

Introduction

Philippa Kelly, Lloyd Davis, and Ronald Bedford

There is no description so hard, nor so profitable, as is the description of a man's own life. Yet must a man handsomely trimme-up, yea and dispose and range himselfe, to appeare on the Theatre of this World. Now I continually tricke up my selfe; for I uncessantly describe my selfe.

(Montaigne, "Of Exercise or Practice," *Montaigne's Essays*, trans. John Florio, 3 vols. London: Dent, 1965, vol. 2, 49–61 p. 59.)

*W*hat are the moments that successfully “describe my selfe”? Are they the stylized moments of self-revelation—those in which, as Montaigne puts it, one “trimmes” oneself with an eye to public appearance—or the myriad of modest repetitive actions that fall outside the realm of careful disposition? This question goes to the heart of current debate about literature and autobiography. It addresses the contentious issues of what is meant by early modern English autobiography; what is meant, essentially and socially, by the notion of “selfhood,”¹ how autobiography was written, and whose writings can be deemed appropriately self-representational. Many scholars are now skeptical of finding the key to expressions of selfhood in the list of hugely worked-over plays and occasional writings that have been marked as literary treasures, but this skepticism should be tempered by an acknowledgment of the highly structured society in which carefully “trimmed-up” writings were taken as the template for many more harried, and perhaps necessarily less contemplative, people—people who did not have the luxury of time and means afforded to scholars such as Montaigne—to use as guides for living their lives.

The collection *Early Modern Autobiography* does not set up an exclusive focus on the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Beginning as early as the fifteenth century, it brings together researchers from a number of disciplines—literary studies, women’s

studies, history, and politics—in order to examine the practice of autobiographical writing and self-representation. In drawing this historical arc, the volume rejects a critical tradition that insists on the sixteenth century as a discrete thrust forward in self-understanding; it develops new readings of significant autobiographical works while also suggesting the importance of many texts and contexts that have rarely been analyzed in detail. These moves enable us to explore developments across a range of life-writing genres, reflecting on, and challenging, many prevailing notions about what it means to write autobiographically and about the development of self-representation. The collection recognizes the continuities and changes between modes of autobiographical authorship, as well as acknowledging the relationships among different autobiographical forms and genres.

Throughout its three sections, the collection is premised on the belief that early modern writing displays a constant interplay between two poles: the grand ideals of selfhood (immortality, stability, presence), and the everyday terrain of passing observations, travels, daily records, household expenditures, pleasures, and the like. Moreover, the incessant pressure of spiritual beliefs on secular life means that access to “real” selves is granted not through one pole (the spiritual) or the other (the secular and everyday) but rather through a complex personal, spiritual, and social interweaving of these perspectives. To take what now seems a somewhat amusing example, excess consumption of plums may merit the recording of both physical and moral intemperance, as the clergyman Samuel Ward suggests in his diary entry for 18 June 1596.

also think how intemperate thow was in eating so many plums before supper, and think how thow mightest have prevented ytt if thow hadst gone out of the orchard when thow mett Mr. Newhouse, and learn to avoid even the occasions of sin . . . (Ward and Rogers 113)

More than a gastronomic oversight, a stomachache can signal the weakness of the flesh and the sin of greed. Ward’s scruples remind us that approaching autobiographical writing from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries means understanding “selfhood” as a fascinating composite, shifting between the spiritual and the mundane, the stage script and the scrap of paper, the pressure of “immortal longings” and the secular concerns of everyday endurance. *Early Modern Autobiography* aims to convey the density of such experiences, describing the

autobiographical “I” as a nexus of spiritual and secular understandings that inflected the most ordinary activities and experiences.

