CHAPTER 1

Introduction

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the practice of keeping a diary has become ever more prominent. The *New York Times*, for instance, featured an article on 13 April 2020, with the headline “Why You Should Start a Coronavirus Diary”. Countless other newspapers, magazines, and foundations all over the world launched their own “Lockdown Diaries” around the same time or have encouraged readers to contribute individual stories to their *Coronavirus Diaries* platform. Philippe Lejeune, in his seminal study *On Diary*, suggests that keeping a journal is actually a way “to get out of […] crisis”:

The diary offers a space and time protected from the pressures of life. You take refuge in its calm to ‘develop’ the image of what you have just lived through and to meditate upon it, and to examine the choices you make. […] This activity of reflection is also at the heart of diaries maintained in times of crisis. A crisis diary is, I dare say so, in search of its own ending. You are constantly searching how to get out of the crisis, and, as a consequence, out of the diary itself. (Lejeune 2009: 195)

According to Lejeune, writing about pressing emotions in the moment they emerge enables the writer to look at herself from a distance, and thus offers structure and maybe even solace in times of crisis. For Lejeune, the diary is not just a medium for self-reflection but also an affective practice, a way of “unload[ing] the weight of emotions and thoughts” (ibid.) and
transforming them into narrative. This might be one possible explanation why the diary witnessed a curious rebirth in spring 2020.

Lejeune’s emphasis on free emotional self-expression bears the hallmarks of Romanticism in its specific historical context, which encouraged “free [expression of] individual subjects” (Jameson 2013: 140). However, the practice of keeping a diary conspicuously predates the notion of the subject or bourgeois individual. Early modern England witnessed an explosion of diary-writing from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Encouraged by Cromwell’s rise to power, dissenting or “Puritan” clergy took the opportunity to publish and circulate “do-it-yourself kits” (Lamb 1999: 69) in practical theology. With only very few exceptions, these widely read guidebooks insisted on rigorous daily self-monitoring, which led many literate dissenters to keep a daily log of their pious practices and their inner spiritual progress. Paul Hunter notes that “diary-keeping […] became a national habit practiced by a large percentage of those who were literate” (1990: 303).

The present study explores this early history of the diary, analysing how individuals wrote about their lives at a time in which the importance of the individual subject was not taken for granted and was still largely framed by notions of obedience and community. It assesses the possibilities and limitations for self-expression the practice held for the writer. Furthermore, it examines how early modern diarists framed and narrated emotions in a cultural climate that valued self-restraint over a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth: 744). Investigating the varieties and affinities between early modern diaries, this study develops some critical coordinates for reading the early modern diary as one of the pivotal genres of life writing on the one hand and as a cultural practice of affective self-monitoring on the other.

**Critical Contexts**

Surveys on early modern autobiographical writing have proliferated in the last decades. In the work of Caldwell (1983), Lynch (2012), and Hindmarsh (2005), the pious “conversion narrative” takes centre stage. Glaser (2001), by contrast, looks at the secular aspects of early modern life writing and discusses various autobiographical genres such as letters, diaries, and memoirs. In addition to diaries, *Early Modern English Lives* (Bedford et al. 2007) analyses travel narratives, military journals, and women’s advice books, placing emphasis on topicality (such as time,
gender, and space) rather than on genre. Meredith Skura (2008) scrutinises the factual/fictional divide in reading a variety of narratives as we would now deem “fictional” as instead autobiographical. Drawing on a host of material from several British archives, Adam Smyth identifies four kinds of texts which would shape autobiographical genres to come: “the printed almanac, annotated with handwritten notes; the financial account; the commonplace book; the parish register” (2010: 1). These studies thus explore autobiographical forms of writing in all their variety, but they do not address the generic and performative specificity of the diary. The reluctance to read for genre is not accidental since the study of autobiographical genres has all too often been vexed by the habit of reading backwards. As Adam Smyth argues, “[g]iving 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 missed opportunity: there is so much else out there to explore” (ibid.: 2).

