Introduction

How did individuals write about their lives, before a tradition of diaries and autobiographies was established? In *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, I examine the kinds of texts that sixteenth- or seventeenth-century individuals produced to register their life, in the absence of these later, dominant templates. I explore four new kinds of life-writing and, through these forms, I bring a dynamic and surprising culture of autobiographical writing to critical prominence for the first time.

I began my research by visiting local archives in Britain, calling up, in a spirit of optimism, all the manuscript materials I could locate that were catalogued under 'diary' or 'autobiography'. What arrived at my desk were often not, in fact, diaries, or autobiographies, as those terms are normally deployed, but rather many other kinds of texts that were loosely related to an idea of self-accounting: letters; reports of court proceedings and records of legal interrogations; travel narratives; documents of spiritual conversion; recipe books; annotated family Bibles. At first the sheer variety seemed problematic; but, as I read on, I had that particular sensation that archival research so often produces: an initial sense of disappointment, as what I had expected to find didn't appear, which gradually gave way to the realisation that here was a culture of life-writing whose very inclusivity and taxonomical strangeness demanded that I revisit many of my assumptions about autobiographical forms.

Four kinds of text appeared at my desk with particular frequency: the printed almanac, annotated with handwritten notes; the financial account; the commonplace book; and the parish register. Certainly these texts are not diaries or autobiographies as criticism would conventionally use those terms – and scholars of autobiographical writing have largely overlooked these forms. But it soon became apparent that these texts were central to a historically sensitive exploration of early modern life-writing. It is with these four forms that *Autobiography in Early Modern England* is preoccupied: I devote a chapter to each.

In the period before the diary or autobiography began to dominate attempts to arrange a written life – that is, before the later seventeenth century – individuals seeking to produce textual records of their lives experimented and improvised with other available forms. In much, but not all, past scholarship, a too rigid conception of genre – and a desire to identify early modern autobiographical practices which are discernibly our own – has obscured this culture of innovation and adaptation. The previously neglected autobiographical forms which I foreground – forms found precisely in the gaps between existing archival and generic categories – contribute towards a larger network of life-writing texts. I argue that early modern autobiography took place across such a network: the connections between these texts are crucial. Life-writing was produced through an often lengthy chain of textual transmission and revision, sometimes over a long period of time: records were shunted from text to text – from almanac to diary; from account book to parish register to diary; from commonplace book to diary to autobiography – and were reworked in the process: filled out; regularised; pruned back; reordered; revised; converted into narrative. The conventions of earlier stages of revision shaped later texts. A single, albeit spectacular, diary, like Pepys's, was not an isolated text, but in fact sat within a web of other life-writing forms, drawing on earlier notes and drafts and other kinds of record; and early modern autobiographical writing can, I think, best be read through this conception of a dense network of life-writing texts, where notes were moved from text to text. Giving prominence to one or two particular kinds of life-writing (the diary; the autobiography, conventionally defined) over others is not only anachronistic; it also represents a critical missed opportunity: there is so much else out there to explore.

Faced with this culture of transmission and revision, many modern assumptions about autobiographical writing unravel. Diary writing is often imagined as spontaneous, unmediated, artless, and candid: Virginia Woolf described the diary as a 'capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds & ends';[1] one recent scholar suggested the diary's 'unwittingness' may be likened to a set of fingerprints;[2] and a third critic claimed that Pepys's diary was written 'frankly and swiftly to get down what had stirred his mind each day'.[3] I hope to show that early modern autobiographical writing was

[1] Virginia Woolf, *Diary*, 20 April 1919. Quoted in Harriett Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries* (Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1989), p. 6.
[2] Roger Cardinal, 'Unlocking the Diary', in *Comparative Criticism* 12 (1990), 71–87, 78.
[3] Percival Hunt, *Pepys in the Diary* (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1959), p. 175. Quoted in Mark S. Dawson, 'Histories and Texts: Refiguring the Diary of Samuel Pepys', in *The Historical Journal* 43.2 (2000), 407–31, 416.

something rather different: a retrospective, mediated, intertextual process. Or, to put it more aphoristically: early modern life-writing was as much about writing as it was about life.