This complex melding of self-experience speaks also to the canonical heritage of works from the late medieval and early modern periods—including, for example, Chaucer, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Browne, and Milton. These writers’ finely crafted puns, wordplay, and philosophical speculations might at first glance appear commensurate with a division between the elegant robes of display (rhetorical and philosophical) and the unvarnished realities of everyday life. Such a distinction between surface and truth is more in keeping, however, with the cultural formations of modernity than with those of the late medieval and early modern periods. The “real” self was not displaced by the intricate formulations of language to be found in poems, plays and narratives: far from it. These kinds of rhetorical “show”—such as Shakespeare telling the time, “When I do count the clock that tells the time / And see the brave day sunk in hideous night” (Sonnet 12), or a John Ford character invited to look in a mirror, “If you would see a beauty more exact / Than art can counterfeit or nature frame, / Look in your glass, and there behold your own” (Ford 1.2.205–7)—served to bring identity into perspective. They functioned as ornate, accepted forms of personal and social speculation in a society that rarely encouraged such suppositions within commonplace daily circumstances. And in more workaday writings—running diaries, household records and the like—moments of self-speculation often emerge seemingly out of nowhere, indicating not so much an idiosyncratic moment of perception as a deeply ingrained awareness of the individual as a part of a greater schema: “This weeke the Lord was good to mee and mine,” observes Ralph Josselin, as is his habit when in receipt of good fortune, “in our peace, plenty, continuance of our health, and in restoring us to it in some measures, in food, raiment, in all outward mercyes, in inward peace, in preservacon from grosse sins . . .” (24). Such observations betray an instinctive acknowledgment of what Basil Willey once called the “simultaneously available” worlds between which people could move quite naturally (42). Philip Henry affords another example when Roger Puleston, who was under his charge at Oxford, “assaulted me in wrath, whereby my unruly passions being stir’d I strook againe and hurt his face, against the command of our Lord Jesus, which requires the turning of the other cheek” (18). The biblical precept represents the cheek as an overarching spiritual emblem, so that, while the diary note records a bad-tempered incident, it also

strives to make penance before God. What such structuring does—whether the unreflective diary entry against day and month and year or the organization of a life in relation to, perhaps in subservience to, a larger moral “plot”—is to confirm and acquiesce in a sense of the fundamental importance of spiritual order and structure and the ordinariness, the un-uniqueness, of every individual. Everyone marks time to the clock and calendar; everyone processes, with varying degrees of success or dignity, toward death and divine judgment, and everyone is constantly reminded that, while temporal sensations pass and eternity is what remains, the most ordinary temporal experiences can affect one’s standing in the eyes of a constantly vigilant Maker.

It is necessary, therefore, that we read these texts in ways that are cognizant of their times, understanding that formality of style does not necessarily mean impersonality, and, moreover, that impersonality does not mean lack of personhood. We need also to read in terms of the huge differences in communication modes and practices between then and now. News and information were conveyed at a very different tempo, which affected the reception and representation of life-changing events. A striking example is afforded by Elias Ashmole, who makes the retrospective diary notation: “*Dec. 5.* My dear wife fell suddenly sicke about evening, and died. . . .” The next entry, on 14 December, marks Ashmole’s journey toward Cheshire, where he lived with his wife. An entry for 16 December remarks, “Arriving at Lichfield, I first heard of my wife’s death” (Ashmole 18). In his comments on the event, Ashmole soberly praises his wife’s goodness and humility, also finding an opportunity to mention his own virtues. Given the number of deaths constantly befalling families and acquaintances (indeed, throughout the course of his diary Ashmole enthusiastically monitors each minute detail of his own health and treatments), a spouse’s demise, no matter how unfortunate, is never beyond one’s expectation. The sense of detachment that pervades his diary note is granted not only by this condition but also by the fact that he finds out about her death a full eleven days after its occurrence. Given that time lag, how should he record the immediacy of an event that is over before he can experience it? In assessing Ashmole’s diary as “self-writing,” then, judgments cannot be usefully applied without an understanding of the contextual boundaries of a historical life.

In any age, autobiographical writing is generally triggered by an event, or an experience, that provokes self-reflection, and the events and experiences are as diverse as the circumstances in which each writer lives. Thomas Whythorne is moved to self-scrutiny by his

birthday: “considering with myself that I was now above thirty years of age and growing toward the age of forty, at the which years begins the first part of the old man’s age, I took occasion to write thereof this sonnet following . . .” The ensuing sonnet follows a conventional “ages of man” format.

The force of youth is well nigh past,
 Where heat and strength of late took place,
 And now is coming in all haste
 The cold, weak age for to deface
 The show of youth . . .

