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Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices
(review)

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Biography, Volume 30, Number 4, Fall 2007, pp. 637-640 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2008.0018>



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It is a pity that this model is pushed so hard by the author, and is allowed to exclude other possible explanations. It is arguable, for instance, that King Childebert plays so prominent a role in the *Vita* of St Vigor because his association with Vigor would thus boost the monastery of Cerisy, a newly founded house of the 1030s dedicated to Vigor, where the *Vita* was composed. It gave Cerisy some status against longer-established rivals, like Jumièges and Mont-St-Michel, which claimed to possess Carolingian royal diplomata. It is arguable also that the territorial concerns with the French Vexin so evident in the *Passio* of St Nicaise (composed at the abbey of St-Ouen of Rouen) had nothing to do with establishing ducal claims in the region, but more to do with affirming the archiepiscopal authority of Rouen in a region which was politically outside Normandy. The features Herrick identifies can be interpreted equally as the product of ecclesial as political concerns, but these are not considered, even to be argued against. This is not to say that Herrick's theory is not worthwhile, but it is the job of the historian to consider multiple theories, even if it does not make the resulting work easier to read.

The quality of Herrick's work is not in doubt, however. There is, in addition to the text, a learned appendix on the manuscripts and manuscript traditions of the *Vitae* of Taurin and Vigor, and another on the transmission of the *Passio Nicasii*. The endnotes are models of erudition. This book could not be bettered as an example of the new school of early medieval hagiographical criticism.

David Crouch

Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly, eds. *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006. 309 pp. ISBN13 978-0-472-06928-6, \$27.95.

The contributors to this valuable multidisciplinary collection bring to the study of early modern autobiography a rigorous attention to a wide range of early modern autobiographical material. In their introduction, the editors argue that early modern autobiography demonstrates the "constant interplay between two poles: the grand ideals of selfhood . . . and the everyday terrain," and thus the objects of study are drawn from those poles and everywhere in between (2). Underlying the volume is the assertion that, as Lloyd Davis claims in his overview of the critical debates about autobiography, "detailed reflection on social, cultural, and historical factors" is essential to the study of early modern autobiography (23). Indeed, the strength of many of the essays in the collection is their attention to the cultural making of the "self" of self-writing. This volume is rich and full of insights into the construction and

communication of the early modern self. Its inclusion of overlooked materials is refreshing and ambitious; however, the risk involved in this inclusion works better in some of the essays than in others.

The essays that comprise Part One, "Self Theories," examine the factors that influence how the early modern self may have seen itself. Conal Condren claims that the early modern self was the display of a persona or an assumed identity rather than a "moral individuality" (46). Ronald Bedford argues for a source for such personae: the theater. Bedford examines "the mimesis that occurs not when the dramatist or poet holds a mirror up to nature but when an audience member or reader is moved to imitate what is represented" (49). Philippa Kelly considers "the capacity of mirrors in *language* to help shape certain concepts and practices of self-representation and life writing" in her informative discussion of early modern mirrors (62).

In Part Two, "Life Genres," the contributors examine the effects of confinement on self-writing. Two of the essays, Peter Goodall's and Dosia Reichardt's, treat literal confinement. Goodall argues that an "authentic self" can be seen in the "literary representation of lived experience as nurtured in the study" (104). Self-writing was made possible, according to Goodall, because the rise of the private study created the opportunity for a person to retire to write about the self. On the other hand, Reichardt's prisoners did not choose their confinement, and the self-writing they produced reveals the tension between "desired reunification" and the "expression of individuality" (115).

The other essays in this part deal with different forms of figurative confinement—confinement to a period, to a portrait, by exclusion, and to a playwright's corpus. Anne M. Scott argues that Hoccleve is an "autobiographical poet," who ought not to be studied as merely belonging to the medieval period because "to give labels such as medieval, early modern, or modern, is to ignore the constant organic development of thought and attitude that transcends notions of periodization" (101). Scott's reading of Hoccleve's *Complaint* is very persuasive, and there is a "self-representation [that] emerges" in the poem (100); however, it is not entirely clear why that self-representation transcends periodization. Certainly, one might just as easily argue that there is something specifically medieval about Hoccleve's self-writing that is worth exploring. In her essay on Van Dyck's portrait of Suckling, Belinda Tiffen argues that the portrait is evidence of Suckling's self-fashioning and self-representation. Tiffen admits that an examination of "visual autobiography" is complicated by the painter, "who takes cues from the subject but filters them through his or her own interpretation" (165), but the essay does not deal with this complication as fully as one would like. Helen Wilcox's examination of exile and autobiography shows the effects on self-writing of being excluded from one's home. While her claim that "exile . . . is the space of

autobiography” is very convincing (155), Wilcox’s loose definition of exile undermines her overall argument. R. S. White’s piece about Shakespeare’s “autobiography” may seem ill-suited to this section—in fact, White notes a number of times that the reader may wonder what the essay is doing in the collection at all. On the contrary, the story that White tells about piecing together the life of Shakespeare from the confines of his published works complicates some of the main assumptions of the volume by questioning the truth of any self-writing. As White points out, Shakespeare’s works “can be read as notes toward an autobiography of an identity, a self, but simultaneously as an evasion of the self” (186).

