

From Essayist to Author: Roger North and Evolving Narrative Forms

One of the most recent and full accounts of the late seventeenth-century moral essay is by J. Paul Hunter in his *Before Novels*.¹ Hunter regards the essay as precursor to the eighteenth-century flourishing of the novel and notes that its major contribution to this genre is its didacticism. This study of the essay takes its starting point from Hunter's perception of the link between the essay and the novel, but takes account also of other, common, aspects of each. Beside Hunter's focus on the successors of the late seventeenth-century 'guide' literature we need to consider the essay's origins: in the work of Montaigne and what the English development of the Montaignean essay contributes to larger narrative forms. Hunter's focus is on 'guide' literature in print publication, and he convincingly shows how the didactic purpose of this literature found a new medium in the novel. Nevertheless, the seventeenth-century essay takes a multitude of forms, is not only a print genre, and has purposes besides didacticism. Perhaps one reason for its comparative neglect by scholars is that those essays written for manuscript circulation lie uneasily in the world of print culture and print is, often anachronistically, imposed as a model for all seriously intentioned literature.² A print culture both creates and reflects its own audience, and at the same time sets genre firmly within boundaries, giving its authors a certain role within those boundaries. A manuscript culture, such as that which survives throughout the seventeenth century (although alongside a burgeoning print culture), had different restrictions, particularly in the case of the dissemination of texts.³ In the case of the manuscript essay, people wrote for all sorts of purposes, and often for dissemination among a very small group. The seventeenth-century manuscript essay retains throughout its period of popularity an awareness of its origin in the French meaning of the word: literally an *essai*, an attempt, not a treatise.

None of Roger North's moral essays was printed in his lifetime but several, perhaps many, were intended for circulation – primarily among his family members but possibly also among close friends.⁴ By focusing on the more

informal, manuscript, essays of North I wish to show how many elements of this eclectic genre contributed not only, as Hunter has claimed, to the content and purpose of later novels, but may have, more generally, influenced evolving narrative forms – as they did in North’s own case.

North’s own purposes in his prolific writing were several, and different at different times. He rarely wrote, however, for print publication, and when he did, he did not reveal his own name. The idea of being an ‘author’ was something he specifically wished to avoid. In his Preface, as translator, to Pierre de Villiers’s *Reflections on our Common Failings* (1701), he wrote: ‘Men of Families and Affairs may, at subsecive hours, and out of generosity Translate, whose daily Employments are above the drudgery of Composing; for that will not bear intermissions, and is therefore more proper for meer Scholars, State-Fugitives, or idle Companions, whose fortune it is, to be no otherwise employed’ (Sig. A9v).⁵ North speaks here for many of his contemporaries who neither necessarily, nor usually, regarded themselves as published or professional writers – what North himself often termed ‘formal’ writers. For instance, when he sent a copy, with his own annotations, of François de Prendcourt’s instruction books for the harpsichord and thorough bass to a friend, he satirised Prendcourt’s pretensions: ‘Here is a very thin composition, and yet the garb and livery of an author, so much hath he of chaptering, articling, firsting and seconding, as if he had amassed together and digested the whole materia musica.’⁶

North perceived Prendcourt’s ‘formality’ as pomposity, partly because his subject-matter was so slight. He also saw the name of author as making claims to a certain style, to fixed genres.⁷ It was within an ‘informal’ context that the essay flourished in the seventeenth century, even in its printed forms; and because of its very lack of formality it could borrow from a number of other, recognised, genres – especially the letter and the Theophrastan Character.⁸ Sometimes it was reflective, usually didactic, sometimes a mixture of these, but by its very nature it lacked a fixed structure and fixed purpose. It was, paradoxically, this very lack of a fixed form that defined it.⁹

A major contribution to discussion of the seventeenth-century essay is that by Ted-Larry Pebworth.¹⁰ He refers to Montaigne’s *Essais* (1580) as the model for the English: their first English translator was John Florio (1603) and their first imitator was Sir William Cornwallis the younger, a self-acknowledged disciple.¹¹ In his very title, an adaptation of Montaigne’s ‘I do not portray being: I portray passing’,¹² but also in more detail in his article, Pebworth draws attention to the ‘informality’ of the essay as Montaigne and his imitators practised it: its emphasis on the passing minute, the immediate thought. The portrait is of the mind thinking. But further than this, in writing of Bacon – perhaps the most famous English essayist of the seventeenth century – Pebworth draws attention to the essay’s use of inductive, rather than deductive, reasoning.¹³ As another writer, Graham Good, says of both Bacon’s and Montaigne’s essays’ *difference* from, for instance, the Senecan

epistle: 'the main thrust of each piece [of Seneca's] is didactic, and in that respect is like an informal sermon which the preacher illustrates from his own life. The form invented by Bacon and Montaigne reverses these priorities: the general statements are derived from observation and experience, rather than experience being used to illustrate a pre-established doctrine.'¹⁴ Its inductive method is what most clearly distinguishes the seventeenth-century English essay. It is autobiographical: but it also, like a letter, presupposes a reader, someone addressed. While it is often (or usually) didactic in intent, it is unlike the sermon in that it is a dialogic form, not dogmatic, presupposing debate rather than certainty, even if the debate is with the author alone. But this supposition of debate does not preclude the essay's perceived value as a means of instruction, and indeed many (including Montaigne's) have this purpose.