(115)

As he approaches his sixth climacteric, or seven-year span in the nine that were understood to be a person’s expected allowance, the reflection of time’s scythe appears to have prompted Whythorne to speculate about himself and his place in the world, in which his overwhelming consciousness is of an ever-advancing, never-returning “progress” through successive individual moments of decay and loss. It is a familiar topos from the period, but, as many of the essays included here show, a wide range of situations and events could prompt people to explore their lives and identities in writing. Isabella Whitney is provoked to write poems about London as a relief from her immersion within the overdetermined roles of maidservant and prospective wife, allowing her tentatively to adopt the typically masculine position of social critic. Thomas Hoccleve’s autobiographical *Complaint* is inspired by a moment of extreme cultural dislocation: finding himself dislodged from his public office and persona through a mental breakdown, Hoccleve discovers that these roles no longer exist: “Forseten I was, al oute of mynde, a wey, / As he that deed was from hertis cherte.” Christopher Love, the author of over fifty tracts against Cromwell, tries to beat back the sense of a newly conferred identity as he awaits death in prison. Proclaiming himself innocent, he aims to restore his reputation by repeatedly asking the “Reader to take notice” of his detailed description of his trial. Conversion narratives, like William Langland’s, mark a point if not of epiphany then certainly of turning or departure for the self: it is time, in Langland’s view, to “bigynne a tyme / That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne.” Other autobiographical texts, like Anne Clifford’s, stage and record complicated legal battles for claiming rightful inheritance and thereafter the management of property and estate.

While these triggers to self-representation were as varied as the

circumstances in which people found themselves, our collection finds striking points of confluence in the social and hierarchical structures within which they were understood and expressed. In all of the instances of life writing we provide, individual experiences are defined by a strong sense of social expectation and obligation. Such definition is rarely (as it is today) in the service of revealing one's own, or another's, psychology or of setting out to explore one's unique individuality; indeed, the texts in question are often underwritten by a patchwork of formalized spiritual and secular commonplaces that remark on the *un*-uniqueness of the individual's sensation or experience. But in appreciating what such social understandings *mean* to the subject who observes them and who feels, however obliquely, their coalescing or competing pressures, we can glean some comprehension of the "auto"—its limits and the sensibilities with which it is loaded—in the early modern sense of *autobiography*. And such broader considerations thus frame all of the following questions. Who is this person? What motivates her or him to set pen to paper? Who constitutes the intended readership? What can this document tell us about how the subject conceived of, and expressed, a sense of personhood?

Lloyd Davis begins the book's opening section with a discussion of contemporary debates about the kinds of critical perspectives that have been applied to the study of autobiography as a genre—for example, Schlegel's skepticism, Sturrock's insistence on the autobiographer's will to unify the narrative subject, Eakin's plea for pluralism in the description of autobiography as a composite of many stories. Such debates involve, among other things, questions of canonicity and genre, as well as a recognition of the impact of ways of reading on the understanding of autobiographical texts. In this way, many of the issues in the study of autobiography enable us to question critical and cultural values, expectations, and constraints.

The majority of chapters in our collection focus on specific texts and authors. When read in concert, however, the essays integrate analysis of various texts with critical reflection on relevant cultural and historical contexts and on the theory and practice of life writing and its effects and purposes. This comprehensive approach enables us to address issues concerning the nature and function(s) of autobiographical writing that are raised in the specific details of each text. In "Specifying the Subject in Early Modern Autobiography," the second essay in part 1, Conal Condren instances writers such as Montaigne, Hobbes, and Locke to describe the highly social nature of early modern self-construction, as well as its impact on autobiographical cate-

gories and codes. Condren suggests that in the very act of analyzing autobiography, contemporary scholars are tempted to insinuate modern sensibilities into the figurative play that marks early modern texts. In these terms, autobiographical theory might more usefully represent the imposition of perceptual categories than any of the writers' intentions or dispositions.

Perceptual categories are also the subject of Ronald Bedford's essay, "On Being a Person: Elizabethan Acting and the Art of Self-Representation." Bedford asks the question: if early modern audiences saw actors onstage as offering recognizable versions of themselves—however exaggerated—what might such recognition tell us about early modern notions of identity and selfhood? Ideas about, and vocabulary to describe, personhood and its relationship to acting or other forms of representation in the early modern period were largely derived from various theories of *mimesis*, from God's multiple personhood, from debates about Christ's real or symbolic presence in the Eucharist, and from the concept of *theatrum mundi*. Like his counterparts in the theater of life, the actor received a part that was his to imitate or "play." Despite elaborate debates about the nature and functions of this display, the actor's job is generally understood by modern theater critics as that of impersonating the character "to the life," and Bedford discusses the implications of this formulation for our understanding of theatrical records and their relationship to self-representation. For example, whose sense of "to the life" is meant here—our post-Stanislavsky, postmodern sense or one that is immanent to early modern culture?

