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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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From Life-Writing to Biography:
The Emergence of the Anecdote
in the Seventeenth Century

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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Abstract

This thesis challenges the general opinion that biography became a distinct genre during the mid-eighteenth century, locating the sources of this opinion in a temporary decline in biographical writing in the early eighteenth century and in the consequent appearance of originality in the biographical theory and practice of Johnson and Boswell in the latter part of the century. The emergence of the anecdote in the seventeenth century is examined as evidence that English life-writing developed into biography at this time. A chronological sampling of lives written over the course of the century reveals distinct phases of development in the genre. Late sixteenth-century ideals of decorum and didacticism in history-writing made the revelation of individual personality irrelevant and precluded the use of anecdote. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, however, writers of individual lives began to make their work more entertaining and thus more accessible. This shift in attitude admitted the possibility of anecdote in life-writing. A few decades later, as political and religious tensions made intellectual life more precarious, the values of friendship and conversation gained increasing currency. As soon as these values began to influence life-writing, individual personality became of paramount importance and modern biography was established. The principal requirement of the biographer was intimate acquaintance with his subject, and the anecdote became the most important means for illustrating individual character.

... feeling in herself the right of seniority of mind, she ventured to recommend a larger allowance of prose in his daily study; and on being requested to particularize, mentioned such works of our best moralists, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances.

Jane Austen, Persuasion

Discretion is not the better part of biography.

Lytton Strachey

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Chapter One

Alan Shelston, in his short study Biography (1977), identifies the emergence of the anecdote as the principal feature of the development of biography in the seventeenth century. Shelston's book is unusual in that it takes a thematic approach to the history of the genre, describing the temper of each period in biographical writing rather than analysing the work of individual biographers in chronological sequence. His assessment of the importance of anecdote is for Shelston mainly a convenient focus for discussion of the period; he makes no attempt to demonstrate how pervasive was the change he describes, or to explore its causes and implications. Nevertheless, Shelston's characterization of seventeenth-century biography in terms of the progressive replacement of the exemplum with the anecdote describes the process by which life-writing became modern biography. The aim of the present study is to pursue Shelston's suggestion in greater detail and to demonstrate its usefulness in explaining a crucial phase in the development of biography.

The originality of Shelston's theme is not particularly obvious unless one considers that neither anecdote nor the seventeenth century receives much attention from commentators on the development of biography. Theorists and historians of the genre are generally agreed that biography emerged as an independent literary form in the mid-eighteenth century, but the use of anecdote is never cited as a distinct and necessary feature of the form. The modern biography is

above all an account of the life of an individual, not so much as a series of events and accomplishments but as the story of a developing character. The biographer's literary skill lies in his ability to depict character. The role played by the anecdote in revealing character, the consequent emancipation of biography from history, moral philosophy, and related fields, and the role of the seventeenth-century biographer in recognizing the central place of the anecdote are the subject of the present work.

If the link between anecdote and character has such an important part to play in modern biography, two questions arise: what is the nature of this link, and how has it been overlooked? The main reason for neglect of the anecdote is a crucial ambiguity in the concept of "anecdote" itself. Considering that the definitions of anecdote offered by the OED carry quite different connotations this ambiguity is not surprising. Thus the anecdote poses difficulties for commentators on biography. Donald Winslow, who has compiled a useful glossary of biographical terms, bases his definition of anecdote specific to the purposes of biography upon the OED version, defining anecdote as, "The narrative of a detached incident, or of a single event, told as being in itself interesting, striking, revealing; secret, private, or hitherto unpublished brief narratives of details in the history of a life, illustrative of one or more aspects of an individual character or personality".¹ The view that anecdote can illustrate an aspect of individual character is the justification for its use in biography. This is a modern opinion and, although few commentators would refute

it, it is not widely stated or discussed. But note that there is a strong dissonance between the two halves of Winslow's definition which is present in the OED version as well. Each part of the definition is independent of the other, and each points in a rather different direction. On one hand, the anecdote is described as the narrative of a detached incident, in itself interesting or revealing. As such it is an impersonal, uncontentious device, suited to history-writing, rather than to the biography of an individual, but unobjectionable. On the other hand, anecdote is also described as the narrative of something secret and private, and there is the implication of indiscretion in the publication of "hitherto unpublished" material. Given the tension between these two interpretations of the term "anecdote," its use in biography is problematic, as is discussion of the practice. Anecdote is not discussed as an essential and honourable literary device in biography because its ambiguous nature and the ambivalent attitudes it generates have not been recognized and stated openly.

It is difficult to know where to draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate uses of anecdote, and between legitimate, revealing anecdote and gossip. The most important consideration in judging such questions is that of context, a factor that definitions of anecdote do not mention. James Sutherland, editor of The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes (1975), holds a typical opinion of the anecdote: "The ability to tell an anecdote well may not be the highest reach of literary achievement, but one develops a new respect for writers . . . who can not only recall or envisage a total situation, but who have the

creative ability and the verbal felicity to shape it into a memorable anecdote."² Because the anecdote is a narrative in its own right, relating an episode with a beginning, middle, and end, it can be divorced from its context and read on its own without losing sense or seeming pointless. Sutherland's book is a collection of anecdotes, each removed from its context and offered simply as an amusing or interesting story. But under these circumstances anecdote certainly seems an inconsequential form, since its purpose is simply to entertain; whatever significance that remains does not seem very profound.

In many cases, of course, the taking of an anecdote out of context hardly matters. In written works, including some biographies, an anecdote may be connected to material that precedes and follows it by only the merest thread of association. As we shall see, anecdote first appears in biography to perform exactly this function. In the early seventeenth century, the author of a life often promised to enliven otherwise dry material with amusing stories. This practice has continued ever since, and this unintegrated, gratuitous use of anecdote has contributed to its poor reputation.

As the second part of Winslow's definition indicates, however, there is a specific place for anecdote in biography. It is an invaluable means of illuminating the character of the biographer's subject. In order to explain the connection between anecdote and character in biography, it is necessary to consider, in quite elementary terms, the nature of biography. Although the theory of

biography remains undeveloped in comparison to the theory of other genres, the following considerations characterize modern biographical intentions. The biographer must acknowledge his sole aim to be the account of the life of his subject, that is, he must not use the life to illustrate some other topic that is the actual focus of his discussion. And his principal object must be to reveal his subject's character; no other aspect of his subject's life or person is to take precedence over this. Character, in turn, is best discerned in the subject's private life rather than in the public sphere, where the demands of his work or station may obscure his true nature. Modern biographers consider their most valuable sources of information to be the subject's family, friends, and colleagues. Personal acquaintance with the subject, it is believed, produces the most revealing testimony.

The reader is considered to have a right to such intimate knowledge of the subject, though the limits to which this principle may profitably be taken are still controversial. Over the course of the twentieth-century these limits have retreated further and farther, especially in that last bulwark of private, intimate life--sex. Lytton Strachey began this process, challenging Victorian biographical methods (as decorous as at any time in the history of the genre) and the myths surrounding honoured public figures by concentrating on details of their intimate lives in Eminent Victorians (1918). Strachey advised that the biographer should, "row out over that great ocean of material, and lower it down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will

bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity".³ Strachey used telling details in place of a more direct analytical approach: "It has been my purpose," he said, "to illustrate rather than to explain."⁴ These were not actual details of sexual life but seemingly innocuous nuances that subtly suggested the elemental personality of the subject, conveying a strong sense of his or her sexual identity, an area of experience unacknowledged in Victorian biography.

In "Florence Nightingale," for example, Strachey directly states that the ministering angel of popular legend was actually a ruthless and driven woman, but in subtle ways he suggests that ~~this~~ was the result of repressed sexual energy. "Beneath her cool and calm demeanour lurked fierce and passionate fires,"⁵ he says, and she who "seemed to take no interest in husbands" was nonetheless consumed by a "singular craving" for action.⁶ He is never more explicit than this, but the portrait he compiles from dozens of small details is overwhelmingly that of an insatiable and somewhat malevolent personality.

In his biography of Strachey, Michael Holroyd rejected mere suggestion and resolved to be straightforward in describing his subject's intimate life. In his preface to the revised edition of Lytton Strachey: A Biography (1979), Holroyd expresses his gratitude to Strachey's friends, most of whom cooperated fully with his desire to be explicit about their intimate relations with his subject. Holroyd recognized the possible consequences of such candour: "It was for all of us a daunting prospect. 'Shall I be arrested?' one of them asked

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after reading through my typescript. And another, with deep pathos, exclaimed: 'When this comes out, they will never again allow me into Lord's.'"⁷ But for Holroyd, such an approach was essential:

It was only through detail, I argued, that the extraordinarily complicated relationship surrounding Lytton could be properly presented. I was setting out to do something entirely new in biography, to give Lytton's love-life the same prominence in my book as it had had in his career, to trace its effect on his work, and to treat the whole subject of homosexuality without any artificial veils of decorum . . .⁸

Even so, Holroyd confined himself to describing the particulars of Strachey's intimate relationships as emotional entanglements, as aspects of his mental life rather than of his physical being.

Humphrey Carpenter, however, in his biography of W.H. Auden (1981), asserts that the details of the physical element of intimate relationships must be stated openly. Upon recounting Auden's preferred forms of sex and detailing his sexual adventures at Oxford, Carpenter justifies using this material by saying, "I have recorded this detail because Auden himself argues that it was necessary to be explicit about sexual practices when recording the lives of homosexuals."⁹

Whatever the precise nature of personal and private material in modern biography, this intimate knowledge of the subject is now considered to constitute the core of biography. This material,

furthermore, is of most interest and worth to biographers when it is couched in the form of accounts of actual, concrete events--anecdotes, in short--rather than general impressions. Successful biographers know that whereas it is quite possible to describe a man's character by listing his attributes, such a collection of abstract qualities is not likely to leave the reader with a lasting impression of the subject. Modern biographers prefer to illustrate the subject's character through a series of scenes which, taken cumulatively, build a compelling portrait of a personality.

Thus the anecdote is eminently suited to modern biography, and not merely in providing the particular case to demonstrate a general truth. It is an essentially dramatic and immediate form, presenting the reader with an instance in which an aspect of the subject's character is vividly displayed. As Henry James once said, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"¹⁰ James was referring to the novel, but in biography anecdote fulfills the same literary role. It transforms an elusive concept--the character trait--into a concrete, observable truth.

It follows that a study of the use of anecdote in earlier periods of the development of biography reveals fundamental attitudes to the writing of biography. Despite following a straightforwardly chronological approach to the seventeenth century, the present work is by no means a study of influence. References by one biographer to another (other than classical historians) are rare before the end of the seventeenth century. Seventeenth-century biographers do not appear

to use one another's works as models, and the features they share are borrowed from traditional, mainly classical, precursors. More importantly, fundamental attitudes, ones that perhaps are considered too self-evident to require articulation, or that are largely unconscious, are best perceived in decisions, such as those concerning the use of anecdote, that are rarely discussed as intellectual problems but made on another level entirely. The attitudes that governed the use of anecdote in the seventeenth century had less to do with principles of historiography than with basic assumptions about personality and social relations.

Within the scope of the present work it is impossible to be comprehensive, but I have attempted to cover a broad spectrum of examples in order to illustrate how widespread were the attitudes I identify, and I have included some quite obscure biographies along with more familiar ones. Similarly, I have sought to achieve a balance between theoretical works on biography and the biographies themselves, since on occasion stated biographical principles differ from those revealed in the actual practice of biography at a particular moment.

In describing a specific work as biography I mean that it satisfies the principal requirement of modern biography--that its purpose is the revelation of individual character. Works that do not fit this description are referred to as "life-writing." This distinction serves to emphasize the magnitude of the change that the genre underwent during the seventeenth century. On the other hand, the term "anecdote" has been used to describe any short narrative of a

particular episode that is included in a written life, whether it is used simply as an ornamental device or as a means of illustrating personality. The term "exemplum" describes material that might be considered anecdotal but is intended as a vehicle for moral instruction. The difference between the two terms is contextual, and is central to the present study. The change from exemplum to anecdote represents the fundamental change in attitudes that transformed life-writing into biography.

In what follows, the development of biography over the seventeenth century is divided into three principal stages. The next chapter demonstrates that life-writing at the beginning of the century was still largely medieval in character, continuing sixteenth-century conventions of such genres as hagiography and de Casibus tragedy. Life-writing was universally regarded as didactic, and specific incidents were related as exempla in the service of precepts for moral instruction. This principle is stated by such varied commentators as Richard Brathwaite, Richard Puttenham, Thomas Blundeville, Samuel Daniel, and Walter Raleigh, and its influence on life-writing is demonstrated in biographies such as Fulke Greville's Sir Philip Sidney (c. 1610-12), John Hayward's Henry IV (1599), and Francis Bacon's Henry VII (c. 1622). Equally pervasive in these works, both theoretical and practical, is the assumption that human nature is constant and that history is therefore endlessly repetitive, a view that is necessary to the belief in the morally didactic power of history.

The central connection between life-writing and the exemplum is

the exact equivalent to that between biography and anecdote, and serves to distinguish the two genres. While the exemplum dominated, biography was impossible. Some new forms of life-writing did emerge at the beginning of the century--eulogies of private men and women, and political life-writing, for example--but these were not really advances toward biography. These types of life-writing were more sophisticated, since eulogy extended the limits of possible subjects for written lives beyond statesmen and saints, while political life-writing placed greater emphasis on character, as its focus was the training of character for political life. But both these new forms of life-writing were simply variations on the conventions, still based upon traditional principles of didacticism and the universality of human experience.

Even as early seventeenth-century historiographers were restating these conventions, however, many writers of lives, while adhering in the main to the old order, were beginning to admit anecdotal material into their work. Chapter Three explores the trend toward the popularisation of history that permitted the incorporation of anecdote into life-writing, and demonstrates that the justification for this change was the ostensible desire to increase the didactic power of life-writing by making it more entertaining. This change sparked a number of developments in narrative style in life-writing, developments that can be discerned in such works as Thomas Heywood's Englands Elisabeth (1631), Richard Brathwaite's Roman Emperors (1636), Hayward's Henry IV, and Bacon's Henry VII, though theoretical endorsements of such practices are almost non-existent at this time. These advances did

not, however, lead life-writing into biography, for the crucial requirement that character hold the central position was not yet recognized. Despite the tremendous insights into human personality that had become familiar in the theatre by the end of the sixteenth century, individual character was not explored in prose genres. Description of personality was limited to the "character," a form that did not contribute to the development of biography because it dealt with generalized types rather than individuals. Some changes did occur in the early seventeenth century. One was the largely unstated challenge to didacticism posed by the demands of popular entertainment, a development that permitted the use of anecdote, though not for the purposes of revealing character. Another was the study of character in other genres. Some progress was made, but as yet the writing of biography was impossible.

As is explained in Chapter Four, however, biography proper had appeared by the middle of the century. This development was made possible by a shift in the nature of intellectual life from a rather isolated, formal, and impersonal sphere to one that was characterized by values of conversation, friendship, tolerance, and the free exchange of ideas. These concerns are widely reflected in life-writing at this time, in works such as Izaak Walton's Lives (c. 1640-90), Abraham Hill's Dr. Isaac Barrow (1683), John Aubrey's Brief Lives (c. 1669-96), and Roger North's General Preface and Lives of the Norths (c. 1690-1728). These biographers emphasized the uniqueness of their subjects' characters, focussing much more upon personal and private aspects of

Individual lives than such reactionary writers as Thomas Sprat, Gilbert Burnet, and Anthony Wood. At this point, the anecdote seems to have quite naturally come into play as a means of revealing personality in biography. The critical changes had been achieved and modern biography established; later centuries could only further refine the genre.

Chapter Five outlines the degree to which modern biography is considered to have commenced in the mid-eighteenth century, despite the evidence to the contrary. Modern critics cite Johnson and Boswell as the first to identify and practise biography, though to a certain extent the critics simply echo Johnson's and Boswell's opinions on this point. The early eighteenth century seems to have been a period of stagnation, if not regression, in the development of biography. Many of the ideals that had spurred the rapid transformation of life-writing into biography in the seventeenth century were pursued in the early eighteenth century for their own sake rather than for their place in biography. The anecdote, for example, was removed from the framework of biography, and became a popular form in its own right. Anecdotalists were more successful than biographers at this time, as were those who collected the conversation of eminent persons to be published as it stood rather than incorporated into biography. It was during this period that anecdote came to be seen as a distinct form; it was also during this period that anecdote was abused and exploited to the point that Johnson, in 1750, would not mention it in his discussions of biography. Small wonder, then, that Boswell's extensive use of anecdote erroneously appears to many critics to be an important

innovation in biography. As biography itself had been overshadowed by other popular genres throughout the early eighteenth century, it is understandable that Johnson and Boswell might appear to have invented modern biography.