The case studies of the final part, “Self Practices,” show the importance of the margins and professionalism in the construction of early modern selves. Isabella Whitney, as an unemployed and unmarried woman, lived on the margins of society. Yet, as Jean E. Howard’s essay demonstrates, the “urban context in which the speaker lived and wrote” allowed Whitney to imagine a life in which she chose to remain single and write (230). In the Paston Letters, Helen Fulton recognizes “evidence . . . for an emerging subjectivity produced by the secular discourses of urban exchange” (213). This “exchange” between the city and the Pastons’ properties in Norfolk, Fulton argues, shows a different kind of subject coming into being, because it is filled with “discourses of commodification, bureaucracy, urban centrality, and socioeconomic status” (213). According to Nancy E. Wright, the margins of the page are as important to autobiography as are the margins of society and urban centers. Wright examines Anne Clifford’s use of first-person pronouns in the margins of her household accounts, and argues that Clifford “exercises her agency as a woman of property” for her “family” and “household,” which “define her ‘self’” (249).

Three of the essays in this final part elucidate the relationship between fashioning a self and being a professional. Inigo Jones, according to Liam E. Semler, self-consciously “assembled his desired self” in a “peculiarly textual way” (253). Semler reads Jones’s notebooks and marginal notes for traces of this “self-assembly.” Adrian Mitchell looks at William Dampier’s assertion of his identity as a privateer not a buccaneer in order to unlock the “key to Dampier’s self-imagining and self-valuing” (273). The final chapter in the book, Wilfrid Prest’s, treats the reappearance of a “legal autobiography” in the writing of William Blackstone in the eighteenth century. Prest argues that Blackstone broke “the autobiographical drought” of over seventy years because of “the unusual trajectory of his legal career” (292).

Early modern selves, it seems, are made of and by many different things. From the self-reflective writing of Part One to the confinement of Part Two to the margins and professions of Part Three, *Early Modern Autobiography*

gathers together sixteen important essays that consider early modern notions of the self, what went into forming that self, and how it could be expressed. Although the quality of the essays is at times uneven, the collection should prove an important resource for scholars of autobiography and early modern culture alike.

Jessica C. Murphy

Teresa A. Toulouse. *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007. 225 pp. ISBN13 978-0-8122-3958-4, \$49.95.

Perhaps the most popular genre in early American literature, the colonial captivity narrative continues to fascinate readers and scholars. But while some critics have focused on the generative role that the colonial captivity narrative allegedly played in bringing about other, more “literary” genres such as the novel in other places and times (i.e. England or the nineteenth-century US), Teresa Toulouse’s new book interrogates the culturally complex functions that the colonial captivity narrative played in its own place and time—colonial New England during the last two decades of the seventeenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth. Also, while other critics have often tended to read the captivity narratives as historical, autobiographical, or ethnographic documents, Toulouse is interested in these narratives as rhetorical constructs that fulfill particular political purposes at the time at which they were published. Finally, in contrast to critics who have frequently found in these narratives manifestations of a “subversive” self rebelling against religious, social, or political orthodoxies, Toulouse reads them as allegorizations of a thoroughly conservative and patriarchal socio-political ideology in an age that saw the steady erosion of the cultural and political authority of the ministerial oligarchy.

“From the Restoration of 1660 to the Peace of Utrecht of 1713,” she writes, “imperial conflicts over the larger meanings of political legitimacy and authority in Europe both exacerbate and evoke a crisis in cultural identification for some second- and third-generation New English ministers which eventuates in a defensive reworking of their English-born (grand) fathers’ original ‘errand’” (15–16). Yet, the ministers’ filial relationship was ambivalent, Toulouse suggests, precisely because the second- and third-generation “sons” aimed both to appropriate as well as to redefine the authority of their first-generation “fathers.” In pursuing this line of argument, the book focuses on the various publications of four key texts: Mary Rowlandson’s archetypal *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), about her captivity during King