Chapter 1 of *Autobiography in Early Modern England* considers annotated almanacs. Printed almanacs were staggeringly popular, and early modern drama, including Shakespeare's, is saturated with references to this form. These cheap, diminutive, eminently portable books provided readers with monthly calendars, astrological and meteorological prognostications, details of fairs and journeys between markets, notes of what were deemed canonical historical events, medical tips, discussions of the planets' influence on the well-being of the body, and more. But perhaps the most striking feature is that almanacs were often interleaved with blank pages, on which readers added notes of their activities: their journeys; their illnesses and recoveries; their resolutions; their financial dealings; the births, deaths, and marriages of their family's life. By examining a number of annotated almanacs – by well-known figures (Anthony Wood, John Evelyn), and by previously unknown individuals (widow Sarah Sale, Norfolk Puritan Matthew Page) – and by focusing in particular on the Civil War almanacs of Lady Isabella Twysden of Roydon Hall, Kent, I consider the relationship between printed almanacs and manuscript annotations, and the connection between annotated almanacs and those categories which organise critical discussions of life-writing: identity, subjectivity, autobiography, diary. If readers added notes of their activities to their almanacs, what place does this practice have within a culture of autobiographical writing? One answer to this question has to do with textual transmission. Materials added to almanacs were frequently transferred to other texts: diarists often generated a life through a process of shifting material from text to text, starting with an almanac, expanding records with each movement. Many attributes of diaries are due to the later-effaced presence of the almanac as an early text in an ongoing process of rewriting. This founding compositional moment shaped the contents and form of later diaries.

The financial account was one of the most common genres of writing in early modern England but it is, in terms of literary criticism, hugely under-explored. In Chapter 2 I aim to rectify this neglect by considering the relationship between financial accounting and accounting for a life, through a close reading of the accounting practices of three individuals: Lady Anne Clifford, well known to scholars for her life-long battle to secure her inheritance and for her extensive life-records, but also the compiler of a largely ignored account book; antiquarian Sir Edward Dering, who constructed 'A Booke of expences from y^{e} yeare 1619 (being halfe a yeare before

I was first marryed); unto y^e^ yeare [1628]'; and controversial Independent minister Thomas Larkham – 'a sower of discord and hatred,' according to opponents, 'in all places wheresoever he hath been'[4] – who compiled a dizzyingly complicated, palimpsestic record of his finances. The links between financial accounting and life-writing are many, but two broad connections run throughout this chapter. Not only did many autobiographies and diaries, like Pepys's apparently 'impulsive' journal, begin life as lists of expenses that were gradually worked up into prose; but, more broadly, one crucial paradigm for the whole process of textual transmission was financial bookkeeping: the shunting of financial records between inventory, waste book, journal and ledger, prescribed in influential guides to financial accounting such as John Mellis's *A Briefe Instruction and Maner How to Keepe Bookes of Accompts After the Order of Debitor and Creditor* (1588), was, to a significant degree, an exemplary model of production that informed and shaped the movement of other kinds of texts. Clifford is particularly important here: her significance to early modern life-writing has long been recognised – she constructed a series of closely related autobiographical texts which constitute 'the longest surviving autobiographical record of the early modern era'[5] – but the central role of financial accounting to the production of her written lives – as an early stage of her life-writing, and as a model for the process – has been generally overlooked. Furthermore, financial accounting is also crucial for life-writing because methods of early modern financial accounting constructed a particular idea of truthfulness. The printed guide to financial accounting, and in particular to double-entry bookkeeping, was a hugely popular publication, and established a strong link between particular methods of arranging financial records and ideas of reliability and truthfulness. When individuals came to write accounts of their lives, the financial account provided one readily available template for truthfulness, a template which life-writers might appropriate for their own projects. The structures and methods of financial accounting thus underlay many attempts to produce reliable records of the events of a life.

In Chapter 3 I turn to the commonplace book, a hugely influential early modern form, associated in particular with young men of the universities and Inns of Court, but in fact also produced by a wide range of compilers, including women, outside these environments. In commonplace books, aphorisms, plucked from reading or conversation, were arranged under

[4] Thomas Larkham, *Naboth, In a Narrative and Complaint of the Church of God which is in Christ Jesus, At Tavistock in Devon* (1657), p. 6.