In "Dialogues of Self-Reflection: Early Modern Mirrors," Philippa Kelly continues this investigation into modes and theories of display. In the early modern period, the complex realm of individuality was importantly linked to images of reflection that were developed from a burgeoning industry in glass mirror making. Kelly suggests that, while it is tempting to regard the mirror as a Burkhartian emblem of premodern self-consciousness, this view does not exhaust all aspects of the debate about who or what the self was. Social self-production was certainly served by the mirror; yet the issues of what such self-production involved, and what it aimed for, remain contentious. Kelly explores mirrors and their social meanings and, more specifically, the capacity of mirrors in language to help shape certain concepts and practices of self-representation.

Part 2 of the collection, "Life Genres," applies the critical issues raised in the preceding section to a wide range of late medieval and

early modern life writing. It begins with “Thomas Hoccleve’s Selves Apart,” Anne M. Scott’s analysis of various approaches to Hoccleve as an autobiographical poet. Some critical perspectives have tended to privilege the generic effects of irony and trope, while others turn to Hoccleve’s self-writing as a revelatory form of self-expression. Scott draws on this variety of critical responses to suggest that Hoccleve’s poetry—stylized, figurative, and highly conscious of the social connotations of “individuality”—can serve both kinds of critical approach. She posits, for example, *The Regement of Princes* as a political statement and a careful act of social self-positioning. And in discussing Hoccleve’s period of insanity she addresses medieval attitudes toward mental “wandringes,” which were considered acts of moral and social aberration, reducing man to the status of beast. Yet it is within and through Hoccleve’s awareness of his own social self-positioning that he speaks to the subject of autobiography, and it is how, many centuries later, readers strive to define and understand it.

Peter Goodall’s essay, “The Author in the Study: Self-Representation as Reader and Writer in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” relates medieval ideas of “writing” a self to developments in autobiographical topoi in the sixteenth century. Goodall examines a shift in understanding of the relationship between the acts of reading a book and addressing the self. Saint Augustine is in Goodall’s view the seminal figure here, but there are other major medieval authors, such as Petrarch, who self-consciously scrutinize the writing and reading of the self. This tendency to self-scrutiny gains cultural and material impetus in the emergence of the study in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a physical place where, for the first time, secular people could read, write, and introspect in relative peace. In tracing this development, at once architectural, literary and personal, Goodall makes something of an ironic preparation for Dosia Reichardt’s essay on another kind of secluded place for writing in seventeenth-century England. In “The Constitution of Narrative Identity in Seventeenth-Century Prison Writing,” Reichardt discusses the various motivations for writing one’s story in prison, not the least of which is the wish to construct a narrative identity by rewriting the verdict that led to incarceration. It may appear somewhat odd that prisons seemed, if not to welcome these accounts, at least to allow for them, since the wealthy and literate were permitted to bring in an unlimited supply of pen and paper. The availability of writing materials suggests that self-writing may have been allowed as a form of tolerated rebellion within

an environment where not only inmates, but also their jailers, were often all too aware of the veracity of pleas of innocence.

The essays contributed by Goodall and Reichardt demonstrate that modes of autobiographical representation are sharply influenced by the physical locations in which self-writing can occur. In “Selves in Strange Lands: Autobiography and Exile in the Mid-Seventeenth Century,” Helen Wilcox develops this viewpoint by examining the profound physical and psychological associations of exile for early modern people. Noting that the verb “to exile” had by the early sixteenth century come to mean “to ruin or devastate,” Wilcox contends that “the experience of exile can signify constancy and integrity and lead to a surprising ‘blossom’ of unknown yet positive potential.” The English Revolution made exile a prevalent condition for many seventeenth-century English people, and Wilcox explores the relationship between these conditions and the flourishing of life writing in the period.

Belinda Tiffen, in “The Visual Autobiographic: Van Dyck’s Portrait of Sir John Suckling,” notes that critical readings of Suckling’s verse have often assumed a strongly autobiographical element in his writing. The few known facts of Suckling’s life—such as his disastrous participation in the Bishops’ Wars—seem to present an appealing complement to his literary self-presentation as the cavalier par excellence: witty, urbane, and elegant but politically and artistically disengaged from serious matters. At first viewing, Van Dyck’s famous portrait of Suckling may seem to echo in paint the self-image (as elegant indifferent) that the poet created of himself in his verse. Yet a closer reading of the portrait reveals both an encoded political comment and a concern with literary seriousness that is unexpected from the figure Suckling presented in his best-known verse. There is enough evidence of Van Dyck’s career in England to suggest that his portraits were often directed by his sitters: Suckling may have chosen this portrait as an autobiographical undertone that paradoxically challenges the self-image he fostered in other contexts.

