Writing Lives

Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England

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Introducing Lives

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We began to think about this subject—surely not coincidentally—as Oxford University brought to fruition the largest project in humanities research in modern times: a full revision and extension of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, an ongoing biographical database of the most notable English men and women through history. The *ODNB* is a monument of modern scholarship, but one need only enter a local bookstore or scan the pages of the weekend supplements to see that biography is also a thriving and popular form. From literary and historical lives to the biographies of sporting heroes and of course celebrities, lives are the predominant form of non-fiction. The very popularity of biography and the authority of the *ODNB* seem to have so naturalized the form that we seldom pause to ask questions about the origins and the emergence of biography, or about the changes in the form through centuries of economic, social, and intellectual transformations. When was it, we might ask, that biography emerged as a distinct form? How does biography relate to—and how has it negotiated with—other modes of imagining, scripting, and depicting lives? Biography is of course not an exclusively national genre, but we should ask, as Stella Tillyard suggests, how and in what ways biography is shaped by cultural styles and national habits of recording, memorializing, and celebrating lives. Most fundamentally, we ask, why do people write and read lives, or, to pose the question historically, what have been the purposes and uses of biographies and other forms of life writing?

Writing Lives is concerned with these questions, most particularly with early modern England, the place and time in which what we recognize, and what contemporaries began to describe, as biography

emerged from myriad forms of representing lives. The predominant form of life writing that had emerged by the end of the seventeenth century was not only biography but national biography. While we have taken for granted the national identity of biographies, we must remind ourselves that in this early modernity marked an important departure. The medieval lives of saints and martyrs were of course catholic, universal, and the models and heroes of hagiography and of spiritual combat were not of nations but of European Christendom. Though Renaissance 'lives' were less preoccupied with crusades and eschatologies, they were no less conceived as international, as lives to be imagined within a European republic of letters and written in the international language of scholarship. Classical antiquity gave Renaissance humanism not only its language and its literatures but also its exemplary lives of stoic self-restraint, civic virtue, and public duty. We are familiar with the ways in which the Reformation fractured European Christendom, but less attention has been paid to how reformations shaped conceptions of lives in new confessional, local, and even national terms. The models of Reformation and Counter-Reformation spirituality rather than European and Catholic, were Protestant and Roman, Lutheran and Zwinglian, vernacular, provincial, and even national. In the case of England, the course of the Reformation is inseparable from the story of nationhood; and English modes of life writing cannot be separated from emergent notions of Elect Nation. Though the Renaissance exemplary life remained an important model, over the course of the sixteenth century it gave place, at least in terms of popularity, to the lives forged through Reformation struggle: Foxe's martyrs and puritan worthies. By the end of the sixteenth century, models of life writing in England were often inseparable from confessional and national identities.

Elect Nation was not just the geography but the driving force of sixteenth-century English lives. Elect Nation was not a descriptive but a polemical discourse and design, a Protestant defence against the ultramontane and the popish. But for all the tension between them, Protestantism was still part of a humanist culture than cannot be defined and delimited by nation. Who would confine Sir Philip Sidney or John Milton to national boundaries? Whatever their importance to an emergent notion of a national literature, both were and conceived themselves as European men of letters, conversant with antiquity, and as members

of a humanist community. If we may at times feel that even in these cases the European dimension of intellectual formation and identity has not been fully registered, not fully acknowledged in our reading of Sidney's and Milton's lives and works, it is generally the case that vernacular nationalism has occluded those aspects of the life lived across national boundaries and borders. National identities are of course forged always in relation to—albeit in tension with—other identities. As Alastair Bellany demonstrates, the most powerful courtier in Jacobean England fashioned his authority, indeed his identity, as much from the tropes and signs of European baroque culture as of English and Protestant idioms. In Milton's case, his design for a godly republic was situated fully within, was indeed dependent on, an education in European letters.[1] Lisa Jardine insists that the life of a figure like Constantine Huygens—at home within and an agent between republic and monarchy, confederacy and nation state—cannot be fully imagined or adequately written as national biography. Huygens offers a powerful example of the need to situate early modern lives beyond national boundaries. But in the English case, he also raises the question of the *longue durée* of the European republic of letters in the face of an increasingly powerful and polemically insistent emphasis on Britishness. By the end of the seventeenth century, British identity is beginning to determine not only a national literature but as well national biography.[2]

The emergence of the nation as a determining force on life writing is a phenomenon that we date to the end of our period. We should also recognize that the very term biography emerges late in the seventeenth century.[3] And just as emergent nationalism has flattened the full textures of lives lived across national boundaries, we might also argue that the conception of life writing as biography—the organic

[1] In *The History of Britain*, Milton argued that 'many civil virtues must be imported into our minds from foreign writings and examples of best ages, we shall else miscarry', Milton, *History of Britain*, in the *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D. Wolfe et al. (New Haven and London, 1971), v. 450; and see Milton's programme of moral, literary, and rhetorical learning in *Of Education*, *Complete Prose Works*, ii. 357–415.

[2] See Linda Colley's celebrated *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London, 1992).

[3] The *OED* identifies the emergence of the word in English with Dryden's *Life of Plutarch* (1683), but, as Ian Donaldson points out, the term 'biography' was already in use twenty years earlier in *The Life of... Thomas Fuller* (1661); see Donaldson, 'National Biography and the Art of Memory', *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford, 2002), 67.

and developmental narrative of a life—imposes an anachronistic and circumscribed model on the writing of early modern lives, indeed on those lives themselves. Our endeavour in this volume is to set aside the dominant Enlightenment model of biography in order to explore the variety and the complexities of all the forms in which early modern lives were written. Furthermore, it is by returning to the full panoply of early modern forms that we may more fully, more closely inhabit and reimagine those lives—rewrite them and refashion our conception of biography itself.

Such a recovery must begin with the simple but fundamental question: what were the purposes of life writing in early modernity? Even a casual perusal of early modern lives discloses quite different intentions and purposes to those of the modern biography: where, for example, the modern biographer focuses on childhood, development, psychology, and individuality, early modern lives are more concerned with community, with spirituality, but most of all with the life as exemplar. Indeed, exemplarity is at the heart of early modern lives and early modern life writing. From classical antiquity and medieval hagiography, Renaissance writers inherited, edited, and re-presented exemplary lives of scholarship, sanctity, and civic virtue. Such lives were consumed as pedagogic texts, as counsel and guide, as models for the life of the mind and spirit. And the exemplary life was more often than not a polemical as much as pedagogic text, an ethical example, an ideological formation, but also a political argument. Early modern lives were above all lives written for use. The uses and purposes of early modern lives are inseparable from forms of life writing quite different from our own. The modern biography is above all a free-standing text, the narrative of an individual and of individuality self-contained in form as in subject. Early modern lives are more often written and read in collections and as collectives, folded into histories, prefacing and appended to a myriad of early modern books. While the free-standing 'life' is not unknown in early modern England—Roper's *Life* of More is an obvious example—from editions of Plutarch's *Lives* to Clarendon's *History* exemplary and polemical lives were more often encountered within the pages of other texts and bound to other lives. For all the scholarly attention to self-fashioning, to the celebration of the individual, the most common forms of early modern life writing caution us that individuality itself is fashioned out of collectives, typologies, and exemplars. The conventions

and materials, the very forms of early modern life writing, are to an extent that we have not fully appreciated central to our understanding of early modern lives.

Out of what materials was the early modern 'life' constituted? And what place might their materials of life writing have in our imagining and writing of their lives? To begin with the example of the early modern literary life, modern biographers have anxiously sought to distinguish the archival records—the locus of fact, event, and truth—from the literature and fictions of their subjects, to police the fictive and privilege the factual. It is such anxious discriminations that long characterized, even limited, so many modern lives of the greatest of Renaissance literary figures, not least the lives of Marlowe and Shakespeare. By contrast, in our collection Andrew Hadfield identifies a Spenser who self-consciously writes himself into his own fictions, perhaps plots his own life, certainly his own aspirations from those fictions. Rather than a nervous resistance to such moments, Hadfield urges the full embrace of the fictive as evidence of life writing. The life imagined, even fantasized, within the work becomes then the archive of biography. Traditional biography would be quick to record and narrate the fact of Spenser's marriage; Hadfield turns our attention to Spenser's fantasy of his own wedding night in which a voyeuristic queen peers in envy through his bedroom window and Hadfield invites us to find in such a fantasy a deeper truth about Spenser's imagination and life: his erotic selfhood, his domestic economy, his transgressive political daring. In the case of Milton, early modern lives are, albeit differently, as at great a distance from modern biographical preoccupations. The modern biographies have privileged the poet's high ideals, his spirituality, his ideological engagement and public service, and of course his epic literary achievement. But as Thomas Corns reminds us, this is hardly the Milton written into or out of his early lives, lives which subordinate spiritual development and political engagement for stories and rumours of illicit sexuality. Such early rumours and innuendoes have been accorded little place and play in modern lives of Milton, yet the insistence and in some cases the anxiety with which early modern lives of Milton engage what we have been inclined to dismiss as trivia surely invite us to admit rumour and innuendo into the archive of biography. Harold Love urges us not only to acknowledge gossip as the very material of early modern life writing but to see gossip as constitutive of personality and identity, recognition

and reputation, we might say the life itself.[4] In Love's formulation, gossip by underpinning social norms partakes of a conventionality that might well evoke the Renaissance exemplar; but gossip at the same time depends on particularity and idiosyncrasy. In the early modern world, gossip constituted a social selfhood; but often it was the instrument of defamation, of the destruction of reputation and identity. Because rumour and gossip are often the fragmentary residues of fuller lives and histories, modern biography in its quest for organic wholeness and linear narrative has often elided gossip in the construction of early modern lives, not only on the grounds of unreliability but on account of its fragmentary nature. Our contributors in accord with other critical and historiographical moves, and perhaps with some scepticism about master narratives, have variously privileged the fragmentary as a window onto historical circumstances and contingences, and therefore as an especially rich material for early modern lives.