[5] Katherine O. Acheson (ed.), *The Memoir of 1603 and The Diary of 1616–1619* (Broadview Editions, Peterborough, Ontario, 2007), p. 9.

thematic headings to provide the compiler with a storehouse of pieces of eloquence – pieces which could be redeployed in written or spoken exchanges. Although, in practice, commonplace books were often more varied and irregular than this definition suggests – compilers often bundled together everything from lines of Ovid to recipes for curing one's ailing horse, and produced kinds of collection that bled into other forms – commonplace books were, at heart, catalogues of reusable passages of text. To suggest any relationship between the commonplace book and life-writing may thus seem surprising, or counterintuitive, since the commonplace book contains recycled quotations, gathered from sources not composed by the compiler, which appear to be, therefore, autobiographically inauthentic. But in this chapter I suggest that a compiler's life was constructed in the pages of his or her commonplace book precisely through this recycling of quotations. I examine a range of commonplace books (by, among others, Parliamentary General Sir William Waller, Sir Roger Wilbraham, Solicitor-General for Ireland, Kentishman Henry Oxinden, and Sir Francis Fane, who produced a commonplace book composed of the wisdom of five generations of his family), but also focus on the spectacular Civil War manuscript of Royalist Sir John Gibson, produced while Gibson was imprisoned in Durham Castle in the 1650s. Gibson deploys borrowed texts that speak very particularly to events in his life: in order to record the death of his children, for example, Gibson transcribed two short verses 'On an Infant that dyed', drawn from a contemporary printed verse miscellany. Other events in Gibson's life – his crippling debts, his relationship with his parents – are similarly conveyed through recycled lines. More broadly, Gibson conceived of his life as a retelling of a known tale: in order to describe his own sufferings and, as he saw it, unjust punishment, Gibson transcribed short lines of verse or prose, and glued in images, cut from texts by or about a coterie of individuals who represented, to Gibson, the tribulations of the good man: Charles I, Charles II, Archbishop William Laud, John the Baptist, Ovid, Ulysses, St John Chrysostome. Gibson understood his life as one more iteration of these types. And so while the manuscript appears to be lacking in autobiographical details, those details are expressed, paradoxically, through other people's words and other people's lives. I consider the implications of this notion of a life as a patchwork of excerpts where the paradoxical dual meaning of 'identity' as both 'uniqueness' and 'sameness' is apparent. While criticism inclines us to expect and value a subjectivity founded on difference and individuality, commonplace books reveal the degree to which a compiler's identity might be constructed through a process of alignment with other figures, narratives, and

events; through a pursuit of parallels; through an interest in sameness, not difference.

In Chapter 4 I examine the parish register: a new, dramatically inclusive form of early modern accounting that is bursting with life. Parish registers were introduced by Thomas Cromwell in 1538 to record 'the day, and year of every wedding, christening and burying in . . . [each] parish and the name of the persons wedded, christened or buried',[6] and they demonstrated to parishioners that (almost) every life might be registered in written form. After establishing the conventions of the register as a piece of writing and as a material form, I trace the transition of the burial record from a curt notice of name and date ('May 13 Thomas Crannoway buried') into something like a proto-obituary ('Philippe Winchly of Ware, an owld notorious bedlam rogue, died suddanly in the fields within our parish as hee travelled alonge, and was buried with us the xijth of October').[7] The increasing detail of burial records is particularly common in notices of individuals who occupy a position on the margins of society: the poor, the nameless, the homeless, the foreign. Register notices also grow in detail as a result of ministers introducing moralising reflections on the lives of their flock: '1673, April 23, was buried M^r^ Thomas Sharrow, Clothworker, late Churchwarden of this parish, killed by an accidental fall in a vault . . . *Let all that read this take heed of drink*.'[8] Parish register notices blossomed into detail in moments of crisis: plague led to the creation of narrative across records; and the collapse of sanctioned modes of communal remembering in the form of purgatorial culture meant parish registers assumed a vital role in keeping alive memories of the local dead. And while parish registers provided increasingly detailed collections of biographies, they might also evolve into first-person diaries: I finish by examining the extraordinary parish register compiled by the Reverend John Wade of Hammersmith, which contains detailed, and agonised, notes on Wade's own life that chart a reiterated movement between indulgence and guilt ('I eat their sturgeon at supper too freely'; 'never drink above 3 glasses to please any man'). I consider the connections between a minister making records about his

[6] 'Cromwell's Injunction to the Clergy', 5 September 1538, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. James Gairdner, vol. XIII, part II (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1893), no. 281.

[7] Parish register of St Alfrege, Dulwich, London Metropolitan Archives, P78/ALF/1, 1616; *The Parish Register and Tithing Book of Thomas Hassall of Amwell*, ed. Stephen G. Doree (Hertfordshire Records Publications vol. V; Hertfordshire Record Society, Hertfordshire, 1989), p. 95.