Part 2 of the collection concludes with R. S. White’s essay, “Where Is Shakespeare’s Autobiography?” which speculates on what happens when people from later periods seek to “write” an early modern autobiography. White begins by suggesting that Shakespeare’s omission of an autobiography has proven apposite because scholars have been trying to write his biography ever since he died. Their more or less successful efforts suggest that autobiography and “authorized” biography

confront similar dilemmas of self-representation, including memorial and authorial vagaries. These problems are particularly potent in the area of Shakespearean biography. White considers four different biographical records of Shakespeare's life: the "soul biographies" of Dowden, Boas, and Barber; the unashamedly fictional (Burgess, *Shakespeare in Love*); the "documentary" (Schoenbaum, Honigmann); and the iconoclastic (Duncan-Jones). He contends that these different modes pose different challenges to what it means to record a life: first, in the claim to objective analysis implicit in the task of "biography"; second, in the fragments of Shakespeare's life gleaned from his texts under the heading "autobiographical"; and, third, in the authors' obvious need to fill in Shakespeare's famous blank spaces with their own autobiographically oriented perspectives. By drawing on these challenges, White proposes a composite (auto)biographical mode whereby a "life through works" might make use of Shakespeare's plays as primary documents. In this way, the absence of Shakespeare's autobiography provides an occasion to rethink the limits of autobiographical discourse and the strategies of self-representation through which early modern identity can be portrayed in its own time and for later periods.

Whereas the essays in the second section of the volume share a preoccupation with the representational modes through which lives can be portrayed—modes that manipulate public and private spaces, for example, or strenuously juggle perceptual possibilities in the act of self-reflection—the essays in part 3, "Self Practices," examine texts produced for a more workaday purpose (Fulton, Wright); for a more workaday context (Howard); or, as we shall see with the marginalia described by Semler and Mitchell, with an eye to a "running commentary" that provides an overarching, informal mode of dialogue on texts produced for the public record. The pressure of finance defines the strategies through which the authors in this section perceive and depict their lives, building an "I" that self-consciously sees itself as a part of, and a development from, its surroundings. But, while all the authors share a lens that is provided by the worlds of work, survival, and social interaction, they display widely varying conceptions of what such a lens might do or mean.

The section begins with Helen Fulton's "Autobiography and the Discourse of Urban Subjectivity: The Paston Letters." Of the Paston letters, Fulton asks: who is the epistolary self? The letters can be read autobiographically, as the record of a gentry family based in London and Norfolk, yet they also construct subjects of numerous discourses, particularly that of urban materialism. The growing economic power

of towns and cities in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries shaped new kinds of subjects, in literary texts as well as in other kinds of writing. Whereas the characters of courtly lyric and romance were broadly categorized according to social standing and moral worth, the individuals of urban writing required the more finely tuned classifications of status, occupation, and material display that marked urban society out from the older, land-based feudalism. In the same way, the identity of the author was redefined in an urban context, constructing an autobiographical self described in terms of the city. Fulton examines the Paston Letters from the point of view of self-construction, self-allegorization, and the expression of an identifiably urban subjectivity. She argues that the letters are “autobiographical” in the sense that they convey an authentic account of subjectivity in the context of medieval and early modern views of selfhood (both Christian and feudal) and the urbanized location in which the letters were generated.

The impact of urban contexts on early modern identity and self-representation is, in a different and more self-conscious way, the subject of Jean E. Howard’s essay, “Textualizing an Urban Life: The Case of Isabella Whitney.” As Amy Erickson and Martha Howell have shown, last wills and testaments were notable among the documents over which women exercised some control in the early modern period. In their bequests, women sometimes disposed of land, goods, and movables and often bequeathed to kinswomen and friends items with sentimental or emotional value. These documents also provide evidence—highly mediated to be sure—of the lives of their makers. In her essay, Howard considers the poetry of Isabella Whitney, especially her witty and acerbic *Will and Testament*, to the city of London, as a form of life writing through which the writer fashioned a self in print. Though the “facts” of her life are obscure, in her verse Whitney constructs a complex subject position between the coordinates of woman, servant, writer, jilted lover, and urban dweller. Of particular interest is the way she fashions a self in relation to the cityscape, incorporating the complexity of cultural and economic realities that characterize England’s capital city. In writing her poetic will, and in making London the executor and beneficiary of her largesse, Whitney uses her pen to narrate a life imagined in terms of the peculiar rigors and freedoms available to an impecunious, but talented, woman of the metropolis.

