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The literary history of sincerity is, among other things, a history of writers uncovering and exploiting the exchanges between inwardness and its expressions. With each movement of inwardness and its corresponding expression, the one makes demands on the other. Sincerity is concerned with the representational efforts of the self, with making the inner self available to and operative in the outer world. Sincerity in literature, specifically, finds its performances of the self tested by their exposure to audiences through various forms of representation, poetics, and theatricality. Thus, literary histories of sincerity target especially the investments of its dialectical relation to the self, as the idea of sincerity cannot evolve or dissipate on its own but must work through culturally and textually embedded representations of interiority and exteriority, honesty and dishonesty, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, and nature and nurture.

Typically, historians and critics address sincerity in the context of discussions about modernity. Modernity, as many have suggested, has had the effect of augmenting the distance between forms of sincerity and the outward correlatives by which it authenticates itself. Hence, the modern term “authenticity” is commonly understood to mean self-authenticating, to describe something that is pure and good on its own without reference to external correlatives. Part of sincerity becoming more individualistic in modern eras is its decreased reliance on inherited forms, institutions, and authorities outside a notion of the autonomous inward self. Lionel Trilling states the case in terms of the “organic”:

The belief that the organic is the chief criterion of what is authentic in art and life continues . . . to have great force with us, the more as we become alarmed by the deterioration of the organic environment. The sense of something intervening between man and his own organic endowment is a powerful element in the modern consciousness, an overt and exigent issue in our nature. In an increasingly urban and technological society, the natural processes of human existence have acquired a moral status in the degree that they are thwarted. It is the common feeling that some inhuman force has possessed our ground and our air, our men and women and our thought.¹

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But the dialectic of sincerity works the other direction as well. The shapes that outward expressions take change and reinforce beliefs about the self that support them. Note Trilling's recognition that "the natural processes" of life become moral "in the degree that they are thwarted" by commercial society; that is, attending to one's organic environment puts one in mind of inorganic, social constructions of the self and thus creates an alliance between the organic and the moral, which we call the authentic. Trilling might have gone further to add that the natural and the moral appear to us "in the degree that they are thwarted" or at the rate that moral problems give rise to new perspectives on what is and is not natural and therefore sincere about the self.

In other words, a critical awareness of the history of sincerity reveals its own dialectical influence on the history of ideas about nature and the organic. Charles Taylor notes that even the motivations that drive social change contain a view of the inward self and thus of sincerity: "Of course, the social changes that are supposed to spawn the new outlook [of individualism and instrumental reason] must themselves be explained, and this will involve some recourse to human motivations, unless we suppose that industrialization or the growth of cities occurred entirely in a fit of absence of mind."² The truth about the self is duplicated in expressions of the self's access to and representations of the truth, and vice versa. Hamlet pretending madness, Milton's Satan exercising his version of free will, Wordsworth's leech gatherer, Eliot's self-conscious Prufrock—when the grounds for establishing self-accuracy are called into question by new social patterns, they do not become irrelevant or obsolete. Rather, they shift, or plunge, rooting themselves at a lower depth. Out go the old correlatives, and in come the new, disguised as the truly sincere.

Theologically informed literary criticism is suited to reveal these burials. In some ways, the history of sincerity is a theological history of the social self, but always with reference to how social and rhetorical contexts interact with religiously contextualized histories of telling the truth. Literary texts have often functioned to expose contingencies of the sincere and, by negating these contingencies, they push the self down deeper. Accordingly, literary criticism excavates its depths, exposes its hiding places. In short, criticism is the practice of bridging (or re-bridging) the fictional divides between inwardness and its expressions.

The essays in this issue investigate the phenomena of sincerity in texts of the medieval, early modern, eighteenth-century, Romantic and modern periods. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of essay submissions in response to the call for this special issue focused on the earlier historical periods. Rather than aiming to include essays representing a wide and arguably more balanced range of literary eras, we've allowed the review process to select essays that reflect the concentrated scope of the submission pool. Our hope is that this will prompt readers' reflections on the methodological and historiographical commitments that alternatively motivate or deter literary scholarship on the topic of sincerity in fields underrepresented by this issue. One observation we'd like to make, however, is that the majority of long-form literary critical and theoretical work on sincerity and

authenticity published over the last half-century has focused on literary and cultural products from the Romantic, modern, and postmodern eras, a trend that contradicts the trend of our submission pool. One explanation for this discrepancy is that this journal's interest in the thought and history of Christianity forecloses ways of entry from more recent historical epochs. Some of these accounts of modern sincerity have linked its rise as a moral formation to the secularizing forces that are sometimes thought to signal the demise of religion after the Enlightenment, thus perhaps discouraging attempts to discuss modern sincerity in a forum devoted to "Christianity" and literature. Have sincerity and its more recent relative, authenticity, divested themselves of the influences of theology, lived religion, and religiously integrated social movements?