While fully concurring with the view that there is “much else out there to explore”, I do not agree with Smyth’s implication that the early modern diary has been explored already. More often than not, the early modern diary is dealt with in passing and deemed a “primitive form of a practice which would, by the nineteenth century, produce the narrativized autobiography and the concept of the individualist self” (Mascuch 1997: 71). Mascuch does not elevate the diary to the status of autobiography, which Phillippe Lejeune famously defined as “retrospective narrative in prose that a real person makes of his own existence when he emphasizes his individual life, especially the story of his personality” (Lejeune 1989: 4).

Feminist critics have argued forcefully that the narrow focus on linear, retroactive, and often very stylised autobiographies mythologises the experiences and narrative style of a small minority of urban, male, and upper-class writers while repressing the voices of villagers, ethnic minorities, labourers, and women (see Jelinek 1980, 1986; Nussbaum 1988, 1989; Smith and Watson 1992; Stanton and Plottel 1984). Concomitantly, some of the most exhaustive and interesting diary criticism takes a feminist stance, unearthing and analysing diaries written by women. Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff’s influential collection of essays, *Inscribing the Daily*, focusses on American women’s diaries from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Magdalena Ożarska (2013) discusses the “diary poetics” of Fanny Burney, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley. In her seminal *Centuries of Female Days* (1988), Harriet Blodgett charts the progress of British women’s journal writing between 1599 and 1939.
More controversially, feminist criticism has debated potential connections between gender and genre. The first generation of feminist diary critics argued that the fragmented narrative form of the diary mirrored women’s fragmented experience of the everyday (Mason 1980; Culley 1985; Juhacz 1978; Jelinek 1986). This thesis is now considered to be too categorical (Benstock 1988; Peterson 1999; Smith and Watson 1998; Seelig 2006). Focussing on fragmentation might deflect our attention away from the fact that early modern diaries (the diary of Margaret Hoby would be the most obvious example) are often concerned with establishing order and structure. What is more, early modern women diarists do not necessarily resolve the conflicts they face along feminist lines.

More recently, diary criticism has focussed on the cultural uses of the diary, particularly with respect to the Victorian era (Steinitz 2011; Millim 2013). In her discussion of Victorian diaries, Rebecca Steinitz demonstrates that the ideal of privacy became “fraught by the routine sharing of manuscript diaries” (Steinitz 2011: 7) in the nineteenth century. Anne-Marie Millim similarly challenges the notion that diary-writing was a self-indulgent, private activity as she argues that the Victorians saw the diary “as a vital tool in rational decision making” and a means “to achieve professional productivity” (Millim 2013: 1), while it was simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, associated with emotional “incontinen[ce]” (Millim 2013: 15).

One of the very few studies that investigate the historical genesis of the early modern diary is Stuart Sherman’s *Telling Time* (1996). Sherman reads the diary as one form of diurnal writing among many others tracing the “critical encounter” (x) between chronometry and the emergence of new prose forms in the 1660s. According to Sherman, a new “technology for counting time emerged simultaneously with a new paradigm for recounting it in prose” (xi). Sherman’s insights have provided me with an excellent starting point for my analysis (see Chap. 2). However, my overarching aim is to analyse the diary not just as temporal but also as a religious and affective practice. I explore how the diary could become a genre associated with emotional self-articulation when it emerged in the context of practices of book-keeping, chronometry, and what we would call “time-management”. Consequently, my theoretical angle differs from Sherman’s, and my study investigates a different set of diaries and a different set of metadiscourses on diary-keeping.
THEORETICAL COORDINATES

Diary criticism, from its very inception, has had to confront negative images of its object of study and, concomitantly, has been working towards establishing itself as a valid research area. The comparative scarcity of diary criticism with respect to the general prominence of life writing suggests that the process is still ongoing. In this vein, my study starts with the assumption that early modern diaries can and should be read as texts and not just “raided” (Sherman 1996: 30) as a source for information. Diaries have intricate verbal structures and rhythms. Their reduced, fragmented, enumerative form of narration may not offer a lot of aesthetic reward, but it is suggestive of a pattern and a structure, and thus it can be and should be analysed from a formalist, narratological angle. For this reason, this study draws on a narratological approach to lay out the formal characteristics of the early modern diary. Narratology here is used loosely, as a toolbox rather than a meta-theory, to explore narrative mediation, temporality, and the question of verisimilitude with respect to the early modern diary.

