CHAPTER 4

Creating Pious Identity: Margaret Hoby’s Reformist Diary

The diary of the Yorkshire gentlewoman Margaret Hoby is the first extant woman’s diary in English (Lamb 1999: 43). It is also often considered to be a “dry recitation of routine events” (Warnicke 1983: 148), thus, as the “least developed” (Seelig 2006: 15) diary of its kind, not read for its literary qualities but rather for historical reasons (ibid.). Ralph Houlbrooke, for instance, suggests that it paints an “unrivalled picture of the daily activities of a country gentlewoman” (1988: 15). Feminist historians, such as Susan Cahn, use Hoby’s diary as evidence for the relative economic independence of early modern women of Hoby’s class (1987). Mary Ellen Lamb argues that Hoby’s journal “provides invaluable insights into the interiority of the Reformation subject, especially as inflected by gender” (1999: 64). Thus, with the possible exception of Sharon Seelig, critics seem to agree that Hoby’s diary is interesting because of its content but quite unremarkable on a formal-textual level. While agreeing with Warnicke that Hoby’s diary offers little aesthetic reward, I would nevertheless insist that its repetitive formal make-up is by no means trivial: of over 100 autobiographical accounts written between 1550 and 1700, only 4 out of 31 female-authored accounts are written in serial format and only two follow the diary format (Matchinske 2009: 207). It is thus curious and worth investigating Hoby’s choice of the diurnal form.

Another important characteristic of Hoby’s writing is her intriguing silence about her thoughts, attitudes, and emotions. Her diary “offers remarkably little intimate revelation. Lady Hoby’s diary was not a place for
her to tell at all”, as Sharon Seelig puts it (2006: 16). With characteristic lack of specificity, Hoby writes about her “prauat praiers” (2001: 4) or having “passed the time in talk with some freinds” (sic, 2001: 9) without relating the content of her prayers or the topics of her conversation. Hoby is no exception: early modern life writing is usually silent about “feelings and fantasies” (Skura 2000: 211, see also Shuger 2000).

However, silence about an inner life need not automatically suggest an actual lack of feelings (Kern Paster et al. 2004: 11). In a similar vein, treating writers like Hoby as “blank slate[s]” not yet “interpellated” (Barker qtd. in Skura 2000: 211) into bourgeois culture rests on a great deal of speculation: just because Hoby hardly ever mentions emotions does not necessarily mean that she did not experience them. Thus, texts as Hoby’s require a critical approach precisely because they predate the rise of the bourgeois subject.

The present chapter falls into three parts. First, it will provide some background information on Margaret Hoby as a historical persona and the specific regional situation of North Yorkshire in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. North Riding was a region dominated by recusants, and the Hobys were one of the very few landed dissenting families in the area. According to Elizabeth Crawford (2010, 2014), it is likely that the diarist felt beleaguered by Catholics and more moderate Anglicans, which may well have been one of the motives for Hoby’s keeping a diurnal record of her pious practices.

Second, I will assess the formal characteristics of the diary in the context of the reformist ideal of self-monitoring. As Mary Ellen Lamb has argued convincingly, “Hoby’s diary demonstrates the significant role of reading practices in shaping the subjectivity of Hoby and other women in the Reformation” (1999: 64). I will amend Lamb’s content-oriented reading of Hoby’s diary in suggesting that the iterative, repetitive structure of the diary similarly answers to the religious demand for rigorous, regular self-scrutiny. Hoby’s struggle to discern God’s will is open-ended, as is her diary.

Third, I will analyse Hoby’s intriguing silence about her inner life from a psychoanalytic angle. My aim is to show that the text vacillates between anxiety and matter-of-factness, between narrating time and constructing pious interiority, between “dry[ness]” (Warnicke 1983: 148) and a certain affectivity. Hoby’s rigorous practice of self-monitoring is suggestive of a very complex interiority—she finds herself guilty of certain “sinnes” and “Omissions” but also occasionally regards her self-monitoring as a form of
regenerative purge. Hoby is not a “dissident subject” in Sinfield’s sense. Rather, her subjectivity hinges on fulfilling (perhaps even overfulfilling) what she considers to be her normative duty.

A Voice Without a Face

Lady Margaret was born and raised in Yorkshire, a stronghold for recusancy (Meads 1930: 4, see also Moody 2001: xvii, FN 4). She was baptised on 10 February 1571, and since baptism typically took place shortly after the birth of an infant, it is very likely that she was born only a few weeks earlier. Her parents, Thomasine and Arthur Dakins, both adhered to the “Puritan” faith, which made them outsiders in the region (Meads 1930: 4). They sent her to the household of Katherine Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon (1538–1620), for her education and training. Lord Hastings was one of the few landed reformists in Yorkshire and a very influential figure at court—he was a long-time consort of the ageing Queen Elizabeth. It was also Hastings who engineered the match between Margaret and Thomas Posthumous Hoby (Crawford 2010: 195, see also Meads 1930: 26). The Huntingdons were deeply influenced by Calvinism (see Moody 2001: xviii), and beyond doubt, Margaret’s faith was grounded in her education in the Huntingdon household (see Cross 2008: n.p.). Her upbringing at the Huntingdons’ may have also inspired her habit of keeping a daily record of devotional and secular activities (ibid.).

Margaret was married three times: first to Walter Devereux (the second son of the Earl of Essex) who, like Margaret, was educated in the Huntingdon household (Meads 1930: 5). Devereux died in 1591, only two years after their wedding (ibid.: 11). Only a few weeks after Devereux’s burial, Margaret attracted new suitors (ibid.). This led to her second marriage to Thomas Sidney (the younger brother of Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke). Some biographers speculate that the marriage with Sidney was the “love-match [that Margaret] most desired” (Moody 2001: xxii; see also Meads 1930: 11). However, the diary is entirely silent on the subject of both marriages.