Montaigne's *Essais* had a wide influence in seventeenth-century England, both in their subject-matter and their manner of expressing it. There is no doubt that Bacon's rewriting of his own *Essays*, from 1612 on, was greatly influenced by Montaigne's style; and the form and subject-matter, in imitation of Bacon, was popular right to the end of the century. The renewed popularity of Bacon's *Essays* in the 1680s illustrates this.¹⁵ But in the latter part of the seventeenth century there was also a flourishing of 'instruction literature' and the topics with which it dealt were those which had occupied Montaigne and Bacon: moral and social issues and conduct. The *difference* in many of their imitators was precisely that of style, a piece tending more towards the sermon, deductive rather than inductive, hardly autobiographical, with illustrative examples of any single point not taken from personal experience but, in effect, little set Character pieces in the Theophrastan manner. Most of the works to which I refer here are printed works, works which consequently 'freeze' the genre and become part of the instructional and 'educational' writing of the period. They are given the 'garb and livery of an author'.¹⁶

Roger North's essays, perhaps of all in the late seventeenth century, keep closest to the spirit and the method of Montaigne. Like many of those of his (printed) contemporaries, his essays take part in the debates of the period about social and moral behaviour, and his writing shows awareness of the Theophrastan Character as example, although he does not use it overtly, preferring to draw on his own experience for example. But his purpose is, like Montaigne's, debate, rather than pure instruction, and, also like Montaigne's, his essays are true *essais* – attempts at working out his ideas on various social and moral topics. To that degree they are autobiographical: although autobiography of the mind as much as of the act. An example of the difference between North's style of writing in the genre and that of a printed instruction book is to be seen by comparing the following passage from *The Art of Complaisance* (1673) with one from North's first essay 'On Breeding'. Both writers are discussing social interaction:

Decency is chiefly to be observed in three things, our *speech*, *countenance* and *cloaths*; In the *speech* the voice must be fine, not rough, nor too loud, nor too low, but distinct, the terms honest, ordinary, Intelligible and Common, not mean or affected, but proper to the thing.

2. In the *countenance*, herein we must be careful, that all our looks be full of sweetness, kindness and modesty, not affected, and without grimaces; the carriage of the body decent, without extraordinary or apish gestures in all our ordinary actions, be it in eating, drinking, or the like, we must show modesty, and follow that which is most received among those with whom we converse.¹⁷

North's text is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is as though he has in mind an actual conversation between people of his acquaintance and is, in the act of writing, considering the ways in which the participants interacted, or might have done:

Being well bred is no other then an art habituated of passing the time in idle company, with eas[,] profit and delight to yourself, and them. I say, idle; not excluding conversation in buisness; for there scarce can be any such meeting, but great part of the time is spent upon forme, and the avenews or approaches to the matter which is of the same consideration as idle company ... I sayd, *with eas to the self* for without that it is impossible the company should be easy. Paine and torment is seen in the countenance, as wee call making faces, and it is well knowne that few spectators can forbear doing the like in compassion. And this happens not onely in extremity's, but also in all degrees proportionably, therefore a cheerfull posture within is necessary to the forming a pleasant conversation to the company. And by the way, this is one reason why designing fals people are seldome easy in idle conversation, for they have so much constraint in their minds by striving to act fals parts, that they come out stiff and formall. And there is no better way to conceal this light, shining on their behaviour, than by taking a part professedly stiff and formall, such as sectary teacher's use. I say'd *with delight* becaus there must be action and discours to give life to conversation; it will not subsist with all passives, as silence, and rest, like a quakers meeting. There must be discours offered, and attended to; and condescensions of superiors to oblidg inferiours; display of witt; various applycation's as occasion shall require, and the like.¹⁸

North uses similes and little scenarios to illustrate his point. But in order to illustrate the difference in North's method from that of the author of *Art of Complaisance*, one needs more than a single paragraph; for he is far from prescriptive, and goes on to discuss at length the various times and places when one or other manner of behaviour is more or less acceptable, and he refers too, to customs obtaining in other countries, such as in France. So he can claim (fol. 134) that 'a world of instances may be given, to shew there is no universall character of good breeding, the currency whereof is purely from the stamp of custome, and opinion'.

When North uses more extended examples of behaviour than similes and analogies he writes from his own experience. An example is this 'picture' of Archbishop Sancroft (North was Steward to the See of Canterbury from

1679) which follows a discussion of the safest way to behave ‘if the company be enemy’s, or fals and treacherous’ where ‘all good manners, turnes into policy, trick, and shift’:

I can never forgett the temper, and behaviour of the good archbishop, with respect to freinds and enimys. He was never at eas, in the presence of the latter, nor whatever his case was, uneasy with the others. At his table, if he esteemed all the company to be his freinds, and honest, (for he would never thinck other could be his freind) no person could be more chirping and pleasant then he was. He would sparkle and display witt, not such as is so called, railing and backbiting, but ingenious allusions, and applications of the Latin poets ... rather above, then like a youthfull fancy ... But if his sagatious eye found out one fals person, as many such came to spy, and observe him, and often upon pretence of honour and service to him, but never concealed from him, he would be as mute and grave, as the meat he distributed. When he discours’t or transacted with those he honoured with the style of freinds, if it were, as happened sometimes, upon subjects very disagreeable to his mind, yet he would entertein, and dissolve it with greatt affability, respect, and candor, vnfolding his sentiments, and deducing his reason’s so familiarly and plaine yet with such an accuracy and force of words, as made all both justifie and admire him. But if any one came, that he thought subterfugacious and fals; and that his plain[n]ess might be traduc’t and suffer; he would shew no play, as wrestlers speak, and just not be rude.¹⁹