As the diary is situated in the interstices between life and writing, formalism or narratology can provide only some first clues towards reading the diary. The second, and more difficult task, is to find a critical idiom to describe what it meant to keep a diary in the early modern era, and thus to analyse the early modern diary as a cultural practice that was endowed with significance and meaning. The early modern diary was a medium for “self-accounting” (Smyth 2010: 2) in more than one sense, documenting not only financial gains and expenses but also more spiritual profits and losses. It entailed rigorous self-examination and self-control, but also the promise of achieving full religious identity, the sense of belonging to a community. As a result, I started this study with the working hypothesis that early modern diaries would be taciturn about issues that are of great importance to the reader in the twenty-first century, such as moments of doubt and clashes between inner feelings and outward expectations.

When reading the very first extant English diaries, some of my historicist expectations were actually confirmed. Diarists such as Margaret Hoby construct a sense of self that hinges on notions of obedience and community, rather than on individualism. However, towards the second half of the seventeenth century, diarists such as Ralph Josselin, a Reformist like Hoby, write about their daily lives in a way that resonates more strongly with my twenty-first-century reading habits. Ralph Josselin’s diary
contains representations of emotions, attitudes, and doubts that I would have associated with more recent ways of writing the self. There must have been “something” in early modern culture that encouraged affective self-expression for writers like Josselin, if only in specific contexts. The aim of the first two chapters of this study is to trace that “something”, that is, the traditions and ideologies that paved the way for the articulation of emotions in diaries. Moreover, I set out to find a critical idiom to account for the (surprising) continuities between early modern journals and more recent uses of the diary.

I announce this rationale, aware that the concept of the early modern “self” (Greenblatt 1980) or “subject” (Belsey 1985) has been the topic of scholarly debate for several decades. For cultural materialists, the early modern subject is a “nonsubject” (Pye 2000: 1) which has no interiority. Francis Barker put this in a nutshell in his famous statement that “at the center of Hamlet in the interior of the mystery, there is, in short, nothing” (1984: 37). If this were the case, the early modern subject would have been “a blank slate” (Skura 2000: 211) before being “interpellated” (ibid.) into a bourgeois interiority. Like Meredith Skura (2000), Christopher Pye (2000), Katharine Eisaman Maus (1995), John Martin (2004), Gabriele Rippl (1998), Nancy Selleck (2008) and Christopher Tilmouth (2013), I intend to move beyond the paradigm of “empty” subjectivity. Such readings eclipse what the practice of diary-keeping meant to the diarist herself. Is it really irrelevant that spirituality offered gratification for early modern diarists (see also Seelig 2006: 28) and that keeping a record of their prayer, churchgoing, and reading the Bible endowed them with “a godly identity” (Lynch 2012: 4)? Can the subject be a “void” (Fumerton 1991: 109) if engaged in affective interpersonal relationships?

Skura, Pye, Selleck, and Maus also locate subjectivity outside of the individual, but they take a more nuanced stance, arguing for an interpersonal subjectivity in which inwardness is “reconceived as an experience situated at the boundary between the person and those to whom he relates, within the dialogic domain of intersubjectivity”, as Christopher Tilmouth summarises (2013: 16). In a similar vein, John Martin, in his critical discussion of Renaissance Individualism, argues that the early modern self emerges in “an enigmatic relation of the interior life to life in society” (2004: 14). Indeed, many early modern diarists do not construct themselves as individuals in an economic, legal, and political sense—as the paradigmatic Enlightenment figure “testing rules from without against a
sensibility nourished from within” (Coleman et al. 2000: 3); and yet they do write about their inner lives, their religious beliefs, their relationships to kin and patrons, and about the emotions that colour these relationships. My aim is to shed light on the “enigmatic relation” (Martin 2004: 14; my emphasis) between emotional and social life in early modern diaries, on the role emotions play in the construction of inwardness, and on the implications of silence and gaps in diaries.