The anecdote, then, is indispensable to modern biography, but its role could not be clearly understood until a number of preconditions had been met. For example, the biographer who uses anecdote must seek to establish a certain rapport with his reader. The anecdote is an informal device, suited to a similarly informal style of address, and therefore entails a certain set of relatively relaxed social relations between reader, author, and subject alike. The use of an anecdote, furthermore, depends upon the assumption that it is appropriate to accord an individual the central place in an historical work. Again, to tell an anecdote requires that the biographer have a personal acquaintance with the subject or have received material from someone who does. Finally, the biographer must believe that such material is valuable to his analysis of the subject's character and that it is suitable to a published work.

These requirements seem self-evident to the modern mind, but at the beginning of the seventeenth century they would have been incomprehensible. The fact that anecdotes were not used before the seventeenth century is worth investigating because this omission reveals certain attitudes towards the writing of lives, and toward the reading of lives. The lack of anecdotes indicates some fundamental obstacles to the development of biography, in the form of deeply-ingrained values

and perceptions.



Chapter Two

It is misleading to discuss as "biography" lives written before the seventeenth century, because life-writing was not yet recognized or practised as a distinct genre. Those lives that were written, occurred in the course of historical writing and were not conceived as studies of individual character. Even those works that purported to recount the lives of individuals, almost invariably of public figures, resembled modern biography much less than excerpts from the chronicles. Thus the conventions of life-writing were the same as those that applied to history-writing in general. It is appropriate, therefore, to consider the assumptions and conventions governing the whole range of historical writing at this time. It is not necessary to read very far in pre-seventeenth-century historical works of any kind to recognize that the exemplum was so pervasive in all forms of history-writing that it can be considered the outstanding characteristic of the "entire genre."

The Oxford English Dictionary defines exemplum as an "example or model," especially a "moralizing or illustrating story." But the OED also notes that the word example itself evolved from exemplum, and thus acquaintance with the definitions of "example" allow further insight into exemplum. It is worth considering each of these definitions: example is described as "a fact or thing illustrating [a] general rule; [a] problem or exercise designed to do this; [a] species of workmanship, picture, etc.; [an] instance of punishment" etc. as [a] warning to

others; [a] precedent; conduct as [an] object of imitation." All of these senses of "example" in modern usage originate in the medieval *exemplum*, which was used in almost all of these ways in history-writing before 1600.

We need only recognize, however, that the *exemplum* is essentially a device used to teach something in order to understand its attraction for pre-seventeenth-century historians. There was a remarkable homogeneity among historiographers around the turn of the century. Their belief in the utility of history, and its value as a vehicle for instruction, is especially prominent. In fact, Sidney's Defense of Poesie notwithstanding,¹ the common opinion was that history is better suited than other forms of discourse to the instruction and improvement of the reader. It was Richard Puttenham's view that "the Poesie historical is of all others next the diuine most honorable and worthy, as well for the common benefit as for the speciall comfort euery man receiueth by it."² Similar sentiments are to be found in almost every discussion of history written during this period, and frequently in the opening remarks of the histories themselves.

History-writing at this time was defended as a means to lead the reader to virtue, a markedly medieval notion. Many historians even placed history before religious works as an improving medium. There was general agreement that history is useful because it teaches by example, and thereby enables the reader to benefit from the experience of others. In medieval literature, according to Donald Winslow, the *exemplum* took the form of a fable or parable and was most often used in

sermons,³ but by the end of the sixteenth century there was widespread feeling that the historical example was more powerful than artificial rhetorical devices invented to serve the immediate purpose. Richard Puttenham, for instance, stated that "Right so no kinde of argument in all the Oratorie craft, doth better perswade and more vniuersally satisfie then example, which is but the representation of old memories, and like successes happened in times past."⁴ At the turn of the century, "example" was understood to be an actual historical occurrence.

There remained; however, the assumption that the purpose of historical writing is the same as that of all other forms of writing--to provide instruction in ethical behaviour. To the sixteenth-century mind, of course, ethical teaching was synonymous with religious teaching. Richard Brathwaite demonstrated this association, describing ethical behaviour as "piety:"

These examples being best motiues vnto piety, and indeed more forcible, in that we haue two occasions in exemplary precedents of imitation; the one to caution vs to do this or that, least we fall into the like punishment, being attended on by the like meanes: The other (like a swette lenitiue) inducing vs by reasons drawne from profit, which we conceiue may redound in any way by the like examples.⁵

Brathwaite also explicitly stated that examples are more likely to influence the reader than are precepts: "We vse to be more excited to

goodness by examples then Precepts, and such instances in Histories are not a little perswasive "6

History was conceived of as a vast pool of raw material, upon which an historian could draw in order to strengthen whatever case he wished to make. Walter Raleigh, for instance, conceived of his History of the World (1614) as the illustration of the workings of Providence since the beginning of man. He acknowledged that he could not hope to be comprehensive, however, for "To repeat GODS iudgements in particular vpon those of all degrees, which haue plaied with his mercies; would require a volume apart for the Sea of examples hath no bottome."7

Knowledge of past events was not valued because of what it could tell the historian about the past or about the relation between the past and the present but for the lessons it could be used to teach. In particular, the specific instance was not studied because it was unique; on the contrary, the individual man or woman, or the individual moment, with which an example was concerned, was of little intrinsic interest. Such details were of consequence to the extent that an historian could use them to bolster his argument, but if one person or moment were forgotten the loss was negligible since another of similar import would do as well.

Given these attitudes, it is obvious that the Elizabethans could not conceive of biography as we understand it today. This does not mean, however, that individual lives were not written: a number of different kinds of life-writing were popular at the beginning of the seventeenth century and they all exhibit these assumptions about

history. The oldest form was hagiography, the saints' lives, which presented, in accounts of piety and sacrifice, models of Christian behaviour for the admiration and imitation of the reader. It is perhaps in the saints' lives that the individual is most markedly subordinate to the over-riding didactic intent of the historian. English hagiography is almost unreadable because its purpose was not to describe individuals but to present to the reader an array of examples of godliness. Hagiography presents no characteristics of individual personality by which one saint can be distinguished from another; their miracles and other details may vary but otherwise they are interchangeable. This is hardly surprising, as hagiography is based upon the assumption that all human nature is the same. By virtue of the Fall, every man, woman, and child was engaged in the same struggle between good and evil, and the particular circumstances in which temptation was encountered and overcome were inconsequential.

Although we think of it as a medieval phenomenon, hagiography was still flourishing at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Foxe's Book of Martyrs, for example, had gone through five editions by 1600. And William Hallen's assessment of this work shows it to be the product of the hagiographic version of the historical attitude described above:

History, as [Foxe] wrote it, always came back to the story of an individual, to story after story, told with unflagging energy and conviction. Yet every individual case was charged with the whole meaning of history as he conceived it. The blood of English martyrs of yesterday was shown to be one

with the blood of all the martyrs back to Nero. All history was one.⁹

The hagiographic tradition was but one medieval antecedent to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century life-writing; the other was the de Casibus tradition, exemplified by the Mirror for Magistrates (1559-1610). The Mirror was an updated version of The Fall of Princes (eds. 1494-1558), Lydgate's translation of Boccaccio's De Casibus Vivorum Illustrium (1355-60). Boccaccio's work consists of a series narrative verse tragedies in which illustrious men and women describe how they fell from greatness; Boccaccio, as narrator, acts as interlocutor and commentator, linking the stories together and stressing their common theme. John Wayland, the printer who reissued Lydgate's work as the Mirror, followed Boccaccio's model and reprinted the stories in that work, but he and his collaborators also expanded the collection with similar tales taken from the English chronicles. The result, despite problems with censorship in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, was highly successful, and the Mirror went through several editions, the last appearing in 1610.¹⁰

The Mirror for Magistrates tradition was well-respected, as well as popular in the early seventeenth century; Richard Brathwaite cites the story of Cambyses, a tale very much in the de Casibus tradition, to underscore the efficacy of examples. Brathwaite invites the reader to consider Cambyses, who,

hoping to plant himselfe in a royall Throne by bloud,

miserably ended his owne life by his owne bloud. An excellent and notable example of a sacrilegious and bloud-thirsty-Prince, who sought to establish himselfe by indirect meanes (to wit) by the murther of his owne naturall brother Mergis. I insist . . . upon examples.¹¹

Like hagiography the de Casibus form of life-writing was still popular into the seventeenth century. And the stories in the Mirror are much like the saints' lives, since the latter genre describes the deserving, whom God will reward, while the former demonstrates that God punishes the undeserving. Both forms consist of a single pattern endlessly repeated: the saints' lives all describe the struggle between Christ and the Anti-Christ for the individual soul, and the stories in the Mirror all follow the cycle of ascent-climax-descent in sinful rulers on earth. Both forms are overtly didactic, and as each separate narrative of an individual life is used to exemplify the central theme, the de Casibus narrative is as much an illustration as hagiography of the extent to which the exemplum dominated historical writing in the early seventeenth century.

While both hagiography and the Mirror continued to be written, published, and read enthusiastically well into the seventeenth century, other more sophisticated versions of life-writing were developing from these traditional forms. One such extension of the hagiographic tradition was the trend toward more realistic, accurate, and sustained records of virtuous men and women within living memory. These works more closely resemble modern biography in style and degree of detail,

but their purpose was the same as saints' lives since they provided the reader with accounts of commendable lives that he or she might then be inspired to emulate.

These lives usually took the form of eulogy, and shared many characteristics with hagiography. They tended to conform to a set ~~pattern~~ of conventions, both of style and subject-matter, they described the subject in terms of unqualified praise, and the individual was often lost within the generalized account of his attributes. The principal departure from hagiography lies in the range of individuals about whom eulogies were written. Before 1600 monarchs, clergymen, and other prominent people were eulogized, and as Donald Winslow points out,¹² the emergence of intimate family lives and lives written by friends during the seventeenth century, although it enlarged, still continued this tradition, as such lives were intended to glorify the subject rather than to provide a dispassionate account of his or her life.¹³

As eulogy extended the conventions of hagiography and began to be applied to contemporary subjects in both private and public realms, the attributes that were praised also extended beyond simple piety and godliness. By the seventeenth century historians were often ambiguous about the particular "virtue" that their work was meant to produce in the reader. The promotion of "good" and the deterrence from "evil" were at least as applicable to the temporal realm as the spiritual and the distinction between the consequent earthly and heavenly rewards was not always clear. Thomas Blundeville, for instance, juxtaposes the

public and private in history:

All those persons whose lyves have beene such as are to be followed for their excellencie in vertue, or else to be fledde for their excellencie in vice, are meete to be chronicled. And if they were publique personages or gouernors, then they are to be considered in as many diuers ways, as there be diuers kinds of gouernment.¹⁴

Similarly, early seventeenth-century historiographers often attempted to strike a balance between the virtues attendant upon public and private life. Again, Blundeville illustrates this principle, here in his dedication of The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Histories (1574) to the Earl of Leicester, commending him for reading history "not, as many doe, to passe away the time, but to gather thereof such iudgement and knowledge as you may therby be the more able, as well as to direct your private actions, as to give Counsell lyke a most prudent Counsellor in publycke causes."¹⁵

This combination of secular and religious, public and private concerns, and the correspondingly mixed virtues for which an individual is celebrated are apparent in Fulke Greville's Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney (c. 1610-12). Greville began this work simply as a dedication of his poems to the memory of his friend, whom he had known all his life. Greville was prompted to write, therefore, by the force of the grief of close personal loss, and the commemorative instinct drove him to defend Sidney's honour in strong terms. As a result, the

sections of the Life in which Greville portrays the character of his friend are highly eulogistic, raising Sidney to an almost mythic level of virtue.

As Nowell Smith points out, Greville seems to have written this work entirely under the force of the rush of memories that overwhelmed him as he began the dedication: "There are no dates, no details of personal appearance, place of abode, habits, friends and acquaintances, nothing of marriage; scarcely anything of life at court . . ."¹⁶ None of these aspects of Sidney's life was germane to Greville's purpose; for he was not writing biography. The climax of his account is, however, the relation of a particular event, one of the best-known stories of the Elizabethan age. At the battle of Zutphen, says Greville, a bone in Sidney's thigh was broken by musket-shot and,

being thirstie with excess of bleeding, he called for drink, which was presently brought him: but as he was putting the bottle to his mouth, he saw a poor Souldier carryed along, who had eaten his last at the same Feast, gastly casting up his eyes at the bottle. Which Sir Philip perceiving, took it from his head, before he drank, and delivered it to the poor man, with these words, "Thy necessity is yet greater than mine." And when he had pledged this poor souldier, he was presently carried to Arnheim.¹⁷

This episode is generally considered to be an anecdote, but it functions in this Life, especially since Sidney died of a wound he had

received, as an exemplum. The purpose of this story is to present Sidney as the personification of virtue; it is the point toward which all of the rest of the work is directed. Greville presents Sidney's act on the battlefield of Zutphen as the final and perfect act of the model courtier, and the whole of the Life is meant to characterize Sidney as the embodiment of courtly virtue.

That Greville intended Sidney's life to be considered as an exemplum he made clear in the opening pages:

the debt I acknowledge to that Gentleman is farre greater, as with whom I shall ever account it an honour to have been brought up: and in whom the life it self of true worth, did (by way of example) far exceed the pictures of it in any moral precepts.¹⁸

But by far the greater part of Greville's attention was directed toward depicting Sidney's life as an exemplum of political behaviour. The virtues that Greville recommends to the reader are political astuteness and the ability to govern well. He develops these themes at length to produce an immense sense of waste since Sidney's early death cut off the possibility that this talent could have been used in the service of his country. Elizabeth, according to Greville, lacked these gifts of good government; he describes her kingdom as "kept together onely by a constant and unnaturall wheel of fortune, till some new child of hers, like Henry the fourth, should take his turn in restoring all unjust combinations or encrochments"¹⁹ Obviously Greville felt that

Sidney might have supplied the lack of a capable heir at least in terms of government. He amplified this aspect of Sidney's character by relating at length Sidney's analysis of political situations. Greville indulged his preoccupation to an almost absurd degree, as he devoted several pages to Sidney's plans for colonization in America and allowed himself to speculate about how Sidney might have excelled had he been a magistrate, declaring that he would have been superior to Lysander, Sylla and Themistocles.²⁰

Greville may have succeeded in glorifying Sidney's memory and consolidating (perhaps even establishing) his friend's reputation as a political paragon, but the Life is generally considered a great disappointment by critics of biography. Edgar Johnson describes it as "a sort of combination of biography (a very little) with statecraft, in which Greville uses the prestige of his dead and revered friend to enforce the principles and policies he lays down."²¹ Paul Kendall condemns the work in stronger terms, as he feels that the intimate relationship between author and subject provided an opportunity for intimate and revealing biography that ought not to have been missed: "Fulke Greville, the author, was a talented man of letters, and the subject, his friend Sir Philip Sidney, is one of the most memorable characters of the time, but the result is lamentable--a feeble biographical effort deadened by stretches of political comment and moralizing."²²

These commentators, however, are interested primarily in modern biography, and are thus censorious when elements of modern biography

are absent from these early works.²³ This is unfortunate, because Greville's Life is unusual in that it combines two quite different strains of life-writing current at the beginning of the century: the eulogy and political biography. The obvious depth of feeling for his friend and the corresponding depth of his grief mitigate Greville's use of Sidney's life to advance his own political views.²⁴ Political biography became a recognizable aspect of history-writing during the sixteenth century, but it reached its heyday in the early seventeenth century. The present work is not the place to examine the reasons for the upsurge of interest in political biography during this period, though certainly the translation into English of many classical historical and biographical works was a critical factor.²⁵ Similarly, the translations of contemporary Continental handbooks of government and statecraft were extremely popular at this time.²⁶ Not only the rights and responsibilities of ruler and subject but also the processes by which power is gained, exercised, and lost were of great interest to the Elizabethans, and history was perceived as containing episodes that held useful lessons for participants in Elizabethan political life. It is a pity that modern critics do not evaluate the Life of Sidney in this context, for this widespread interest in political life dictated that Greville could hardly have chosen to represent Sidney's life in any other terms.