To identify and insist on the importance of the various materials of early moderns' life writing for our own writing of early modern lives raises a set of questions about method. Of all literary forms biography has least been troubled by issues of method, by that series of critical enquiries that has so insistently raised questions about textuality, about our own position in relation to interpretation, about the stability of texts, and about issues of reception and the construction of meaning. Ian Donaldson has suggested the value of such textual and rhetorical awareness in the biographical project; to apply such perspectives is radically to disrupt the stabilities of traditional biography, even most radically to read the life itself as a text.[5] Certainly the rhetorics of all the materials of early modern life writing—and of Renaissance lives—demand our critical attention. We may be familiar with the rhetoric of the royal declaration or parliamentary address, but in our roles as biographers we need to extend such alertness to the rhetoricity of all early modern written, spoken, and visual forms. We need, that is, a deeper sense of the rhetoric of the early modern life.

[4] Harold Love valuably extends our recovery of early modern orality in Ch. 5, 'Biography and Gossip'; see also Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England: 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), and Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighborhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003).

[5] See Donaldson, *Ben Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford, 1997), 4.

Renaissance rhetorical theory fully recognized that the meaning of texts was as much made—as we have latterly recognized—by readers as by authors. We might suggest that some greater attention to the receptions of lives should inform our understanding of how lives themselves were written, represented, even lived. As Alastair Bellany observes, in the very act of fashioning his life Buckingham anxiously anticipated not only different but contestatory readings, indeed writings, of that life. And finally, we would urge the application to biography of the new bibliography and history of the book which have so enriched our understanding of the performance of early modern texts. At the simplest level, little attention has been paid to the very materiality of the materials of early modern life writing, to, that is, the presence of the hand, to multiple scripts, to emendation, to address and subscription. Leah Marcus attributes considerable significance to the varying size and position of Elizabeth's signature in explicating the purposes and meanings of her letters. And Marcus reminds us that the relationships among materiality, meaning, and reception are by no means the business only of the manuscript archive. Elizabeth may have written her prayers, but her readers read them and viewed them within the paratextual and marginal illustrations that surely complicated and perhaps contested not only Elizabeth's meanings but her authorially represented life. In the case of James II's 'Life' we cannot begin to think about the life outside its material circumstances: its gaps and fragmentary slips, the scribal copies, the published compilations, the contested versions. We need to return early modern lives to the material forms from which they were written and in which they were first consumed and interpreted.

Recent critical perspectives have not only insisted on the multiplicities, instabilities, and materialities of texts, they have raised questions about the critical categories and determinations of genre. Such critical perspectives open valuably onto the relations between genre and early modern life writing. For the modern biography that relation appears untroubled; nothing is more obvious about modern biography than the stability of its genre and forms, and nothing could be less the case with early modern life writing. As we have discussed, the very sites of early modern life writing in prefaces, paratexts, dedications, and epistles themselves preclude the notion of an established or even predominant genre of life writing. Early modern readers consumed lives in and through the texts that we assign to a variety of other

genres: history, romance, travel narrative, classical translation, hagiography, biblical exegesis. Even to discuss the 'early modern life', as perforce we find ourselves doing, is to fix and stabilize forms and modes that were varied, in flux, indeterminate, and for much of our period undetermined. At some level this claim may seem surprising. Early modern publishers, writers, and readers after all spoke and wrote of 'lives'; they described lives in the language of literary genres—epic and romance, tragedy and burlesque. They even recognized such sub-genres as religious lives and royal lives. Yet when we turn to those lives, it is less their generic fixity than generic multiplicity and instability that strike us. Foxe's *Lives*, for example, could be and was read as martyrology, confessional identity and argument, counsel, providential history, and political polemic. Are not the lives in Clarendon's *History* simultaneously characters, texts of memory, exemplars, sites of ideology, and protagonists of party? In the case of royal lives, as Paulina Kewes vividly asserts, 'lives of princes were located at the intersection of chronicle, political history, panegyric, martyrology, hagiography, confessional polemic, and other more ephemeral forms such as ballads, poems, sermons, pageants, and plays'.[6] That Kewes's list virtually runs the gamut of all early modern literary forms underlines the myriad of genres within whose forms early modern lives were imagined, published, and read. If, as seems the case, generic uncertainty is more a feature of the beginning than of the end of the seventeenth century we need to ask what drove the transformation? What purposes did generic openness serve? And how, subsequently, did generic fixity address new cultural and political circumstances, new conditions of writing and reading? While the relation may be difficult precisely to determine, we surely can be in no doubt that civil war, regicide, and revolution transformed not only the lives lived through these events but as well all lives written in their shadows. Surely by the end of this period what begins to be recognizable as the stable genre 'biography' emerged from the political instability of mid-century.

For all the emergence of a stable genre of biography—and indeed increasingly of history—Clarendon immediately alerts us to the interdependences, sometimes tensions, between biography and history. Today the modern biography—particularly political biography—is as

[6] See Ch. 9, p. 187.

much a 'times' as a 'life'; and today once again historians, no longer in sympathy with grand structural explanations be they Marxist or Annaliste, accord considerable influence to the shaping force of individual men and women. If today history and biography are inseparable in the recently theorized field of memory and memorialization, we should immediately remind ourselves of the self-conscious polemics of memory in post-civil war England. Memory is of course a fact of all historical argument—the medieval chronicle, Renaissance antiquities, civic histories. But in the wake of sectarian division and political contest, history writing was more obviously, more deliberately deployed for polemical and partisan purposes. When Andrea Walkden writes of Walton's *Lives* as 'the guardian of great men after death', she reminds us of the centrality of commemoration to Restoration biography.[7] Though we read them as biography, Walton's and Clarke's 'lives' were conceived and almost certainly read as texts of collective memory in the service of confessional and political causes. The polemics of Clarke's 'Lives', Peter Lake shows, did not depend on the exemplary force of great men. Indeed, at the centre of Michael McKeon's argument is the suggestion that by the end of the seventeenth century the exemplary figure no longer depended on social greatness or political prominence. Ordinariness itself—common humanity—now most powerfully spoke to readers. The twenty-first-century reader immediately recognizes ordinary humanity written into popular celebrity in countless biographies and cultural histories. But what we more specifically would suggest is the need to consider the implications of new forms of exemplarity and life writing for Enlightenment conceptions and practices of history.

The traditional modern history with its clear notions of evidence and archive has permitted little space for what we might call the records of representation which only following the work of Roger Chartier and others has entered the historical narrative. In early modernity, by contrast, representations were the essential materials of history, not least because lives were lived as representations. And not only were they lived as representations, they were imagined and performed as representations. Famously Stephen Greenblatt has characterized the condition of early modernity—of socialities as well individuals—as one of self-fashioning, that is of the artful constructions of identities, selfhoods,

[7] See Ch. 15, p. 333.

public lives. Certainly in the case of such courtiers as the Duke of Buckingham, not only the public authority but the personal identity were produced through a series of constructions and performances. In the theatre of modernity, our own inclination—even desire—is to believe in an essential self, a core being beneath all roles, all fashioning and formulation. In Buckingham's case Alastair Bellany asks whether there was a 'real' self outside representation. He shows how, even if there were, the duke was defined, and certainly by the end of his life trapped, by his images and representations.[8] Scholars now may be familiar—wearily familiar—with the concept of self-fashioning; ironically, however, as biographers we have not embraced in our own writings of early modern lives the full immersion, in some cases submersion, of selfhood in representation. Bellany gestures to a new biography in which the archives of the life are signs, symbols, and mythologies. Even for lives less obviously theatrical, less insistently represented, modern biography needs to find greater space for the symbolic and performative as essentials of the early modern life. Only recently have we begun to appreciate how the symbolic, the performative, the figured, not only enriches but in some sense transforms the life of Oliver Cromwell as read and contested by contemporaries and even as chronicled by us.[9] While we urge the full application of the concepts of representation and self-fashioning to the writing of early modern lives, we must also allow the critique of a new historicism that has, in emphasizing the social and secular, underplayed interiority and spirituality.[10] Frances Harris, by recovering the courtier Robert Moray's personal motto 'to be rather than to seem', more broadly challenges a fashionable emphasis on image and theatricality: 'one needs' Harris insists 'to go beyond outward appearance and (mis)representation'.[11] While we would not ourselves fully endorse a scepticism that takes all acts of representation as misrepresentation, Harris's corrective is an important one. Not least because it returns our attention to the interior life, to,

[8] Bellany here follows Peter Burke's pioneering study of the *Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London, 1992).
[9] See Laura Knoppers, *Constructing Cromwell: Ceremony, Portrait, and Print, 1645–1661* (Cambridge, 2000).
[10] See esp. Debora Suger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley, 1990).
[11] See Ch. 13, p. 288.

of course, the spiritual, but as well to the affective, the sexual, the psychological.