Although Margaret never mentions it in her diary, she was initially reluctant to marry Thomas Posthumous Hoby after Sidney’s death in July 1595 (see Meads 1930: 29). Apparently, Thomas Posthumous was short-tempered and notorious for initiating conflict with influential landed families of the region, most notably with the Eures, with whom he shared an intense mutual dislike (Crawford 2010: 196; Moody 2001: xxiii; Lamb
What is more, Thomas Posthumous Hoby started wooing Margaret only a week after the death of Thomas Sidney, when she was still in mourning (Lamb 1999: 84). However, the pressure to marry Hoby was immense. First, the Devereux family (that of her first husband) laid claim to Margaret’s considerable property and, without a male guardian, she feared that she would lose her estates at Hackness. After both her father and her guardian, the Earl of Huntingdon, had died, she was largely without defences against the claims of the Devereux family (see also Meads 1930: 31). Second, and of equal significance, several important reformist court figures (among them the Countess of Huntingdon) sought to find a counterweight against the recusant majority in the North. Consequently, Huntingdon pressured Margaret to marry Thomas Hoby, “not for any merits of his own, which reportedly were few, but for ‘God’s cawse’” (Crawford 2010: 195). Thomas Hoby was “planted” (ibid.) in the North Riding region by the Cecils and the Huntingdons because he and his pious, affluent wife were thought to serve as a “counterweight to the recusant and Catholic-sympathizing gentry in Northeastern Yorkshire” (ibid.: 196). The Hobys settled into the manor house of Hackness in 1596, which had been Margaret’s property before the marriage, as her relatives had purchased it for her when she was still married to Devereux (ibid., see also Meads 1930: 26).

Lady Margaret had good social relationships with the local gentry, both recusant and Protestant. According to Julie Crawford, Margaret Hoby was more diplomatic than her husband, the gentler and potentially more likeable face of Calvinism in the North, and thus may well have served as an intermediary between radical Protestants and the recusant majority (Crawford 2010, 2014: 86–120).

If Hoby considered it a responsibility to spread Calvinist beliefs in a region initially hostile to her faith, she never mentioned it. Neither did she write about a sense of being beleaguered as a member of the very few radical Protestant households in the North Riding area. Here, as in other contexts, Margaret Hoby remained silent about her inner life. In the diary, she comes across as serene, untroubled by the recusancy of her neighbours, while also remaining loyal to her husband despite their very different reputations in the region. Lady Hoby also remains taciturn about the fact that she had no offspring; each of her three marriages were childless.

The diary was first mentioned by Evelyn Fox (1908), who introduced the text for the Royal Historical Society. The manuscript of the diary is in the British Library Manuscript Department (BL MS Egerton 2614) and
was first transcribed by Dorothy M. Meads in 1930, whose introduction to the text (1930: 1–39) is still referred to as authoritative (see Crawford 2010). While Meads focussed chiefly on the historical persona of Margaret Hoby and her contemporaries, Joanna Moody’s more recent edition of the diary also includes more information on the materiality of the text. According to Moody, Margaret Hoby wrote on both sides of a folio, which measures 15 by 19 centimetres (2001: liii). The remaining manuscript consists of 59 folios (118 pages), which were apparently bound in May 1884 after their purchase by Reverend C. St B. Sydenham on 10 November 1883 (ibid.). As Moody points out, “the writing varies in size, and there are blots, smudges, crossings-out and corrections” (ibid.). The dates in the diary are often erratic. For example, some entries refer to the days of the week, counting Monday as “the first day” (ibid.: liv), but this is not always the case. Moody’s suggestion that “[s]he clearly wrote entries, even groups of entries in retrospect, and often corrected the dates herself” (ibid.: ibid.) is therefore very plausible.

Moody’s transcription remains very close to the manuscript and does not modernise or harmonise Hoby’s erratic spelling. The diarist uses u and v interchangeably, and her spelling occasionally echoes the regional dialect of North Riding: vowels were typically “broad”, meaning they were not pronounced as diphthongs (“wrote” is spelled “wrett”, for instance; Moody 2001: 3; FN 5). In this chapter, I quote exclusively from Moody’s 2001 edition, although some of the biographical information was taken from Meads’s 1930 introduction to the text.

**Temporality, Patterns, and Structures**

Margaret Hoby’s diary starts in medias res on 10 August 1599 and covers a time span of almost six years, ending abruptly on 21 July 1605. The first two folios and the last have missing pieces, so the manuscript is likely to be incomplete (see Moody 2001: liii). If the diarist had a rationale for writing, she does not disclose it in the surviving manuscript. She never mentions her motives for keeping a journal.

The most striking feature of Hoby’s text is its sequential, repetitive pattern. Most entries consist of four or five sentences that resemble each other in structure and content. Writing on a regular, almost daily, basis, Hoby documents her daily activities, usually beginning with her morning prayers and breakfast. The journal then goes on to describe her activities.
around the house or in the village as well as her readings. Her range of reference is impressive: she reads the Bible (of course) and a host of religious authors, most notably William Perkins (1558–1602), Richard Rogers, and Richard Greenham (1535–1584). Sometimes, the diarist mentions conversations with her husband, although she never actually specifies their content. Hoby also relates social activities such as reading to her servants, visiting her family, or entertaining guests like the Eure family, though their relations with her husband were fraught. Margaret Hoby, however, was on good terms with the Eures and may have even been a close friend of Lady Eure, whom she calls “my lady Ewre” when recording a visit in September 1599 (Hoby 2001: 14). Furthermore, she often writes about meeting with Master Rhodes, her divine, and also, we can assume, her friend and the only person who read Hoby’s diary in her own time. She usually finishes with a note about her final evening prayers and the formula “and so to bed”. In this vein, most of her entries resemble the following extract:

the Lordes day 12 [August 1599]

after I was redie, I went to priuatt praiers, then to breakfast : then I walked tell church time Mr. Hoby, and after to dinner : after which I walked and had speech of no serious maters tell :2: a clock : then I wrett notes into my bible tell :3, and after :4: I came againe from the church, walk, and medi-
tated a Little, and againe wrett some other notes in my bible of that I had Learned tell :5: att which time I retournd to examenation and praiyer : and after I had reed some of bond of the suboth, I walked abroad : and so to supper, after praers, and Lastly to bed. (Hoby 2001: 3–4)