Political life-writing shares with de Casibus tragedy and hagiography a fundamental dependence upon the notion that all human history is essentially the same, and that in it can be discovered endlessly

repeating patterns. This new genre was based upon the assumption that history embodies the principles of political philosophy, and the universality of human experience meant that present situations could be analysed by reference to analogous situations in the past. Samuel Daniel states this belief succinctly:

For had we the perticuler occurrents of all ages, and all nations, it might more stufte, but not better our vnderstanding. We shall find still the same correspondencies to hold in the actions of men: Virtues and Vices the same, though rising and falling, according to the worth, or weaknesses of Gouernors: the causes of the ruines, and mutations of states to be alike: and the trayne of affaires carried by precedent, in a course of succession vnder like coulors.²⁸

This assumption of the universality of human experience was so deeply entrenched that the Elizabethans came to rely ever more heavily on history for guidance.²⁹ As Lily Campbell observes, "history during the Tudor-Stuart period was increasingly consulted for its political precedents, not only in the law courts but also in everyday life," because "the Elizabethans saw in the life about them established patterns of conduct and character. Their political thinking was habitually done in historical patterns which were reviewed at each new political crisis."³⁰

The publication of John Hayward's The First Part of the Life and

Raigne of Henrie IIII in 1599 marks just such an instance of a review of historical patterns in a moment of political crisis. At a time when Elizabeth was becoming suspicious of the Earl of Essex's conduct in Ireland, Hayward wrote a work that centered on the end of the reign of Richard II and thus dwelt on the king's troubles in Ireland and his deposition. Elizabeth purportedly went so far as to believe that Hayward had prophesied Essex's failure in Ireland through his description of Richard's career there. And when, in 1601, the Queen heard rumours that Essex was planning to mount a rebellion, she turned again on Hayward. His emphasis on the reasons for the rebellion against Richard (reasons that bear resemblance to criticism that had been repeatedly directed toward Elizabeth herself) made his work seem strongly treasonous.

The debate over whether Hayward intended this work as criticism of Elizabeth has been adequately explored elsewhere,³¹ but given the frequency with which history was used to comment on the current political situation at this time, he must have been either extremely slow-witted or extremely disingenuous at his trial to have denied any such intent. Two aspects of the work are sufficient to illustrate how tenuous was Hayward's defence. In the first place, until the last fifteen pages of a book almost ten times that length, he describes not the reign of Henry IV but that of Richard II, focussing on the reasons for the latter's deposition. Secondly, the preface to the work reiterates exactly this practice of using history to teach political lessons:

Among all sortes of humane writers, there is none that haue done more profit, or deserued greater prayse, then they who haue committed to faithfull records of Histories, eyther the gouernment of mighty states, or the liues and acts of famous men: for by describing the order and passages of these two, and what euent hath followed what counsailes they haue set fourth vnto vs, not onely precepts, but liuely patterns, both for priuate directions and for affayres of state: whereby in shorte time young men may be instructed; and ould men more fullie furnished with experience than the longest age of man can affoorde.³²

The whole episode illustrates the importance the later Elizabethans assigned to historical precedents in assessing contemporary political problems. At the time when Hayward was writing it was becoming quite common to write individual lives in order to illustrate political principles. This development underscores the extent to which the Elizabethans still understood the "lives" of public figures as political exempla. Rather than constituting a step toward biography, political life-writing presented another obstacle to its development, since it used a life as a vehicle for expounding political truths or analysing political situations in terms of "established patterns of conduct and character."

Political psychology of the kind promoted by Francis Bacon, however, did introduce a new element into history-writing. Whereas Hayward used specific historical incidents as precedents for

contemporary political problems, Bacon set out to use history as the basis for a coherent, logical system through which politics could be analysed, understood, and practised as a science. Bacon's view, according to F.J. Levy, was that "The experience of men, as recorded by historians, are artifacts that might be used in constructing theories of psychology and politics in the same way that the works of nature, observed by scientists, are artifacts to be used for the new science."³³ It is easy, however, to over-emphasize the importance of the study of political psychology to the development of biography. As we shall see, political psychology marks a transitional phase rather than a decisive change in the perception of human nature. Political psychology is the study of the role of character traits in determining the course of events. As a result, here too the individual is de-emphasized in favour of isolating and teaching patterns of behaviour.

The exemplum can perhaps be viewed as a primitive step toward biography in that it marks a move away from the general, impersonal precept and toward the use of an individual as illustration. Bacon, however, in reducing character to a science, demonstrates a return to the precept rather than an advance toward biography. When he wished to pass on general moral or abstract knowledge, Bacon did so, as in the Essays, through a series of aphorisms.³⁴ He preferred to express a particular observation about human nature as an axiom, distilled from the collection and analysis of as many specific instances illustrating that theme as possible. The individual episodes were then unimportant, as the exemplum was secondary, in Bacon's view, to the

abstractly-stated principle.

Bacon did not usher in the dawn of modern biography, despite the fact that in the first twelve chapters of Book II of De Augmentis Scientiarum (1605) he identified life-writing as a distinct sub-genre of history and stated that "History is properly concerned with individuals, which are circumscribed by space and time."³⁵ This comment does not indicate that Bacon considers the individual to be of paramount importance. On the contrary, he believed perhaps even more strongly than some of his more traditionally-minded contemporaries that the subject of history is the state, and that it is to be written so that the state might prosper. Bacon meant that since the fortunes of the state are largely dictated by the actions of those individuals who wield power, history properly examines the personality traits that prompt those actions. Life-writing, therefore, should concentrate not on individual character but on the link between a specific character trait and a consequent action. A pattern of such relationships might then be established, a pattern relating to the individual event rather than the specific person involved. This particular emphasis on the role of psychology was not original with Bacon, of course; Machiavelli had also made the point that the limit of one's fortunes was always set by one's character. If one could make one's nature perfectly flexible, one could enjoy infinite political success, as one could adapt one's character to meet the demands of each political situation. This flexibility could be achieved, or at least approximated, by changing the appearance of one's character, playing the role demanded by the

political situation. Brathwaite mentions Machiavelli in this vein in The Schollers Medley, echoing the assumption, which was commonly held at this time, that the arts of dissembling and of recognizing dissimulation were important political skills. Brathwaite stated that a reader can learn from history to recognize the dissembler and to assess his true character: "Better characted thou canst have him then by History, it is the best image of thy life, and can be best set out in their owne native colours such deformed images".³⁶

Like Machiavelli, Bacon applied these views to the writing of history, and perhaps this combination of history and psychology can be considered a step toward the possibility of biography. But Bacon was a philosopher, not an historian, and as a result his Henry VII (c. 1622), the only full-length historical piece that he completed, functions as a vehicle for promoting his treatment of politics as a science. Like so many other accounts of the lives of rulers written around the turn of the century, Henry VII is an exemplum, an illustration of political principles.³⁷ The difference is that Bacon's political principles are the product of psychological insight.

At many points throughout Henry VII Bacon gives pithy character sketches of even quite minor figures, consisting perhaps of only three or four skillfully observed characteristics. For example, when Henry became overly interested in building up his wealth, Bacon observes that:

he had gotten for his purpose, or beyond his purpose, two instruments, Empson and Dudley (whom the people esteemed as

his horse-leeches and sheeters) bold men and careless of fame, and that took toll of their master's grist. Dudley was of a good family, eloquent, and one that could put hateful business into good language. But Empson, that was a sieve-maker, triumphed always upon the deed done; putting off all other respects whatsoever.³⁸

But Bacon was not interested in personality for its own sake, he was concerned with psychology only as the source of actions. He describes Empson and Dudley here only because he wishes to show that their personalities suited them to work the king had set for them; perhaps too much so, as their temperaments led them far beyond the king's expectations or desires in this regard. The personalities of these two men, Bacon indicates, cost the king dearly, as they resulted in acts of extreme cruelty that weakened the king's own popularity. Bacon explains the provenance of a particular law in similar terms: "This law was thought to be procured by the Lord Chancellor, who being a stern and haughty man, and finding he had some mortal enemies in court, provided for his own safety" ³⁹ In describing this man's personality in order to explain his action in a given circumstance, Bacon demonstrates the approach he uses for all of the individuals about whom he writes.

Bacon devotes a great deal of space to detailed accounts of the political actions of the king in all aspects of his reign, foreign and domestic. This emphasis on rather dry and impersonal subject matter renders much of Henry VII hard going for the reader hoping to encounter

biography. Bacon must have anticipated this complaint, because he takes the trouble to defend his choice of material, particularly a long passage describing some of the laws passed in Henry's reign:

Whereof I have these reasons: both because it was the pre-
 eminent virtue and merit of this king, to whose memory I do
 honour; and because it hath some correspondence to my person;
 but chiefly because (in my judgement) it is some defect even
 in the best writers of history, that they do not often enough
 summarily deliver and set down the most memorable laws passed
 in the times whereof they write, being indeed the principal
 acts of peace.⁴⁰

Henry VII is organized into a chronological catalogue of political developments and crises over the course of the king's reign, and Bacon's purpose was to show how these were the result of the king's nature, and secondarily of the other individuals involved. Bacon does not, therefore, deduce Henry's character from his acts, as a biographer might have done. Instead, he describes the role of the king's character in those acts; the final results (the acts and their consequences) are his principal focus, not the king's character. Bacon's summary at the end of the work demonstrates this orientation clearly:

Again, whether it were the shortness of his foresight, or the strength of his will, or the dazzling of his suspicions, or what it was; certain it is that the perpetual troubles of his fortunes (there being no more matter out of which they grew)

could not have been without some great defects and main errors in his nature, customs, and proceedings, which he had enough to do to save and help with a thousand little industries and watches. But those do best appear in the story itself.⁴¹

It is a measure of Bacon's traditional attitudes to life-writing that he adopted the practice of adding a character sketch of his subject at the end of the life. In the conventional manner, Bacon makes a break after the main body of the work, which ends with the king's death, after which he gives a generalized character assessment of the king, confining himself, again as was usual, to a catalogue of abstract virtues and attributes. In this section, however, Bacon summarizes material that is contained in the main body of the life rather than revealing new information. As a result the character sketch, like the whole life, discusses Henry solely as a public man, whose nature dictated his effectiveness as a ruler. The following example stresses this theme:

He was of a high mind, and loved his own will and his own way, as one that revered himself and would reign indeed. Had he been a private man he would have been turned proud: but in a wise Prince, it was but keeping of distance, which indeed he did towards all; not admitting any near or full approach neither to his power or to his secrets.⁴²

Bacon even treats Henry's relations with his wife and children in this

manner:

Towards his Queen he was nothing uxorious; nor scarce indulgent: but companionable and respectful, and without jealousy. Towards his children he was full of paternal affection, careful of their education, aspiring to their high advancement, regular to see that they should not want of any due honour and respect, but not greatly willing to cast any popular lustre on them.⁴³

It is clear in these examples that Bacon shared the popular view that men who hold public office lead public lives. There is no tension here, as there would be in the biographies of public men in succeeding centuries, between the public and private lives and personalities of the public figure. Bacon conveys no sense of Henry as a private man because this is not part of his purpose: such an aim had never been considered an historian's object and Bacon was no exception to the convention.

During the early seventeenth century the writing of lives was subject to certain strongly-held views about the principles governing the manner in which history is written. Early seventeenth-century writers of lives were influenced by classical models, and were expected to conform to the formal conventions of classical history-writing. To a large extent these conventions dictated not only the style and structure of an historical work but also the kind of raw material that an historian might use. Peter Burke explains:

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In general Renaissance literature differs from later medieval literature in that it is concerned to a greater extent with structure, with formal organisation. Whatever was written ought, so it was believed, to conform to a specific genre, preferably one that existed in classical antiquity, and imitate the masters in that genre.⁴⁴

And as Paul Kendall states, the classical models of biography "took the form of funeral elegies, political orations, rhetorical or philosophical exercises which were largely concerned with individuals as representing ideal types of character or ethical patterns of culture."⁴⁵ In short, classical models generally took the form of exemplary lives, and early seventeenth-century historians often cited the ancients to bolster their opinion that history was valuable because it furnished examples. The preface to Hayward's Henry IV, for instance, states that "examples are of greater force to stirre unto virtue, then bare precepts, insomuch as Cicero said that nothing could be taught well without example."⁴⁶ Richard Brathwaite, furthermore, demonstrates the degree to which early seventeenth-century historians felt that classical examples dove-tailed neatly with Christian ideals:

We vse to be more excited to goodnesse by examples then Precepts, and such instances in Histories are not a little Perswasive, representing to our eyes the diuers objects of piety in Coriolanus, of Iustice in Aristides, of Prudence in Cleobulus: and to be briefe of all vertues so well practised

by Pagans, as they may well deserue an imitation by Christians.⁴⁷

Beyond this, Renaissance historians also accepted the classical convention that, in Burke's words, "A historian should also deal with heroic actions, anything less was beneath the 'dignity of history,' a phrase which was much used at the Renaissance. The dignity of history, for the Renaissance writer as for Tacitus . . . excluded 'low' people, things, or words."⁴⁸ Richard Puttenham mentions this convention, but explains it rather differently:

Now because the actions of meane & base personages, tend in very few cases to any great good example: for who passeth to follow the steps, and maner of life of a craftes man, shepherd or sailer, though he were his father or dearest friend? yea how almost is it possible that such maner of men should be of any vertue other then their profession requireth? Therefore was nothing committed to historie, but matters of great and excellent persons & things that the same by irritation of good courages (such as emulation causeth) might worke more effectually, which occasioned the story writer to chuse a higher stile fit for his subject, the Prosaicke in prose, the Poet in meetre⁴⁹

For most historians this prohibition against the unheroic meant that much material that a modern biographer would prize was considered inappropriate to life-writing by his early seventeenth-century

counterpart.

The frustration that modern biographical critics express in discussing early seventeenth-century lives such as Greville's Sidney, Bacon's Henry VII, and Hayward's Henry IV is often due to the absence of the homely detail and the personal anecdote in these works. This material was irrelevant to the purpose of writing lives as it was perceived at this time: the "dignity" of history was based upon the demands of didacticism and the fulfillment of the structural and stylistic requirements of convention.⁵⁰ Life-writing was not principally intended to reveal the character of an individual. Even in those lives, such as Bacon's Henry VII, in which an analysis of character was important, this analysis was made in order to illustrate some other point the writer wished to make.

In an age in which the exemplum dominated all written history, writers of lives necessarily focussed their attention upon those universal principles that their subjects' lives exemplified, rather than on the lives themselves. The attitudes toward life-writing that these writers inherited from classical and medieval models were reinforced by the Elizabethan respect for authority that made them refer again and again to established precedent. The same notions that the didactic justification for life-writing rested upon--that human nature is universal and therefore the individual circumstance illustrates general truths--also reinforced the perpetuation of exemplary life-writing. Early seventeenth-century writers of lives lacked a biographical voice because the conventions of history-writing virtually

eliminated the variety and uniqueness of human character and experience. As long as it was bound by these traditional attitudes life-writing could not progress from the confines of the exemplum to the possibilities afforded by biography.

The early seventeenth century was nonetheless the moment when the first changes began to appear. Certainly the conventions continued to influence life-writing throughout the seventeenth century, but at the same time historians began to introduce a new type of material into written lives, material that was intended to entertain the reader. It is important to recognize that this new approach was by no means introduced as a challenge to the well-entrenched traditions that promoted the elevated aims of historical writing. Paradoxically, the movement toward an entertaining and popular treatment of history was championed as a means of increasing the beneficial influence of history on its readers by making it more appealing and accessible. The new material was perceived as ornamental, enhancing the fundamental goals of didacticism and the written life as exemplum. But this trend toward the popularisation of history prepared the way for the incorporation of the revealing anecdote into life-writing and the consequent development of biography.

Chapter Three

When anecdote was used in early seventeenth-century life-writing its main function was to entertain, not to reveal character. An incident employed to illustrate character always took the form of an exemplum. It was a recurring theme in seventeenth-century historiography that historical writing, though undoubtedly dignified and instructive, was perhaps less improving than might be hoped because it made such dry and tedious reading. Thus the practice of leavening instruction with entertainment became common during this period, even as the theory of history-writing continued to emphasize decorum. By mid-century, in consequence, Thomas Fuller openly acknowledges the creation of pleasure as being among his intentions in writing his History of the Worthies of England (1662):

I confess, the subject is but dull in itself, to tell the time and place of men's birth, and deaths, their names, with the names and numbers of their books; and therefore this bare skeleton of time, place, and person, must be fleshed with some pleasant passages. To this intent I have purposely interlaced (not as meat, but as condiment) many delightful stories, that so the reader, if he do not arise (which I hope and desire) religiosior or doctior, with more piety or learning, at least he may depart jucundior, with more pleasure and lawful delight.¹

The acceptance of "delightful stories" as a desirable and appropriate element in history-writing was a critical advance toward the use of anecdote in life-writing.