Psychoanalysis has a long tradition of teasing out the implications of “enigmatic” silences, of engaging with norms and obedience, of analysing the structure of relationships, and of reading for affect. In its more literary and cultural-historical variants, psychoanalysis does not presume a universal or ahistorical subjectivity but rather offers a non-reductive means for articulating the “contingency of subject, its irreducible relation to sociality, to symbolic systems, to history” (Pye 2000: 11–12). If brought into dialogue with historicist approaches, psychoanalysis provides a very fruitful reading strategy to address the rigidity of the early modern diary as well as its elusiveness and fluidity. My study follows up on Cynthia Marshall’s concept of “extra-mural psychoanalysis” (2005), that is, the project of transferring psychoanalytic criticism “out of its comfort zone” (such as the study of the nineteenth-century novel) to areas that do not readily lend themselves to it.

I take my cue from such historicist readings of psychoanalysis to analyse the cultural functions and uses, the ideological implications, and the affective structures of diary-keeping. In addition to formalist and narratological reading strategies, psychoanalysis thus forms the second important critical coordinate of this study. My thesis is that early modern diaries are used in three different but interrelated ways, which gradually shift and transform in the course of the seventeenth century: as a technique of self-monitoring, as a medium to integrate emotions, as a means for self-mirroring.

The first extant English diaries illustrate that the diary was a way of organising time within a specific ideological framework and a way of narrating or “telling time” (Sherman 1996). The early modern diary as a genre narrated a life as it passed, but also constituted a way of living a dutiful life. Writing a diary entailed the promise of achieving religious identity, but a religious identity that needed to be asserted repeatedly every day. The process of self-monitoring was constant, serial, and open-ended, as was the diary as narrative genre. The Freudian term “super-ego” captures the processual quality of the early modern diary and provides a
helpful metaphor for the affective workings of many of the pious examples. The Reformist diary is a medium in which every detail of domestic and affective life is documented and monitored. It reaches deeper into the self than Foucault’s disciplinary powers, as diary-keeping is a matter not just of empty performance but of introspection, of viewing one’s very emotions against a pious backdrop. Diarists are encouraged to note not just their love for God but also their lapses into sin, their remorse, and their resolutions for the future. The practice of keeping a diary thus was highly restrictive and circumscribed the life of the writer. Pious diaries offer structure and routine, but a routine that is so restrictive and demanding that it is impossible to stick to.

Like Freud’s super-ego, the diary captures the self within a dynamic of dutifulness and transgression, of self-loathing, and of rare moments of the reassuring sense of being a good subject. Thus, in a certain way, diary-writing produces the very transgression it seeks to avoid. Diaries tell of such ambiguities within Protestant faith, of the attempt of trying to comply with impossible demands, such as the attempt not to mourn the death of a little child. Diaries thus afford the possibility to narrate inner struggles and to write about emotions that might well disrupt the very ideology the practice of diary-keeping rests upon.

As a result, the early modern diary gradually becomes a medium to express emotions in a way that anticipates Lejeune’s idea of the diary as emotional “purge”. The moment of self-distancing entailed in the process of writing creates the possibility of seeing oneself through the eyes of another, of constructing silent witness. Painful emotions become bearable in the process of putting them on paper; joyful emotions become memorable when written down. Put into a psychoanalytic idiom, diaries construct an “object”, an inner listener-figure, a future self, a benign posterity to whom the diarist can confide her feelings—her anxiety, anger, or joy.