Sex and sexuality have of course a prominent place in almost every modern biography, and not only for commercial reasons. In a post-Freudian world, it could not be otherwise. Whether or not we have read Freud, we have interiorized the sexual as the defining condition of the self: of childhood, development, adult formation, the psyche—of the life narrated, of the life narrative. Fear of anachronism may have reinforced earlier moral sensibilities in leading us to elide or subordinate the sexual in our narrating of early modern lives. In some respects early modernity itself encourages such subordinations. Rather than a self fulfilled in copulation, even fornication, the hegemonic discourse of early modernity is a discourse of self-abnegation and of sexual self-regulation. Where religious instruction proscribed sex outside marriage and procreation, neo-stoic philosophy instructed a subjugation of base appetite to rational soul. We may read these as denials of the self, but for early modernity the scripts of self-regulation were texts for the full realization of the rational self. Post-Freudian psychology suggests that in ubiquitous discourses of self-denial there always lurks a fear of the overwhelming force of desire; but early modernity itself seems to recognize, if not in psychological language, the powerful—and destructive—undercurrents of appetite, desire, of the undisciplined body. Scholars have underscored the prominence of the discourse of the body in early modernity; we would remark how those discourses fully recognized, even as they sought to regulate, sexuality.[12] Because the various discourses of the body were early modernity's idioms of sexuality, perhaps they deserve a greater place in our own narrations of early modern lives. We could even go further and say that because the discourses of the body were so ubiquitously public and political, their recovery for the biographical project makes a significant and a seamless link between what we distinguish as the private and the public. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the body and the appetites were the very matter not only of politics but of political theory and philosophy.

[12] For important recent studies, see Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London, 1995); Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1999); and Gail K. Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago, 2004).

Hobbes's new theory of state, as we know, was founded upon a recognition of appetites; what has been less remarked is how profound were the implications of Hobbes's naturalizing of the appetites for early modern sexuality. There can be little doubt that the figure of Hobbes lies behind the full expression and publication of sex and sexuality in the Restoration, or that Restoration lives on the stage, at court, indeed in St James's Park, in poetry, print, and portrait were fully lives of sexual appetite and desire.[13] Julia Alexander demonstrates that sex and sexuality have a newly, a recognizably modern, place in the lives of Restoration subjects, and most especially Restoration women. While we have appreciated this for Castlemaine and Nell Gwynn, we need more fully to acknowledge and to psychologize the sexual in narrating Restoration lives.[14]

Frances Harris's recent and rich study of John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin counsels not to conceive Restoration sexuality too narrowly, for as well as the blatant and the pornographic, Restoration sexuality embraced the erotic and affective in public as well as private lives.[15] In this collection, Harris's portrait of Robert Moray discloses, somewhat surprisingly, the degree to which the life of the senior public servant, Presbyterian gentleman, founding member of the Royal Society, scientist and alchemist, makes little sense without a centring of the amorous and affective. Moray's emblem 'agape' announces his own conception of a life with love, in the broadest sense of that word, at the centre of identity. In Moray's case the archive—although previously underexplored—fully opens the affective dimension. In the case of Pepys, though the sexual life has long been apparent, scholars have now begun to explicate the full force of the affective in the life of a highly placed civil servant.[16] Even where we lack such rich archival resources of extensive personal memoirs and diaries, we must not lose sight of the affective dimension; and in the case of apparently colourless

[13] For Hobbes's influence on Rochester, see Warren Chernaik, *Sexual Freedom in Restoration Literature* (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 1, 'Hobbes and the Libertines'; James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630–85* (Cambridge, 2002).

[14] See James Grantham Turner, 'Pepys and the Private Parts of Monarchy', in Gerald MacLean (ed.), *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration* (Cambridge, 1995), 95–110.

[15] Harris, *Transformations of Love: The Friendship of John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin* (Oxford, 2002).

[16] See Claire Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys, The Unequalled Self* (New York, 2002).

bureaucrats we must retain a sense of the force of the affective in a Restoration culture more than ever inflected by the affective no less than the sexual. In writing the affective life, even when the archives are extensive, explication demands empathies and imaginings; when the archive is silent perhaps we should not entirely resist 'emotional speculations'.[17]

The sexual and affective have been most fully explored and theorized in modern scholarship through the prism of gender. For some time gender theory, contesting assertions of essentialist difference, urged the constructedness and porousness of male and female and implicitly argued that biography and life writing ought not to be delimited by traditional constructions of gender. And yet, when we turn to early modernity we cannot but be struck by rigid categories of gender and the relentless gendering of lives written and lived. Such categories compel us to ask: how different were early modern women's lives? How differently were they represented and written? And how do we as modern scholars both recognize and critically interrogate the early modern texts and signs of difference? As we have suggested, the predominant purpose of early modern life writing was exemplarity. The exemplary life, most commonly that of a figure of public standing or greatness, was perforce male; female exemplarity was seldom written as biography and was restricted to the spheres of private devotion and household economy, and to the gendered virtues of silence and chastity. The recovery of women's lives has largely emerged out of the texts of domesticity and devotion. In particular, social historians have uncovered the shared traces of women's lives in courtesy manuals, devotional tracts, household accounts. For all the riches of such histories, we have not yet recovered a highly individuated sense of female lives, of lives self-fashioned, engaged, active. The lives of female monarchs would seem to provide an exception; they are after all and most obviously the lives of public figures, exemplars, models of religious leadership and civic engagement. And yet for all that, and perhaps because of all that, in some measure their femaleness and their relation to other female lives have not been sufficiently studied, especially in the case of Mary Tudor. We have of course some examples of women who have written themselves into and out of spaces and genres which early modernity had not gendered—letters, memoirs, portraits.

[17] See Ch. 5, p. 101.

Lady Anne Clifford forged both an identity and public authority from acts of representation—reading, writing, narrating her own life.[18] It is such sites in which women wrote themselves and lived their own lives that draw our critical attention as biographers. Annabel Patterson rereads the life of Elizabeth Cary not only as a biographical form but as a text of the processes through which an early modern woman crafted her familial and social relations, her identity, her very self. Reading and rereading between the lines of this life, Patterson allows us to hear a distinct female voice and to glimpse a highly individual female life. Early modern women's lives were defined by, lived within, not only spheres but also what we categorize and they recognized as genres. As Patterson observes, the sponsoring institutions of life writing—the church, the university—were male domains. Though we have not yet fully explored the subject, there can be little doubt that changes in women's lives, both lived and written, were mapped and enabled in the history of early modern genres. Protestantism, still more religious radicalism, opened new genres and spaces for female biography and autobiography. And as the ubiquitous male complaint long evidenced, the romance was a site within which and out of which female identity—often transgressive—was formed. In the Restoration there was an obvious broadening of generic opportunity which is inseparable from the emergence of women into public life and publicity. Obviously, infamously, the stage, but also the portrait, the public park, became not only genres and sites for new representations of females, but female spaces and geographies, and not least of a highly erotic and explicitly sexual character. In any narrative of the relations of genre and gender we turn naturally to the emergence of the novel, not least because contemporaries worried those relations. For the novel was not only anxiously regarded as licensing, emancipating, dangerous femininities, it was suspected as the solvent of masculinity and of gender difference itself. The novel provides a new script for the representation of female lives, but perhaps more importantly it fashions new modes of writing and reading, that is to say, experiencing, female lives—all readers' lives.

[18] G. Parry, 'The Great Portrait of Lady Anne Clifford', in D. Howardth (ed.), *Art and Patronage at the Caroline Court* (Cambridge, 1993), 202–19; M. E. Lamb, 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', *English Literary Renaissance* 12 (1992), 347–68; Barbara K. Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), ch. 5.

The history of the novel is not only intertwined with the cultural and social histories of the late seventeenth century, but with architectures of the mind, with the emergence of a new psychology of the self.[19] And as historians of the novel have observed, the emergence of the form cannot be separated from the foundation of what we would recognize as the field of psychology and in particular with the determining force of childhood and with the concept of development. The moment of the novel and Lockean psychology are historically specific and mark the end of our period and perhaps of early modernity. Yet, today, as historians, as literary critics, as students of the human sciences, we cannot deny the powerful impulse, the need, to identify psychological affinities with the subjects of early modernity, to, in the words of Paul Johnson's life of Elizabeth, know our subject 'with a fair degree of intimacy'.[20] The question then poses itself: are we able to interpret and write an early modern history and biography which incorporates the psychological without the cardinal sin of anachronism?

While early modernity was obviously not concerned with developmental psychology and the emotional dynamics of early childhood, Renaissance culture was deeply concerned with the lives, the training, the formation and regulation of youth.[21] Humanist pedagogy was directed not only to learning but to the shaping of spiritual, moral, and civic lives. The modern sensibility finds in pedagogic manuals and habits not only the texts of instruction but disciplinary practices and discourses which undoubtedly spoke to the erotics of early modern education.[22] Nor are the erotics of what we would categorize as adolescence entirely absent from the texts and archives of early modern life. We are familiar with the story of Elizabeth's adolescent encounter with her

[19] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore, 1987); John Bender, *Imagining The Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1987); see also, now, McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore, 2005).

[20] Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I* (New York, 1974), 195, as quoted by Leah Marcus in Ch. 10.

[21] See Philippe Aries's classic study, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962); and, more recently, I. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven and London, 1994), and Matthew Harkins, 'Poetics of Youth in Early Modern England', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Washington University in St Louis (2003).

[22] See Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 1997).

guardian and kinsman Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour; but in the main, historians and biographers have moved swiftly and even embarrassedly over the archival hints of what we would unquestionably call abuse. By laying aside the discomforts not only of adult and improper male desire, still more the sexual infatuation of an adolescent girl and princess, Marcus opens a psychological dimension of life critical to history and biography.