Alongside the essays in this issue, and in lieu of a more substantial introduction, the editors have included a broader historical essay in two parts that aims to address this question. "w/Sincerity, Part 1: The Drama of the Will from Augustine to Milton" locates some of sincerity's recognizable modern fault lines in late classical and medieval philosophy and carries it forward to the early modern period. "w/Sincerity, Part 2: A Theological Concept That Never Left" continues our line of questioning from the Enlightenment, to the Romantic period, and into the present, arguing against the grain that sincerity has, in fact, flourished in recent years. These two essays are intended to be read in tandem and contribute to the same argument. Focusing especially on the medieval, early modern, Romantic, and postmodern periods, we trace the rise of the phenomenon of the struggle for sincerity (itself taken to be a sign of sincerity) from the premodern to the modern, and we argue for the continuity of theology's persisting relevance to this agonistic form of sincerity.

R. Jay Magill's essay on Thomas à Kempis follows "Part 1" of this sequence. In this essay Magill demonstrates how à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* influenced the growth of a late-medieval Christian mode of human identity, which in turn helped to create a conception of inwardness that contributes to a particular understanding of sincerity that becomes important in the Reformation.

Scott Newstok's essay opens with the observation that the same period that gave rise to more familiar modern notions of sincerity concurrently witnessed the emergence of a forceful anti-theatrical critique of commercial drama as insincere. The Renaissance Epitaph stands in respite from this critique as it represents a virtually unchallenged form of sincere verse, but this leads to Newstok's founding identification of the seeming paradox of the sincere-insincere, as the Epitaph began to appear on stage in epitaphic moments—a felicitous paradox for the critic since it offers a window into theater's own critique of the performance of sincerity.

Joshua Held, in his subsequent essay, examines Shakespeare's Caliban's rhetoric of sincerity. Like Newstok, Held is interested in the performance of sincerity. As an indigenous character and as a subject, Caliban uses the ambiguities involved in verbalizing sincerity to his advantage for demonstrating his ability to present complex forms of himself (separating *sincerus* from *simplex*), making him less legible and, in his mind, perhaps more autonomous.

Next, David Urban gathers much of the commentary on motivation, obedience, and disobedience in *Paradise Lost* around what he suggests is the epic's holistic treatment of sincerity. Urban introduces the terminology of "theological sincerity," which he defines not only as honesty to oneself and others, but as being in accordance with true theology. It may be obvious that Satan breaks with theological sincerity in his rebellion and temptation of Eve, but Urban argues that he—along with Even and Adam—also breaks with what might count as a Romantic idea of sincerity as self-truth.

Transitioning genres, David Parry's article is an engagement with Puritan preachers and their concerns with sincerity and rhetorical figures. Parry argues that the "plain style" of various Puritan divines utilizes certain key rhetorical tropes, while articulating a simultaneous concern with sincerity, forging new spiritual connections between the outwardness of rhetoric and the inward inspiration of the soul.

Jeffrey Galbraith's contribution shows how satire and sincerity come together in the eighteenth century, particularly in the works of Jonathan Swift and some key participants in the evangelical movement (including John Wesley). Galbraith demonstrates the ways that sincerity and satire are linked and differentiated in eighteenth-century considerations of mediation, rhetoric, and the self's engagement with the larger world.

Next, in her essay, Markéta Dudová suggests that nausea in Byron's *Don Juan* represents an outward expression of, or physical response to, an inner reality. Dudová shows that seasickness functions as an objective check on performance in Byron's poem, demonstrating a correlative between inner and outer reality.

And finally, in her Afterword, Margaret Russett returns to the paradox of doubleness that motivates Trilling's inceptive work on sincerity. Looking briefly at Milton, Blake, and Wordsworth, Russett considers how counterfeiting and avowing work together in Romantic lyric not to define authenticity for all time but to hold it up as a self-critiquing mirror, a standard that reflects the subject back to itself, in a dialectical "division without which no sincere utterance is possible."

Any collection of essays on sincerity will be subject to critique from those who attend to scenes and authors overlooked in the criticism. This is inevitable, but it is particularly salient to a collection on the literary history of sincerity. For when we begin to record the history of sincerity we necessarily cut people off—authors, speakers, characters—and for the sake of identifying something we label as "the sincere" we inadvertently fill in the non-linear cracks in self-expression that open to competing historical factors. We collect narrative performances of the self around allegedly coherent conceptualizations of self-grounding. In this light, one of several conspicuous omissions from the essays in this issue is an extended consideration of the politics of sincerity, how forces of Occidentalism, nationalism, and borders have affected, for instance, the case of sincerity for the subaltern. But we hope that what these essays will demonstrate, especially given their various suggestions of the relevance of Christian thought to the history of the wholeness and trueness of self-expression, is that, with respect to its Christian roots, the idea of

sincerity has long been a discourse of struggle. And, at the same time, we see in these essays a critique of teleological narratives of modern authenticity, the notion that older ideas about the moral nature of sincerity gave way—through movements of globalism, postcolonialism, secularism, and the like—to a view of authentic selfhood that is conscious of its social and political conditions and for that reason allegedly free to assert an autonomous recognition of self. Historically speaking, these essays, in short, speak to the fact that change occurs through continuity.

Notes

1. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 127–8.
2. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 20.