This entry is very characteristic of the diary as a whole; it conveys the sense that Hoby documents her activities like an accountant would list her income and expenses: neat, orderly, brief, and with a matter-of-fact detachment. Here, as in almost all other entries of her meticulously kept journal, she does not specify the content of her prayers or her conversation, nor does she comment on the sermon she heard in church or whether she enjoyed the walk with her husband or maybe felt guilty for speaking of “no serious maters”. The diarist also remains conspicuously silent about the matters she reflected upon when “examen[ing]” herself. Her diary does not seem to be a place to confess or merely to narrate. Instead, the text resembles a list and only has very few characteristics of narrative—both in the classical (plot-related) and in the cognitive sense. It may have
a chronological structure, full sentences, and an embodied narrative voice, but it is crucially not concerned with “qualia” (Herman 2009: 14) and evokes only a very low degree of “experientiality”. The diary remains silent about “what it [was] like” (ibid.) to have conversation, to pray, or to read on a particular day.

Instead, Hoby appears to be very aware of *time*. She not only structures her diary along diurnal lines but frequently calibrates time by the hour, particularly in the first two years of her diary. The following entry dating from the first weeks of her journal may illustrate Hoby’s awareness and meticulous calibration of time:

*Wensday 15 [August 1599]*

In the morninge at :6: a clock I praied priautly : that done, I went to awiffe in trauill of child, about whom I was busey tell: 1 a Cloke, about which time, She bing deliuered and I hauinge praised god, returned home and betook my selfe to priuat praier :2: seuerall times vpon occasion : then I wrett the most part of an examenation or triall of a christian, framed by Mr Rhodes [her chaplain, M.N.], in the doinge wher I againe fell to praier, and after continewed writing [*faded*] after 3: a cloke : then I went to work tell after 5, and then examenation and praier : the Lord make me thankfull, who hath hard my praiers and hath not turned his face from me: then I taked with Mrs Brutnell tell supper time, and after walked a little into the feeldes, and so to prairs, and then to bed. (2001: 6)

The passage lends itself to Stuart Sherman’s interpretation that diaries tell *time* as it passes. More specifically, Hoby constructs time along “theocentric” lines, as Sherman explains (1996: 52). In Hoby’s diary, time is never “neutral” or important per se—as the market time was important for the Renaissance merchant. For the Reformist Hoby, time is a gift from God that must be treated carefully and responsibly. This is one reason why Hoby meticulously documents everything she does each and every day. In this vein, she also juxtaposes spiritual and secular topics in her diary: Hoby prays, acts as midwife for a local “wiffe”, copies a religious text, prays again, and then ends her day with a walk in the fields and evening prayers. Such a blurring of boundaries between spiritual and secular duties is crucial, I think, with respect to the religious mindset that informs her diary. Being “busey” around the household was thought to be godly, whereas idleness would have been considered a sin. William Perkins, whose works Hoby read and copied on a regular basis, directs a diatribe against beggars and vagabonds whom he considers harmful for the commonwealth.
Making “good” use of one’s time was endowed with spiritual value, and, conversely, “wasting time”—in idleness, drink, or “idle talk”—was viewed as sinful (see also Morgan 1988: 147). The diarist’s concern with time may also account for a certain shift which takes place in the second half of her diary: while the entries in the first four years of her diary focus on her pious and her secular duties alike, most entries in the last two years focus on worldly events, such as sociable dinners with her neighbours. I would agree with Elspeth Graham and Sharon Seelig that “there is no absolute difference between spiritual and social aspects of virtuous femininity” (Graham et al. 1989, qtd. in Seelig 2006: 226). Dining with her neighbours, many of whom were recusants or moderate Anglicans, was actually not time spent idly but rather a part of her religious duty.

As Julie Crawford has shown in her study Mediatrix, Hoby, like other pious women of her time, acted as an intermediary between her unpopular dissenting husband and the recusant majority (see Crawford 2010). Her visits with Lady Eure and other “papest maide[s]” (see Hoby 2001: 64) or hearing her minister Rhodes reading from a “popeshe” (ibid.: 83) book, an officially illegal act in Elizabethan England (c.f. Crawford 2010: 198), clearly serve the purpose of mediating between radical Protestants and Catholics and, thus, of maintaining a power balance in the North (Crawford: 193–220). Margaret Hoby “navigated between maintaining good relations with members of the established church and supporting its critics” (ibid.: 216). Social events (such as Hoby’s frequent visits to the Dean of York and the Bishop of Limerick in the years 1603 and 1604), her mutual invitations with Lady Bowes (a fellow Northern Calvinist who patronised a number of radical Protestant divines; see ibid.: 218), and her visits to London following the accession of James (in April–June 1603, November 1604, and February 1605) were clearly part of her “activism” (ibid.: 220). From a historical vantage point, Hoby’s frequent records of sociable dinners, communal readings, and walks in the fields are easily read as leisured pastimes; but for an early modern Reformist such as Lady Margaret, these activities were meaningful religious duties, as they served the purpose of promoting Protestantism in a region that still very much adhered to the old Catholic faith.

Indeed, Hoby’s diary echoes a plethora of Calvinist intertexts: most notably, William Perkins’s Golden Chaine, Richard Grenham’s A Treatise of the Sabbath, Richard Rogers’s A Fountain of Teares, and Nicholas Bownde’s Doctrine of the Sabbath plainly layde forth. William Perkins, the author whom Hoby mentions most frequently, actually makes an explicit
comparison between account books and self-examination (see also ibid.: 66), as he recommends to keep “bills of receipt [of] graces, blessings and gifts” and “bills of expenses” to “redeem […] time profitably or wastefully spent” (Perkins 1970: 474). Hoby follows these instructions meticulously, recording the time she thus spent, profitably or unprofitably. The list-quality of her diary is therefore anything but accidental. It is largely prefigured by the religious literature she reads. As Sharon Seelig suggests, Hoby’s diary can be regarded as a “stewardship of time” (2006: 16) in which the events are moulded to fit into the grid recommended by the Calvinist divines.