Our modern sensitivities to the psychologies of childhood sexuality, abuse, and paedophilia may open further historical and biographical subjects. A recent rereading of a poet at the heart of the early modern literary canon exposes an Andrew Marvell that we could not have imagined let alone written a decade ago. While we have long if nervously acknowledged the children in Marvell's poetry and imagination, it is the modern diagnosis of paedophilia that brings out the full and illicit powers of that attraction. And beyond that, we can now suspect and in the psychological as well as critical sense analyse the traces of childhood trauma and even abuse in that hitherto impenetrable lyric, *The unfortunate Lover*, in which Marvell imagines and perhaps discloses the history of a life, his own biography.[23] Such enquiry surely opens other texts, most especially fictions, to the discovery of elisions and repressions which are fundamental to the life, if not as obviously to early modern life writing. We need in other words to lay aside our discomforts—perhaps our own repressions and elisions—in order fully to understand the desires and traumas that determined early modern lives no less than our own.

Though the modern sensibility locates the psychological first and foremost in the sexual, for early modernity it was spiritual desire and anxiety that was at the heart of selfhood. Frances Harris cautions a modern biographer saturated in secularism that 'where we are preoccupied with the self, they were with the soul'.[24] Harris's axiom neatly summarizes for us entire literatures and discourses—sermons, spiritual guides, homilies—that urge the surrender of self, the giving of the life

[23] See Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, 'Eros and Abuse: Imagining Andrew Marvell', *ELH* 74 (2007), 371–95.

[24] See Ch. 13, p. 290. Quite appositely McKeon, writing of the very end of our period, reverses this formula, observing 'The gradual replacement of "soul"—by "self"—terms over the span of this period', as well as 'the growth of both secularization and the sociological imagination', p. 349 of the present volume.

to God and to others. Further, the reference to soul underscores the entirely different temporality in which the life was lived, and an entirely different narrative of its writing. Modern biography of course frames life narrative between the historical moments of birth and death. The religious life, by contrast, has its origins in considerations of the first man and woman, of the fall, of original sin, of infant innocence; its terminus is not of course the death of the body but the translation of the soul and the life fulfilled in a return to the Lord's embrace. The afterlife, which only occasionally features in the modern biography as an epilogue of reputation, of historical and social memory, was for the early modern life anything but an appendix. The afterlife was the realization of the life—what gave the life its meaning. Though of course historians and biographers have fully charted denominational histories and spiritual lives, it may be that the modern biographical form of narrative as well as our scepticism and secularism accord too little place to the obsession with the hereafter as a determining force in the early modern life. And yet the contrast of selves and souls may separate what contemporaries experienced and often disturbingly as integral. For all the literatures of self-subordination, the discourses of self-righteousness, spiritual ambition, and pride inhabit early modern texts from the pulpit to the stage. The ubiquitous recognition and satirizing of hypocrisy evidences a deep concern that the spiritual was all too often the worldly. The tensions between the secular and the sacred need to be brought to the fore in our writing of all early modern lives.

In the case of rulers, we have histories and biographies that comprehend the sacred and secular, the history of kings and queens as heads of church and state. What we have inadequately interrogated is the early modern configuring of the secular and sacred in rule and the person of the ruler. Ernst Kantorowitz's famous explication of the theory of the king's two bodies has rightly influenced our histories of political thought and in some measure political practice. But this concept has seldom driven or even much informed the narration of early modern royal life.[25] And yet almost all early modern monarchs drew attention to their corporeal and spiritual bodies and selves in public addresses but more revealingly in poems, portraits, and prayers. When James II's

[25] E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).

devotions have been discussed at all, they have been treated as a text of Whig and Jacobite polemic; they surely invite rereading as a text of intense personal spirituality, of complex psychology and fractured subjectivity. For James II as for Charles I we have spiritual memoirs that can be opened as biography; what we might recognize is that a myriad of spiritual discourses open not simply onto the spiritual but onto all the dimensions of the life less familiar to us as the spiritual.

Religious histories and biographies have understandably been written as the stories of confession and denomination; we familiarly describe in titles and subtitles early modern English men and women as Anglican, Calvinist, Puritan; we might note in passing that only recently has historical and biographical attention been given to the Catholic lives subordinated by confessional polemic.[26] Such denominational terminology serves the needs of religious history and even of straightforward biographical description; what we would urge is a deeper consideration of the relation between confessional identity and the full contours of the self. The theological and liturgical differences between Catholic and Protestant have defined religious history in early modern as in our own histories. But what did it mean to inhabit soteriological systems, to interiorize the different scripts of salvation and damnation, to live the spiritual life according to the different prescriptions of works and grace? The few experiments in the psychobiography of spiritual figures have perhaps understandably deterred scholars from a full psychology of the spiritual life, but the ubiquitous literature of spiritual anxiety and struggle has not been accorded its full place in the life of character, of the formation of the whole personality.[27] Though contemporaries

[26] For the principal works on the recovery of Catholic history see J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570–1850* (Oxford, 1975); C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975); C. Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford, 1993); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London, 1992); M. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550–1640* (Cambridge, 2006); P. Lake, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven and London, 2002); Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, 1999); Arthur Marotti, *Religious Identity and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2005); Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth Century Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1999).

[27] See, most famously, Erik Erikson's controversial biography of Luther, *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958).

and modern scholars have often written religious lives as the stories of spiritual companionship and community, attention to all the tremors of the spirit may help to illuminate the particular and individual spiritual experience. Once we recognize that early modern spiritual texts are texts not only of the devotional life, it is important to acknowledge that texts of spirituality should not be confined by denomination—the Protestant, the Puritan, the Catholic. The texts and conceptions of what have often been deemed spiritual esoterica—the cabalistic, the neoplatonic, the Hermetic—must be, as the case of Moray demonstrates, integrated into the entire life, and into the writing of that life.

The early modern life as we have seen was, above all, a site of exemplarity, and written for use. In any divided culture, however, notions of exemplarity and perceptions of use are inevitably matters of debate, contest, and division. There is no doubting the consequences of Reformation for life writing as for all literary forms in early modern England. In Protestant and Catholic martyrologies, in spiritual biographies, in scaffold life narratives, in wills and testaments, spiritual struggles as well as identities were forged and published. The Reformation was the impetus for collective biography and individual lives which were written, circulated, often printed, not only as exemplary models but also as confessional polemic. If sixteenth-century lives were written in the wake of Reformation fractures, how much more obviously and powerfully did political division across the seventeenth century define and drive the imagining and writing of the life. Most obviously civil war, republic, restoration, and revolution wrote and were written by biographical narratives: the lives of heroes, political martyrs and traitors, protagonists for lofty principles or good old cause. Even after military contest in civil war was subdued by the temporary stabilities of Restoration, life writing remained central to continuing polemical warfare. As Andrea Walkden remarks, 'the life narrative [is] the battleground of the Restoration'.[28] Civil war and revolution not only and inevitably wrote and rewrote lives as texts of party and cause, they fashioned a desire, an appetite and market for lives, old and new, a market which printers and publishers rushed to satisfy. As well as the established figures of government and court, warfare and republican experiment brought to the fore as subjects a new cast of characters—brilliant parliamentary

[28] See Ch. 15, p. 335.

generals, cavalier heroes, charismatic preachers. Such figures became the subjects of life narration and representation in print, in portrait, in engraving and woodcut, on medal, in memento, in verse and ballad. The life of Cromwell—a hitherto obscure provincial gentleman—is only the most obvious example of a public life represented, indeed created, in civil contest; in the cases of Henry Ireton, Charles Fleetwood, Colonel Wildman, James Naylor, the most obscure and lowly figures became the subjects of fame and infamy.

During the 1640s and 1650s lives, old and new, were not only written in and for the new demands of a public sphere; the commerce of print was everywhere embedded in partisanship and conflict. Though scholars have yet fully to interrogate the ideological identities and relations of publishers, printers, and parties, there can be little doubt that certain publishing houses were deeply identified with positions and causes; Quakers, Ranters, and Levellers had identifiable printing houses; it was in fact printers and publishers who created their communal identities, their public lives.[29] Less obviously, less tangibly, in his various editions of cavalier poets—Carew and Lovelace for example—Humphrey Moseley surely sought not only to form a literary canon but, while chasing a profit, to summon poetry and poets to the banner of ideology. The civil war rendered the literary edition a site of polemic and partisanship, and for the rest of this century the editing and publishing of literary as much as political lives was everywhere marked by ideology and difference. As Blair Worden demonstrated, John Toland's edition of the life of Edmund Ludlow erased religious radicalism to highlight republican sympathies in the service of Whig polemics.[30] Toland is more famous of course as one of the first editors and biographers of John Milton; but as Corns's survey of the early lives makes clear, Toland's design was to publicize a Milton of consistent republican commitments at the expense of the lives of spirit and scandal. Out of past political contest editors

[29] See e.g. Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2003), 234–47; John Barnard, 'London Publishing, 1640–1660', *Book History* 4 (2001), 1–16; Keith L. Sprunger, *Trumpets from the Tower: English Puritan Printing in the Netherlands 1600–1640* (Leiden, 1994); and Katherine Van Eerde, 'Robert Waldegrave: The Printer as Agent and Link between Sixteenth-Century England and Scotland', *Renaissance Quarterly* 34 (1981).