Few historians at the beginning of the century, however, are as candid as Fuller; indeed, at this stage it is much easier to find condemnations of the inclusion of entertaining or detailed material than to identify supporters of the practice. Richard Brathwaite, for instance, roundly criticizes one such historian:

I have knowne some too precise in this veine and one especially I remember, who speaking of the great Sultan, could not be content to describe his palace, managements, domesticke and publycke person, and the like; but of his piked Beard, the colour of his stockings: and in the end coming neere him (said he) and indeed neerer then need was, his breath was noysome. These, and such like impertinent circumstances, are so frivolous, that they imply a defect of iudgement in the Author, to insert such idle, and immateriall ambages in a History of consequence.²

Brathwaite here demonstrates that one of the principle barriers to biography in the early seventeenth century was the propriety demanded by the "dignity" of history. Much later in the century the "dignity" of history was still considered to conflict with the materials of biography, but by this time biography had finally become a genre in its own right, a genre unencumbered by the demands of "dignity". John

Dryden, like Bacon, identified three kinds of historical writing:

"Commentaries or annals; history properly so called; and biographia, or the lives of particular men." Dryden repeatedly describes biography as "in dignity inferior to history and annals," but adds:

Biographia, or the circumstances of particular lives, though circumscribed in the subject, is yet more extensive in the style than the other two: for it not only comprehends them both, but has something super-added, which neither of them have. The style of it is various, according to the occasion. There are proper places in it, for the plainness and nakedness, of narration, which is ascribed to annals; there is also room reserved for the loftiness and gravity of general history, when the actions related shall require that manner of expression. But there is withal, a descent into minute circumstances, and trivial passages of life, which are natural to this way of writing, and which the dignity of the other two will not admit.³

Dryden obviously felt that biography is a worthy genre of history-writing and that the personal details of an individual life are valuable. This is not surprising since the statement above is taken from his own life of Plutarch, pre-eminent model for seventeenth-century biographers.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, the question of decorum in life-writing was a serious concern. Many commentators

shared Richard Brathwaite's disapproval of those whom they considered to have breached the acceptable limits, but the limits themselves remained largely a matter of personal opinion. In any case, these censorious attitudes suggest that biography became separate from history because it required conditions that were incompatible with the conventions of history-writing. Those who wished to write lives rather than history, or those who merely wished to include anecdote in history, were obliged to relax their standards or reinterpret them.

The early seventeenth century is of especial interest in this regard. Even though it is difficult to find anyone who approves wholeheartedly of including anecdotal material in life-writing, as Dryden later will, or of satisfying natural curiosity and the desire for entertainment, as Fuller suggests, we do nonetheless find historians who practise both methods. In many cases, it is only through paying close attention to context and the flow of the narrative that the reader can ascertain that an incident has been included simply on its own merits and therefore is an anecdote. Bacon's Henry VII is just such a work. Several anecdotes occur in Henry VII, even though Bacon does not use them to illuminate his subject's personality. The anecdotes are not immediately obvious because Bacon does not draw attention to them. He never changes his tone, and they take the form of well-camouflaged digressions. It is amusing to find that Bacon, despite his logical, spare, and scientific method and his allegiance to the conventions of history-writing, could not resist a good story.

Take, for instance, the account of the quarrel and jousting match

between Sir James Parker and Hugh Vaughn. The passage preceding this account describes the Lord Chancellor's announcement, in St. Paul's, of the Spanish conquest of Granada. Then the king announces a May-day tournament, ~~to~~ "warm the blood of his nobles and gallants against the war." The two gentlemen in question,

having had a controversy touching certain arms that the King-at-Arms had given Vaughn, were appointed to run some courses one against another; and by accident of a faulty helmet that Parker had on, he was stricken into the mouth at the first course, so that his tongue was borne unto the hinder part of his head, in such sort that he died presently upon the place; which because of the controversy precedent, and the death that followed, was accounted amongst the vulgar as a combat of trial of right.⁴

From this incident, Bacon moves on to discuss the king's decision to send his ambassadors to Maximilian, in expectation of moving his army into France. This episode, therefore, is entirely incidental, and Bacon seems to have used it for its rather gory sensationalism and the attractive appearance of poetic justice.

Another example is the relation of a witty remark made by Prince Arthur on the subject of his conjugal relations with Katherine of Aragon, cited in passing during a discussion of the rival claims to legitimacy argued on behalf of Mary and Elizabeth.

There was given in evidence also when the cause of the

divorce was handled, a pleasant passage, which was; that in a morning Prince Arthur upon his up-rising from bed with her called for drink, which he was not accustomed to do, and finding the gentleman of his chamber that brought him the drink to smile at it and to note it, he said merrily to him that he had been in the midst of Spain which was a hot region, and his journey had made him dry; and that if the other had been in so hot a clime he would have been drier than he.⁵

This "pleasant passage" is the only detail that Bacon includes in an otherwise general and concise overview of the problem; it functions, therefore, as a slightly racy interlude.

These stories are the stuff of court gossip, and another of these tales affords us our most intimate glimpse of Henry's character. This is the only instance in which Bacon uses an anecdote to illustrate his subject's nature, and he does so in a somewhat off-hand manner. Bacon seems to have remembered the story while composing the abstract character assessment at the end of the life: in the middle of one passage, Bacon shifts from a general description to a particular incident, as if the episode in question better conveys the personality trait he is trying to describe:

He was a Prince, sad, serious, and full of thoughts and secret observations; and full of notes and memorials of his own hand, especially touching persons; as to whom to employ,

whom to reward, whom to inquire of, what were the dependencies, what were the factions, and the like; keeping (as it were) a journal of his thoughts. There is to this day a merry tale: that his monkey (set on as it was thought by one of his chamber) tore his principal note-book all to pieces, when by chance it lay forth; whereat the court which liked not these pensive accounts were almost tickled with the sport.⁶

Bacon begins the next paragraph with "He was indeed full of apprehensions and suspicions . . ." and thus appears to have used this incident as anecdote ought to be used in biography. But this story, like those of the jousting match and Prince Arthur's marriage bed, is simply a good story, and it is at least as likely that Bacon used it because it was amusing as because it was revealing.

There are signs in Henry VII that Bacon was aware of the value of certain narrative methods that could increase the effectiveness of specific incidents. Like many of his contemporaries Bacon reproduced direct speech, rather than merely reporting what was said, in order to render incidents more vividly. Renaissance historical convention, of course, recognized oration as one of the rhetorical devices appropriate to the dignity of history. Bacon certainly used oration in this way, but he also used dialogue, which, because it does not suffer from the stiffness of the formulaic set-piece, is useful for creating an immediate, dramatic scene. There are two notable examples of dialogue in Henry VII; one is a confrontation between the king and the Earl of

Oxford. At a time when the king, fearing civil war, had forbidden his nobles to keep their retainers in livery, the Earl, while entertaining the king at his castle, displayed his uniformed retainers in two rows forming a lane through which the king was to pass:

The King called the Earl to him, and said, "My lord, I have heard much of your hospitality, but I see it is greater than the speech. These handsome gentlemen and yeomen which I see on both sides of me are sure your menial servants." The Earl smiled and said, "It may please your Grace, that were not for mine ease. They are most of them my retainers, that are come to do me service at such a time as this, and chiefly to see your Grace." The King started a little, and said, "By my faith, (my lord) I thank you for my good cheer, but I may not endure to have my laws broken in my sight. My attorney must speak with you".⁷

Bacon admits that this story is unsubstantiated (introducing it by saying "There is to this day a report . . ."), and thus the detail with which he relates it must be his own invention. Note the stage directions, the gestures and facial expressions accompanying what is said ("the Earl smiled" and "The King started a little."). This dramatic treatment of conversation is more pronounced in another passage in which Bacon recreates dialogue in a meeting between Henry and the King of Castile, when the latter had narrowly escaped shipwreck off the English coast. While negotiations were underway for renewing

the treaty between them,

the King choosing a fit time, and drawing the King of Castile into a room where they two only were private, and laying his hand civilly upon his arm, and changing his countenance a little from the countenance of entertainment, said to him, "Sir, you have been saved upon my coast, I hope you will not suffer me to wreck upon yours."⁸

The rest of the conversation proceeds in a similar manner, and as there were, by Bacon's report, no witnesses to this interview, Bacon allows himself considerable imaginative scope in reproducing the scene,

There are further examples to indicate that Bacon was quite capable of recognizing and exploiting the dramatic appeal of such episodes as presented themselves. For instance, when he is describing the decrees issued by Henry in response to the proclamation of the Duke of Clarence as king in Dublin, Bacon takes the opportunity afforded by the decree banishing the Queen Dowager to a convent to digress on the violent swings of fortune that characterized her life. For an entire page Bacon demonstrates that "This lady was amongst the examples of great variety of fortune."⁹ Except that the Queen seems without fault, this passage reads like a typical *de Casibus* story; Bacon refers to the rising and falling of Fortune's Wheel as he outlines her history. He takes a similar approach in recounting the tale of the king's punishment of Lambert Simnel for impersonating Edward Plantagenet: "he was taken into service in his court to a base office in his kitchen; so

that (in a kind of mattacina [dance] of human fortune) he turned a broach [spit] that had worn a crown. Whereas fortune commonly doth not bring in a comedy or farce after a tragedy."¹⁰

Bacon's reference to the theatre is significant, because modern commentators on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century life-writing have drawn attention to instances in which elements of de Casibus tragedy appear in life-writing.¹¹ Even the Mirror for Magistrates itself is studied mainly as a literary work because of its prominent use in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama. Willard Farnham states that Elizabethan tragedy owes far more to the development of an entirely English tragic spirit than to classical tragic drama, and he locates the origins of a native tragic heritage in the medieval morality plays and the de Casibus narrative. The form evolved into a native cultural tradition through the addition of stories about English princes collected from the chronicles. "The Mirror, says Farnham, did much more than simply supply material for Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy; it was a true innovation artistically, for "it gave for the first time a definite form to the vague medieval conception of tragedy."¹² There was thus a readily available set of conventions for organizing the shape of a life, and it is not surprising that the few lives written substantially earlier than 1600 that are commended for literary merit all employ this theme and structure. George Cavendish's Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey (c.1556), Thomas More's History of Richard the Third (c. 1517), and William Roper's Life of Sir Thomas Moore, Knighte (c. 1558) are the lives most often mentioned in this regard.¹³

Direct comparisons between these lives and the dramatists' treatment of the same material would, however, be mistaken. The de Casibus structure lends itself to a theatrical style that makes use of devices such as an emphasis on individual scenes, described in detail and with accompanying "stage" directions to heighten the impression of immediacy. It is essential to recognize that while sophisticated explorations of character (embracing complex personality, inconsistency, and the mysteries of motive, for example) were highly developed in late Elizabethan drama, life-writing of this period lacked such insights. Since it has become a convention of modern biography to develop character by using dramaturgical devices, twentieth-century critics are sometimes led to ascribe this same intention to seventeenth-century life-writers. However, there is a misleading anachronism in such ascriptions. Despite the richness of characterization in late-Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, devices borrowed from the theatre were used by life-writers simply as ornaments to the prose narrative, and this technique was not accompanied by a deeper understanding of character.

However central the Mirror may have been to the development of tragic drama, its influence on life-writing was indirect. The Mirror did contain anecdotal elaboration parallel to that found in early seventeenth-century life-writing, and while the theatrical treatment of lives in the Mirror did not lead to a more direct focus on character, it may have helped to establish the practice of using anecdote in the prose narrative of a life. Bacon's rendition of the Lambert Simnel

story as a de Casibus narrative and his use of the conventions of theatrical genres suggest that he shares the fondness of his predecessors for the pleasing effect such approaches produce.

Another theatrical device that Bacon uses is that of omens and premonitions. Two prophetic anecdotes together make up the penultimate paragraph of Henry VII:

His worth may bear a tale or two, that may put upon him somewhat that may seem divine. When the Lady Margaret his mother had divers great suitors for marriage, she dreamed one night that one in the likeness of a bishop in pontifical habit did tender her Edmund Earl of Richmond (the King's father) for her husband. Neither had she any child but the King, though she had three husbands. One day when King Henry the Sixth (whose innocency gave him holiness) was washing his hands at a great feast, and cast his eyes upon King Henry, then a young youth, he said; "This is the lad that shall possess quietly that, that we now strive for."¹⁵

What are we to make of Bacon's use of these stories? This material is quite different from the intimate and realistic treatment of dialogue examined above, and Bacon is the last person we would expect to consider such tales as serious evidence of Henry's sanctity. One can hardly imagine Bacon entertaining any interest in such a question. Certainly neither Bacon nor any other early seventeenth-century writer of lives states that he records these supernatural events because he

believes them to be true. John Hayward is unusual in commenting on the practice, but he cites so many supernatural and prophetic occurrences observed during the tumultuous period of the transfer of power from Richard II to Henry IV that he feels obliged to justify himself:

many like accidents are recorded of that time; but I will maintaine neither the truth of them, nor what they did pretend: being a matter wherein most men are rather superstitious, then not credulous, and doe oftentimes repute common occurrences to be ominous, where any strange event doth ensue. Yet as I am loath to avouch any vaine or trifling matter, so dare I not detract all truth from things anciently reported; although done in an age wherein was some delight in lying, many do suppose, that those things which are fatally allotted, though they neuer be auoided, yet sometimes are foreshewen: not so much that we may preuent them, as that wee should prepare our selves against them.¹⁶

This inconclusive and ambiguous explanation is unconvincing. Stories of supernatural events are common in the chronicles, where they are treated as seriously as more verifiable material. But omens and premonitions also play a large part in de Casibus stories, where they foreshadow the inevitable tragedy and underscore the inexorable movement of Fortune's Wheel. It is probable that Hayward, like Bacon and many others, used this type of material simply because it was intriguing and dramatic and thus heightened the popular appeal of a

life.

Bacon serves as a useful indicator of early seventeenth-century methods of using anecdote in life-writing. I have described all of the anecdotes in Henry VII at length because Bacon, as an historian, was guided both by traditional standards of propriety in life-writing and by his own forward-looking notions of historical enquiry. Bacon represents a transitional moment in life-writing, and he uses anecdote in a number of ways that cover the range of methods current in life-writing in the early seventeenth century. Each of the various types of anecdote that Bacon uses is included for reasons other than didacticism that have nothing to do with the elevated requirements of Renaissance historiography. These anecdotes add interest, whether they are amusing, colourful and detailed, or dramatically impressive. While Bacon treats his anecdotal material in an understated manner, however, other historians of his day were developing a sensationalistic and overwrought style in life-writing that bears a strong resemblance to that of medieval saints' lives and de Casibus stories.

As mentioned above, both these forms of life-writing remained popular well into the seventeenth century, and at least part of their appeal lay in the intensely emotional style of the one and the often lurid subject matter of the other. These elements began to appear in more sophisticated forms of life-writing around the turn of the century. The main characteristic of this new manner of treatment was a deliberate exploitation of the melodramatic qualities of a particular incident, from which the historian extracted the last possible vestige

of emotion. There is usually an abrupt shift in tone, pacing, and style between the rather dry chronicle material, in which facts are tersely related in chronological order, and the melodramatic episodes. As the focus shifts from a broad, general viewpoint to a single moment the pace suddenly slows, the previously detached and impersonal tone becomes intimate and emotional, and the emphasis is on precisely-described nuances of character, gesture, and mood.

John Hayward displays a strong sense of melodramatic moment in Henry IV, and he takes advantage of such opportunities by carefully setting the scene in order to achieve the greatest possible effect. Richard's deposition is a case in point, as Hayward's scene-setting is designed to heighten the pathos of the king's speech:

When all were set in their places. King Richard was brought forth, apparelled in his royall robe, the diademe on his head, and the scepter in his hand; and was placed amongst them in a chaire of estate. Neuer was prince so gorgeous; with lesse glory and greater griefe: to whom it was not disgrace sufficient, to lose both the honour and ornaments of a king, but he must openly to his greater scorne, renounce the one, and deliuer the other. After a little pause and expectation, the King arose from his seat, and spake to the assembly these words, or the very like in effect.¹⁷

Hayward also sees the potential for emotional effect in private encounters. He describes in detail, for instance, an intimate

conversation between the Duke and Duchess of Exeter, after the Duchess learns of her husband's part in the conspiracy to depose her brother, Henry IV. She cannot contain her anguish at being caught between loyalty to the king and to her husband: "Heerewith such a shower of teares streamed downe her cheekes, that it drowned her speech, and stopped the passage of further complaint: which when the Duke espyed, hee stepped vnto her, and seazing softlie vppon her hand, vsed these words."¹⁸ The Duke says what he can to comfort his wife, and "when hee had thus saide, hee kissed her, and so leauing her to the torture of a thousand thornie thoughts, he tooke his iourney towards Oxforde

....."¹⁹ Hayward's vivid treatment of this episode leaves the reader with a lasting impression of the Duchess's torment.

