expression and the feeling his words are supposed to express.

In the end, the confessional dialogue remains without a catharsis, because Rather is unable to make a heart-felt confession and to weep over his sins. Thus the confessor cannot offer him the solace of penitence. The only solace available is the treatise of Radbertus of Corbie on the Body and Blood of Christ, which is added to the text of the dialogue. If, says the confessor, Rather cannot reach conversion through the language of confession, perhaps he can reach it through reading about the sacrament.⁸⁷ In the Eucharist one celebrates the feast of the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” and this can perhaps lead to change – to a *transitus* from one state of being into another.⁸⁸ Rather feels that this is indeed the kind of transformation that he seeks: he needs to taste the bitter herbs of remorse and to eat the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”, that is: bread that is not puffed up by the leaven of pride in one’s own eloquence. A year later Rather would elaborate on this notion in his Easter address to the clergy of Verona, shortly after he had been reinstated as bishop of Verona. “If you wish to celebrate a proper Pasch” he told his community, “celebrate it with unleavened bread. If you ask what is unleavened, I reply ‘the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’. For the worst leaven is the hypocrisy of pretence, the most poisonous leaven is deliberate falsehood.”⁸⁹ Rather’s return to his former see showed what the Confession of a Criminal had already uncovered: in spite of his often expressed longing to

⁸⁴ “Ennius peacock” refers to Persius, Satires 6, 11. Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 33, ed. Reid 46a, 249: “*Tergiversari*” ais, “*nimum videris mihi, et colli instar volucris Ennianae colorem cum motu mutare. Nunc enim nimum rigorem, nunc in te maximam admiror mollitiem; nunc quasi fervorem, modo teporem; nunc constantiam, nunc studeo dissolutionem; nunc sincere ... nunc simulate mihi ... cuncta videris referre, et modo miserabili quaedam confitendo quoque celare ... Quare, inquis, et cui confiteris, si affectas celari.*” Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 37, ed. Reid 46a, 255: *prodesse valeat forsitan lecturis, dum in se quoque talia recognoverint, qualia te de te ipso confessum bono animo fuisse putarint, possis veraciter scire, quia ostentatione potius et plausuum affectatione et ingenita tibi, ut iam sepius monstratum est, quadam mentis, ut dixi, inquietudine et inventionum tuarum peculiarissimo amore te deprehendant talia congressisse.*”; Reid, Complete works 298 and 304.

⁸⁵ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 37, ed. Reid 46a, 256: *interius clamitans suasor*. Literally this means “the counsellor crying within.”

⁸⁶ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 36, ed. Reid 46a, 253: *Tui ipsius enim scripto atque verbis conicio, quod pretendis, non te meditari corde satis sincero.*

⁸⁷ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 30, ed. Reid 46a, 247; *ibid.* 42, ed. Reid 46a, 265. Rather cannot yet partake in the Eucharist, as he has not yet made a heart-felt confession and wept over his sins, but he can *read* about the sacrament.

⁸⁸ Rather, *Dialogus confessionalis* 29, ed. Reid 46a, 246. This time Rather does not use the word *conversio*, *transformatio* or *renovatio*, but *transitus*, “crossing-over”, a word that is linked to the resurrection and Passover. See also Rather’s Exhortatio, following Paschasius treatise, *ibid.* ed. Reid 46a, 269; Cf. Rather, *Synodica* (Verona 966) 25, ed. Weigle 124–137, at 126.