[8] J. S. Burn, *Registrum Ecclesiaea Parochialis: The History of Parish Registers in England* (1829, republished EP Publishing, Wakefield, 1976), p. 122.

flock and a minister making notes of his own life. More broadly, I consider the connections between different forms of accounting for a life.

As a project that recovers neglected forms from the archive in order to reconsider autobiography, this book links closely with several strands of recent early modern work. In my expansion of the term 'autobiography', my book sits alongside studies by Sharon Cadman Seelig and Estelle C. Jelinek, who have noted that a privileging of particular life-writing forms – generally those produced by elite men, which offer a written life 'that gives us well a sense of the times in which it was lived',[9] revealing a 'connectedness to the rest of society'[10] – has obscured many other kinds of autobiographical writing.[11] My interest in more varied forms introduces new writers, in terms of gender and of class, to the critical conversation: previously unknown individuals jostle with established names such as Lady Anne Clifford and John Evelyn. Indeed, in parish registers it is precisely the 'elusive', liminal figures (homeless, nameless, criminal) who receive more detailed records, as compilers sought to pin down those figures who evaded orthodox categories of identity.

A further scholarly coordinate for my expansion of autobiography is Meredith Anne Skura's recent study of Tudor life-writing. Skura recognises the gap between modern expectations of autobiography and sixteenth-century enactments: early modern culture did not prioritise development, coherence, and pattern in life-writing; it was less preoccupied with what we call subjectivity or individuality; it read allegorically, and so was less troubled with a clear separation between truth and fiction; and it produced written lives that were 'always part of some other occasion' (entwined in

[9] Sharon Cadman Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600–1680* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006), p. 5.

[10] Estelle C. Jelinek (ed.), *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980), p. 7.

[11] For work that has examined other forms, see Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly (eds.), *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2006); James S. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998), pp. 28–41; Elspeth Graham, 'Women's Writing and the Self', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500–1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), pp. 209–33, esp. pp. 213–17. For anthologies of autobiographical texts that give a sampling of some of these forms, see Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby, and Helen Wilcox (eds.), *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (Routledge, London and New York, 1989); David Booy, *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004); David Booy, *Personal Disclosures: An Anthology of Self-Writings from the Seventeenth Century* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002); and Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550–1700* (Routledge, London and New York, 2004), chapter 6, 'Life-Writing: Nonfiction and Fiction', pp. 241–315.

sermons, prefatory addresses, letters).[12] Thus, while Skura's corpus of materials differs from mine – her established literary figures include Thomas Wyatt, Isabella Whitney, George Gascoigne, and Robert Greene – her pursuit of surprising ways in which autobiography might be conveyed constitutes a similar endeavour. Skura is particularly interested in the capacity of formal literary choices, as much as content, to signal autobiography, such as Wyatt's evocation of the movements of a troubled mind in his rough lines of verse; and she stresses the creative, 'personal' uses of convention, noting how, in *The Vocacyon of Johan Bale* (1553), Bale stretches his own life-story of adversity over the template of St Paul's final journey to Jerusalem. As a result, Skura breaks down a familiar but largely unhelpful dichotomy of (medieval) convention and (Renaissance) authenticity. This emphasis on the way in which convention and autobiography might be compatible, rather than opposed, is important for my book.

Skura's defamiliarising readings of canonical texts represents one route to a new conception of autobiography. Two other strands in early modern studies provide further paths: recent research on the circulation and evolution of texts, and also on the surprising materiality of early modern writing. Arthur Marotti's *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (1995) encouraged scholars to consider texts as inconstant forms that moved between different media. An older opposition between unstable manuscript and fixing print, and a criticism organised around dominant authors and stable texts, gave way to an emphasis on textual malleability, the overlapping cultures of manuscript and print, the (at best) latent control of authors, and the capacitiy of readers to appropriate and rework writing. Underpinning this latter emphasis on readers as improvisers who adapted texts was Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), with its emphasis on the 'ruses' or 'turns' readers perform to resist imposed meanings.[13] One consequence of this interest in textual transmission was a greater stress on archival work, since it was in the archives that variant versions of a text might be found; and this immersion in turn revealed to scholars the fundamentally *strange*, or at least surprising, material forms of much early modern writing. This was evidently a textual culture which had not yet settled around the stable, bound, clean (that is, unannotated) printed book as its primary form, and a criticism which anachronistically

[12] Meredith Anne Skura, *Tudor Autobiography: Listening for Inwardness* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2008), p. 9.