One is therefore tempted to conclude that Hoby does not use her diary to construct interiority, but simply as a means to justify her use of time. However, she does provide considerable hints as to her pious inwardness, as the following two entries will illustrate:

*Thursday* 6 [September 1599]

after I praied I did goe about in to the house, and then eate my breakfast, and after did see my hunnie ordered, and then to dinner : after which I wrought, and walked about with Mr Hoby, nothinge reading nor profitinge my selfe or any, the Lord pardon my ommitiones and Commitions, and giue me his spiritt to be watchfull to redeme the time : then I went to priuatu praier and examenation, after to supper and lector, and so to bed. (2001: 15)

*Friday* 14 [September 1599]

After order taken for the house, and priuat praers, I writt notes into my testament and then brak my fast : after, I wrought, and kept Mr Hoby companye tell almost diner time : then I praied and, after dinner, I walked awhill and went to church Wth Mr Hoby, and when I Cam home wrought tell 6:, then examened my selfe and praied, walked tell supper time : then I hard the Lector, and after wrought a whill, and so went to bed: Lord, for Christs sack, pardone my drousenes which, with a neclegen mind, caused me to ommitt that medetation of that I had hard, which I ought to haue had. (2001: 17)

On a purely formal level, these entries are very dry, chronologically documenting Hoby’s dutiful fulfilment of her daily chores and religious obligations. However, on both days, the diarist mentions having a guilty conscience and thus brings an inward perspective to her enumerative recitation of events. Her sense of guilt stems from “improper” use of time: on Thursday, Hoby has neglected her “medetation”, which she considers a
serious breach of her religious duty. Her diary functions both as a spiritual “balance sheet” (Mendelson 1985: 187), documenting her use of time, and as a medium to record the ensuing spiritual anxiety and the promise for self-improvement. Thus, it gives considerable evidence of an interiority that emerges in connection with religious duties.

The same is true for the entry dated Friday 14, 1599. As usual, Hoby starts with a vague report of her chores, which includes prayer, self-examination, needlework, writing, and, apparently, keeping her husband company. However, she again closes with mentioning her guilty conscience. This particular entry conveys a sense of emotional urgency, including the exclamation: “Lord, for Christ’s sack, pardon my drousenes”. She does not simply record time as it passes, but also her use of time and its religious relevance. Time—past, present, and future—is not a commodity she can dispose of at her leisure, but something lent to her for a specific purpose. If she “misspends” it, she feels guilt and anxiety.

For Hoby, narrating time in her journal is a reminder (for herself) to treat time responsibly. Time and the various ways in which she spends it are crucial components in her relationship to God. She thus narrates her daily life along “heterological” (Lobsien 1996) lines, as she constructs her journal entries in a meaningful relation towards a transcendental alterity. Hoby’s diary documents how her concept of time and, indeed, all other ways of measuring a life take place under God’s constant gaze. Hence, the diurnal format of her writing is not trivial or accidental, but very meaningful.

Hoby’s use of the diurnal form provides a sense of coherence or “narrative identity” (Ricoeur 1991b) in the clutter of the everyday. Unlike the late-Romantic subject that Ricoeur envisions in his theory of identity, Hoby creates concordance in terms of repetition, not in terms of plot. Her identity as elect, which hinges on her use of time, must be articulated again and again—it needs to be repeated ad infinitum. In one of the few lengthier entries in the year 1605, Hoby writes about the necessity of keeping a diary, a meta-commentary on her own writing practice in which she confesses that she feels guilty about her “neccligence”:

April 1605:
The first day Mr Rhodes peached in the Morninge: Mr Hunter, his father in Law, and he, after the Sarmon, took possession of Vnderill his house to Mr Hobys vse and mine: at Night I thought to writ my daies Iourney as before, because, in the reading over some of my former spent time, I funde
some profitt might be made of that Course from which, thorow two much neccligence, I had a Longe time dissisted: but they are vnwrthye of godes bennefites and especiall fauours that Can finde no time to make a thankfull recorde of them. (2001: 210–11)

In this entry, Hoby writes about the events of 1st April, but also about the importance of writing itself, in which she hopes she might “funde some profitt”. She goes on to frame her own negligence in terms of a logic of salvation and damnation that holds for every Christian, as she adopts an anonymous voice, probably recalling the “Sarmon” she heard earlier that day: “they [my emphasis] are vnwrthye of godes bennefites […] that Can finde no time to make a thankfull recorde of them”. For Hoby, it is a universally accepted truth that time is a precious gift that must be treated carefully, and the use of time should be dutifully recorded.

Thus, time plays a crucial role in Hoby’s diary on more than one level. Time and its use form the texture of the religious backdrop against which Reformists like Hoby write. Moreover, time shapes the formal make-up of the text itself: the date that precedes each entry; the open-ended structure of the text, which mirrors the open-ended struggle to discern God’s will; the use of repetition, which is not a stylistic device but a result of the daily mode of composition.

The diarists’ construction of time thus differs considerably from that of Reformist writers such as Bunyan, whose *Grace Abounding* is more clearly teleological, more Ricoeurian, as it were, as it attempts to represent a life in its totality. Bunyan, like later generations of autobiographers, may indeed create “concordance” of “disconcordant elements” (Ricoeur 1991a: 21), as he integrates disruptive and contingent events into the plot of his life. By contrast, it is impossible to read Hoby’s diurnal identity in terms of teleological plot structures. Her conflict with her sinful impulses (an impulse to neglect her evening prayer, for instance) is never resolved in a “happy ending”, but only temporarily, on a particular day, at a specific moment, and it resumes again the next day. Unlike later Reformist autobiographers, Hoby does not fuse past memories, present experiences, and future plans into a “temporal totality” (Ricoeur 1991a: 22). “Totality” is created by reciting the same routine and dutifulness over and over again. The repetitive structure of Hoby’s diary, which mirrors and underscores its repetitive content, might strike “us” as boring, but for Hoby, repetition and routine are likely to have been reassuring.
“Body and Soule”