The analysis of the material circumstances of gender and social context in Fulton’s and Howard’s essays complements the analysis of Anne Clifford’s financial records and obligations provided by Nancy E.

Wright in “Accounting for a Life: The Household Accounts of Lady Anne Clifford.” Wright contends that Clifford’s diaries carefully build her identity in terms of possible legal challenges to her right to own property and land. Nevertheless Clifford’s diaries, letters, and *Life of Me* have often been read as if they were transparent documents in the life of a woman whose consuming passion was to fulfil the duties of her office as heiress in general and landowner, as her female ancestors had done. In order to appreciate Clifford’s complex understanding of the duties of the landowner’s office, however, we need to evaluate various other writings that record her life. Her estate and household accounts provide an alternative means of reading the records that she collected and produced. Before and during Clifford’s lifetime, it was customary for landowners to supervise closely their income and expenditures. Her estate and household record not only her commitment to accumulating the archival records that would substantiate her claim to the Clifford lands but also to accounting for the profits of those lands. The financial records—particularly Clifford’s *Books of Household Expenses*, which contain entries and marginal comments in her own hand—provide a means of understanding the many registers and forms in which “a self” and “a life” can be recorded in writing.

In her essay on Clifford, Wright suggests that we might look to margins as a significant textual space in which early modern selfhood is inscribed. Liam E. Semler develops this perception in “Designs on the Self: Inigo Jones, Marginal Writing, and Renaissance Self-Assembly.” As we now know him, Inigo Jones is a literary production. In fact, England’s first Renaissance neoclassical architect was, Semler suggests, born of marginal annotation. Although Jones wrote almost nothing for print, he was a relentless writer of a particular sort: very few of the books from his personal library escape his marginal annotation, and it is in the privacy of his marginalia that Jones formulates a specific public future for himself. In a script that self-consciously progresses from secretary to gentlemanly italic, and in the margins of works by great Italian writers on art, Jones engages in a strenuous and goal-oriented program of self-education. The marginal notes reveal Jones overwriting a past self that is incoherent and inadequate compared to the lofty office of architect that he is determined to embody. His marginalia are crucial to both plotting out this desired office and bridging the gap between his current self and the publicly authoritative self he intends to become. He graphically embodies the office of architect (adopting its knowledges and behaviors), inserting himself into its generic responsibilities, obligations, and privileges. Having

modeled the paradigm in his margins, he inhabits it mentally and socially and then concretizes this office within the existing English office of surveyor, which must expand to accommodate these new dimensions. The figure we now call Inigo Jones is an astonishingly successful example of self-assemblage via the power of books, reading, and, more particularly, directed marginal annotation.

Annotations can also inscribe a self-narrative that complements and sometimes corrects the body proper of an autobiographical text. Adrian Mitchell, in “William Dampier’s Unaccepted Life,” explores this kind of tension between juxtaposed strains of life writing. The draft copy of Dampier’s *New Voyage Round the World* (eventually published in 1697) incorporates a series of running annotations in the author’s own hand. What the manuscript provides is evidence of incremental layers of composition. Dampier’s annotations are, interestingly, made heavily in the first person—in effect an incipient autobiography largely repressed in the published version of the *Voyage*. This commentary forms something of an intermittent, companion autobiographical narrative to the account of Dampier’s travels in the manuscript and published versions of the *Voyage*; it also acts as a virtual apologia for the buccaneering life that is celebrated in the published version. One way to read Dampier’s suppressed “life” might be as rogue (auto)biography, which underwrites the buccaneer adventure. Dampier presents himself in this commentary as an informed, and often challengingly opinionated, participating witness rather than the simple prototype of the new scientific traveler. The running marginal annotations to the draft for the *Voyage* are much more specific about events and personalities, more precise about such matters as slavery, and more technical about the ethos of privateering than the narrative itself. Why the liveliness of Dampier’s life is suppressed in print is open to question. It is possible that he was aiming for respectability or that his publisher, Knapton, pressed for changes to, and suppression of, the public record of a controversial personal life.