By comparison, the work that North translated – *Reflections on our Common Failings* – exemplifies behaviour (like many contemporary published conduct books and books of essays on social and moral behaviour) by more abstract and partly satirical Characters. The following is an example from the chapter on ‘Self-Interest’. After discussing the subject in a general way, the author gives examples:

Mr. T... is an excellent Person, and hath a great Passion for E...; he would readily [s]pend his Life in her Service; but he wants an Estate, walks a Foot, and has sometimes occasion to borrow. She vows he deserves to be Loved, but yet in truth she neither loves nor cares to please him. A... is a stupid Brute, but waits on her in his Coach. She no sooner hears that, but away, she leaves Mr. T... retires to adjust her self at her Glass; over and over again; a great Chair is set, and Mr. T... may please to retire, and divert himself in the Anti-room. After all this, E. is a good Woman: State and Pomp are no less important in the Honourable, than in the other Amour.²⁰

A similar method of illustration is found in Judith Drake’s *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696, formerly attributed to Mary Astell) in which the Characters (all of men) serve to illustrate, by contrast, the advantages of women’s education and social education.

North wrote throughout his whole life; and he used the essay form not just for those short pieces on moral and social issues which date from the late seventeenth century, and which are closest to the *Essais* of Montaigne which

were his model, but also in the sense of ‘attempts’, ways of working out ideas for larger, more formal, works. My focus in this paper is on those Montaignean essays of North – on moral and social issues. These are of significance not just for themselves, as participating in a popular genre and drawing attention to the kind of educational programme which many of the more liberal of the printed texts advocate. They are also important in that they, too, are preparatory to the extent that they form a basis for North’s development of a narrative form – of biography rather than autobiography – which celebrated exemplary life and which, itself, might be seen as having a similar purpose to that of the moral essay.²¹ Thus, in developing his biographical style, North’s essays on moral and social topics provided him, in miniature, with a purpose, a style and a narrative method.²² Their purpose was partly for himself – to work out his own ideas from his own observations and experience – and partly instructive of his intended reader, a reader who is explicitly addressed in the early version of the essays, ‘Pride’ and ‘Breeding’, but who retreats in the later, shorter, versions of these and in others. His style was that of (implied) dialogue, and his narrative method anecdotal and without a fixed structure; but he used anecdote in ways others had used the Character sketch, as exemplary.²³ The essays on social and moral behaviour also show a keen awareness of details of social interaction. They draw attention to a society in which this is of primary importance, one in which every gesture, every article of clothing, every phrase (written or spoken) has a social valency and a significance which reveals the person and relationships between people.²⁴ Thus, besides a didactic purpose, North’s essays have, in their dialogic form, two characteristics significant for the later development of larger (fictional) forms: interiority, the expression of the mind freely flowing about a given topic, and an acute awareness of social forms and decorum, details of people interacting socially.

When he came to writing biography, particularly in his monumental *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, the Life of his elder brother Francis North,²⁵ Roger North seems to have had in mind the Life as a long, exemplary essay. In later versions, particularly the last, this was to be not simply a family document, but both a public defence of his brother and an account of an exemplary life, the life of one not living in easy retirement, but one continually in the public eye and, nevertheless, living blamelessly and significantly both in public and in private. Roger North had lived with his brother for at least fifteen years before Francis died (in 1685) and so believed that he had the knowledge and the authority to write of his brother’s actions and motives. Nevertheless, in the earlier versions he still wrote as though he were primarily writing of himself, the witness. The challenge, then, in the later versions was to move from an essentially autobiographical method to a more detached biography: that is to say, to move from the expression of the interiority of his own thoughts to the expression of those of his brother. He had, in Francis’s ‘remains’ and his own recollection of conversations,

sufficient material on which to base an (assumed) understanding of Francis's ideas and motives, and gradually, over a number of versions, he worked out a method of describing not simply his own thoughts (for he keeps the personal, first-person style of narration in all the versions) but those of another – by free indirect speech, without the constant need to claim the authority of his own witness.

The influence of Montaigne came to North through his grandfather, Dudley 3rd Lord North, who published a vast collection of essays and poems in 1645,²⁶ each of the essays written as a letter to a woman (unnamed and unidentified). In it, Dudley North refers several times to the influence of Montaigne on his life and his writing. For instance, he writes 'I have formerly wondred at *Montaigne* ... that in his *Essayes* hee often takes a title and writes little upon it: I find it now in my selfe ...'.²⁷ He also attributes his lifetime suffering from melancholy to the 'overusing of Treakle, hot and dry, in my youth' and to his 'first studies in the way of morality and Scepticisme'.²⁸ Sir Dudley's method is personal, autobiographical and informal; but he also has some pieces on stated topics, such as that on 'Virtue' (pp. 107–9); and he includes a section on Theophrastan Characters, 'Written about the yeare, 1625' (pp. 85–101). Dudley North's eldest son, Dudley, 4th Lord North (1602–1677), Roger North's father, also practised the genre, but with a more overtly didactic purpose. One volume was published in 1669, a book of instructions and observations from personal experience on household management and the management of families: *Observations and Advices Oeconomical* (London, 1669). His more personal collection of essays was published after his death: *Light in the Way to Paradise: with other occasionals* (London, 1682).