The dry tone and the routine pattern of Hoby’s diary are hardly ever broken, except in the passages in which she writes about minor ailments. Illness was a matter of much concern in the radical Protestant sects. God was supposed to inflict “castigatory punishment” on the elect (Lake 1982: 150) as a sign of providence (see also Lamb 1999: 70). Thus, Calvinist practical theology suggested to develop not just a watchful sense of self, but also a watchful sense of embodiment, to pay attention to minor ailments, and to keep a record thereof. This might explain why we can witness an almost obsessional concern with bodily well-being in Hoby’s diary:

[1599] Friday

after dinner, it pleased [the Lord], for a Iust punishment to corricte my sinnes, to send me febelnis of stomak and paine of my head, that kept me vpon my bed tell 5: a clock : at which time I arose, haveinge release of my sickness, according to the wonted kindnes of the Lord, who, after he had Let me se how I had offended, that so I might take better heed to my body and soule hereaftter, with a gentle corriction let me feele he was reconsiled To me. (Hoby 2001: 7)

In this entry, Hoby describes her body in a holistic way, which does not translate into the Cartesian division between the body and the mind, in which the body is pictured as a “container” (“res extensa”) for the higher cognitive capacities of the soul (“res cogitans”) (see Descartes 1985: 59–60). Rather, Hoby writes about her body as if it was “porous” (Kern Paster et al. 2004: 16), subject to spiritual forces and magically cured through divine interventions. The passage constructs the body as a direct recipient of God’s wrath, a vessel for God’s “Iust punishment”. Through her body, Hoby can picture the “wonted kindnes of the Lord”. If she remains receptive to His “gentle correction”, she will “feele he was recon-siled” to her. Therefore, an inner sense of passive receptivity provides an enabling moment in her faith. Hoby does not construct faith in terms of individual choice (even the “godly” choice to resist temptation), but in terms of obedience. She ascribes to God many of the motivations, experiences, and feelings that “we” (readers in the twenty-first century) would locate inside of ourselves. Hoby thus articulates a sense of self which is not just “decentered”—as Derrida would put it—but which never had a centre in the first place.
Hoby’s identity as passive recipient is not only, or not exclusively, a religious construct but also, more generally, a culture-specific response to a material reality. It tells us much about what it must have been like to live in a historical moment in which life was extremely precarious. Hoby wrote before the age of modern medicine and hence was quite literally helpless in the face of diseases. This is particularly present in many entries between the summer 1603 and the spring 1605, in which Hoby mentions repeatedly, and with an increasing sense of urgency, how the plague spreads from the South of England (London and Whitby) to her part of Yorkshire (191–195). She notes the numbers of the dead in London—124 on 24 August 1603, 3200 in the first week of September (Hoby 2001: 191)—which resonates in 2020 as we stare at our phones tracing the casualties of the Covid-19 pandemic, waiting for the curve to flatten. However, and here our cultural construct differs from Hoby’s, she interprets the pandemic along religious lines:

The 23 day [October 1603]
this day I hard the plauge was so great at whitbie that those [who] were cleare shut themselues vp, and the infected that escaped did goe abroad : Likewise it was reported that, at London, the number was taken of the Liuing and not of the deed : Lord graunt that these Iudgmentes may Cause England wt speed to tourne to the Lord.

As much as Hoby’s entry resonates with the 2020 sense of paranoia and beleaguerment, it also articulates a Calvinist hope for salvation that speaks to Hoby’s own historical moment. For Hoby, the plague is a “Iudegen[t]” that she hopes “may Cause England wt speed to tourne to the Lord”. Where “we” hope for a vaccine, Hoby hopes for more spiritual cures.

The historical alterity of Hoby’s text is particularly conspicuous in entries in which she writes about medicine. Hoby herself acted as midwife, druggist, and doctor in the village (see Hoby 2001: 60). In the following passage, Hoby relates the death of her physician and friend, Dr. Brewer (Moody 2001, qtd. in Hoby: 13; FN 34):

[1599] Friday 31
I hard of the sudden Death of Doctor Brewer, Procured by a medeson he minestred to him selfe to Cause him to sleep: I was much greued for it, because of the familiaritie I had with him, and good I had receiued from, but, after better aduice, I found the mercie and power of god shewed in openinge his eies thouchinge me, and shuttinge them against him selfe, by
Causinge him to haue great Care of ministringe vnto me, and so little for his owne saftie : therefore I may truly conclude it is the Lord, and not the phisi-
sion, who both ordaines the medesine for our health and orderethe the
ministring of it for the good of his children, closinge and vnclosinge the
Judgmentes of men at his pleasure : therefore let euerie one phisision and
pactente Call vpon the Lord for a blessing. (2001: 12–3)

Here, Hoby starts with relating her grief (“greu[e]”), ensuing from Doctor Brewer’s sudden death. Intriguingly, Hoby immediately frames this event and the emotions connected with it in the ideological grid of her faith. The next phrase, which is introduced by the insertion “but, after better aduice”—indicating that she has conferred with Master Rhodes—illustrates that she considers her mourning for Master Brewer to be inap-
propriate. She continues by explaining that Dr. Brewer had been overeager and never actually had the capacity and the authority to heal: it is the Lord who “ordaines the medesine for our health and orderethe the ministring of it for the good of his children”. Hoby thus portrays Dr. Brewer as a person who did not know his place. There is the sense that the grief she experienced at Dr. Brewer’s loss is a “forbidden mourning”, but she nev-
evertheless mentions it and finds ways to frame the emotion in terms of her faith. As readers in the twenty-first century, we might not be able to relate to Hoby’s religious language, and we might even find it bizarre; but for the diarist, such religious framings of emotion were significant and offered solace.

On a more general level, Hoby interprets the episode as a lesson about spiritual hierarchies. According to the Calvinist worldview, no human being can be trusted over God. Hoby, however, had trusted Dr. Brewer, who, in turn, had trusted himself in his abilities as a physician. Dr. Brewer’s death then reminds her that she needs to trust God and not His creatures. Her sentimental feelings about Dr. Brewer’s death are an impediment to her learning and thus need to be rejected or, at minimum, tamed.