[13] Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1995). Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984), p. 174.

privileged such a form over all others sacrificed a compellingly chaotic bibliographical context. In this book I am attentive to such alternative forms: handwritten notes covering printed texts, printed books interleaved with blank pages, medieval manuscripts enclosing financial accounts written centuries later, pages cut from one text, glued into another.[14] Such bibliographic inventiveness, far from being anomalous, was representative of early modern culture and reflected the tussle between readers, printers, and authors that created material texts.

If the archival turn of the last two decades – and the strange riches this has produced – is an important context for this book, in terms of expanding both the genres and the material forms of writing, so too is the recent interest in the ways in which early modern texts generated trust or, in the words of Mary Poovey, 'the effect of accuracy'.[15] Axiomatic to this area of research is the idea that truthfulness has a history, and is generated in different ways at different times, and also that conceptions of truthfulness and plausibility might migrate between discourses and cultural spheres. In *A Social History of Truth*, Steven Shapin argues that the conventions and etiquettes of early modern gentlemanly conduct shifted into the sphere of experimental natural philosophy: attributes that were deemed central for upper-class male sociability – trust, integrity, civility, honour, (economic) independence – informed early modern conceptions of how to establish scientific truth. Lorna Hutson's *The Invention of Suspicion* suggests that methods of reviewing evidence in English legal culture found an analogue on stage, in the ways in which characters in drama established plausibility. Jurors, justices of the peace, and others engaged in the 'strongly participatory structures of English criminal justice', were required to compare and evaluate competing narratives, and such skills in 'weighing likelihoods'[16] found expression in characters on the 1590s stage who weighed and evaluated information in an attempt to establish truthfulness – and who, as a result of this struggle with evidence, generated the impression, to theatregoers, of plausibility, naturalism, and even psychological depth.

Such recent work has shown the mobility of conceptions of plausibility. I examine financial accounting as another source of ideas about truthfulness and as a template for the production of reliable autobiographical texts. In so doing, I am building on the work of Craig Muldrew and Ceri Sullivan,

[14] See Juliet Fleming, William Sherman, and Adam Smyth (eds.), *Renaissance Collage* (forthcoming).
[15] Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1998), p. 30.
[16] Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008), pp. 3, 2.

among others, who explore how an emerging market econcomy created a culture of debt, and so a web of reciprocal obligations which depended upon individuals convincing others of their trust and reliability.[17] While many scholars, following Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism* (1905), have traced the emergence of an acquisitive, individualising, capitalistic mode of behaviour, my attention to the accounting practices in the archives reveals a financial culture that is more varied, less preoccupied with individualism, and more aware of the network of textual and social connections that bookkeeping creates. I am interested in the migration of a financial lexicon – credit, debt, obligation, trust, account – into a broader cultural sphere to describe social relations, in the shift from accounting for one's finances, to accounting for one's life. Early modern literary studies has, over time, turned to a number of master-narratives for explaining cultural change: religion was long dominant, and then politics. Judging from much recent work, it now appears to be money's turn.

A final scholarly co-ordinate for this book is the long-running debate about the 'birth' of early modern subjectivity. Ever since the publication of Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), the Renaissance has been formulated as the moment in which a discernibly modern subjectivity was born – the moment that saw the emergence of individuals who conceived of themselves as self-reflective, detached, interiorised.[18] While the term 'early modern' has to a considerable degree displaced 'Renaissance', this narrative of the invention of a new spirit of individualism, selfhood, and introspection – linked to Protestantism's emphasis on self-reflection and inwardness – has remained largely intact. Very often Shakespeare's plays, and in particular Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act 1, Scene 2, stand as epitomes of this 'modern depth'.[19] 'All of us', writes Harold Bloom, with a characteristic level of understatement, 'were to a shocking degree, pragmatically reinvented by Shakespeare.'[20]

One problem with this narrative is that its dominance has led to an almost exclusive prioritising of one model of subjectivity, based around modern ideas of difference, individuality, and alienation: 'the single and

[17] Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998); Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Associated University Press, London, 2002).

[18] Burckhardt wrote that in the middle ages, 'man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation'; it was only in the Renaissance that 'man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such'. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* (Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1944), p. 81.

[19] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995), p. 31.

[20] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (Riverhead Books, New York, 1998), p. 17.