Roger North began writing his own essays in the style of Montaigne in the 1680s, and it appears that he began them, following Bacon, as part of his vast plan for a 'systeme of Nature upon the Cartesian or rather Mechanicall principles'.²⁹ Among the manuscripts at Rougham Hall is a bound commonplace book in which North set out his plan in schema and began to write some essays towards its realisation. It is a plan which comes close to that of Bacon in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*. North's indebtedness to Bacon is evident in the introductory section to his schema in which he says: 'All the knowledg in the world is to be comprehended in the termes of History, and Philosophy, the science of security and profit lies in the former, and the true and just knowledg of things in the latter.'³⁰ In both Bacon's and North's plans there is a place for the essay on moral and social behaviour (although neither makes it explicit) as part of the understanding of human nature. In Bacon's plan, his *Essays* might be seen to find a place in the third section of his plan for 'Human learning', under 'Human philosophy'.³¹ In North's 'systeme' these essays were to be included in his section 'Historicall knowledg' which, he says, 'relates to men cheifly'. In his commonplace book are North's first works in this genre: 'The art of Words' and the beginning of 'Religion'.

The first pages of the Rougham manuscript explain North's purpose in writing, as well as his 'audience':

I have alwaies laboured to understand the things of this world, and the occurrences of life, by real and just measures, and not by superficial and prejudicated opinion, in which way, being assisted by books, and not ordinary conversation, I have bin seduc't so far, to thinck my apprehensions not contemptible, altho, according to my profession [of lawyer] in censuring my self, I put on the person of another, as the most hopeful stratagem to judg well, where I am inclin'd to favour.³²

He goes on to say that writing helps him to understand his thoughts and to cultivate a style. Perhaps, most important of all, he believes that it might invite criticism, judgment and correction from others, although the last of these will hardly apply in his case because, he says, he intends that his 'papers shall be as silent and as private as my premeditated cours of life'. His writing is as much a process of self-definition as of (self)-instruction. He continues:

My designe is to set down all my knowledg of things, both naturall and civil. And that cheifly by paring off the vulgar, and mistaken opinions, and showing the true and nude essence and reality of them.³³

And having set out his 'systeme' in schema, he concludes:

And if I may have so much credit I must declare that I am as sensible of the imper-tinence, incoherence, and uncouth stile of what I write, being all extemporaneous stuff, as any one els can be, and doe it onely for diversion, professing the minute only pleaseth me, never after.³⁴

North has other essays in this manuscript which relate to other parts of his 'systeme', but most of the book, a large folio volume bound in vellum, is empty. His writings that survive (and on all topics these amount to some 50,000 pages) survive mainly on loose sheets. The ambitious, vellum-bound folio book of blank pages was too daunting to fill, and his turning to loose sheets perhaps reflects most clearly his attitude to his writings: provisional pieces that can be altered or discarded or rewritten, not to be preserved in a formal book. The other surviving essays on social and moral issues survive in this state, i.e. on loose sheets. The earliest come closest to the genre as Montaigne wrote it: in the style if not the exact form of a letter, that is without a set form, apart from the initial paragraphs, conversational, personal, autobiographical in making clear that North's own experiences and observations are the foundation for his comments. Despite his instructional intent North is not prescriptive: the essays are rather dialogic, setting out various points of view and elaborated with reference to his own experience.

The Montaignean essay served North well as a model. Its provisional manner and style, its tone of debate and personal reference provided him with a method of writing which was congenial to him, in that he wrote this way in almost all his writings. Although he says in the Rougham commonplace book that he writes for himself alone, in the case of much of his writing there is at

least an imagined other whom he addresses, and in some quite clearly an actual person. At about the time he was writing these essays – in the late 1680s and 1690s – North also began an autobiography: ‘Notes of Me’, British Library Additional manuscript 32506. But this work, evidently written over a number of years, perhaps even with some quite long breaks in writing, is incomplete – not because leaves are missing but because it seems to have become clear to North that *all* his writing was in some ways autobiographical – autobiography not to tell his own *story* so much as to define, as he said in that preface to his ‘systeme’, his own *self*.³⁵ This ‘essayistical’ and autobiographical style of self definition served him even when he was working out, and expressing in a more finished form, his thoughts and theories on the natural world, on sound or on physics, or human phenomena and arts, such as language and architecture; but when he was writing of human subjects, subjects other than himself or his own ideas, he needed more objectivity.

Nevertheless, in two of his three biographies, North maintained the informal, essayistical, style. *The Life of Dr John North*, even the final version, was written informally because, as he says, ‘here is little or nothing of the public or states matters’ and therefore, ‘I chose to proceed in a style of familiar conversation, and as one engaged to answer such questions concerning our doctor, as may be obviously demanded.’³⁶ There is nothing to justify here; here is simply the story of a brilliant but eccentric person, one whom North obviously admired but with whom he was not close. As for the *Life of Dudley North*, Roger North seems never to have formally completed it.³⁷ Its two extant versions are separate texts, and are also different from the version that his son, Montagu, compiled and published after his father’s death. All versions are, however, heavily reliant on Dudley’s stories of his travels and work in the Levant, and to that extent Roger North is more a teller of another’s tale and to that extent also detached.