**PIOUS INWARDNESS**

Hoby may not always be very detailed and explicit, but she gives some very significant clues about the state of her interiority. She grieves for Dr. Brewer but finds “mercie” in God. She feels bad about her drowsiness but knows how to interpret such bodily symptoms as God’s “Iust
punishment[s]”. As Mary Ellen Lamb suggests in her study of Hoby’s reading practices,

[Hoby] provides considerable indirect information concerning the inwardness she developed as a Calvinist woman through the books she reads, through her documentation and interpretation of and through her accounting for her time. [...] Hoby uses books by contemporary authors such as William Perkins and Richard Greenham to determine which activities are profitable. These practices combine the primary purpose of Hoby’s diary, as a “Course of examenation” [...] through which she perceived, or attempted to perceive, her inward self through the gaze of God. Only through his scrutiny could she discern her ‘true identity’—that is, whether she were elect or reprobate. Good deeds could not change her destiny. (1999: 66)

Lamb suggests that Hoby’s identity is predicated upon adhering to religious norms, and upon conformity and obedience. Hoby, an avid reader of Perkins, knows that she will never be able to save herself through pious behaviour, but that she depends on God’s grace for salvation. The concomitant sense of passivity is illustrated in formulaic phrases such as “it pleased god”, which she uses repetitively: “After I was redie I betooke my selfe to priuat praier, wherin it pleased the Lord to Deall mercifully” (Hoby 2001: 3); “after dinner, it pleased [the Lord] for a Lust punishment to corricte my sinnes, to sende me febelnis of stomak and paine of my head” (ibid.: 7); “it pleased god to fre me from sunderie temptation” (ibid.: 60; my emphasis). Thus, not just Hoby’s reading practices but also the verbal structure of her journal is illustrative of a sense of identity that it is theocentric rather than anthropocentric and passive rather than active.

Hoby constructs her identity in terms of inwardness, but it is an inwardness under God, not the inwardness of the Romantic subject who struggles for individual self-expression and autonomy. Her inner life emerges in the tension between “divine and human observation” (Maus 1995: 11). It hinges upon the attempt to replicate God’s gaze (however imperfectly) so as to develop a raised awareness for her own fallibility. This painful self-awareness provides a clue to her “true identity” (Lamb 1999: 66) as elect, but she can never be sure of her salvation.

In her study _Inwardness and the Theater of the English Renaissance_, Katherine Eisaman Maus argues that the early modern era is concerned with the tension between “inward disposition and outward behaviour” (1995: 19). This tension manifests itself not only in early modern drama.
but also in philosophical explorations on the problem of other minds such as Thomas Wright’s (1971) *Passions of the Minde*. Among the theological authors who address the question of inwardness is William Perkins, who distinguishes between

a human vision that is fallible, partial, and superficial, and a divine vision that is infallible, complete, and penetrating. Without a continued tension between divine and human observation, human inwardness—constituted as it is by a difference between those scrutinies—would seem for Perkins to collapse. (Maus 1995: 11)

As Katherine Eisaman Maus demonstrates, inwardness is not an imposition of the contemporary reader onto the historical text, but a concept that was already available in early modern thought. The distinction between inner feeling and outward ritual was particularly attractive for the dissenting sects (Maus 1995: 19). Alan Sinfield explains the importance of human inwardness in Calvinist thought:

Both Catholicism and neoplatonic humanists encouraged a belief in a continuity between human and divine experience; that one might school one’s soul and rise from one to the other. Protestantism insisted on the gap between the two, emphasizing the utter degradation of humankind and the total power of God to determine who shall be saved. (Sinfield 1992: 144)

Thus, Protestant interiority is constituted by the tension between God’s perfect divine vision and the subject’s own inadequacy. The “gap” Sinfield and Maus describe here is certainly present in Hoby’s diary. Hoby’s text conveys an overhang in religious obligations, which she attempts to fulfil. These obligations are not just a matter of outward performance, of church-going, praying, working diligently, and so forth, although these issues do matter, of course. But, crucially, it is also Hoby’s religious duty to watch her inner sentiments and to match them against the ideals described in the pious tracts she reads. In the process, Hoby never actually manages to entirely replicate God’s gaze as she has to rely on her own, fallible powers of observation. If she managed to double God’s gaze perfectly (which, of course, is an impossibility), her diurnal log of activities would cease to be necessary. Also, her interiority would merge with that of God and thus be non-existent (see Lamb 1999: 72).
Keeping a diary is an important instrument for developing such a pious, watchful, self-reflexive interiority. As Hoby can never be sure of her salvation, the sequential, diurnal pattern of her diary is indispensable: Hoby needs to ask herself every day, again and again, which scriptures she read, whether she indulged in idle pleasures or remained disciplined, whether she prayed devoutly or mechanically, and hence whether she spent her time profitably or unprofitably.

Hoby’s diary articulates the contradictions inherent in Protestant thought rather than resolving them. Self-monitoring does not actually serve as a tool to improve the diarist and does not aid her in her struggle against her unruly body, which is too “drowsy” to pray properly or which otherwise leads her to neglect her duty. As an avid reader of Perkins, Hoby would have believed that she was prone to sin despite her best intentions. Following Perkins’s thought, Hoby would have “known” that she could only be saved through divine intervention. Characteristically, Hoby’s interiority is not a “blank slate” as Barker would call it, but it emerges in an unequal dialogue with a stern metaphysical authority.

In this sense, Hoby’s diary is Freudian rather than Foucauldian. Self-monitoring does not actually serve as a tool to improve the diarist and does not aid her in her attempt to civilise her unruly body, but it only creates moments of self-awareness. It is in these moments that she discerns, if fleetingly, her identity as a good Christian. Her dutifulness, her feelings of relief and gratitude, her painful realisation of her inadequacy, her capacity to read illness as “punishment” are steps in her struggle to discern God’s will. Hoby knows that she is bound to “sin” again, however hard she may try to be pious and obedient. Like the subject constructed in Freud’s theory, she is not really in control of what she does.