⁸⁹ Rather, *Sermon I on the Pasch* (Verona, Easter 963) 3, ed. Reid 46, 41: *Si desideratis Pascha legitimum celebrare, in azimis celebrate. Quae sunt vero, si requiritis, azimae, sinceritas, respondeo et veritas. Fermentum enim pessimum est simulationis duplicitas, fermentum noxium est falsitatis voluntas.* Reid, Complete works 340.

return to the monastery of Lobbes, he could not refuse the offer to become once more bishop of Verona when the opportunity presented itself.⁹⁰

The fact that the confessional dialogue remains without resolution shows, in a sense, the failure of Rather's attempt to gain self-knowledge through reading and writing. Yet it was also *through* the process of writing the Confessions of a Criminal and engaging in dialogue with the different voices of his thoughts, that it became clear to him that the sin that stood in his way of returning to God – a return that was simultaneously a true *recognitio* of himself – was not, as he thought at first, the breaking of his monastic vows and his reluctance to return to the monastery, but his love of language. Thus by the end of the dialogue Rather had come to see the eloquence for which he was renowned as a *tumor* – something inflated and bombastic that stood in the way of unleashing the 'voice crying within'.⁹¹ Among all the many voices of the dialogue, this was a voice Rather realized he lacked. The Confessions of a Criminal Called Rather was the book which he would later say showed what kind of man he really was. Either that, or it showed what a thorough liar he was. Rather does not solve the riddle, but leaves it to his readers to crack the irresolvable paradox. He saw himself as a bishop *and* a monk, and felt the need to stress this double identity when signing his autobiographical writings. Perhaps this was the tension that gave rise to his extensive autobiographical output, which was unique for its form and content in its time. A conflicting sense of belonging may have induced him to explore the possibilities of self-fiction in a quest for a better knowledge of himself. However, when reading the Confessions of a Criminal one gets the impression that the problem that troubled Rather as an *author* was of a different nature. Rather was wrestling with a language that he loved but that would not, in the end, reflect so much as obstruct the discovery of 'who he really was'. After twenty-five years of struggling to overcome the blindness of introspection, which he first encountered when he was imprisoned in Pavia, he discovered that the main obstacle that prevented him from reaching true self-knowledge was what he loved most: language. To reach that kind of conclusion about oneself, whether it is fiction or non-fiction, makes an author a 'genius of reflection' indeed. Rather's 'perjured confession' gives us no reason to doubt his sincerity. To paraphrase the words of one of Chuck Barris' critics: sometimes the best way to tell the truth is by lying.⁹²

⁹⁰ Although it must be said that Rather did turn down the opportunity to be reinstated as bishop of Liège in 960. This happened around the time that he was staying in the abbey of Aulne and wrote the Confessions of a Criminal. He sent a letter to archbishop Bruno, who had convened a synod to have Rather reinstated as bishop of Liège. In the letter, he informed Bruno that he no longer wished to be bishop, but rather wanted to stay in the monastery of Aulne. Rather, Letter to archbishop Bruno of Cologne 14, ed. Weigle 69f.

⁹¹ Dialogus confessionalis 33, ed. Reid 46a, 251: *Mane, inquam, mane videbis, quis sim, spondeo, clarius, nec tamen reprimetur tumor ob id semel, promitto, conceptus*. "Soon, I say, soon, you will see more clearly who I am, but the tumour of pride in one's eloquence, once grown will not be suppressed." Reid, Complete works 299. For another example of the image of *tumor* (swelling or fermentation) to indicate the bombast of inflated rhetoric, see Augustine's manual of Christian rhetoric, *De doctrina christiana* 4, 6 (ed. and transl. Sister Thérèse Sullivan, Washington 1930) 64, and Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12, 10, 73, ed. Russell 320.

⁹² Joel Stein, Chuck Barris: Lying to tell the truth, in: *Time* 7 January 2003. For a comparable attitude towards fiction as a conveyer of truth, see Augustine, *Questiones evangeliorum* 2, 51 (ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CC SL 44b, Turnhout 1980) 116: *Non enim omne quod fingimus mendacium est. ... Cum fictio nostra refertur ad aliquam significationem, non est mendacium, sed aliqua figura veritatis*. ("For not everything we make up is a lie. When our fiction refers to something that has significance, it is not a lie but another figure of truth.") However, in his two works on lying (*De mendacio* and *Contra Mendacium*) Augustine states that while fiction can indeed be used to convey the truth, he denounces the practice. I thank Courtney Booker for calling my attention to this.