But in *The Life of the Lord Keeper North*, his elder brother Francis posed far more complex problems, both as a person and as a subject for life writing. From the time Roger North came up to London and started a career in the law until his brother died in 1685 he lived with him, even after Francis married; and Francis, already a successful lawyer, helped Roger in many ways. While he was always grateful to Francis and called him his ‘best brother’, Roger nevertheless often felt that Francis was overbearing, wanting to impose his own ideas and notions of things on him. When (probably in the late 1680s or early 1690s) he began to collect his brother’s papers to start a biography of him, North may have had in mind as audience Francis’s son, Francis, who was twelve when his father died. But later, in response to various published criticisms of his brother, North began to write a more formal biography, possibly with a view to print publication, and defence of his brother. This was, then, to be a far more formal work, and both this and the fact of North’s closeness to his brother seems to have made the writing extremely difficult. The difficulties arose when North began to plan publication in defence of his

brother, exemplified in the style of the versions from the third (1709) on. His closeness to Francis made his narrative in all but the last version inevitably autobiographical, in that he wrote as though from his own experience: in the third version, for instance, he writes 'I had the advantage of knowing most things ...'; 'I may affirme it with assurance, for I knew his heart'; 'I was with his Lordship ...'.³⁸ His loyalty to his brother also made him appear to feel and think *with* him: so also his style was more anecdotal possibly for the same reason – as much about Roger as about Francis – and allowed him to claim, through his witness, the 'truth' of what he claimed for Francis. An example is to be seen in the following passage from the 1709 version of the 'Life', in which North describes the time when Francis faced the 'black vote' in the House of Commons for drawing up the King's 'proclamation against tumultuous petitions' for the early sitting of parliament, December 1679:

But then ... came on this terrible session's of parliament, in which time wee found an eas wee had not knowne, in divers sessions before, for then [i.e., before] wee were attacked, and having a great many freinds, wee were more then a match for the enimy, and following close could lay 'em upon their backs, and they had no game against us but trick's. ... [B]ut now wee were eased of all that, for wee had not a freind scarce to speak too, very few but such as were so singular among the others, that they could give us no encouragement to attend or make any application's, for all would be in vaine.³⁹

When North describes the same episode in his final version of the 'Life' (c. 1728) he excludes himself altogether and makes much less of personal feelings about the situation:

While the ... questioning the proclamation, in the next sessions of parliament, was talked of by the factious party in towne and terrible doings were expected, his Lordship was passive, and appeared not to have any concerne upon his spiritts, but consulted his best freinds, and shewing them the proclamation, asked if they could find any caption to be made upon it⁴⁰

One of the aspects of life writing which North most struggled with in writing and rewriting his *Life* was that of the necessary transformation of his biography from a record of events to which he himself had been a witness, and, at least in sympathy, a participant, to an objective history of his brother's thoughts as well as his actions. He was now to define his brother, not himself. The final version of the *Life of Francis North*, like the earlier versions, was not just to record history but to act as an exemplum of a just and good life; to this degree it conforms to the aims of the moral essay. It was to be a celebration of a man who, in high office, was often forced to make unpopular decisions and judgments, but who, North claims, never acted falsely or without a clear standard of moral and loyal conduct to the monarch and the society he served. But North obviously wanted it to be more than this. He wanted it to stand on its own, within the 'formall' genre of 'life writing' – a genre in which North's final version of the *Life* was innovative, carefully

designed to give the reader more than a simple account of acts. Therefore, the *Life* required a form, structure and freedom from the anecdote and autobiography which had characterised both North's essays and his earlier versions of the *Life*. North's own uncertainty was about his ability 'to author it in such manner, as the subject deserves'.⁴¹

North began the transformation from essayist to author by relying heavily on the Theophrastan Character tradition, presenting Francis as an external, fixed, picture, a moral exemplum.⁴² But while the whole purpose of the *Life* remained, through all its transformations, the presentation of Francis as a just and upright judge, North moved from the assumed need to assert autobiographical witness as 'evidence' to a more objective position, a position partly achieved by the elaborate form of the final work. At some distance, in the final version, from the historical facts of his brother's life and his own involvement in it, he no longer needed to apologise for lapses in his memory, or for incomplete factual data about various incidents in his brother's life. He was free to create his brother as a character in a story, to give him direct speech, to impute thoughts and feelings to him, without the heavy use of autobiographical witness as justification.⁴³

North transformed the loosely defined rhetorical strategies of the essay – its autobiographical, conversational mode of *real-life* writer and *real-life* recipient and its reliance on amplification through the Character example – to a subtly structured third-person narrative in which there is a narrator: detached, ironic, commentating. This implies, as a consequence, not (as the essay) an actual reader, but a 'narratee', a persona of a reader.⁴⁴ As such, it lies, quite consciously, somewhere between history and fiction, with an awareness that the act of narrating is not separate from the events narrated and so North the narrator is also a persona, unlike the North of the essay.⁴⁵ An example is seen in comparison of the final version's and the third (1709) version's accounts of Francis's role in the legal examination of William Bedloe, who was involved in Oats's plot, as he, Bedloe, lay dying in Bristol. Francis North was in Bristol as part of his tour as judge on the western circuit, and Roger North was, on this occasion, with him. In the earlier version of the 'Life' (Additional manuscript 32510, fols 62–64v), Roger North gives an account of the incident as a plot against his brother, only foiled because Bedloe died. Throughout that account the reader is continually reminded of Roger North's presence, and although he was not in the room during Bedloe's actual deposition, North gives details of motives, and the implications for himself as for his brother. In the final version of the *Life* the account is given in the Chapter of Plots (North still regarded the episode as a plot against his brother); but instead of a long narrative of the episode, he gives the reader, in full, Francis's own narrative of Bedloe's deposition, a copy of his letter to Secretary Jenkins about the episode and a verbatim copy of the examination of Bedloe. In this there is no authorial interposition or interpretation as there is in the earlier version. North nevertheless prefaces his copies of Francis's own