Furthermore, her watchful, Calvinist sense of self is marked by a very specific affectivity: by guilt, anxiety, self-loathing, and pain. Although she does not write as frankly and elaborately about her emotional as later diarists (such as Josselin or Pepys), she is not entirely silent about her emotions either. Hoby is quite explicit with respect to her affective life in a few passages. Significantly, these passages concern her alleged wrongdoings and her ensuing religious anxiety, as the very first entry of her diary illustrates:
Here, Hoby reproaches herself for neither praying nor regretting her lack of discipline. Thus, religion is not just a matter of ritual and appropriate behaviour but also of responding with an appropriate feeling. “[M]ourninge” and anxiety seem to be acceptable, even desirable, when they occur in a spiritual context and produce godly behaviour. Echoing Calvin, Hoby attempts to feel her own depravity, which she interprets as a sign of God’s love. I will quote from another episode to discuss the interplay between godly behaviour and pious interiority in Hoby’s diary. In it, Hoby relates an episode in which she is so plagued by toothache that she cannot perform her religious duties:

The passage implies that the physical pain is not half as bad as the “greffe” the diarist feels about not being able to go to church and receiving the sacraments. The entry conveys the sense that she is afraid that she has angered God with her “sinnes” and therefore begs his forgiveness, as she writes, “tell it please the Lord, by his spiritt, to Certefie agan that their sinnes are pardoned.” The language in the entry shifts back and forth between faith—“the Lord is powerfull”—and a modicum of doubt as
Hoby laments that God deprives “[his children] of the ordenarie Instrumentes wherby he hath promised to Coneaye his graces vnto His people for their sinnes”. Hoby most likely interpreted the event as a test for her faith and, hence, an assurance of being “elect”. She attempts to establish order in the emotional chaos in praying to God and feeling reassured of his “Loue” and enigmatically free from pain. A crucial component in Hoby’s struggle for emotional moderation is her willingness to suffer “sorowe and greffe” and, thus, to succumb to God’s will and actually enjoy His castigations.

The ambivalent interiority in-between pleasure and pain that Hoby constructs here echoes her Calvinist upbringing and reading practices. She draws on the idea that the elect are particularly prone to feel “sorowe and greffe” about their sins. In Hoby’s view, these negative emotions are (paradoxically) part of the realisation of being saved. Feeling guilty establishes the true identity of the elect and is therefore actually a very positive emotion.

As I suggested earlier, the emotional blending of pleasure and pain, of self-loathing and enjoyment, is encapsulated in Lacan’s theory of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the affective underside of fulfilling a normative duty. It is what Hoby points to when she writes that she rests assured of “godes Loue”. In submitting herself completely to God’s wisdom and repenting her “sinnes”, she (paradoxically) feels the *jouissance* of being part of the elect. Shortly before Christmas, Hoby notes:

*Saterday the 22: [December 1599]*

[…] att 5 a Clock, I returned to my Closett vnto priuat examenation and praier : then I went to supper, after to the Lector, and Lastly to priuat praers and preperation to the supper of the Lord by takinge an account what breaches I had made in my faith, since I found that I had itt, by reparinge those by repentance, as also medetating what grace I had, what benifetes godes spiritt ther did offer me, if I Came rightly, and worthyly, both of person and vsag: and so I went to bed. (2001: 46)

Here, Hoby relates that she monitors her faith, keeping an “account” of her “breaches” and, in so doing, fills herself with “repentance”. This sense of guilt and penitence actually brings about some relief and even the sense that she can “repair” the damage by feeling guilty for it. She explicitly articulates her sense of relief and gratitude in the closing sentence of the entry, in which she writes that she “medetat[es]” on the “grace” she has
received from the Lord. Therefore, she can go to bed with a clear conscience.

The passage represents an intriguing transition from fulfilment of duty (self-monitoring, writing the journal), to articulating guilt, penitence, but also gratitude. The multifarious interiority (fear of an authority, guilt and ambivalent joy) is precisely what the concept of jouissance encapsulates. Only very rarely does Hoby appear to be unequivocally happy about her behaviour, as on 27 March 1600, when she notes “hauing no distractions or temptations felte more then ordenarie, so that I found great Cause to praise god who is the giuer of all true Comfort what soeuer” (2001: 69).

On a more abstract level, Hoby presents us with two different aspects of herself. Hoby constructs a self that watches, surveys, and critically examines the other version of the self, which is unruly and has apparently made some serious “breaches”. For Hoby, the process of self-monitoring leads to a feeling of “repentance”, which then restores or “rep[airs]” the damage done by the more unruly part of herself. In meditating on her “breaches”, in feeling earnest guilt and penitence, she develops a pious, obedient affectivity, a jouissance, which blends pain, guilt, and enjoyment. This affective piety hinges on an earnest introspective regard, on a splitting of the self into a part which controls and judges and a part that is being watched over, controlled, and judged. For further illustration, I will quote from one more passage also discussed in Mary Ellen Lamb’s study of Hoby:

The:18: [July 1600]

[…] I Came to publeck praers and, after, to priuat, wher I please the lord to touch my hart with such sorow, for some offence Cometted, that I hope the lord, for his sonne sake, hath pardoned it according to his promise, which is ever Iust: after, I reed apaper that wrought a farther humiliation in me, I thanke god. (2001: 99)

As Lamb argues, this passage echoes Hoby’s reading practices, which emphasise human depravity and God’s mercifulness: “[s]eeing her offence through God’s gaze […] achieved redemptive sorrow” (1999: 73). In this context, Lamb questions the extent to which Hoby’s experience of “humiliation” was gendered feminine (ibid.). Translated into the idiom of psychoanalysis, one is tempted to ask if Hoby invokes a mysterious feminine jouissance here, as celebrated in the work of Luce Irigaray (2007, 1993). Irigaray coins the neologism “mystérieque” (2007) to vindicate
feminine mysticism as a primordial form of feminism. According to
Irigaray, the mystic, like the hysteric several centuries later, embraces a
subversive subjectivity, which undermines the rationalist logic of patriar-
chial power (2007).