Hayward's treatment of the dramatic possibilities of this tumultuous period in English history is strikingly similar to Shakespeare's. The abortive duel between Mowbray and Hereford, for instance, which is so central to the early part of the play, is described in the written life at length and includes a wealth of detail such as the gestures accompanying the speeches of the combatants and the colours of their livery.²⁰ To read this passage in Hayward's version is to envision the scene as if it were being acted on the stage. Similarly, Richard's deposition, his death, and even his soliloquies are as dramatic and immediate as in the play.

This technique in the writing of lives was not to everyone's taste, however. For at least one of Hayward's critics, Edmund Bolton, these innovations were too pronounced:

Dr. Hayward's Phrase and Words are very good, only some might have wished that in his Henry the 4th he had not called Sr Hugh Linn by so light a word as Madcap, tho' he were such, and that he had not changed his Historical State into a Dramatical, where he induceth a Mother uttering a Woman's Passion in the Case of her Son.²¹

For other critics, however, Hayward's was a recognized and acceptable method, with advantages to the reader which drier histories might lack. Richard Brathwaite describes those who write in this manner as "moving historians," and commends their attention to the task of rendering someone else's experience appreciable to the reader:

And this certainly have most Historians euer obserued in their writings: so liuely to expresse the disasters of deseruing men, that their relations might moue a kinde of sensible pity and remorse in the peruser, which is best exemplified by circumstances: for the time, place, cause, and person, with other necessary adjuncts do (for the most part) lay a more open and smooth Tract to the inforcement of Passion.²²

Brathwaite explicitly notes the connection between the works of the "moving historians" and the playwrights. In the following passage he ponders the similarly cathartic effects of tragic episodes in properly-handled history and in drama:

Each Tragicke occurents require their Emphasis, and a kinde of unusuall working passion: that the History may present to our eyes, the very acts how they were done; making her discourse (as it is) a Theater of humane action. I know pitifull stories have strange effects, if amply described.²³

Perhaps the most effective examples of the theatrical treatment of individual episodes in a written life are to be found in Thomas Heywood's Englands Elisabeth (1631).²⁴ Heywood, of course, was a successful dramatist, and his theatrical sense made him a popular historian as well. Englands Elisabeth is an ambitious work, filling 234 pages even though it extends only up to Elizabeth's coronation. One suspects that the time frame was deliberately chosen, for Heywood makes the most of the sensational and dramatic events of the latter years of Henry VIII's reign. It is in the death of Lady Jane Grey that Heywood has his best opportunity to exercise his abilities in creating tragic romance out of history. This passage continues for fifteen pages, and Heywood employs every possible detail and device to heighten the pathos of the scene. He dwells at length on the victim's prayers during her journey to execution, her last address to the spectators, and her feeling blindfolded for the block upon which she will be beheaded, thus transforming her story into moving, and therefore, popular history.

Heywood, however, was exceptional in bringing to the writing of history both an artistic ability and a creditable respect for sound scholarship. His dramatic sense, therefore, served to enhance rather than demean his chosen material. Heywood's lives are far removed in

aesthetic terms from those of the more directly manipulative sensation-
 alist historians, whose works were intended solely to satisfy the
 popular demand for melodrama. Richard Brathwaite's Lives of All the
 Roman Emperors (1636) is especially noteworthy in this respect because
 of the enormous difference between Brathwaite's treatment of history
 here and the manner in which he says it ought to be written in The
 Schollers Medley. In the Medley Brathwaite addresses the theory of
 history-writing in a serious, high-minded manner, but in the Emperors
 he caters to popular taste without apology. The lives of the emperors
 are intended simply as entertainment, and because of the sheer weight
 of numbers Brathwaite ensures a readable work by relying on brevity.
 He justifies this approach in the preface, saying "thou maist portray
 the whole Hercules having found but the length of his foot," and he
 will therefore "present to thy view great personages to the life, in
 small draughts and peices, and give thee onely light touches of their
 vertues and vices." He repeatedly asserts that he has composed this
 work as far as possible in a manner to avoid tedium, and to this end
 has "provided thee a little and dainty, variety and plenty, short and
 sweete"

These lives, however, are anything but sweet. The work contains
 accounts of 156 emperors (none is more than three pages long) and they
 are characterized by an endlessly repetitive catalogue of violence and
 debauchery. Brathwaite pursues two themes throughout the work: one is
 the varieties of sin practised by the emperors, and the other is the
 persecution of the early Christians under the reign of each succeeding

emperor, with particular emphasis on martyrdom. Thus Brathwaite combines the melodramatic aspects of both the de Casibus tragedy and the saints' lives. One extract is sufficient to suggest the general tone of the work. Here Brathwaite describes with typical relish the sexual exploits of Heliogabulus:

he fell into a life so libidinous, that hee had to doe with his owne Mother. Hee raviisht Vestall Virgins, and in his Palace he kept Wenches and Whores, and men, of wicked, lewd, and debauched life, upon whom he conferred the offices of principall note and honour in the Court, with greatest graces and entertainments possibly he could.²⁵

He does include the occasional character sketch but these are of necessity superficial. In Brathwaite's hands the emperors are much more remarkable for their homogeneity than for any differences between them.

The attitudes that enabled Brathwaite to produce this work are radically different from those that prompted some of his views in The Schollers Medley. In that work he states that some material is best left out of a written life, as "Acts silenced sometimes doe better then if expressed: for the Gurtaine of vices drawne, moues imitation rather than euitation" ²⁶ He cautions historians to consider carefully the consequences of their selection of material:

We must walke in a more modest path for iudgement in the relation of euery act that is done: we ought to vse a kind of

deliberation, consulting with our owne intimate vnderstandings, and aske them whether such an Act is worthy memory, or no: for many things we see and reade, which discretion would rather have omitted then to writing committed 27

Obviously no such concern has influenced Brathwaite's approach to the Lives of All the Roman Emperors, where the choice of subject alone implies a marked departure from the opinions he expressed in the Medley.

The trend toward the use of detail and anecdote in life-writing originated in the belief that instruction was most effective when mixed with entertainment. In the Roman Emperors, however, Brathwaite does not pretend to didacticism, presenting his work as nothing more than an amusing diversion.²⁸ This juxtaposition, rather than posing an inexplicable contradiction, demonstrates the co-existence of opposing attitudes, old and new, toward life-writing in the seventeenth century. To Brathwaite, as to his contemporaries, history proper was a distinct genre with its own appropriate treatment and subject matter. It was quite possible to write history of a lower sort that allowed a relaxation of conventional standards. The important consideration was to keep these categories separate. The lines between such gradations of history-writing are indistinct because historiographers did not discuss them until much later in the century. But early seventeenth-century writers of lives seem quite aware of the particular level of history at which they were writing. The fact that Brathwaite was able to write two such diverse works as the Medley and the Roman Emperors is

significant, for the development of Biography as a distinct genre depended upon just this distinction between popular and scholarly levels of history-writing.

The fulfillment of popular demand for entertainment in history-writing permitted the use of certain kinds of material, such as anecdote, that were not admissible in the more established genres based on classical models. Even so, the anecdote was not deliberately used to reveal character in popular life-writing any more than in serious, exemplary lives. This omission does not, however, indicate that the seventeenth century lacked interest in the study of personality. On the contrary, complex and realistic portrayals of personality flourished in the early and middle parts of the century, but in literary genres other than history and life-writing.

Thus it is true that the most profound investigations of character in the early seventeenth century were to be found in drama. Though sharing common sources with drama, however, as the example of the Mirror for Magistrates conventions indicates, life-writing was developing independently. Partly in consequence, life-writing remained relatively unsophisticated. The independence of the two genres was reinforced by the uses of each made of Plutarch. The importance of Plutarch to both Elizabethan drama and life-writing is beyond dispute. For the dramatists, Plutarch provided the skeletons of plots and the balanced and perceptive character sketch from which an artistic unity-- of plot and character inextricably bound and mutually explanatory-- could be fashioned. Plutarch outlines just those elements of

personality and suggestions of individual motives for acts with profound historical consequences that appealed to the Elizabethan imagination. The writer of lives, however, borrowed from Plutarch the form of the individual lives, the emphasis on virtues and vices (by which Plutarch compared his Roman subjects unfavourably with the Greeks), the didactic purpose, the political lessons, the occasional personal detail, and the character sketch appended to each life. The adoption of such a codified form gave some coherence to life-writing at this period, but did nothing to advance the revelation of personality as its principal purpose.

The only prose genre in which human personality was explored was the "character," a form whose revival was peculiarly confined to the seventeenth century. It originated with Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, who wrote generalized portraits of personality types, each describing a particular aspect of virtue or vice. The ancient Greek version was intended as an aid to philosophical enquiry, principally in the area of ethics.²⁹ I suspect that it was revived in the early seventeenth century because it lent itself to the genre of the guide-book to temperament and motives, which was considered an essential tool for seventeenth-century public life. The "character" closely resembled the Baconian essay: both drew conclusions from direct observation of particular aspects of human nature, and both aimed for a "condensation of expression" that could strike the reader's mind as forcibly as an aphorism.³⁰ Like the Essays, "character" books were based on the practice of noting down maxims encountered in reading for later

application to daily life. This practice itself was based on the premise that, as Brian Vickers puts it, "you could learn about life from books . . . and that you could learn more, and more quickly and safely," for works like these contained "the experience of others, digested into a manageable and portable shape, often in unadorned aphoristic precepts."³¹

Yet the "character" was as much an entertaining as edifying genre. There is not much difference between a memorable aphorism and epigrammatic wit, and as the seventeenth-century began to develop that taste for wit that would dominate the next century, character-writers sought for the clever turn of phrase that would capture a facetious description of a personality. The title of Sir Thomas Overbury's Characters; or, Witty descriptions of the properties of sundry persons (1614) catches the main point of the genre, and in a later work Overbury defined "What a Character Is:"

To square out a character by our English level, it is a picture (real or personal) quaintly drawn, in various colours, all of them, heightened by one shadowing.

It is a quick and soft touch of many strings, all shutting up in one musical close: it is wit's descant on any plain song.³²

The specific systems of psychological typology that character-writers chose to follow in describing their subjects reflect the whole range of psychological theories current at the time. Some

character-writers followed the traditional ethical division between virtue and vice; Joseph Hall's Characteristics of Vertues and Vices (1608) and Thomas Fuller's The Holy State and the Profane State (1642) are the best known examples. Others used the medieval physiological theory of the four humours, and the character is often linked with "the character of humours as developed in the comedies of Ben Jonson."³³ But the best of the characters owe little to religious or secular systems of categorization and spring instead from observation, received opinion, and native prejudice about various social roles dictated by class or occupation. This last group anticipates the satirical portraits of the eighteenth century. A small sampling of the characters written by Overbury illustrates this eclectic approach, for among his studies are those of "An Amorist," "A Braggadocio Welshman," "A Good Wife," "A Fine Gentleman," "A Fair and Happy Milkmaid," "A Worthy Commander in the Wars," "A Jesuit," and "A Tinker."

As Overbury states in his definition, "characters" are entertaining, and their success depends upon brevity and the emphasis on one personality trait. The portrait must be "heightened by one shadowing." For this reason, even though the "characters" of Overbury and other masters of the form are well-written and contain some finely-judged observations of human nature the genre did little to advance the development of biography. One need only consider the "characters" of specific individuals to realize this. The Character of . . . Thomas the Coryate (1611) is a good example; it is prefixed to Thomas Coryate's The Odcombian Banquet "by a charitable friend, that thinkes

it necessary by this time, you should understand the Maker, as well as the Worke."³⁴ The character is humorous, as is the work it introduces, and it focuses on one aspect of Coryate--his love of travel--and exaggerates that trait to the point of caricature:

A Carrier will carrie him from any company that hath not been abroade, because he is a species of a Traveller. But a Dutch-post doth ravish him. The meere Superscription of a letter from Zurich settes him up like a top: Basil or Heidelberg makes him spinne. And at seeing the word Frankford, or Venice, though but on the title of a booke, he is readie to breake doublet, cracke elbows, and overflow the roome with his murmure.³⁵

The only concrete facts mentioned in the entire piece, four pages long, are the dates of Coryate's departure and return from a journey to Venice. It is, however, a remarkably vivid rendering of character, and seems more illuminating than many serious lives written at this time:

Hee is alwayes Tongue-Major of the companie, and if ever the perpetuall motion be to be hoped for, it is from thence. He will aske, "How you do? Where have you beene? How is it? If you have travelled? How you like his booke?" with, "What newes?" and be guilty of a thousand such courteous impertinences in an houre, rather than want the humanity of vexing you. To conclude this ample Traveller in some bounds, you shall best know him by this: he is frequent at all sorts of

free tables, where though he might sit as a Guest, he will rather be served in as a Dish, and is loth to have anything of himselfe kept cold against the next day.³⁶

The impression we receive here of a strongly-realized personality is misleading. This is not a character study but the stylized exaggeration of one aspect of an individual personality. It is certainly compelling and lively, but it is nonetheless the description of a type. The character reduces individuals to a single characteristic, and thus, like the exemplum, it is anti-biographical.³⁷

In the early seventeenth century, therefore, accompanying the conventions of life-writing that ensured that particular incidents in individual lives (and the individual lives themselves) were treated as exempla, we find two quite separate popular trends developing. On one hand, anecdotal material was being introduced into written lives in order to make them more entertaining. On the other hand, increasingly sophisticated observation and depiction of human nature were to be found in drama and in "characters." But these developments were isolated from one another and they occasioned no change in attitudes toward life-writing. Anecdotes were regarded as frivolous, ornamental material, while the study of character was still governed by the assumption that human nature demonstrates similarities and unity rather than diversity.

But with the popularising influence of anecdotes and "character" studies as entertainment, the early seventeenth century did mark an advance in life-writing, for the ingredients that were required to push

the genre forward were at least becoming common literary practice. The necessary step that remained to be taken was the amalgamation of these new elements with life-writing. Once character became the principal focus of life-writing and anecdote became recognized as a valuable means to illustrate character, the rapid development of modern biography was assured.

Chapter Four

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the transitional life-writing described in Chapter Three had been superseded by recognizably modern biographies. By about 1640, beginning with the first of Izaak Walton's Lives, a critical change in attitudes can be observed in life-writing, a change that reflects an increasingly sociable and conversational intellectual milieu. The subjects of biography were now more likely to be people celebrated for their intellectual accomplishments than for their rank or office. Personal acquaintanceship with such individuals became fashionable, and biographers began to write from their own intimate knowledge of their subjects. The revelation of individual character replaced the earlier emphasis upon abstract, generalized portraits. Under these conditions, the anecdote became an important vehicle by which Walton and his successors could illustrate a subject's personality.

The principal feature of Walton's Lives, for our purpose, is the emphasis Walton placed on friendship. He was a friend of three of his subjects--Donne, Wotton, and Sanderson--and Hooker and Herbert had many friends in common with their biographer. Herbert, for instance, had been a friend of both Donne and Wotton, while David Novarr believes that it was Donne who introduced Walton to Wotton.¹ Walton was not naturally well-placed to make such acquaintanceships, being a draper in Chancery Lane and far junior in age to his subjects. As Dr. Johnson remarked, "it was wonderful that Walton, who was in a very low

position in life, should have been so familiarly received by so many great men, and that at a time when the ranks of society were kept more separate than they are now.² These friendships clearly did not come about by chance, and in making contact with these men and cultivating his relationship with them Walton demonstrated the same desire for intimate acquaintance with celebrated men as moved Boswell to attach himself to Johnson. The result in both cases was intimate biography, nothing like mere life-writing.

Like Boswell a century later, Walton considered his friendship with his subjects (and with their friends) to be the principal source of his authority for writing the lives. In 1670, in his dedicatory epistle of a revised edition of the Life of Donne to George Morley, Bishop of Winchester, Walton wrote:

If I had been fit for this Undertaking, it would not have been by aquir'd Learning or Study, but by the advantage of forty years of friendship, and thereby the hearing of and discoursing with your Lordship, which hath enabled me to make the relation of these Lives passable in an eloquent and captious age.³

The degree of intimacy between Walton and his subjects is by no means as clear-cut as he suggests in the Lives, but what is important is his emphasis on his personal acquaintance with them.