documents by an introduction. Reference to his own presence or sympathetic involvement is replaced by the ironic detachment with which he refers to the plotters as well as to the profit motive of the Speaker of the House of Common, Sir William Williams, in publishing Francis North's account. The paragraph on its own is sufficient to indicate North's clear sense that Francis was too careful and too honest to be trapped and replaces his sense of drama, and relief at its safe outcome, in the earlier account:

This Bedloe (Oatses second) came downe to Bristoll, when his Lordship was there by himself alone, for the other Judg Jones, being sick of the gout, was parted off for London; and I guess the news of that induced the plot councill, to dispatch Bedlow downe post, in order to find the cheif justice single, for two made a guard. He contracted a feavour by his hard riding and dyed at Bristoll, which I presume was no part of his plott; his wife, and a brother of his, were with him, and the matter succeeded as stands declared in his Lordship's narrative given in to the Hous of Comons, and by their order, (and for the speaker's profit) printed, and by the haukers with audible voices cryed in the streets as narratives about that time used to be cryed.⁴⁶

In his *General Preface*, which precedes the *Life* in the St John's College manuscript of the final version but which is intended to refer to all three *Lives*, North writes of two criteria for a good biography:

These 2 criteria, (1) the qualifications of the writer and (2) the monuments of the subject, joined together, promise a good life-history, but either apart are defective, and want the reciprocal interpretation that the one gives the other. If an author commends a man for being a good poet, and produceth none but silly verses; if for a good orator, and *makes him speak* obscurely or nonsense ... I doubt both author and subject will suffer contempt alike.⁴⁷ [my italics]

Of 'monuments' North had ample for his *Life* of Francis North, and his careful structure enabled him to use them more convincingly than he had used the one document of John's that survived.⁴⁸ It was the 'making him speak' (without inserting his own claim to know what he said) that he had to work at in order to become a fit 'author' for his subject. In the final version of the *Life* he does make Francis speak without affirming the accuracy of the words from his own presence.

I have described here a particular instance: North's transformation of the materials of the essay (personal, loosely constructed, anecdotal) into a formal, detailed and subtle narrative of his brother's *Life*, but nevertheless one which retains the essay's frequent purpose of instruction. This instance of North's transformation from essayist to author is not available for any other prose writer of the period, but his process may, by extension, exemplify transformations in narrative practice by other writers, particularly writers of prose fiction. While one cannot ignore, for instance, changes in *fashion*: for instance, the shift from the epistolary novel (each Chapter or Letter

autobiographical, loosely formed, dialogic), or from the felt need of the author to claim personal knowledge of his subject, to third-person fictions where the narrator no longer needs to assert (even if only fictionally) a personal witness; if we wish to see the late seventeenth-century moral and social essay not simply as a genre in itself but also as part of a larger narrative tradition, it is not only (nor mainly) to its didactic intent that we need to look, perhaps, but also to its method.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, in North's transformation of essayist to author we have an instance of how eighteenth-century narrative fiction might have used all the resources of the late seventeenth-century essay to develop subtle ways in which stories could be told. Most important, perhaps, is the personal and autobiographical. But also important is the awareness in many writings in the genre of a recipient, so that the essay is a debate with another as well as with the self. Furthermore, there are the possibilities of development in the fixed, and usually satiric, Theophrastan Character; and, finally, the extreme consciousness (which the genre shared with the theatre), and the often detailed account, of the myriad ways and meanings of social interaction. All these, *besides* Hunter's claim for the essay's influence that the eighteenth-century reader was primarily interested in a 'moral.'

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Notes

- 1 J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-century fiction* (New York and London, Norton, 1992), chapters 9–11.
- 2 Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 1–3 and pp. 161–5, cautions against attempting to read into seventeenth-century writing conditions those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the seventeenth-century essay one might extend the caution to writings by both men and women; for while the genre, loosely defined, was a printed one, print publication was not considered a possibility, nor even desirable, for many writers.
- 3 On ways in which print created both an audience and identity for that audience, see Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London and New York, Routledge, 1989), pp. 15–16. See also Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993).
- 4 Roger North (1651–1734) wrote, among many other works, essays on moral and social issues. Some of these have been collected and published by F. J. M. Korsten, *Roger North (1651–1734): virtuoso and essayist* (Amsterdam and Maarssen, APA-Holland University Press, 1981), pp. 100–222. Most of his essays of this kind were apparently intended for his wards (the children of three of his brothers) and later for his own children.
- 5 *Reflections on our Common Failings. Done out of French by a person of Honour*