However, it may be premature to see Hoby as a “mystérique” in
Irigaray’s sense. Calvinist male diarists show a very similar concern with
acceptance, dutifulness, and conformity (see Chap. 6). What is more,
Hoby’s language is never a language of excess and subversion, which is a
central characteristic of Irigaray’s theory of the mystérique, but the idiom
of what one could call a spiritual accountant. Hoby only articulates affec-
tive interiority in the context of her religious duties. In many entries,
Hoby depicts situations that would be considered causes of grief and inner
turmoil in the twenty-first century, but she writes in a tone that is placid
and matter-of-fact. On 26 August 1601, for instance, she relates an epi-
sode in which a nameless villager pleads with her (it would seem, desper-
ately) to perform an operation on her newborn boy who was born with a
horrible deformity (the infant had no anal passage). Hoby concludes the
entry stating: “I was earnestly intreated to Cutt the place to se if any
passhage Could be made, but, I althought I Cutt deepe and seearched,
there was none to be found” (2001: 161).

Passages like this may have led Lawrence Stone to his often-quoted
statement that “feelings were less warm” (1977: 221) in the Renaissance
(see also Ariès 1973). Even Sharon Seelig, who characteristically avoids
bold conclusions, is tempted to ask: “Did she [Hoby] ever feel anything?”
(2006: 21). However, as Seelig herself concedes, the mere fact that Hoby
did not write that she feared for the baby’s life or that she felt helpless,
does not imply that Margaret Hoby, the historical person, lacked empathy.
Hoby’s silence about issues that must have been at least a bit upsetting
should not be summarily interpreted as an expression of coldness. As Kern
Paster et al. caution us, “modern readers tend to misread early modern
emotion codes along specific lines, often parsing emotional control as a
lack of feeling and privileging spontaneous and passionate expressions as
evidence for authentic experience” (2004: 11). It is very likely that Hoby
felt despair when cutting open a newborn infant, although, of course, we
can never be entirely sure. What we do know is that she did find it neces-
sary or adequate to write about these emotions. The reason for her silence
lies, I would suggest, in her faith, which provides the framework for her
writing practices. She only notes her feelings when they connect with the
pious inwardness demanded by her Calvinist faith. She may have been
afraid to hurt the baby or may have felt devastated and helpless when her attempts to save the child failed, but she did not consider her diary the place to write about such emotions.

**Summary**

As the analyses have shown, Margaret Hoby’s journal is pervaded by Reformist piety, which gives her a rationale to write about her life and a structure and form for her narratives. Thus, her journal follows the grid recommended in Calvinist tracts on self-monitoring. It is kept in strict chronological order as the diarist records her daily chores and religious obligations with characteristic diligence. As a result, Hoby’s journal is numbingly repetitive as a text and evokes only a minimal degree of what Monika Fludernik has called “experientiality” (1996: 12).

This does not mean, however, that Hoby’s journal is a medium that only looks at outward events and performance and does not entail an inward-looking gaze. Hoby actually uses her diary to construct a specific pious interiority. Keeping a record of her religious duties, Hoby looks at her behaviour with rigorous introspective regard. She not only documents the extent to which she manages the performance of her duties but also asks herself, daily and repeatedly, whether she prayed devoutly (rather than just reciting empty words) or whether she concentrated on her reading (rather than being drowsy), trying to make sure that she is in a proper frame of mind. In the process, Hoby constructs a sense of self that is characterised by receptivity, passivity, and obedience.

Hoby’s journal serves as a material medium for self-examination, in which she documents her “sinnes” and “breaches”. The text that emerges out of these restrictive practices provides some proof that she has prayed regularly and, more important, earnestly. It does, of course, also demonstrate when she has not. Thus, the diary is not just a narrative which documents her piety but also a practice within her faith. It serves as a reminder and an incentive to organise her day along the lines of her faith, to avoid idleness, to use her time for prayer and self-examination. Hoby knows that she will have to write about her “breaches”, and perhaps this knowledge prevented her from breaching the norm in the first place. Thus, keeping a diary can very literally take over super-ego functions and evolve into an inner control instance. On the level of its content and verbal structure,
Hoby’s diary is the site in which the introspective guilt so crucial for Calvinist identity is constructed. The diary can be used to construct the specific affective piety that arises out of conformity and obedience.

Furthermore, the diary as a written medium also points outwards, as writing it begets the possibility of someday being read. Keeping a journal, pious women like Hoby could put themselves under a semi-public gaze, and thus were “authorised” to speak and be heard. As a consequence, Hoby’s practice of diary-keeping is both restrictive and paradoxically enabling. It is restrictive because clearly Hoby’s range of agency—already limited through her gender—was even more limited through her rigorous disciplinary schedule; however, it is also conspicuously enabling because it provides a justification for narrating her life. By keeping an account of her piety and obedience, by monitoring her behaviour, Hoby has the possibility to speak and to write as a woman without flouting the norms of her time. Indeed, her journal-keeping was not provocative, since the diarist was protected by a most austere system of piety, which provided both a pattern and a rationale for writing.

For this reason, it is difficult to interpret Hoby’s writing as an act of feminist heroism avant la lettre. Neither can she be read as a mystérieque who subverts the law of the reason with her excessive speech, nor does she engage in a form of self-fashioning that threatens patriarchal authority. Hoby can more adequately be described as an accountant of piety, an accountant who nevertheless enjoys what she is doing. As I hope to have shown, Hoby’s jouissance arises from her dutifulness and obedience. Hers is not a language of subversion and excess but, on the contrary, a dry and sequential language with only little attention to “qualia”. She leaves hyperbole, imagery, and excess to “popeshe” (120) books.

Gender did, of course, have an impact on Hoby as a person and her writing practice. In the early modern era, there was very little to everyday life that was not seriously inflected by gender. However, Hoby does not breach the gendered norms of her time. On the contrary, she constructs herself as a dutiful Christian, as a woman who fulfils her religious and secular duties. Lady Anne Clifford, whose diary I will discuss in the next chapter, is more daring with respect to gender hierarchies and relies on very different strategies to gain voice and agency.
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