From the very beginning, in the first (1640) edition of the Life of Donne, the claims of friendship were paramount to Walton. The first

paragraph of that work consists of an apology, acknowledging the superior fitness of Sir Henry Wotton to write Donne's biography:

It was a work worthy his undertaking, and he fit to undertake it; betwixt whom and our Author, there was such a friendship contracted in their youths, that nothing but death could force the separation. And though their bodies were divided, that learned Knights love followed his friends fame beyond the forgetfull grave, which he testified by intreating me (whom he acquainted with his designe) to inquire of certaine particulars that concerned it: Not doubting but my knowledge of the Author, and love to his memory, would make my diligence usefull. I did prepare them in a readinesse to be augmented, and rectified by his powerfull pen, but then death prevented his intentions.⁴

It is characteristic of Walton's approach to biography that he conflates a hymn to friendship and a statement of his own ability to write a particular life. He goes to great pains to show that if he himself did not have direct and intimate knowledge of his subject he was certainly acquainted with those who did. This emphasis on intimate, personal acquaintance with his subject parallels Walton's preference for material of an intimate, personal nature that could only be known by a close friend. Walton's preparation for writing a life consisted mainly of collecting anecdotal reminiscences about his subject from those in a position to have such memories. As Novarr

states, Walton "ever preferred an oral source to a written one; he would rather indulge in discursive discussion than sift records. He preferred anecdote to fact and was more interested in elaborating a portrait by little stories than in chronicling the events of a life."⁵

In writing the Life of Hooker (1665), Walton was by his own account at a great disadvantage, for "I foresee that it must prove to me, and especially at this time of my age, a work of much labour to inquire, consider, research, and determine, what is needful to be known concerning him. For I knew him not in his life . . ."⁶ Walton uses the introduction to establish his credentials as a worthy biographer of Hooker by describing in detail his close friendship with individuals who knew Hooker intimately. For instance, Walton states that he enjoyed "an entire and free friendship" for forty years with William Cranmer and two of his sisters, who "had some affinity, and a most familiar friendship with Mr. Hooker . . ."⁷ The parallel structure of the statement "They had . . . a part of their education with him, as myself, since that time a happy cohabitation with them"⁸ is intended to underscore the closeness of the link that these friends formed between the biographer and his subject. Furthermore, Walton states that he made the most of this opportunity to learn about Hooker long before he conceived of the biography:

having some years before read part of Mr. Hooker's works with great liking and satisfaction, my affection to them made me a diligent inquisitor into many things that concerned him: as namely of his person, his nature, the management of his time,

his wife, his family, and the fortune of him and his. Which inquiry hath given me much advantage in the knowledge of what is now under my consideration, and intended for the satisfaction of my reader.⁹

The testimony of friends provides Walton with the most memorable material in the Lives, and he makes as much of that material as possible. Early in the Life of Hooker, for instance, he describes the relationship between Hooker and two of his pupils, Edwin Sandys and George Cranmer:

Betwixt Mr. Hooker, and these his two pupils, there was a sacred friendship; a friendship made up of religious principles, which increased daily by a similitude of inclinations to the same recreations and studies, a friendship elemented in youth, and in a university, free from all self-ends, which the friendships of youth usually are not: and in this sweet, this blessed, this spiritual amity they went on for many years . . . 10

There is much more in the same vein, and several pages further on we discover that Sandys and Cranmer are the participants, with Hooker, in the most famous anecdote in all of Walton's Lives. Hooker married his landlady's daughter and became a priest in a country parish:

And in this condition he continued about a year, in which time his two pupils, Edwin Sandys and George Cranmer, took a

journey to see their tutor; where they found him with a book in his hand (it was the Odes of Horace), he being then like humble and innocent Abel, tending his small allotment of sheep in a common field, which he told his pupils he was forced to do then, for that his servant was gone home to dine, and assist his wife to do some necessary household business. When his servant returned and released him, then his two pupils attended him unto his house, where their best entertainment was his quiet company, which was presently denied them, for 'Richard was called to rock the cradle' 11

The vivid impression this anecdote creates of Hooker's character lingers long after the other aspects of the Life are forgotten. The entire episode, however, has no basis in fact, beyond what it suggests of Hooker's wife's attitude to his former students.¹² It is entirely the product of Walton's imagination but he labours to create the impression that it is true. Having previously established both the close acquaintance of Sandys and Cranmer with Hooker and his own long connection with Cranmer and his family, Walton forestalls any question that this story, ostensibly gained on such good authority, is not authentic.

Walton intended his anecdotes to reveal character. He was more interested in character than in factual events in a life, and this is why he selects, arranges, and to an extent alters his material in order to render his own conception of his subject's character most

effectively. The story of Hooker's domestic arrangements bolstered Walton's image of "our meek and patient Mr. Hooker."¹³ Similarly, an anecdote in the Life of Herbert reinforces Walton's impression of his subject's personality. On his way to Salisbury to a musical meeting, Herbert encounters a poor man and his horse that has fallen under its load. Herbert helps the man unload and reload the horse and gives him money. When Herbert arrives in Salisbury, his fellow musicians are astonished at his dishevelled appearance and tell him he has degraded himself by his act. Herbert replies that "the thought of what he had done would prove Musicke to him at Midnight," and that he is thankful for the opportunity to help one in distress, ending his explanation with "And now let's tune our instruments."¹⁴ This too is the kind of story that one would learn only from a man's friends, and Walton increases the impression of immediacy by paying particular attention to detail in this and many other anecdotes.

The theme of friendship runs through all of the Lives. Walton's subjects share qualities that he himself valued, especially meekness and quietness, scholarship and retirement, and the ability to make and keep friends is one that Walton ardently attributes to all of his subjects in greater or lesser degree. The language in which Walton describes the friendship between Sandys, Cranmer, and Hooker, and between Wotton and Donne, is echoed in his account of Donne's friendship with Herbert's mother, of Sanderson's with Gilbert Sheldon, and of the affection between Herbert and Nicholas Ferrars.¹⁵ It is not simply friendship that Walton celebrates, however, but the friendship of great

men of intellectual stature. Walton himself was indirectly connected with a group for whom the ideals of friendship and free intellectual discourse were of paramount importance. Robert Sanderson and George Morley, as well as several other of Walton's friends, were also friends of Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, and thus members of the Great Tew circle in the 1630's. Great Tew was Falkland's country house, which he put to use as a meeting place for people who valued, in Irene Coltman's words, "serious and disinterested discussion":

the people especially welcome were those who had new ideas and information, who would speak freely and never repeat what they heard freely expressed there. They came down from London and Oxford to talk to each other. Falkland himself would not know who was at his house till he came in to dinner. As they ate and talked the guests found themselves surrounded by their particular friends, friends they were not likely to meet all together anywhere else.¹⁶

The group was based upon the concepts of amiability and gentle manners of the sort championed by Walton in his Lives. The members of the circle "were distinguished by their politeness, by the openness with which they approached other people, by their lack of exclusiveness and their delicate and discriminating cultivation of personal relationships."¹⁷

They were also distinguished by their intellectual eminence, men of letters mingling with theologians and philosophers. Sidney

Godolphin, John Halés, John Selden, and John Earle were frequently at Great Tew, while many playwrights were at home there because both Falkland and Clarendon, one of his most intimate friends, had belonged as young men to Ben Jonson's circle at the Apollo. Hobbes for a time was a pivotal member, for the group's beliefs fell in with at least part of his opinion that "The sum of virtue is to be sociable with them that will be sociable and formidable to them that will not."¹⁸ For other members of the circle their acquaintance with one another and the conversations they shared helped influence their future work. The character portraits for which Clarendon is celebrated in his History of the Great Rebellion (1702-04) are in several instances the result of close acquaintance with people he knew at Great Tew.¹⁹ Many of John Earle's "characters" in Microcosmographie (1628) are based on the individuals he met there while teaching Falkland Greek. And John Selden's Table Talk (c. 1653) owed much to the conversation around Falkland's dinner table and to the spirit of sociability that made such conversation possible.

It was natural enough that when friendship became a factor in the writing of biography conversation soon followed suit. Walton depended upon conversation with friends for the intimate anecdotes that would illustrate his subjects' personalities. He also used conversation extensively in his narratives in order to reproduce the intimate atmosphere created by friendship. In the Life of Sanderson (1678), the most intimate of the Lives, a considerable amount of text is devoted to conversation, particularly in the anecdote in which Sanderson and

Walton, taking refuge from a rain-storm in an inn, discuss theology over bread, cheese, and ale.²⁰

Another well-known life that relies heavily on conversation is Gilbert Burnet's Rochester (1680),²¹ but here the conversation is much less deftly handled. Burnet was interested in his subject's life only to the extent that Rochester's degenerate habits contrasted with his deathbed conversion to Anglicanism under Burnet's tutelage. Burnet approaches the climactic scene with a letter from Rochester, who writes, "If God be yet pleased to spare me longer in this World, I hope in your Conversation to be exalted to that degree of Piety, that the World may see how much I abhor what I so long loved" ²² The inclusion of this letter shifts the centre of attention from Rochester back to Burnet himself, and the reader is not surprised to find that the last half-dozen pages of Rochester are devoted to the conversion where Burnet uses what he relates as conversation as a medium for his own sermonizing. There is a strong contrast between Burnet's use of conversation and Walton's, for while conversation between subject and biographer demands that the biographer intrude into his work and become a character himself, Walton, like Boswell, never veered from his self-presentation as a lesser man in the presence of a greater. Burnet, on the other hand, has a healthy sense of his own importance, and Rochester seems in their conversations more a foil to set off Burnet's powers of argument than the principal subject at hand.

Donald Stauffer, however, finds Burnet's conversational material effective:

Perhaps the most skillful use of dialogue, during the seventeenth century, for the purpose of tracing mental development, is that employed by Gilbert Burnet in his Life of Rochester . . . which reproduces in dramatic detail the long series of conversations between the Anglican Bishop and the dissipated and dying courier, leading to Rochester's conversion.²³

James Sutherland also admires Burnet's use of the technique which, he says, results in "an intimate and revealing work" for as "the story unfolds, both men grown in stature, and both become more likeable."²⁴ I find, however, that the conversations trace not mental growth or intimacy but the development of a carefully organized and delivered argument. The roles seem reversed to the extent that Rochester's function seems to be to voice his doubts simply in order that Burnet can display his brilliance in refuting them. The dialogue appears to be a rhetorical device imposed on the material rather than the faithful reproduction of conversation. We hear too much of Burnet's voice and not enough of Rochester's.

Of course, Burnet was writing an edifying life, and Rochester's career, other than his conversion, was hardly edifying material. But we chafe at the frustrating sense that a splendid chance was missed: Burnet's subject was a talented poet and a fascinating, colorful, and highly individual personality. Burnet could have given us an enthralling life had he not been driven by a narrow and conventional vision. Had Burnet included more of Rochester's personal life and allowed

enough detail to create a strong impression of his character, the conversations about conversion would have been much more effective and believable. Only one anecdote of any liveliness finds its way into Rochester. Burnet describes how his subject disguised himself as an Italian mountebank and sold physic in the streets for a period of weeks, and the vivacity of the story suggests that Burnet had more of this sort of material and could have related it with considerable success had he chosen to do so.²⁵ The conversations do not fall into this category, and there is evidence elsewhere that Burnet probably had no intention of using conversation or anecdote to create an intimate portrait of Rochester. In the Life of Matthew Hale (1682) Burnet criticizes biographers who write lives:

too jejunely, swelling them up with trifling accounts of the childhood and education, and the domestic or private affairs of those persons of whom they write, in which the world is so little concerned; by these they become so flat, that few care to read them, for certainly those transactions are only fit to be delivered to posterity, that may carry with them some useful piece of knowledge to aftertimes.²⁶

For Burnet, the demands of propriety overcame those of faithful and revealing biography. In the preface to his Memoirs of the Lives and Action of James & William, Dukes of Hamilton & Castleherald (1673), he remarked that, "Every year we get new Memoires of some one Great Person or another. And though there are great Indiscretions committed, in

publishing many Secrets and Papers, not fit for Publyck View: yet this way of Writing takes now more in the World than any sort of History ever did."²⁷ Burnet illustrates the degree to which conversation had become an accepted technique in the writing of biography, because he rejected almost every other biographical advance that his contemporaries had come to acknowledge as necessary and valuable.

By the late seventeenth century, conversation had become an important influence on prose style, and this can only have enhanced the development of biography. As James Sutherland notes, "Restoration prose is not only conversational in tone, but actually is on many occasions a sort of conversation carried on by the writer with some individual, real or imaginary."²⁸ Furthermore, as David Novarr points out in commenting on Walton's pronounced use of conversation in the Life of Sanderson, this practice implies a close relationship between the biographer and his reader: "His candidness here reveals that he is establishing a relationship with his reader which is different from his more modest and more remote relationship in the other lives."²⁹ The reproduction of conversation serves to deepen the sense of intimacy in a life in two ways: it establishes a rapport between biographer and subject, and it implies that the reader is close to the biographer, since he is permitted to "overhear" the conversation of two friends. Conversation is an informal mode of communication, it suggests a face-to-face encounter and the language of conversation is spontaneous and relaxed. The conversational manner, therefore, is suited to personal, anecdotal material that would be inappropriate in formal discourse.

Both the use of actual conversation and a conversational narrative tone permit the biographer to include intimate details of his subject's life and character.

A similar effect is achieved in the use of letters in biography. With letters, the recipient need not be the biographer, as the tone of amiability and intimacy is caught in the letter itself. Walton made liberal use of letters, with the principal goals of illustrating character and of demonstrating the closeness of the bond between the correspondents. Donne's letter to Mrs. Herbert, for instance, serves Walton as testimony of their friendship.³⁰ The function of Rochester's letter to Burnet is to illustrate the degree of their attachment. For some late seventeenth-century biographers, however, the fact that a subject's letters provide a glimpse into his personal life made them inappropriate for use in biography. Bishop Sprat, for example, refused to use letters in his biography of Abraham Cowley (1668). As Cowley's intimate friend and literary executor he was ideally placed to write Cowley's life, but Sprat felt no compulsion to extend his own intimate acquaintance of Cowley to his readers. Sprat's work is more famous for its omissions than for any insight it makes into Cowley's character, for Sprat adamantly states that a man's letters are not appropriate material for biography:

The very same passages, which make Writings of this Nature delightful amongst Friends, will loose all manner of taste, when they come to be read by those that are indifferent. In such Letters the Souls of Men should appear undress'd: And in

that negligent habit, they may be fit to be seen by one or two in a Chamber, but not to go abroad into the Streets.³¹

Sprat here demonstrates that he understands the effect that letters produce in biography even as he rejects the practice on the grounds of impropriety. Bishops Burnet and Sprat are perhaps constrained by their vocation to write edifying rather than intimate lives. But after the middle of the century biography became less characterized by what Pinto calls the "dignified vagueness" adopted by both Sprat and Burnet.³²

An interesting example of a biographer who feels pulled in both directions is Abraham Hill, who wrote an appealing life of Dr. Isaac Barrow (1683).³³ Hill re-echoes the contemporary preoccupation with conversation as a desirable element of biography, and also places considerable value on letters and on the testimony of his subject's friends, saying "I wish they would (as I have adventured) bring in their Symbols toward the History of his Life: there are many who long before me had the advantage of his Conversation, and could offer more judicious observations, and in a style fit to speak of Dr. Barrow."³⁴ At the end of the life, Hill repeats the sentiments of Bishops Burnet and Sprat with regard to personal details in biography. Fortunately, however, Hill overcomes such scruples to the extent that he is able to recount a vivid anecdote:

There are beside other particulars which are gratefull to talk over among friends, not so proper perhaps to appear in a publick Writing. For instance, One morning going out [of] a -

Friend's House before [which] a huge and fierce Mastiff was chained up (as he used to be all day) the Dog flew at him, and he had that present courage to take the Dog by the Throat, and after much struggling bore him to the ground, and held him there till the People could rise and part them, without any other hurt than the streining of his Hands, which he felt some days after.³⁵

Clearly Hill's interest in this incident is stronger than the demands of propriety to which he pays lip-service.

Hill illustrates a trend toward a changed concept of propriety in biography. Sprat and Burnet and, to an extent, Walton, represent the minority of life-writers who, in the late seventeenth century, still conformed to notions of the "dignity" of history mentioned in the first chapter. For most secular biographers of this period, propriety in life-writing was no longer threatened by the inclusion of anecdotes or details of a private, personal nature in biography. These were, on the contrary, actively sought out and enthusiastically recorded with the express purpose of serving the needs of biographers.

A revealing illustration of notions of propriety in late seventeenth-century biography is to be found in the partnership of John Aubrey and Anthony Wood. Two more unlikely collaborators can hardly be imagined, for the amiability and generosity for which Aubrey is celebrated are as apparent in his biographical works as Wood's peevish ill-nature is in his.³⁶ But they shared an interest in individual lives, and it was actually Wood who first pointed Aubrey into the path of

writing biography. Both Aubrey and Wood were antiquarians; in light of the enormous popularity of Aubrey's Brief Lives (c. 1669-96) it is easily forgotten that he completed a great deal of antiquarian research and published his findings in several books before he began the Brief Lives.³⁷ Aubrey, therefore, was deeply motivated by the desire to preserve information for posterity, but it was Wood who channelled Aubrey's energy from the miscellaneous diversions of antiquarian research into the realm of individual lives. Wood was a new kind of biographer, for like his History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford (1674), Athenae Oxoniensis (1691-2) was an antiquarian work, intended to save what was known about the individuals (specifically writers and bishops) connected with Oxford. Wood enlisted Aubrey as his research assistant, asking him to use his extensive circles of acquaintance to gather information from first-hand sources, namely the friends and relations of the subjects.