[30] Edmund Ludlow, *A Voyce From the Watch Tower*, ed. A. B. Worden (London, 1978); and Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: The English Civil War and the Passions of Posterity* (2001), 21–121.

such as Toland wrote and rewrote histories and lives as new models of exemplarity and for the new conditions of the politics of party. In these conditions of partisanship the acts of memorializing and commemorating lives were often written and likely to be read as polemic; acts of recollecting and re-presenting lives rewrote them in ways that often rendered the life quite other than originally written or lived. Elizabeth I, for example, might have happily embraced her Anglican afterlife, but surely would have been horrified by being memorialized as champion of international Calvinism, still more of Whig politics.[31] In the case of Charles I, from the moment of regicide and self-scripting the life was everywhere appropriated and rewritten; indeed, in serving myriad polemic ends the complexities of the life were subsumed in the typologies of saint and martyr, heretic and sinner.[32] Ironically, as rewritten by Restoration and revolutionary polemic, the lives of Charles I appear to have lost the intricacies of an interior life which was the essence of the *Eikon Basilike*.

We would not wish to argue, however, that the polemics of Restoration life writing are confined to the public and social, the external life. Nor was a Restoration fascination with the interior a business only of the lives of faith and spirit. In Restoration life writing as in Restoration culture, we can hardly avoid a contemporary fascination, an obsession, even a prurient engagement with the most intimate aspects of aristocratic and public lives. Lely's portraits of female aristocrats and courtiers disclose an interior and sexual life not obvious in the canvases of his great predecessor, Van Dyck.[33] No student can read *Poems on Affairs of State* without everywhere encountering the most intimate details of lives once veiled and proscribed as *arcana imperii*. Late seventeenth-century readers both demanded and secured an unprecedented access to the privacies and interiorities of lives of state and stage, even of the king himself. As mention of the king reminds us, Charles II responded to, even encouraged, such access to intimacy for his own purposes in

[31] See J. Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge, 2002); J. Walker, *The Elizabethan Icon, 1603–2003* (Basingstoke, 2004); M. Dobson and N. J. Watson, *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford, 2002); J. Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (Cambridge, 2003).

[32] See See A. Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Woodbridge, 2003).

[33] See Catharine McLeod and Julia Marciari Alexander (eds.), *Painted Ladies* (New Haven and London, 2001).

the representation and scripting of his story. He was notorious for the publicity and publication of the often lurid details of his private affairs. As we have begun to appreciate, however, such acts of sexual self-publication may have been tactical as well as self-indulgent; and in the case of the narrations of his escape from the Battle of Worcester, intimacy, humanity, even vulnerability were deployed and published as personal virtues and qualities of rule.[34] Though unprecedented in their preoccupation with Charles's vulnerability and humanity, early narrations were popular not only as printed lives, but as songs, ballads, and symbols. Charles II is by no means the only example of the intimacies and commonalities of the royal life. In the 1680s there was a vogue for stories of Henry VIII as the companion of a humble cobbler and for romances of Elizabeth's amorous and personal life, a vogue which extends to the genre of the secret histories, which came into huge popularity by the end of this century.[35] All these genres of lives gave unprecedented access to arenas hitherto intimate and private; though their relation to the broader stories of politics and ideology have yet to be plotted, there can be little doubt that the publication of intimacy was itself part of the narrative of revolutionary politics, and even of the larger processes of demystification and democracy.

In Michael McKeon's formulation, we are presented with the exemplary life itself as it shifts from a focus on greatness to the celebration and

[34] K. Sharpe, '"Thy Longing Country's Darling and Desire": Aesthetics, Sex and Politics in the England of Charles II', in J. M. Alexander and C. Macleod (eds.), *Politics, Transgression and Representation at the Court of Charles II* (New Haven and London, 2007); A. M. Broadley, *The Royal Miracle: A Collection of Rare Tracts, Broadsides, Letters, Prints and Ballads Concerning the Wanderings of Charles II After the Battle of Worcester* (1912); M. Williams (ed.), *Charles II's Escape from Worcester: A Collection of Narratives Assembled by Samuel Pepys* (1967). See B. Weiser, 'Owning the King's Story: The Escape from Worcester', *Seventeenth Century* 14 (1999), 43–62.

[35] *The Pleasant and Delightful History of King Henry 8th. and a Cobler Relating How He Came Acquainted with the Cobler* (P2530, ?1670); *The Cobler Turned Courtier Being a Pleasant Humour between King Henry the Eight and a Cobbler* (C4782, 1680). There were many variant editions of *The History of the King and the Cobbler*, some in two parts, published in the eighteenth century. For Elizabeth, see e.g. *The Novels of Elizabeth Queen of England* (Wing A4221, 1680); *The History of the Most Renowned Queen Elizabeth, and her Great Favourite, the Earl of Essex In two parts. A Romance* (Wing H2173, 1700); *The Secret History of the Duke of Alencon and Q. Elizabeth A True History* (Wing S2341, 1691). For recent work on the 'secret history' genre, see McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 469–505, and Annabel Patterson, 'A Restoration Suetonius: A New Marvell Text?' *MLQ* 61 (2000), 463–80.

publication of ordinariness, of the common man. McKeon finds in the rise of empiricism, the scientific revolution, and the 'sociological imagination'[36] the origins of new forms of imagining and writing lives—most signally the emergence of the novel with its new modes of virtual exemplarity and its new picaresque heroes and heroines. What we might also emphasize is the politics of these developments and transactions. 'The valorization of interiority'[37] in the figuring of all lives, the turn from greatness to common exemplarity, is unquestionably related to a Restoration unsettling of traditional structures of authority and hierarchy. Even aristocratic life, by the early eighteenth century, begins to be depicted less as removed greatness and privilege than as life lived not only within but across the socialities and social arrangements of order and class. The conversation piece—the favoured genre of aristocratic self-portraiture—was unquestionably a site of status and privilege, but status and privilege now presented not only as intimate and familiar but even accessible and inclusive. By the time of Queen Anne, the royal portrait—the very mode of iconicity and mystery—has become domestic, bourgeois, almost ordinary.[38] These demystified portraits have of course their own politics which in celebrating ordinariness and shared humanity construct new bonds of affectivity between rulers and subjects in ways that gesture to the familiar images of our own monarchs, prime ministers, and presidents. On canvas as in the novel, even the life of greatness has begun to be written as the ordinary life.

The common life identified by Michael McKeon is not only common in our sense of humble or lowly; it is common also in the sense of communal and shared. This may seem, if not a pious, a forlorn hope in an age that we have described as riven by difference and partisanship rather than defined by community and affinity. In fact rather than a disjuncture we identify a relation—a history—between the rage of party and quest for community and common humanity which fashioned the exemplary lives of the novel. It should not surprise us that after half a century of bitter conflict in which the discomforts of necessary allegiance troubled the careers and lives of so many public and literary

[36] See Ch. 16, p. 349. [37] See Ch. 16, p. 341.

[38] Toni Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Literature and Culture* (Cambridge, 1996); S. Schama, 'The Domestication of Majesty: Royal Family Portraiture, 1500–1800', in R. Rotberg and T. Rabb (eds.), *Art and History: Images and their Meaning* (Cambridge, 1988), 155–83.

figures, contemporaries yearned for at least the illusion of community. That quest for harmonious coexistence has been told as the history of politeness and latterly as the forging of a common identity, that of Britons.[39] Do we not also detect the desire for pacification and community in new modes of life writing, and not only in the lives represented by fiction but as well in the new communities of readers fashioned by the form.[40] Whether written to underpin political causes and commitments or to deny or temper bitter partisanship, late seventeenth-century lives were formed by and within, and gave definition and expression to, human needs, social formations, and ideology.

Reflections on the end of our period inevitably lead us to review the processes and histories out of which biography emerged in late early modernity. We have briefly discussed within the broad and continuous category of exemplarity changes in the writing of lives as models of spirituality and civic virtue. We have argued—for all the continuing lability of the modes and forms of life writing—some increasing self-confidence within the form itself, a settling of locales and designs of the 'life'—that is a more clearly articulated sense of the project of biography. Unsurprisingly such emerging self-confidence and self-consciousness we have plotted in the history of genre: in the story of the clear publication and recognition of the life as a literary genre. In the case of a figure like John Dryden, the engagement with and the writing of biography is for the first time integral to the literary career, not only as a literary mode itself but for him a necessary site of self-reflection. The histories that we are tracing are not simply literary: the shifting forms of life writing and the emergence of biography must be told as part of economic and social history—of aristocratic patronage and clientage, of expanding literacy, of the commerce of print, of the development of urban and urbane lives. And finally we have urged the full situating of lives in all the high political narratives of early modern reformations and revolutions, in all ideological narratives. We would argue that the further exploration of such narratives—especially brought into conversation and play with one another—will unfold new perspectives and insights into the exchange between lives and histories. However, what most characterizes the essays

[39] See Colley, *Britons*.

[40] See Zwicker, 'The Constitution of Opinion and the Pacification of Reading', in Sharpe and Zwicker (eds.), *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), 295–316.

in this collection, rather than grand narratives, is an engagement with, a celebration of, the local, the particular, the case study, the micro-historical. We discern here a congruence with broader historiographical scepticisms about master narratives and overarching explanatory models as well as with the de-centring moves of recent literary theory. In the case of writing early modern lives, many of our contributors argue that a full reinhabiting of the local and an embrace of the gaps and silences in the archive, of the fragmentary and the episodic, are crucial to comprehending and writing early modern lives.