As Semler’s and Mitchell’s essays suggest, autobiographical texts often orchestrate ongoing dialogues among an author’s different roles and personae. Such dialogues can also be interestingly established between various versions of a particular professional identity. Wilfrid Prest concludes part 3 with “Legal Autobiography in Early Modern England,” which examines this phenomenon. Prest discusses various examples of autobiographical writing by English common lawyers of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, from John Savile through James Whitelocke to Roger North and William Blackstone. The chap-

ter makes special reference to the themes of vocational and personal identity: how does a particular professional world establish the terms by which its practitioners might understand their personal and professional lives? Despite a considerable burgeoning of legal-historical studies since the 1970s, the law courts, together with the litigants and practitioners who used them more intensively than ever before or since in English history, remain largely neglected. While the memoirs of common lawyers and law students can be analyzed to illuminate the working conditions, mind-set, and private and domestic lives of the English bar through the seventeenth century, they can also be read as cultural artifacts in their own right. Beginning with an overview of late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century legal autobiography, Prest moves on to consider William Blackstone's unusual self-life, which in some respects represents a revival of what had once been a flourishing subgenre of early modern life writing.

What is the meaning of a life? In terms of present-day preoccupations with unique existential being, this question is the prerogative—and its exploration the challenge—of every individual (to the extent that it has become somewhat ludicrous, anticipating everywhere grand moments of personal crisis or epiphany). For people in early modern England, however, the question of life's meaning was quite different, both in its manifestation and in the conclusions it provoked. Whereas today such meaning—and the reasons to describe it—involve conjectures about the psychology of oneself or one's associates, early modern society was structured around a network of beliefs pertaining to the events of the temporal realm and their impact on the other eternal realm that superseded it. This did not mean that temporal events did not matter. On the contrary, Lady Clifford's acquisition of her lands, Isabella Whitney's response to London, Blackstone's legal diary, or Hoccleve's distress about losing his worldly status, for example, mattered intensely. These events mattered not simply in themselves but *because* they contributed to the sum of a life, acting always, and sometimes inscrutably, as the measure of participation in an ongoing history of entitlement to a part in a greater life to come. Self-description, therefore, referred to understandings of oneself *within* a wider frame, and more often than not individuality was marked less by how one stood *out* than by how effectively one fitted *in*.

We began this introduction by considering a “selfe” from long ago, a “selfe” that its bearer, Montaigne, acknowledges not always to be carefully “disposed and ranged.” Montaigne's “selfe,” and those of the many

early modern subjects depicted in this collection, bear witness to the relationship—not always fully apparent nor the same in every act of contemplation—between the mundane and the monumental, the routine and the exemplary, the material and the eternal. Their depiction also reflects the special preoccupations of the contributors to this volume, which grant purpose and focus to historical analysis, determining not just *what* we observe but how, and why, we choose subjects for discussion. The contributors to *Early Modern Autobiography* have a variety of aptitudes, interests, and critical frameworks, each one carefully calibrated in the act of contemplating the subject(s) we depict. And we use our understandings to provide illustrative contexts for appreciating the pressures people felt, the ambitions they entertained, and the meaning of such pressures and ambitions for the ways in which they reflected on, and talked about, themselves. Authorial apologetics, memoirs, epistolary collections, theatrical performances, diaries, marginalia, prison narratives, household account books and legal notebooks, these are the diverse and unpredictable modes and voices to which we listen. And in listening to these voices, as critics and as readers, we must attend also to ourselves: our task is not only to observe “who” these people were but how they are mediated through the prism of historical perspectives.

NOTES

1. Idealist, essentialist positions on subjectivity have jostled in recent decades with the various historicist and cultural materialist positions—the critiques of humanist “Renaissance” models offered by Dollimore, Goldberg, Neely, Greenblatt, or Gramsci—which connote the subject as a flexibly fashioned, or determined, cultural construct. Idealist and essentialist positions, deriving from a posited Renaissance model of individualized freedom and human autonomy and its *locus*, especially in texts such as Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, would include most notably Jacob Burkhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. C. G. Middlemore, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), esp. pt. 2, “The Development of the Individual”; and Ernst Cassirer’s introduction to *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 16–20. Historicist critiques of “essentialist humanism” are illustrated inter alia in Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Coppélia Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Jonathan Goldberg, “The Politics of Renaissance Literature: A Review Essay,” *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 514–42; Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge MA: Harvard Uni-

versity Press, 1985), q. 17, para.1; and Carol Thomas Neely, "Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses," *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988): 5–18.

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