Their antiquarian cast of mind meant that neither Wood nor Aubrey felt compelled to write exemplary or even particularly flattering lives. They recognized no higher authority than posterity, and combined dedication to tireless research with high standards of clarity and accuracy. Wood, for instance, was especially conscious of the importance of chronology. As Allan Pritchard remarks, "Wood himself had an obsessive concern with chronology, for which posterity has cause to thank him. Through his awareness of the importance of dating he became the first to detect the error of Izaak Walton's ways as a biographer."³⁸ Pritchard adds that although he had corresponded with

Walton and admired him, Wood felt obliged to mention in his own life of Sir Henry Wotton inaccuracies committed by his predecessor.

Wood also went to great lengths to discover information about his subjects. He was not content with the rather random approach favoured by Walton, who was happy to discuss his subjects with those who knew them when the opportunity presented itself without extending his investigations much beyond such pleasant conversations. As Pritchard demonstrates, Wood was systematic and wide-ranging in his research:

he frequently addressed enquiries to the persons who were his subjects or potential subjects, and to the surviving associates, friends, and relatives of persons no longer alive, with requests for information, sometimes under such headings as parentage, time and place of birth, grammar school, university, preferments, employments and places, writings, date and place of death and burial. In addition he used various of his acquaintances as agents in gathering such information.³⁹

Such an approach to his work, like the concept of Athenae Oxoniensis itself, demonstrates that Wood thought of himself as a biographer in a modern sense. Writing lives was for him a vocation and a profession.

Wood also had firm notions about the kind of material that was appropriate to biography, notions that ran counter to those of many who had a personal interest in the individuals chronicled there. Wood's own journal records in detail the repeated complaints about Athenae Oxoniensis after it was published.⁴⁰ For those who were expecting a

commemorative work in which each individual would be carefully presented in the best possible light the result must have been a shock.

Wood, in something of the same manner as Lytton Strachey two and a half centuries later, told the truth as he saw it, which meant stating his own opinion and including factual information of an unflattering nature if it was true to the best of his knowledge and if he thought it was important. Furthermore, Wood did at times use rather a heavy hand in setting down his truth, and one wonders how he could have been surprised at the reactions he provoked. Wood was not a popular man at Oxford, he was too keenly aware of the failings of his colleagues and too willing to tell them so.⁴¹ The journal is testimony to Wood's poor opinion of the people with whom he had dealings and to his realization that he was disliked, but he also appears to be bewildered and hurt by the adverse reaction to his work. The most frequent charge against himself recorded in the journal is that of ill-nature, and finally he was stung to retort (albeit to himself only): "Who is ill natur'd? whether the author who speaks the truth, or a company of idle fellows that sit all day in an alehouse or tavern to pick holes in the coates of Industrious men who labour for the honor of the University."⁴²

It is difficult to decide whose complaints were justified since the sense of injury felt by all parties tends to cloud the issue. But for Wood the question of propriety was simply a matter of whether his work was libellous. As Wood recorded in his journal, Bishop Burnet felt that Wood was dismissable on these grounds:

Certain records belonging to the cathedral Church of

Salisbury are under the custody of several keys, wherof the bishop (Dr. Gilbert Burnet) keeps one. A little before the 2nd vol. of Athenae et Fasti Oxoniensis were published (18 July 1692), a certaine clergyman belonging to the church of Salisbury desired the bishop's key to come to the said records to search for matters for Mr. Wood of Oxford. Whereupon the bishop said 'Why do you trouble yourself about such a little silly fellow who hath an ill designe to libell honest men?' --43

As in so many other things Burnet was mistaken in his opinion that Wood need not be taken seriously as a biographer, but in the end Wood was indeed prosecuted for libel by Henry, second earl of Clarendon, for reporting, as his editor points out, "the freely expressed opinion of the day that at the Restoration Lord Chancellor Hyde had received money from office seekers."⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Clarendon had been dead for twenty years and in exile for eight years before that to avoid impeachment on this and other charges, Wood was expelled from Oxford in 1693, but was reinstated in 1695 by an Act of Pardon.

One must recognize that whatever the rights or wrongs of the case Wood was a man of ideals. He had a strong sense of the value of his work and in writing it had before him his own standards of truth. That his opinions were sometimes tainted with spleen and his style of writing unnecessarily harsh are beside the point. Wood represents a new kind of biographer, one who actively and systematically pursues all avenues of research, for whom all facts have value, and who writes

solely for the benefit of posterity. In the final analysis Wood's vision and his accomplishment have stood the test of time, for as Pritchard states, "The phrase 'according to Wood' occurs with monotonous regularity in biographical studies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English writers; the Athenae Oxoniensis is a major authority for the lives of a very high proportion of the literary figures of the period."⁴⁵

Athenae Oxoniensis, nonetheless, is of interest mainly to scholars; it is not the sort of work one peruses for pleasure. Wood's dour and fretful temperament makes his work rather uneasy reading, whereas Aubrey's joyous and ingenuous nature recommends the Brief Lives to the casual reader as much as to the scholar. Moreover, in one crucial area--the anecdote--Aubrey and Wood had very different opinions. Pritchard, in examining Wood's manuscript sources, found that:

One category of material that Wood not infrequently omitted when it occurred in his sources was the anecdote. Since his main concern was with solidly factual matter, he tended to regard anecdotes as frivolous or trivial, and he was much less inclined than Aubrey to make use of them for the revelation of his subjects' characters and circumstances.⁴⁶

Temperament may have had a fair amount to do with this difference for as Wood himself explains in the preface to Athenae Oxoniensis, he did not have that gift of sociability that leads to intimate knowledge of other men. This work, he says:

had been a great deal more fit for one who pretends to be a virtuoso, and to know all men, and all things that are transacted; Or for one who frequents much society in commonrooms, at clubbs, etc; where the characters of men and their works are frequently discussed; but the author, alas, is so far from frequenting such company and topicks that he is as 'twere dead to the world, and utterly unknown in person to the generality of Scholars in Oxon.⁴⁷

There is a current of self-pity running through this description, for despite Wood's deprecating attitude toward his colleagues it cannot have been pleasant to be barred from the common-room at Merton College "as an observing person, and not fit to be present where matters of moment were discussed."⁴⁸ The knowledge of his own unpopularity must have rankled still more when contemplating his research assistant, for Aubrey was the sort of man who was welcome at any gathering. Being so well-disposed to all he met, Aubrey amassed a huge collection of anecdotes, and it is for these stories and his brilliant ability to recount them that he is still read avidly as Wood is not.

Aubrey's Brief Lives are the epitome of the seventeenth-century trend toward biography based on friendship. Anthony Powell remarks in his affectionate study John Aubrey and his Friends, "Aubrey's own career is bound up with the Lives" in a fundamental way, "because a large number of the persons mentioned were so well known to him that their combined portraits show the pattern of his days, and the orientation of the brilliant society through which he moved . . ."⁴⁹ Unlike Wood,

Aubrey had no plan in his choice of subjects, writing instead about his friends and acquaintances simply because they were known to him and because he recognized that he was thus well-placed to observe and record their lives and personalities. Aubrey's technique of compiling the lives is apparent from the manuscript notes of the Brief Lives. He began with what he knew personally of his subject, adding to his notes as he collected further information.⁵⁰ The manner in which Aubrey set down the details of each portrait, jotting down odd facts and anecdotes as they occurred to him, following the dictates of his own memory and association of ideas, suggests a method, or lack of method, that directly reflects the eccentric course of his social life.

Aubrey's unworldliness, his eclectic interests, and his utter lack of ambition or pretence must have gone a long way to engender the trust and affection that made him the recipient of so much intimate and personal information, but he also loved conversation. He was gregarious and enjoyed intellectual discourse on almost any topic. As he remarked in notes he made of his own life, Aubrey felt his principal role in life, other than being an antiquarian, was to act as a kind of whetstone against which other people could hone their ideas and wits, and thus improve their work.⁵¹ Aubrey would have been at home in the Great Tew circle, and he is indeed linked to that group through what was (next to his relationship to Wood) the strongest and most significant friendship of his life, with Thomas Hobbes.

The "Life of Hobbes" in Brief Lives is by far the longest, running to forty pages, and the completed work was considered by Aubrey to be

his most important biography. The life as it appears in Brief Lives is filled with details and anecdotes, ranging over all possible aspects of Hobbes' intellectual and personal life. The sharpness of Aubrey's observations combined with his ability to capture detail in a succinct and vivid phrase create a complex, intimate, and affectionate portrait of Hobbes. The anecdotes in just this one life are far too numerous to be recounted in full, but one remembers striking images such as that of Hobbes as a boy frequenting bookshops where he would "lye gaping on Mappes,"⁵² and the impression of intense mental activity conveyed in the sentence "He walked much and contemplated, and he had in the head of his staffe a pen and inke-horn, carried always a Note-book in his pocket, and as soon as a notion darted, he presently entred it into his Bookes or els he should perhaps have lost it."⁵³ One ponders the knowledge that Hobbes:

had alwayes bookes of prick-song lyeing on his table: which at night, when he was abed, and the doores made fast, and was sure nobody heard him, he sang aloud (not that he had a very good voice) but for his health's Sake: he did beleve it did his Lunges good and conduced much to prolong his Life.⁵⁴

Equally vivid is Aubrey's remark that "In his old age he was very bald (which claymed a veneration) yet within dore, he used to study, and sitt bare-headed, and sayd he never tooke cold in his head, but that the greatest trouble was to keepe-off the flies from pitching on the baldnes."⁵⁵ The refreshingly intimate nature of these anecdotes is

strong proof of the close and affectionate relationship between the biographer and his subject

In the end, although he recognized his own fitness for writing Hobbes's life by virtue of his long friendship, Aubrey lacked confidence in his own writing ability, anxiously asking Dr. Richard Blackbourne for advice, and especially "Is my English well enough?"⁵⁶ Blackbourne finally produced the life himself in Latin, and Aubrey was left with the feeling that both Hobbes and himself had been ill-used in the process. Aubrey displayed a strongly individual sense of what was required in writing biography when provoked by the often dictatorial pronouncements of his advisors.⁵⁷ He was scornful of the opinion, held by Dryden and Judge Vaughn, that details such as Hobbes's having been a page should be omitted, saying "I never yet knew a witt (unless he were a piece of an Antiquary) write a proper Epitaph, but leave the reader ignorant, what country-man, etc. Only tickles his Eares with Elogies."⁵⁸ Indeed, in sending his collections to Wood for use in Athenae Oxoniensis, Aubrey gave Wood leave to censor them as he wished but had a well-defined idea of what might best be excluded. He has written, he says, nothing but "the naked and plain trueth:"

which is here exposed so bare that the very pudenda are not hid, and affords many passages that would raise a Blush in a young Virgin's cheek. So that after your perusall I must desire you to ~~make~~ a Castration (as Raderus to Martial) and to sowe-on some Figge-Leaves--i.e. to be my Index expurgatorius.⁵⁹

Aubrey was willing to bow to the demands of commonplace restrictions against lewdness but would be dictated to no further. With true antiquarian integrity of purpose he favoured the principal claims of posterity over any considerations of propriety, and preferred that his work not be published in his lifetime rather than have it suffer amputation, ending his letter with the remark, "Now these Arcana are not fitt to lett flie abroad, till about 30 yeares hence; for the author and the Persons (like Medlars) ought first to be rotten. But in whose hands must they be deposited in the meantime?"⁶⁰ Small wonder, then, that Aubrey never forgave Wood for cutting out several manuscript pages of the Brief Lives, fearing prosecution for libellous material in Athenae Oxoniensis that he had received from Aubrey

Despite the fact that Wood completed and published his works while Aubrey's remained in fragmentary manuscript form, Aubrey was by far the better biographer. Wood was scrupulous with dates and facts but he lacked Aubrey's over-riding fascination with personality. Wood distrusted anecdotes and, like his predecessors, felt they did not belong in serious biography. But for Aubrey anecdotes were the very essence of biography. He loved them because they encapsulated the eccentricities of human behaviour. All of his subjects are individuals, drawn with a wealth of distinguishing detail.

Critical opinion about Aubrey is mixed. He has fervent supporters who cite the qualities outlined here, but he also draws criticism, mainly as a result of never having completed a biographical work. It is not difficult to come across evidence in Brief Lives to support

charges of credulity, lack of method, gossip-mongering, and indecency. But we have no way of knowing how he might have molded his material into finished biography. It is unlikely, given his development as a biographer and his increasing clarification of his task over the years in which he was associated with Wood, that Aubrey would have jeopardized the ultimate success of his biographies through such mistakes in judgement. One must remember that the standards of scholarship in the antiquarian works that were published in his lifetime earned Aubrey high praise. The popular characterization of him as clumsy and unreliable is inaccurate to say the least. But speculation about the quality of hypothetical works is useless, and fortunately unnecessary since the biographical accomplishments of Roger North demonstrate even more forcibly than Aubrey's that modern biography was practised in the late seventeenth century.

North is undeservedly less well-known than Aubrey, for he combined Aubrey's gifts of intimate acquaintance with his subjects, observation and insight, characterizing detail, and impartial treatment with high literary skill. North supplied those elements of structure and polished prose that the Brief Lives lack, and in his Lives of the Norths (c. 1690-1728) and the treatise on biography that constitutes its General Preface, he refers to and sums up the changes that had taken place over the course of the seventeenth century. As Peter Millard observes, "It is as if John Aubrey had worked out a consistent theory of what biography should be and then sat down and actually completed some examples."⁶¹ Thus even more than Aubrey, North encapsulates the

accumulated theory and practice of biography of the seventeenth century, writing not only three full-length lives of his brothers but also describing in detail his views on the nature and purpose of biography.

North based his opinions on the old premise that biography should be morally exemplary, but combined with this traditional view were a number of most untraditional opinions, that reflect the gains enjoyed by biography in the latter part of the century. North was adamant about the need for private rather than public lives. Unlike Dryden, who celebrated Plutarch for the personal details in the Parallel Lives (but balked at Aubrey's use of such material in the "Life of Hobbes"), North criticizes Plutarch's Lives for not going far enough, saying "if they had given us more of the retired manners of the heroes, it had been as well."⁶² Similarly, North praises Walton's Lives, "in all which we find the man at home, as well as abroad."⁶³ And he firmly declares that his own works are private biography, even though his brothers were substantial public figures.⁶⁴ North says that he will include no more of "foreign affairs or national concerns" than is necessary to account for how his subjects passed their time, "And if I am asked why not, since ears itch after that sort of news, I answer that it is not my talent."⁶⁵ He himself was not involved, and what he knows personally of his brothers falls into other areas of life:

And most of the conversation we had was familiar and easy, rather about arts and sciences than court bribes, and at times when we were retired, and cared not for repetitions of

such uneasy matters, oh! how pleasant and agreeable were those days, when in the midst of storms we lay safe and fearless in retired harbour, and never so well pleased as when we were escaped from the billows, if I may term crowds such.⁶⁶

For North, as for so many of his contemporaries, the love of amiability and good fellowship, retirement and conversation provided the stimulus to writing biography.

These values are the basis of North's biographical theory. He insists on the idea that not everyone is qualified to write biography. Personal acquaintance with the subject is of paramount importance, for "how should Plutarch or anyone gather the privacies of so many men remote in time and place from him but from loose fame, which is but a poor instruction?"⁶⁷ The author's "peculiar authority," says North, belongs to those whose

course of life was such as rendered them capable of the undertaking, and that is by having been in almost continual conversation or converse with the subjects, and so attached to the very persons, that little of importance in their whole lives could escape their notice. Such friendships often happen between persons who live almost at bed and board together, and communicate to each other their most recondite thoughts and designs, and profit each other by mutual

counsel. Such as these are so far qualified to be authors of lives.⁶⁸

North by his own criteria was admirably placed to write the lives of his brothers, for shared family history and childhood were combined with a continued closeness that prompted North to refer to them as his friends as much as his brothers. He was also aware of the common objection that such bonds necessarily lead the biographer into excessive praise of his subject. North himself condemns Burnet's lives for exactly this fault, saying, "the design may be apparently invective, or panegyric, such as Burnet's lives of the Lord Rochester and Judge Hale, the persons of whom none ever knew, but must also know that those written lives of them are mere froth, whipped up to serve a turn."⁶⁹ North is careful to specify that his own work "aims at, the life of a person known to some yet living, and done by a close acquaintance and frequent companion, who hath neither inclination nor temptation to court the public or to flatter the private."⁷⁰ The writing of lives "purely for favour to certain theses, opinions, or sects"⁷¹ enrages him and he is very precise in his allowance of the judgements a biographer is entitled to make: "he should not give out his political maxims, as if he were a legislator but with a sort of deference, as becomes well-bred conversation, to be decently and with respect carried on betwixt him and his reader."⁷² North was the first to make explicit the simple rule that 'low history,' consisting in the main of the knowledge that one man gains of another in conversation, is best recounted in a conversational style. He remarks in his introduction to the Lives of

the Norths that "considering that here is little or nothing of the public or states matters which may ever require a nice retrospection, I chose to proceed in a style of familiar conversation."⁷³

North's vision of the biographer's task is ideally suited to the use of anecdote, and he was unusually successful in applying his own dicta to his work, for the Lives of the Norths are filled with anecdotes. More importantly, like Aubrey, North had the ability not simply to tell an anecdote well, but to use anecdote to illustrate character. Like Walton, North carefully revised his stories until he had achieved the greatest dramatic effect, but his professional standards would not allow him to stretch or alter the truth as Walton did.