What does such a reinhabiting of early modernity then teach us about our own writing of early modern lives? Whatever our addiction to narrative, coherence, and explanation, our contributors surely imply the historicity and ideology of the modern biographical project and consequently underline the risks of plotting pre-modern lives as Enlightenment biography. Similarly our return to the fragmentary and episodic as well as to the condition of exemplarity point to the incongruence for early modern lives of a modernist model of developmental psychology with its profound teleologies.[41] To urge a scepticism about modernizing narratives and to reinhabit the fragmentary may seem to follow the turns, some might say raise the spectre, of the postmodern. And indeed it is not coincidental that some of the most interesting refigurings of the early modern have emerged from postmodern insistence on the historicity and ideologies of modernity and a disassembling of the modernist categories of the natural and normative. But as critics have increasingly objected, postmodernism has been less willing to accept the ideology and historicity of its own moves and moment—a moment which now appears itself transitory rather than exemplary.

How then might we conceive and write early modern lives in a time after postmodernity? For much of our period we have been talking about lives written for instruction, application, and polemic. Today biographies and lives seem far more obviously written for entertainment. Whether as books, bi-ops, or blogs, modern lives traverse all the media of the entertainment industry. What could appear more distant from early modern technology, spirituality, and exemplarity? And yet when we reflect on twenty-first-century modes of representing lives from an

[41] In her recent *The Sea Lady* (New York, 2006), one of Margaret Drabble's characters urges, 'The universe has shed the teleological fallacy' (p. 303).

early modern perspective we can identify some affinities. Though we are surely far removed from Renaissance scripts of exemplarity, we unquestionably take the lives of sporting celebrities and movie stars, even the ordinary figure raised to publicity through reality television, not only as cultural icons but as the very models of selfhood. And today the obsession with celebrity, the cult of the makeover, the ubiquitous desire to craft social identity out of fashion evoke and echo and speak to the impulses and desires of Renaissance self-fashioning. Despite the intense scepticism and secularism of our own time, do we not also discern in contemporary yearnings to find identity in popular icons some traces of the spiritual anxiety as well as psychological dislocations that we have identified in early modern lives? And for all our talk of entertainment and recreation, contemporary figurings of lives just as much as early modern representations are sites of ideology and contestation. In urging and explicating the exchanges among the early modern, the modern, and the contemporary we may find not only better ways of understanding and writing early modern lives but a greater willingness to historicize and critically read the scripts of our own life narratives—ourselves.

5

Gossip and Biography

Harold Love

Between 1661 and 1684 a small British community huddled on the Atlantic shore of Morocco in the storm-beaten citadel of Tangier. Cut off from local travel by the encircling Moors, the town's elite filled their days with conversation:

> Gossip and scandal throve apace in the narrow circle of Tangerine society; social jealousy was acute. It can be gathered from John Luke's 'Journal' that almost every look and word was noticed and commented upon. He himself took a deep interest in the affairs and intrigues of his neighbours; even the Governor and the chief officers of the staff did not despise the diversion of an hour's gossip.[1]

On one such occasion in 1671 'Major Fitzgerald recounted to his Excellency the carriage of all the ladyes last night at his house, a pleasant discourse wee had concerning Mistress Legg'. No doubt at the same time Mistress Legg and her women friends were engaged in a parallel discussion of the males: there was probably not much else to talk about. John Luke himself underwent the experience of being looked at 'something strangely' when he attended a wedding reception organized by his social betters. While such mutual scrutiny was understandable among the inhabitants of an isolated garrison town, even a passing acquaintance with Restoration comedy and the clandestine satire of the period will indicate that it was also a defining activity of leisured, upper-class life in the metropolis. Participants in this life nourished their days with a highly seasoned diet of oral personal narratives, which as well as providing precautionary models of how to avoid ridicule were

[1] E. M. G. Routh, *Tangier: England's Lost Atlantic Outpost* (London, 1912), 287.

also their main form of entertainment, promulgated through coffee-house conversations, the incessant 'visits', and other occasions of Town sociability.

Gossip was a subset of the wider category of news, whose circulation through Britain during the seventeenth century has been anatomized by Adam Fox.[2] The first greeting to a stranger met on the road or arriving in a town or village was likely to be 'What newes?' (p. 341). Certain classes of traveller had a special role as news transmitters: these might include professional carriers, petty chapmen, pedlars and vagabonds, or a poor woman 'who goeth abroad to sell sope and candels from towne to towne to get her lyving and she useth to carrie tales betwene neighbours'.[3] At London, Paul's Walk, the Royal and New Exchanges, and the theatre auditoria acted as clearing houses for oral information flowing in from the country and out to it again. Thames watermen were another source of topical news, in this resembling taxi-drivers today. In the country a news hub function was performed by fairs, markets, inns, especially those standing on well-travelled roads, and by churches and conventicles on sermon days. On 8 June 1651 Ralph Josselin recorded an occasion on which yearning after godliness and hunger for news mingle discordantly:

> a hearer at Halsted, the sermon very spirituall and profitable, lord blesse the towne and contry in the labours of that man, heard as if the Scots were neare Carlisle, the lord our god stand up for our helpe in whom I putt my trust: the great rumours of this weeke came to nothing, Cromwell recovers apace for which gods name bee praised.[4]

Tangier was a news hub in its own right, regularly supplied with homeland news by travellers and mail but also a listening point for happenings around the Mediterranean. Its news from Spain, southern France, Italy, and the Ottoman dominions would have been better and more timely than that received at Whitehall. Its leading inhabitants—traders, officials, diplomats, naval and military officers, and contractors working on a gigantic breakwater—were professionals for whom accurate information was vital and who would spare no pains to secure it.

[2] Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), 335–405.

[3] Ibid. 343–5, 341.

[4] *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616–1683*, ed. Alan Macfarlane (Oxford, 1976), 247.

But gossip was something different, and it is gossip that concerns us here. We need then to ask how gossip differed and still differs from other forms of orally circulated narrative.

A distinction which, while it should not be forced, is certainly in conformity with our own experience is that gossip arises from a concern with personalities rather than bare happenings. The whereabouts of the Scots army was news but whether the king of England was a papist and when he might have become so and the sayings and foibles of prominent courtiers belong with gossip. Individuals most commonly become the focus of gossip when their behaviour departs in a singular way from accepted norms; and yet, because gossip is essentially a narrative art and draws on a repertoire of proven, pre-existing story types, it will often elaborate on what was directly observed in ways dictated by those types. A good story may attach itself to new protagonists as old ones drop from memory. Often—indeed, almost always—gossip sets out to erode personal dignity. It is the enemy of pretensions to virtue whether fraudulent or perfectly justified. A further distinction, already implied, is that gossip has to entertain. This becomes evident when we compare Pepys, a diligent searcher after usable information, with Aubrey, an anecdotalist. While Aubrey will sometimes hunt down informants in order to verify claims, he is primarily interested in telling a good story. His lives frequently turn their subject into a species of monster. He is capable of admitting ancient jests (for example, the 'switter swatter' story about Raleigh) as biographical materials. Pepys will sometimes record gossip of this kind but his primary aim in conversation is to obtain information about people with whom he may have to deal professionally. Fabulous or inaccurate data might be positively dangerous to him. He also had to assess his informants carefully. Consider him on that saltwater pyromaniac, Sir Robert Holmes:

> He seems to be very well acquainted with the King's mind and with all the several faccions at Court, and spoke all with so much franknesse that I do take him to be my Lord's good friend, and one able to do him great service, being a cunning fellow, and one (by his own confession to me) that canne put on two several faces and look his enemies in the face with as much love as his friends. But good God, what an age is this and what a world this is, that a man cannot live without playing the knave and dissimulacion.[5]

[5] Entry for 1 Sept. 1661, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Mathews (London, 1970–83), ii. 169.

The gossips of Tangier, as well no doubt as angling in Pepysian style for the *utile*, were entertaining each other in an Aubrey-like way and helping to make the city itself a place of interest and excitement. They probably did this by discovering a great deal more deviant behaviour in the lives of their fellow citizens than they were ever guilty of.

In order to be entertaining the good gossip has to be a performer, even something of a stand-up comedian. In my *English Clandestine Satire* I explore a negative symmetry between gossip and the verse lampoon, arguing that the lampoon was a form of gossip in writing and gossip, in sufficiently skilled hands, a form of oral lampoon.[6] Interestingly, the best-known lampoon writers were all male while the virtuoso gossips like Catherine Sedley, Penelope Osbourne, and Mrs St John were generally female. A satirist of 1698 has left an account of Sedley in full flight:

> A wither'd Countess next, who rails aloud
> At the most reigning vices of the Croud,
> And with the product of that ill turn'd brain,
> Does all her Guests at Visits entertain,
> Thinks it a Crime for any one to be,
> Either ill natur'd or as leud as she,
> A Soveraign Judge over her sex does sitt,
> Giving full scope to that injurious witt,
> Too old for Lust and prove against all shame,
> Her only business now is to defame . . .[7]

Here we have a lampooner attacking a gossip. No doubt the compliment was often returned but, while the verses remain, the more dazzling art of the countess is preserved only imperfectly in her correspondence. A letter from Ireland of 1686 conveys something of her deixis:

> The match you writ off concerning the Lord Arron I believe true, for some people love to propagaite ffools. I doupt the pretty little widdow will come in at that toe, for her choyse is not very good. I thought she would have bin true toe love, and have marryed Tolmedge; sure she has Royall blood in her, she is soe fickle. Pray write toe mee offen, for letters from England are the only thinges that make this place supportable. Send the news true or false, I care not. I love an English lye . . .[8]

[6] Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire 1660–1702* (Oxford, 2004), 191–217.
[7] 'An answer to J. Poultney's Letter' (1698), Leeds University Library, Brotherton MS Lt. q. 38, p. 207.
[8] V. de Sola Pinto, *Sir Charles Sedley 1639–1701: A Study in the Life and Literature of the Restoration* (New York, 1927), 347–8.