- (London, 1701), Sig. A9v. The original was by Pierre de Villiers, *Réflexions sur les défauts d'autrui* (Paris, 1691).
- 6 British Library Additional manuscript 32531, fol. 5v.
 - 7 See also Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (trans.) and Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 113–38.
 - 8 For the Theophrastan character in England see: Benjamin Boyce, *The Theophrastan Character in England to 1642* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1947) and Benjamin Boyce, *The Polemic Character 1640–1661: A Chapter in English Literary History* (New York, 1969). For the letter, see Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York, AMS Press, 1980) and Ralph Johnson, *The Scholars Guide from the Accidence to the University ...* (London, 1665), p. 15 and pp. 16–19.
 - 9 See Johnson, *Scholars Guide*, pp. 13–14.
 - 10 Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Not Being, but Passing: Defining the Early English Essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 10 (1977): 17–28.
 - 11 Don Cameron Allen (ed.), *Essayes by Sir William Cornwallis the Younger* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946). Cornwallis published the first edition of his *Essayes* in 1600. Cornwallis first read Montaigne in French.
 - 12 See III. 2. 'Of Repentance' in Donald M. Frame (trans.), *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 611.
 - 13 Pebworth, 'Not being', pp. 23–4.
 - 14 Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (New York and London, Routledge, 1988), pp. 43–4.
 - 15 Bacon's *Essays* continued to be published well into the eighteenth century. In the 1680s and 1690s there were at least twelve editions published.
 - 16 See, for instance, those listed in Hunter, *Before Novels*, chapters 9–11 and discussed by him there. See also Gertrude E. Noyes, *Bibliography of Courtesy and Conduct Books in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1937).
 - 17 [Eustache du Refuge], *The Art of Complaisance or the Means to Oblige in Conversation* (London, 1673), p. 32.
 - 18 'Breeding', British Library Additional manuscript 32523, fol. 133.
 - 19 'Breeding', British Library Additional manuscript 32523, fol. 138.
 - 20 *Reflections on our Common Failings*, pp. 46–7.
 - 21 North is perhaps best known to literary scholars for his *Lives* of three of his brothers, Francis, lawyer and Lord Keeper, John, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Dudley, merchant and Sheriff of London in the early 1680s. He began work on the Life of Francis in the early 1690s, but later developed it into a full-scale biography. He appears to have regarded all three as forming a kind of 'triptych.' See Richard Wendorf, *The Elements of Life: Biography and Portrait Painting in Stuart and Georgian England* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990). The lives of Francis and John are available in modern editions: Mary Chan (ed.), *Roger North's Life of the Lord Keeper North* (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), and Peter Millard (ed.), *Roger North: General Preface and Life of Dr John North* (Toronto and London, University of Toronto Press, 1984). The *Life of Dudley North* was edited (and possibly added to) by Roger North's son, Montagu North, and published in 1744. It was republished, with the other two Lives, in 1826 and 1890.

22 His essays of this kind, which all date from the late 1680s and early 1690s, are to be found in the following manuscripts: British Library Additional manuscripts 32523, fols 122–131v, ‘Pride’ and 132–141v, ‘Breeding’, both dating from the late 1680s or early 1690s; 32549, fols 36–36v, ‘Of Pedantisme’, 36v–38v, ‘Of Pride’; 32526, fols 48–49v, ‘Of Pride’ [continuation of ‘Of Pride’ in Add. 32549, above], 50v–54v, ‘Of Breeding’, 55–56, ‘Of Affectation’, 57–59v, ‘Of Dressing’, 60–64, ‘Of Selling,’ 68v–74, ‘Of the Generall Conduct of Weomen.’ On fols 90–95, ‘Essay’ appears to belong to this group but it is on paper different from the rest in the group (which uses two different papers although in one instance both are used for a single essay). Two other essays which do not strictly fall into this same type are found together with these and were clearly intended by North as part of the ‘set’: fols 74v–79, ‘On the English Militia’ and 79v–87v, ‘Of the Clergy of England.’ Another, in the same manuscript volume, but on different paper (unidentified) and therefore perhaps written at a different time, occurs on fols 124–125v, ‘Religion’, and another, fols 120–123, ‘Reason’, copied in the hand of Ambrose Pimlowe, vicar of Rougham from 1710–23. In an unnumbered manuscript at Rougham Hall, Norfolk, is an essay entitled ‘Religion’, and, in the same volume, ‘The art of words.’ In the middle of his manuscript entitled ‘Physica’ at Rougham Hall (dating from the mid to late 1720s) is an essay ‘Duty’, which seems to belong with the early essays and simply to have been copied into that place much later.

Korsten, *Roger North (1651–1734)*, has printed some of these: ‘Pride’ and ‘Breeding’ from Additional manuscript 32523; ‘Essay’, ‘Of the Generall Conduct of Weomen’, ‘Of the English Militia’, ‘Of the Clergy of England’, ‘Of Selling’, ‘Reason’ and ‘Religion’ from Additional manuscript 32526. He has also included some others, not strictly within the genre of moral and social essay. Some of these are sections from each of two versions of a longer work by North: ‘Of Etimology’ (Additional manuscripts 32529 and 32530): see pp. 160, 166, 209, 214, 217. Korsten claims, p. 81, that ‘Pride’ and ‘Breeding’ were addressed to a woman. I can find no evidence in the essays themselves for this; and I think that North’s style of address is not what would be appropriate to either one of the women in his family (sisters or nieces) nor to a woman who was not a relation. One of the points North makes in both essays is about appropriate forms of social address and approach, making clear that this was a very precise skill. A more likely addressee is his nephew, the young Lord Guildford, who about this time was going up to the university. See also the letter he and two of his brothers addressed to this nephew at that time, copied and preserved by Thomas Baker, Cambridge University Library, Baker MS Mm.1.48., fols 114–117v.