These pious uses of the diary need to be set apart from practices of diary-keeping that are more clearly oriented towards creating public image. Such diaries appear to lend themselves to canonical new historicist readings, as they engage in a form of self-fashioning in relation to public power rather than private piety. Such diaries could thus be read as mirrors in the psychoanalytic sense, as reflecting an idealised, potentially fictive image of the self. However, I found such diaries rarer than I had anticipated. Even the examples that appeared to be straightforwardly Lacanian on a first glance contained passages that resisted such readings. Diarists of rank such as Lady Anne Clifford, for instance, are aware of their public
role and power, but they also write about the affective intimacy of social relationships. Rather than placing the early modern diary within clear-cut categories or binaries (secular vs pious diaries, factual vs affective diaries, etc.), I read the early modern diary along the lines of their cultural functions and implications. Diaries can be super-ego materialised, a way of structuring the life along very narrowly circumscribed lines; they can be mirrors reflecting back a fiction of the self that the writer enjoys; they can be objects that hold and store the emotional life of a writer. Some diaries, such as the Diary of Samuel Pepys, are all of these at the same time. These three cultural uses of the diary do not dispense with each other in a teleological or progressivist way. Instead, they are all part of a social-cultural repertoire of diary-keeping.

CORPUS

Selecting the diaries for this study has been a challenge because of the sheer magnitude of the material. Editions, anthologies, archives, and the resource Early English Books Online hold uncountable diaries produced by early modern Englishmen and women from many different walks of life. My choice of diaries was guided by the intention to provide a wide range of diarists and then to select some exemplary texts. Therefore, I explored both pious and more secular variants of the genre, both rural and urban writers, men and women, the landed elite as well as yeomen.

The second important parameter for my selection of diaries is aligned with my theoretical background and methodology for reading diaries. Diaries have specific verbal structures and images, a texture and a rhythm, and I intended to give each diary a thorough textual reading. As a result, my selection had to be exemplary rather than exhaustive.

I ended up settling on four diaries, each of which will be analysed in a separate case study: I chose two women diarists—the Yorkshire gentlewoman Margaret Hoby (1571–1633), whose journal is the first extant diary of an Englishwoman, and Lady Anne Clifford (1580–1676). Clifford was among the elite in early modern England, and her decade-long struggle to regain her patrimony made her famous even in her own time, unlike Hoby, whose diary was rediscovered by feminist critics only comparatively recently.

In a similar vein, I chose an established figure, urban and secular, as well as a lesser-known figure, who hails from a rural and pious background. I focus on the diary of the Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin (1617–1683),
whose work is quite prominent among historians (see MacFarlane 1970, 1978; Jarzebowski 2016) but comparatively marginal in literary study (see however Bedford et al. 2007). Reading Josselin’s at times agonising self-doubt next to the characteristically bawdy London *Diary of Samuel Pepys* proved to be very rewarding and interesting.

The reception of Pepys has been particularly rich and controversial. His *Diary* is often seen as anticipating later-eighteenth-century variants of the genre (see Kohlmann 2010; Mascuch 1997; Sherman 1996), with its urbanity, sobriety, worldliness, and its interest in trade and consumer culture. Earlier approaches explore the traces of his “Puritan” education at St Paul’s (Barker 1984; Hill 1985). I will balance my own reading against Pepys criticism and analyse the affinities and differences between the *Diary* and the three other journals.

**Structure/Overview**

The first chapter opens with a general discussion on genre and lays out some narratological grids for defining the generic characteristics of the diary. Specifically, it addresses questions of narrative mediation, temporality, and authorship. Furthermore, it explores how the diary navigates between life and writing, drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s concept of mimesis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the communicative structure of the diary and its alleged secrecy or intimacy.

“The cultural history of the English diary is the focus of Chap. 3, its material preconditions and metadiscourses, assessing how early modern discourses on self-monitoring and self-examination inflected the practice of diary-keeping. On a theoretical level, it brings early modern pious anthropologies (Calvin, Perkins, Rogers) into a dialogue with psychoanalytic theories of culture. As a next step, I discuss early modern languages of feeling and intersubjective models of the self. I hope to show that object relations theory provides a critical vocabulary that helps to bridge the gulf that separates me, a critic in the twenty-first century, from early modern writers. The chapter concludes with a more general discussion on the cultural history of emotions and the recent debate between cognitive theories of emotions and historicist approaches.