Clearly this was something different, and much more in-your-face, than her father's affable charm that so amused Pepys in the theatre.[9] Sedley *père* is sometimes represented as a gossip (as for instance when he appears as Medley in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*) but what can be determined of his real-life conversation suggests that his actual line was non-stop wit, smart similes, and quick replies. The gossip fascinated through a gift for storytelling rather than sprightliness of manner.

It should be stressed here that, despite Sedley *fille*'s declared preference for an 'English lye', gossip cannot be entirely careless of accuracy. Its attractiveness lies in the possibility that the outrageous proposal might just conceivably be true. Whenever that possibility is wholly lost, the standing of the deliverer of the gossip is undermined. This applies even in the case of present-day newspaper gossip columns. Practitioners have variously defined the difference between a salacious rumour and a usable item as lying between 'half a dozen phone calls' and 'close to 100 emails a day'.[10] In earlier times this might involve having spies at work.[11] A gossip is assumed to embroider but will be the more appreciated to the extent that she appears to be preternaturally informed. The *vero* comes with much more force to the listener than the *ben* (or *mal*) *trovato*, as well as being a compliment, since no one wants to think they are seen by their informant as credulous. In addition, the gossip of the Town was very often based on a direct acquaintance by both speaker and hearers with the persons concerned, allowing a knowledgeable estimate of the plausibility of an accusation. Where actual social closeness was lacking, behaviour and deportment could be assessed as part of the licensed voyeurism of the theatres or the park. Even the king's body language was open to analysis as he lolled in the royal box among his favourites.[12] However, there is a significant difference between gossip and legend. Left to petrify, gossip quickly mutates into myth. Alan Macfarlane, having compiled his detailed, document-based account of the doings of two Restoration highwaymen named Smorthwait, found that their names had become incorporated into a regional folk tale

[9] See e.g. *Diary*, v. 288; viii. 72.
[10] 'Careless whispers', *The Age (Melbourne) Magazine* (February 2005), 36–8.
[11] See on this Love, *Clandestine Satire*, 163–4, 167, and Burnet's story of Rochester disguising a spy as a sentinel in order to obtain information about court intrigues.
[12] Decorum dictated that the other spectators should not turn their backs on the monarch, which might require pit attenders to adopt a twisted, side-on position. It was equally forbidden to establish direct eye-contact with the monarch; however, Pepys's accounts are evidence that this did not inhibit careful, indeed often fascinated, scrutiny.

that had virtually nothing to do with their actual deeds.[13] Despite the tendency of gossipers to reapply old stories, good gossip is always of the week, the day, even the hour. Hearers have no wish to rehear what they have already heard and might just as well have been uttering themselves. Good gossip is also fluid in the sense that it can be contested by those with different views and information, making it a stimulus to conversation.

What has been said will suggest something of the operations of gossip in Restoration England in an age when there was no rival public source of information about other people's personal lives. While at one level an almost universal pastime, it was one that at London had its recognized virtuosi, performing their art at visits and salons, and through this determining both the content and the governing inflections of what was passed down the informational food chain. The 'visit', as it has been anatomized in the case of the Verneys by Susan E. Whyman, was a key institution of gossip.[14] Members of the landed ruling class in town for the winter, consolidating themselves into a new, dominant urban demographic, spent a good deal of their time on highly ritualized observance of each others' nominated visiting days.[15] Gossip was the primary activity of these meetings. 'Where I was visiting the other night' narrates Rochester's Artemiza, before launching into an unforgettable portrait of a bad, because overbearing and untrustworthy, gossip seizing the floor and refusing to stop until she was totally out of breath.[16] In passages from Southerne's *The Wives Excuse* (1692) and Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), we learn of regular club-like cabals convened solely for the purpose of exchanging gossip—a leisured-class counterpart to the meetings of godmothers at a christening, which were the etymological origin of the term.[17] Such gatherings had a more oligarchic function in the gossip economy than the salons of Katherine Sedley or Penelope Verney. New gossip would certainly be transmitted and stale

[13] Alan Macfarlane, *The Justice and the Mare's Ale* (Oxford, 1981), 160–72.
[14] In Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660–1720* (Oxford, 1999), 87–109.
[15] On this social phenomenon, see also Love, *Clandestine Satire*, 66–79.
[16] *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford, 1999), 65.
[17] *The Plays of William Congreve*, ed. Herbert Davis (Chicago, 1967), 396; *The Works of Thomas Southerne*, ed. R. J. Jordan and Harold Love (Oxford, 1989), i. 289. Discussed in Love, *Clandestine Satire*, 70–1. On lying-in as an occasion of gossip see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 2003), 172–6.

gossip laughed out of court, but we should also assume an editorial or reviewing function by which stories were shaped and approved for the further circulation that would take place once the participants were returned to their regular domestic networks.

Gossip owes its power to its capacity to expose the subject to ridicule, either open or dissembled—the suppressed smile or the muffled laugh behind the back, whether actually observed or only imagined. But this power is not exercised solely for its own sake. Here we need to acknowledge what makes gossip so fascinating to social anthropologists, which is as a way of defining norms for behaviour and encoding practical morality.[18] The prospect of being gossipped about with the same freedom as one gossips about others is so unpleasant that one can hardly not pay attention to the lessons gossip teaches about what is acceptable and what unacceptable. Not in Tangier in this case but Tripoli, three Christians caught with prostitutes had to pay a huge fine and 'were well drubbed into the Bargaine... Twas a deere bout! But they would take noe Warning!'[19] They had failed to learn from gossip. There is, admittedly, a sub-class of individuals for whom gossip, whatever its content, is not resented because it provides reassurance that they are still reigning celebrities. Thomas Campion's Latin epigram I. 23 'Ad Calum' describes a great man who collects lampoons written against himself and enjoys reading them because they prove that he is still feared.[20] Gossip also constructed boundaries around desirable social formations. In order to be admitted to a circle one might have to pass a trial by gossip, or a bad run at the hand of the town gossips might lead to one's exclusion. A process of enrolment is described in a Restoration lampoon in which the narrative of a duchess's misdoings is agreed by a gossip circle to qualify her for being 'sworn of the Gang'.[21] The gossip of the Restoration Town was also an element in its most important and most eagerly scrutinized form of commerce—that of the marriage market. Members of gentry families came to London to seek spouses in what,

[18] A subject more fully considered in Love, *Clandestine Satire*, 193–8, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York, 1985), 34 and n. 24.
[19] C. R. Pennell (ed.), *Piracy and Diplomacy in Seventeenth-century North Africa: The Journal of Thomas Baker, English Consul in Tripoli, 1677–1685* (London and Toronto, 1989), 141.
[20] *Campion's Works*, ed. Percival Vivian (Oxford, 1909), 240.
[21] BL, Harl. 7315, fo. 211^{v}; more fully quoted in Love, *Clandestine Satire*, 206.

in the case of the Verneys, was always primarily a financial transaction. (Like most of their class, caught in a downward trend of agricultural prices, they could not afford for it to be otherwise.) The social side of the activity was usually managed by their female town relatives, the business side by a trusted agent who would haggle, often for months on end, over settlements, dowries, and jointures. These negotiations were in turn the object of intense, curious inspection by the Town at large. The value of the commodified human property under offer was very much at the mercy of gossip. 'Reputation' as Patricia Meyer Spacks has remarked 'is social currency'.[22] Rumours of unchastity in females or venereal disease in males might shave thousands from an estimate. By contrast, as Whyman records, approving gossip 'drove up prices and produced financial offers'.[23] We know of no case in which an attack through gossip on a woman's chastity was deliberately implemented in order to improve an intending husband's chances in the market, but it would be rash to say that it never happened. One heiress found her value as a matrimonial property enhanced by gossip that she was so badly infected with syphilis that she could not live long.[24]

GOSSIP AND BIOGRAPHY

Having obtained at least an imperfect sense of gossip as a phenomenon in early modern Britain and its dependencies, we now need to look more closely at the nature of its relationship to biography. In one significant case, that of Aubrey, the question has already been posed and the answer given that he showed little interest in discriminating between gossip and other sources of usable narratives. He is always primarily the storyteller. Biography in its modern, print-mediated sense rests primarily on records, correspondence, and newspapers. For the early modern period we also have the court depositions which have been so effectively used by Alan Macfarlane and Laura Gowing.[25] Anthony

[22] Spacks, *Gossip*, 31. [23] Whyman, *Sociability and Power*, 142.
[24] See *The Surviving Works of Anne Wharton*, ed. G. Greer and S. Hastings (Stump Cross, 1997), 100–3.
[25] Macfarlane, *The Justice and the Mare's Ale*; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers* and *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 2003). On gossip, see ibid. 120–3.