Korsten does not give a context for these essays apart from a very long and detailed discussion of North’s life. He does not date the essays, nor are they presented in a chronological context. He says he prints them as examples of North’s writing style: ‘his unpremeditated and rambling way of writing often forms one of the charms of his essays’, p. 96.

23 One might include in the genre of essay North’s published translation of Pierre de Villiers’s *Reflections on our Common Failings* (1701) as deriving from the same impulse as his own essays and dating from about the same time.

24 See also the discussions by Michael McKeon, ‘Historicising Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660–1760’, *Eighteenth-century Studies*,

- 28 (1995), 295–322 and Laura L. Runge, *Gender Difference and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660–1790* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 25.
- 25 This is preserved, in its final version, in St John’s College, Cambridge, manuscript James 613, volumes 1–10 which is the last of at least six manuscript versions. For a discussion of the evidence for the versions of the *Life* see Chan (ed.), *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, pp. xii–xxiv. The version by which North has been known, that which his son Montagu published in 1742, is not based on North’s final version of the *Life* but is a pastiche of several versions. Montagu also destroyed his father’s carefully worked out structure and reverted to the rambling and essayistical, anecdotal style, with its emphasis on Characters (even on his title-page) which North himself had worked so hard to eliminate.
- In the final version of the *Life* North created an elaborate structure of first, an overview of the whole life, in roughly chronological order of events, which he called the ‘Series’, followed by ‘Chapters’, each dealing with an aspect of Francis’s work and ideas.
- 26 *A Forest of Varieties* (London, 1645), published anonymously.
- 27 *Forest*, p. 60.
- 28 *Forest*, p. 130.
- 29 ‘Notes of Me’, British Library Additional manuscript 32506, fols 24–24v.
- 30 Rougham Manuscript (uncatalogued), [p. 5].
- 31 See Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 46: ‘The *Essays* represent the “civil and moral” dimension of Bacon’s overall project: to find out how things actually work in society and nature, and then take advantage of this knowledge in practical terms for individual and collective betterment.’
- 32 Rougham manuscript (uncatalogued), [p. 1].
- 33 Rougham manuscript (uncatalogued), [p. 2].
- 34 Rougham manuscript (uncatalogued), [p. 10].
- 35 See also Roger North’s ‘*Cursory Notes of Musicke*’ (c. 1698–c. 1703): *A Physical, Psychological and Critical Theory*, ed. Mary Chan and Jamie C. Kassler (Kensington, Unisearch Ltd., 1986), Introduction, p. 35 where we consider this treatise as belonging to this ‘autobiographical’ mode.
- 36 Millard (ed.), *General Preface and Life*, p. 95.
- 37 Two versions survive in British Library Additional manuscripts 32512 and 32513. Montagu North published his version in 1742 and his source is difficult to ascertain. While it owes much of course to the two extant manuscripts, he included other material as well, some of which no longer survives. Thomas Baker, to whom Montagu lent his father’s manuscripts of the ‘Lives’ of Francis and John, his father’s ‘Notes of Me’ and the ‘Examen’ from all of which he made summaries, says in his manuscript commonplace book (Cambridge University Library, Baker Mm.1.48), that the *Life of Dudley* was not available, even so soon after Roger North’s death as the copies were made.
- 38 British Library Additional manuscript 32509, fols 89, 99v, 131v. The ‘essayistical’ design of this third version of the ‘Life’ is evident from North’s entitling the first volume (what he called the ‘Series’ of the life in the final version of Francis’s *Life*) ‘Current and extempore Recollections ...’
- 39 British Library Additional manuscript 32510, fol. 65v.
- 40 See Chan (ed.), *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, p. 155. Roger North spends much

less time on this episode, both here and in the first volume (or Series) of the *Life*, pp. 92–3.

- 41 See Chan (ed.), *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, p. 9.
- 42 See Chan (ed.), *Life of the Lord Keeper North*, pp. xlvii–lvii. Here I describe the way in which North was originally influenced by Francis's own interest in aphorism and character and his often expressed didactic and moralistic approach to others. Because of its structure of Series and Chapters the final version relies much more on thematic logic than on chronology, and such a structure allowed Roger North to give an account of Francis's behaviour in, and responses to, a wide variety of situations, political, legal and personal, without resorting to a simple series of loosely related anecdotes.
- 43 North made Francis speak directly in all versions from the third; but such speech seems there to rely on North's constant lapsing from third-person narration into 'I' and 'we', as though asserting his personal knowledge of what was said.
- 44 See Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 38 and 78–9, and Gerald Prince, 'Introduction to the Study of the Narratee', in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 7.
- 45 cf. Williams, *Theory and the Novel*, p. 38.
- 46 Chan (ed.), *Life of the Lord Keeper*, p. 398.
- 47 Millard (ed.), *General Preface and Life*, p. 80.
- 48 See the 'Apology', Millard (ed.), *General Preface and Life*, p. 89, in which North excuses the inclusion of 'A dissertation of the new and modern (new) philosophy'. Millard excludes this 'dissertation' from his edition.
- 49 This is not to deny other influences, such as those discussed by Hunter, *Before Novels*, or, more generally in works such as Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978), Robert Higbie, *Character and Structure in the English Novel* (Florida, University of Florida Press, 1984), Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976), Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

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