Following up on the two methodological chapters, four individual diarists are discussed in separate chapters. I begin with the diary of Margaret Hoby, which she kept between 1599 and 1605. The text is remarkable because of its obdurate silence on her attitudes, thoughts, and emotions.
Both on a structural and on a thematic level, Hoby follows the grid recommended in Calvinist tracts on self-monitoring: She keeps her diary on a regular basis and in strict chronological order. Furthermore, she attempts to match her own life against religious ideals. As a result, her journal is indeed quite dry and repetitive, as Sharon Seelig contends (2006: 20). There are, however, some instances in which Hoby breaks the monotonous litany of her journal. Characteristically, these passages focus exclusively on her religious anxieties. Hoby never actually “fashions” herself (Greenblatt 1980) as a model Christian figure, instead stressing her own inadequacy. She does articulate a sense of self; however, her narrative identity is characterised by passivity, obedience, and receptivity rather than by an emergent individualism. Her diary does not convey the confident sense of being a “Puritan saint”, as Diane Willen notes with respect to other Protestant women (1992: 563). Hoby’s interiority, as constructed on the pages of her journal, is fragmented rather than unified and only becomes coherent through repetition and routine.

The diaries of Anne Clifford mark a decisive break with the pious habit of self-monitoring, as I will argue in Chap. 5. Lady Anne’s diaries were instrumental in the struggle to regain her patrimony; as a consequence, Clifford has been characterised as a “proto-feminist” (Lewalski 1991). Partly recuperating Barbara Lewalski’s observation that Clifford positions herself in a lineage of strong female kin in her conflict with male authorities, I suggest that Clifford’s diaries waver between public self-assertion and private self-expression. Clifford’s writing mirrors her fight for her patrimony even at a time when the heritage was securely hers. In this vein, her diary is not only or exclusively part of her political strategy, but something less tangible, an “object” (Winnicott 2005) in the psychoanalytic sense, constructing a listener-figure or a benign posterity.

Chapter 6 traces the cultural career of dissenting ideologies in the diary of the Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin. Like Margaret Hoby half a century earlier, Josselin constantly matches his experiences against his religious belief. In the process, his diary produces a very ambiguous inwardness. On the one hand, his obedience is psychologically disruptive—Josselin can never fully meet God’s demands, nor does he always manage to discern God’s will in the first place. On the other hand, it is also a cohesive force: his sense of guilt also provides a regenerative purge and gives him the reassurance of belonging to the elect.

Another striking characteristic of Josselin’s diary is its thematic variety: issues of faith predominate, of course, but the diarist also writes about
social relationships, his family, and his emotional attachment to the people that surround him. In discussing the way Josselin writes about his family and other social relations, I hope to show that Josselin’s sense of self is inseparable from these relationships. His identity therefore is not individualist, or at least not “rampant[ly]” (MacFarlane 1978: 63) so, but primarily social. He constructs his identity with respect to what psychoanalysis calls significant “objects”, that is, persons to whom he is emotionally attached, such as his wife, family, relatives, and members of the parish.

Chapter 7, “Enjoying the Diary”, explores the Diary of Samuel Pepys. It assesses recurrent tropes in Pepys criticism such as the Diary’s alleged “Puritanism” (Barker 1984: 8), Pepys’s bourgeois individualism, and the capacious, encompassing quality of his writing. Revisiting Francis Barker’s notorious reading of Pepys as a “tormented Puritan”, I suggest that Pepys’s use of the diary form indeed partly overlaps with that of his contemporary Josselin. Like Josselin, Pepys is surprisingly frank with respect to his emotions, although the pious framework that circumscribes Josselin’s text has obviously faded in Pepys’s Diary. Scrutinising the notion that the Diary epitomises an emergent ideology of bourgeois individualism, I suggest that Pepys constructs his life in terms of community. The Diary is populated by kinfolk, friends, acquaintances, and, of course, by lovers. Pepys’s creation of narrative identity is, I argue, set in the transitional space between individualism and relationality, between private autonomy and public duty, between Restoration libertinage and affective sentimentalism. Rather than simply ascribing the capaciousness of the Diary to the alleged curiosity of the historical persona Samuel Pepys, I propose that the Diary includes the transitions that marked the Restoration period, from public to private, from feudal to bourgeois, from pious to secular. These transitions are not, however, mechanical stages which dispense with each other, but they are organically included in the cultural repertoire of Restoration England.

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