Wood was much more resourceful than Aubrey in his use of documentary sources and comes closer to the modern ideal of biographical practice but shows little interest in the personal as opposed to the public lives of his subjects. As Alan Pritchard has shown, given a juicy anecdote by Aubrey he might well ruin it in his retelling.[26] Pritchard's other important point is that most seventeenth-century biographers saw their role as one of providing exemplary models of vice or virtue from which private occurrences were rigorously excluded. Thomas Sprat suppressed, or possibly even destroyed, Cowley's diverting letters to his friends on the grounds that they were too personal for the world at large. That Swift, in the following century, was the subject of a long series of biographical treatments is chiefly due to the preservation of large bodies of correspondence, including the diary-like *Journal to Stella*, but also reflects a massive shift of interest on the part of readers of biographies towards the private person. Roger North, important both as a theoretician and practitioner of biography, illustrates the same shift. He had little time for biography composed solely on the basis of public documents (notoriously subject to the distortions of party), preferring that it should rest on close living acquaintance. A revisionist before his time, his preferred form of life writing was not of great men at all but of figures whose lives provided a meaningful conformity to those of the educated reading public. Most ancient biography was valueless for him because it was constructed around a bare record of actions and required to be padded out with fiction. Exemplary biography was not biography at all but a form of rhetoric. The authority he claimed for his own biographies rested on a lifelong intimate knowledge of their subjects. As a legal adviser to members of the royal family and witness of Privy Council meetings he had also been a close enough observer of the political leaders of his day to reject assessments in White Kennett's *Compleat History of England* (1706) made solely on the basis of written and second-hand oral sources.[27] Izaak Walton could have made a similar claim of intimacy with his subjects and was respected by North for that reason.[28] It was appreciated, of course, that social

[26] Alan Pritchard, *English Biography in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto, 2005), 167.
[27] In his *Examen: or, an Enquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a Pretended Complete History* (London, 1740).
[28] Roger North, *General Preface and Life of Dr. John North*, ed. Peter Millard (Toronto, 1984), 64.

behaviour was governed by insincerity and self-disguise and that the art of interpersonal negotiation was one of concealing one's real motivations (not only recognized by Pepys in the passage quoted earlier but an incessant theme of Restoration comedy). The good Northian biographer, like the good gossip, must also be a skilled decoder of pretence and reader of disguised intentions. Only intimate knowledge could ensure this.

Yet a concern for the personal does not imply approval of gossip as a means to supplying this. Gossip is made unreliable as a way of representing individuality by its norm-enforcing function. On one hand it is stimulated by the unusual and eccentric as departures from the norm that deserve to be subjected to ridicule. This process may convey a vivid sense of individuality, though one that is always on the edge of caricature. But at the secondary level where it delves for the hidden meanings of observed actions, it consistently seeks to activate a small repertoire of reductive story-types, in the sense that a chance meeting between two individuals might be turned into a liaison or a choice of dress into an occasion for treason. This process works to erase the real complexity of individual selves and their social relationships by accommodating them to stereotypes. North deeply resented the power by which gossip, especially once hardened into legend, might be used to project false and distorted images. His *Examen: or an Enquiry into the Credit and Veracity of a Pretended Complete History*, published posthumously in 1740, was written in response to the Whig Kennett's negative view of the characters of Charles II and James II and those who, like North himself and two of his brothers, had conscientiously served them. North's response was to stigmatize the work as '*a continual Libel, or rather Cloaca of Libels*' (A1^{v}). In one key passage, he upbraids Kennett for a malicious and uncritical use of gossip:

> His general Method of working up this fine Portraiture, is as gross as the Design, for he deals in the very Language, and useth, almost, the very Words which, at the Time, were current at Clubs, Cofee-houses, and factious Assemblies of the Party-Men. And he culls out of Libels, and Lampoons of the Town, choise Relations, Sentences and Flowers, which together with the factious Calumniations, Lyes and Raileries then in Vogue, he applies to the like Purposes, for which they were at first coined; that is to render the King little, and odious to the People, and his Government contemptible. (pp. 17–18)

These oral sources are seen as disingenuously manipulated. On the belief that the Popish Plot Martyr, Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, had been murdered by Catholics he writes:

> Those who first launched such a Rumour, had Reason for what they sent forth. As for the Progress of it, we knew it depended on the idle Coffee-House Company, with whom certain Hints and Nods, of a few choise Persons, went for Inspiration. (p. 201)

Kennett's key accusation, that Charles II had been a papist even before his Restoration, is instanced by Fox as a perennial item of gossip.[29] Yet, while rejecting vulgar and malicious gossip (the kind mostly considered in this chapter), North in his own approach to both his subjects and his reader is very close to what Spacks has described as 'serious gossip . . . the kind that involves two people, leisure, intimate revelation and commentary, ease and confidence' and affords an opportunity for 'emotional speculation'.[30] It would be good to have a different word for this kind of gossip.

North's method, presented by him as empirical rather than intersubjective, did not, paradoxically, lead to an assertion of the coherence of the individual life. In the cases of both his beloved elder brothers, Francis, Lord Guilford, Keeper of the Privy Seal, and John, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, he had to confront the emergence of a submerged personality as each approached death. Francis suddenly became uncharacteristically 'rigid', suspicious, and parsimonious and, what wounded Roger most, lost his pleasure in music.[31] John, following a severe stroke, was transformed from a pious dedicated scholar into a layabout who delighted in buffoonery and risqué stories, devoting his formerly brilliant mind to 'low concerns and reptile conceits that scarce rose from the ground'.[32] North's method of exact observation ('the profession I make of truth, for better or worse') (p. 155) required him to record these things, much as Boswell did with Johnson's many oddities and inconsistencies, while lacking or not

[29] Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*, 357. [30] Spacks, *Gossip*, 3.

[31] *The Life of the Lord Keeper North*, ed. Mary Chan (Lewiston, NY, 1995), 129. In this he differed from George Herbert, whose calling for his lute the Sunday before his death is represented by Walton as a prefiguration of his entry into heaven.

[32] North, *General Preface and Life of Dr. John North*, ed. Millard, 156.

desiring Boswell's capacity to assimilate these to an aesthetically integrated characterization.

As Pritchard has pointed out, even to admit such matters to a biography was a radical break from reigning traditions of life writing. It would be possible to interpret the move from Walton, say, via Aubrey and North to Boswell as reflecting a progression from biography as a philosophically or theologically grounded practice firmly located within the parameters of print culture to biography as a written-down derivative of gossip, conversation, and oral legend. Spacks sees the change, I believe anachronistically, as an effect of biography's negotiations with the novel.[33] The point remains, however, that biography's new concern with fabrications of the intimate rests directly or mediatedly on oral sources, premier among which was gossip. Even in Swift's case, literary sources and correspondence were largely valued as a means of interrogating questions that had become the matter of gossip, such as the nature of his relationships with Stella and Vanessa. The understanding of historic lives existed as oral legend prior to its being recorded in documentary form and the nature of the documentation was likely to be heavily influenced by the pressure of legend. Gilbert Burnet's *Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester*, so admired by Johnson, is at least based on acquaintance with Rochester and a series of interviews with him in the period prior to his death; but the assessment of his subject that the biographer brought to those interviews came from orally circulated stories of his subject's wild freaks and mocking of religion. North, having himself known Rochester, regarded Burnet's portrait as 'mere froth, whipped up to serve a turn'.[34] That this does not seem to have bothered Burnet's contemporaries arises from their lacking any other notion of how a contemporary life might be made the subject of a personal as opposed to an exemplary narrative. The moment the insufficiency of gossip as a ground for biography began to be recognized is marked by a sudden impatience over exactly this theoretical problem, only then perceived to be a problem. Not surprisingly it was the losers in the biographical stakes, such as North, who first became acutely aware of it. His own writings are an attempt to rescue

[33] Spacks, *Gossip*, 92–120. Anachronistically, because it involves a reading backwards from the novel in its achieved form to earlier life writing.
[34] North, *General Preface and Life of Dr. John North*, ed. Millard, 77.

individuals he respected from misrepresentation through gossip, using both a scrupulous record of his first-hand recollection of every aspect of their living selves and a critical analysis of the disputational practices of the misrepresenters.

Yet even today biographers, however scholarly and scientific their methodology, and however subtle their theorization of their practice, are likely to be drawn to a subject by a sense of presence that is a product of social repute. Once research begins, the problems of testimony that so worried North will be found to be just as present as they were for him. As Jean Cocteau once warned:

> Our opinions are based on matter which in us and in others gets deformed. Our readiness to mythify and accept myths is incredible. A falsified truth is soon gospel to us. To it we add something of our own brew, and little by little a likeness is formed which bears no relation to the original.[35]

Mythification, whose natural medium is gossip and which so soon hardens into legend, continues to invade the core of the biographical project, serving as a standing temptation to biographers to become storytellers, holding their audience through the vibrancy of narrative, rather than historians sceptically processing documentary traces, or philosophers reflecting on the strange alchemy by which flesh is transmuted into text. Most readers of contemporary biography clearly prefer it that way. The withered countess's salon has always been a more diverting place than Roger North's sober study.

As for Restoration Tangier, it remains, as it always was, a city without biography. A survey of its quarter-century under British rule reveals stirring stories of military and naval heroism, engineering genius and mercantile enterprise to set against others of chicanery, betrayal, and neglect; but the individuals whose acts gave rise to these stories remain little more than names on muster-rolls, ships' manifests, and treasury dockets. In so far as any of the day-to-day human agents are still comprehensible to us as living presences it is only through the journals of John Luke and the peripatetic Henry Tonge, both of them arrant gossips. Otherwise oblivion has scattered her poppy over all. Peter Millard has argued that it was the fear of a similar oblivion overtaking his brothers

[35] Jean Cocteau, 'Of the Pre-eminence of Fables', *The Hand of a Stranger (Journal d'un inconnu)*, trans. Alec Brown (London, 1956), 107.

and himself that inspired Roger North's biographical project. While he planted trees that he knew would last for many generations 'he was aware always of the terrible impermanence of things, especially of people' (p. 13). Again, the rarely examined impulse that moves a biographer to negotiate the mysteries of another life, whatsoever the means, the methodology, or the theory, will often have bubbled up from the undertow of the personal or its lingering, duplicitous, presence in gossip.