As Peter Millard notes, the Life of Dr. John North contains more anecdotal material than the other two lives, and this "is probably due to the fact that North had far less material at his disposal in the case of John North and had to rely on his memory more--it is the little stories that stick in the mind"⁷⁴ A few examples reveal the skill with which North handled his anecdotes. Like Aubrey, North was fascinated by eccentricities of human behaviour; he did not hesitate, for instance, to describe at length John North's hobby of keeping spiders in glass jars in his study.⁷⁵ For North, this was a pastime that marked his brother off from other men and offered an insight into his character. He also gives two accounts that illustrate his brother's timidity. The incidents took place at Cambridge, where, says North:

One would have expected that a youth at the university, no mean scholar, should have got the better of being afraid of

the dark; but it was not so with him, for when he was abed, if alone, he durst not trust his countenance above the clothes. For some time he lay with his tutor, who once coming home found the scholar abed, with only his crown visible. The tutor (indiscreetly enough) pulled him by the hair, whereupon the scholar sank down, and the tutor followed, and at last with a great outcry, the scholar sprang up, expecting to see an enorme (sic) spectre. This made a jest, but not much to the tutor's credit.⁷⁶

North immediately follows this story with another, in which John North, lying in bed one moonlit night, thinks he sees someone in a white sheet, standing in his room.

He suryeyed it with all his opticks, and was confirmed it was a spirit (as they call it), and resolved with himself, if he could, to find out what it came for. He got out of his bed, and being still of the same opinion, went nearer and nearer, till he might touch it, and then reaching out his hand, he perceived it was only his Towel hung against the wall, with the moon shining full upon it, and then he went to bed and slept well.⁷⁷

The obvious care with which North relates this story, prolonging the tension until the moment of discovery, does not mean that he was merely using it as an entertaining interlude. "I mention not these passages," he says a few lines farther on, "as of themselves worth

remembering, but to show that, as in the case of our doctor, a vigorous and active spirit may be quartered in a slight and feeble machine of flesh."⁷⁸ North goes on to say that this propensity to fears had a grave effect on his brother's character, to the extent that they hastened his death. These anecdotes are among the first with which North builds a composite portrait of a shy and introspective man, plagued by hypochondria and melancholia. In another example, much later in the life, North illustrates his brother's fear of blindness:

The doctor once travelled with his best friend and some other company, and his friend thought fit to take a merry opportunity to make him better conceited of himself. 'Mr North,' said he, 'is not that a very fine windmill?' (when none was in sight). The doctor looked about, and seeing none, 'I protest and as I am a living man,' said he, 'I verily believe I shall now soon be quite blind, for I cannot discern so much as that windmill,' at which his friend and the company made a stout laugh upon him.⁷⁹

There is no denying that this, like the others, is an amusing story, but North never sacrifices sensitive insight to amusement. We never lose sight of the tormented man he describes, and the stories do not undermine the respect and admiration due to the Master of Trinity College, and a clergyman and philosopher. North anticipates criticism on this point, and in so doing demonstrates his understanding of complex personality:

He was, in a word, the most intense and passionate thinker that ever lived and was sane. I may here be told that if I think by these descriptions to exhibit the portrait of a great man I am but of the way, for what is less consistent with such a character than such timidities? I answer that I am not giving the portrait of a perfect man, and whoever pretends so to do is a foul flatterer. And yet the character I give is not a small one because of a single infirmity, natural and unavoidable.⁸⁰

It would be difficult to identify an aspect of the Lives of the Norths that falls short of modern ideals of biography. With Roger North the developments in biographical writing are gathered together and pursued to their logical conclusion. In his hands, the elements of intimate acquaintance, friendship, private lives, domestic detail, conversation, and a conversational style are revealed to be interdependent, closely-related strategies, in the service of the principal concern of the biographer--the personality of his subject. It fell to North to illustrate that the sum of these techniques, the single most significant contribution of the seventeenth century to biography, is the use of anecdote to reveal character.

Chapter Five

Modern biography depends first and foremost upon the belief that individual character is the biographer's subject. Character became the biographer's central consideration with the emergence of the anecdote as a means of revealing personality in life-writing. This change was caused by the development of certain ideals of intellectual life in reaction against the increasing constraints upon intellectual and artistic expression produced by the pressure of political and religious dissension.

As we have seen, the link between biographers from Walton to Aubrey and North is a biographical purpose based firmly upon values of friendship and intimacy and a shared vision of life removed from the hazards of the public sphere. These biographers speak repeatedly of the simpler, more enduring rewards to be gained from living in retirement, with a few intimate friends, in an atmosphere of tolerance and good fellowship, where one might say and write what one thought without fear of the consequences. It is not difficult to perceive the reasons that these ideals gained increasing currency in England as the seventeenth century progressed. As the religious and political climate became ever more passionate, intolerant, and eventually, dangerous, those scholars and men of letters who forbore dogmatism and shunned public controversy were forced to seek respite in private life.

This phenomenon is illustrated clearly in the Essais (1580) of Montaigne, whose particular form of scepticism led him to remove

himself as far as possible from the religious struggles precipitated by the Reformation. For Montaigne, dogmatism was pointless because human judgement is hopelessly flawed and subject to the influence of ever-changing circumstances and perceptions.¹ Since human judgement is so unreliable, one had best not put one's trust in abstract principles but live instead to the best of one's ability according to the laws and customs of one's society. And, as Montaigne states in one of his essays, the best and worthiest social institution is that of friendship:

There is nothing for which nature seems to have given us such a bent as for society. And Aristotle says that good law-givers have paid more attention to friendship than to justice. For, generally speaking, all those relationships that are created and fostered by pleasure and profit, by public or private interest, are so much the less fine and noble, and so much the less friendships, in so far as they mix some cause, or aim, or advantage with friendship, other than friendship itself.²

Another essay is devoted to the art of conversation, in which Montaigne says that he enjoys conversation more than anything else in life but that the circumstances must be appropriate. "I like to dispute and discuss," he says, "but in a small company only and for my pleasure":³ "In good company, I like expression to be bold, and men to say what they think . . . I like strong and manly acquaintances and

society, a friendship that prides itself on the sharpness and vigour of its dealings".⁴

Montaigne was disgusted by dogmatism and the strife it engenders. He enjoyed arguing intellectual positions but felt that such discussions were suitable only in enclosed, intimate circles of friends and not in the public domain. Furthermore, since one could not, in Montaigne's view, rely on a personal conviction of truth, principles such as friendship and tolerance, conversation and retirement from the world became of paramount importance. Taken together, Montaigne's essays on friendship and on the art of conversation suggest that in the absence of political stability or religious certainty one could find security and purpose only in the strength of intimate friendships and the conventions of sociability.

Perhaps the earliest English expression of these values is to be found in the career of Ben Jonson, who had ample experience of reprisals, including imprisonment, for overstepping the limits of the politically acceptable in his work. Jonson celebrates the pleasures of conversation in private and relaxed circumstances in his poem "Inviting a Friend to Supper." He suggests that his servant "Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus, / Livy, or some better book to us, / Of which we'll speak our minds, amidst our meat:"

And we will have no Poley or Parrot by;

Nor shall our cups make any guilty men,

But at our parting we will be as when

We innocently met. No simple word

That shall be uttered at our mirthful board
Shall make us sad next morning, or afright
The liberty that we'll enjoy tonight.⁵

It can hardly be coincidence, that William Drummond's account of Jonson's table talk, recorded during Jonson's visit to Scotland in 1619, is a racy and fascinating collection of anecdotes and devastating pronouncements upon the work and character of his fellow writers.⁶ Jonson also revealed a considerable amount of his own life and work during these conversations, and the whole of Drummond's account presents superb material, in intimate and revealing factual detail, for a potential biographer. This is by no means biography, nor even gathered with any biographical purpose, but Drummond's record of Jonson's conversation is as significant as Jonson's own vision of a life among intimate friends, removed from the conflicts of the public arena.

Several years later the habitués of Great Tew congregated for exactly these reasons, escaping however briefly the rapidly worsening climate of political and religious division. Thomas Hobbes at least felt that the free expression of doubts, even in the private and retired gatherings at Great Tew, was largely responsible for the Civil War. Be that as it may, the elevation of personal attachments above polemics helped liberate life-writing from didacticism and led biographers to turn their attention to the revelation of individual character. Similarly, this development was very probably a significant factor in the increasing use of anecdotes illustrating personality,

such, anecdotes being the products of intimate acquaintance. Withdrawn by choice from the public life of his community, a man was to be judged solely upon his character, and it would be this, rather than any role he might have played or any theme or theory he might be used to illustrate, that the biographer would take as his subject.

When this relationship between anecdote and character is overlooked, two mistaken judgements follow. The first is that the seventeenth century becomes a period of "pre-biography," or preparation for biography. The second is that various related developments are pressed into service to explain the appearance of modern biography early in the next century. These include Renaissance individualism, autobiography, and the new science as exemplified by the Royal Society, explanations that are vague and inconclusive, and of only indirect or partial relevance.

It is true that modern biography would never have developed without the influence of the individualism that is ascribed to Renaissance humanism.⁷ But this was such a fundamental and wide-ranging concept that its influence can be discerned in almost every intellectual and artistic development since the Renaissance, and thus its importance to biography does not leave us much farther ahead. Furthermore, the force of the original humanist movement was largely spent long before the seventeenth century in England, and Renaissance individualism cannot have been an agent for any specific change in the mid-seventeenth century.

The growth of autobiography in the seventeenth century is

sometimes considered a preliminary to the development of biography. Margaret Bottrall, for instance, argues that seventeenth-century autobiography was characterized by introspection and self-revelation and therefore promoted greater psychological depth in other literary forms, including biography.⁸ The self-analysis in both the religious and secular strains of autobiography common during this period, however, is of a limited and particular kind, bearing little resemblance to sophisticated psychoanalytical techniques found in twentieth-century autobiography. Because the characteristics of religious and secular autobiography were quite different during this period, each type must be considered separately.

Puritan autobiography was a widely-practised form in the seventeenth century because a large part of community worship took the form of individual testimony to God's grace in daily life. Considerable importance, therefore, was placed upon personal experience, and the anti-hierarchical element in Puritanism is sometimes seen as the origin of the view that any person's life was worth recording. On the other hand, Puritan autobiography was not meant to reveal character, other than in the most elementary terms of good and evil. The form was highly codified, and the Biblical themes, imagery, and language that were entrenched in the Puritan way of life provided convenient and familiar formulae for any who might have difficulty describing or interpreting personal experience. Adherence to these models ensured that Puritan lives were almost as homogeneous as saints' lives. Given that Puritan autobiography was a vehicle for the advancement of a cause

and that it emphasized the universality of human character and experience, its contribution to biography cannot have been significant.

Secular autobiographers, however, show some similarities to biographers in this period, focussing their attention on their friends and family rather than on themselves. Seventeenth-century secular autobiographies are characterized by character sketches of the author's acquaintances that are much more ably handled than are attempts at psychological self-portrayal, which as yet still relied heavily upon the conventions of traditional roles. There were no models to follow in writing secular autobiography, and these works display a wide variety of form, content, and style. It would appear, therefore, that biography influenced autobiography, which tended to take a paradoxically biographical form. There is little difference between autobiographies that consist in large part of the author's personal impressions of famous men and women, and the biographies, such as those by Walton and North, that demonstrate a strong autobiographical element in the biographer's strong presence in his narrative. In this sense alone late seventeenth-century autobiography can be seen as developing in a course parallel to that of biography.

A third factor that is often identified as an influence on seventeenth-century life-writing is the growth of scientific empiricism, particularly as represented by the Royal Society. Supporters of this explanation perceive a relationship between late seventeenth-century biographers' attention to detail and the Royal Society's interest in any and all observable phenomena. Peter Millard and James Clifford,

for example, are convinced that Roger North's biographical attitudes are in considerable measure due to his activities in the Royal Society.⁹ Similar comments are often made about John Aubrey.¹⁰

It is erroneous, however, to state that modern science "began" in the seventeenth century. The Fellows of the Royal Society misunderstood science to be the collection of everything that could be known about anything, which would then be written up as "histories" of natural phenomena. This was antiquarianism rather than science. The aims of the Royal Society, furthermore, were based upon Bacon's directives for the formulation of systems of universal laws. Knowledge of individual human beings, therefore, would be considered important only to the extent that it could be used to construct a theory of human nature. Such an approach to individual lives, and to specific events in those lives, is anti-biographical, and a link between the Royal Society and anecdotal biography, other than the habit of observation that both require, is questionable at best.

In one sense, however, the Royal Society may have made an important, though indirect, contribution to biography. As the new science was dedicated to the observation and description of facts about the world, it required an economical mode of expression in which the thing described should be clearly apparent. Again taking their cue from Bacon, the Fellows of the Royal Society adopted as part of their program the development of a plain, direct prose style through which scientific knowledge could be communicated as lucidly as possible. It is impossible to assess the degree to which this recommendation

influenced prose throughout late seventeenth-century society but the example of Thomas Sprat suggests that it did have at least a limited immediate effect. Sprat's History of the Royal Society (1667) contains a strongly worded statement in favour of abolishing the rhetorical, ornamented style that had previously dominated all philosophical, (including scientific and historical) writing. The principal complaints were that figurative language obscures rather than illuminates, and that eloquence encourages emotion and irrationality by appealing to the imagination rather than to reason. Sprat's style in this work measures up to his own standards. R.F. Jones observes that this "linguistic platform . . . exerted a powerful influence on the style of its members even in writings other than the scientific. . . ." ¹¹ Certainly this influence is as apparent in the biographical works of Sprat and Burnet (who was also a member) as it is in those of Aubrey and North.

This plain prose style is particularly significant to the use of anecdote in biography, for it is virtually impossible to relate an anecdote in a highly-embellished, figurative style. The concrete and immediate nature of anecdote demands a correspondingly straightforward and direct manner of delivery, precisely that endorsed by the Royal Society. The plain style in biography does not, of course, demand the use of anecdote, and there is no reason that Sprat and Burnet should have changed their views on using anecdotes and other personal details even while adopting a more direct style. But for writers such as Aubrey and North the new prose style exactly suited the material they

considered appropriate and necessary to biography. The Royal Society's vigorous championship of the new prose was simply another development parallel to that of biography, reflecting rather than promoting similar fundamental shifts in attitude.

These popular explanations for the development of biography are not so much incorrect as not quite to the point in various ways. They perhaps demonstrate the change to a more favourable climate for biography but they do not explain the actual appearance of the genre. They do not account for the elevation of individual character to the central place in life-writing nor for the emergence of the anecdote to illustrate character.

Given its prominent place in late seventeenth-century biography, it might seem incredible that the anecdote has been entirely ignored as a critical element in the assessment of the genre. This omission has ensured that the catalytic role played by seventeenth-century ideals of friendship and conversation in the birth of biography has been overlooked. There are, however, good reasons for this misrepresentation of the development of biography, reasons that can be found in the fortunes of biography and of the anecdote in the eighteenth century. For evidence of the temporary eclipse of the anecdote in biography during the eighteenth century one need look no further than Samuel Johnson, whose ambivalence toward the anecdote is typical of his day.

Walter Raleigh cites an instance in which Johnson expressed his reservations about anecdote:

To Lord Shelburne, who once asked him to repeat a story for

the benefit of some who had not heard it, he replied, "Indeed, my lord, I will not. I told the circumstances first for my own amusement, but I will not be dragged in as a story-teller to a company." . . . "A real story," he said once, "is a specimen of human manners, and derives its sole value from its truth." Even its truth would not justify the recital unless it were a useful truth, apposite to the discourse, or fit for the need of the moment.¹²

Johnson objected to the fact that in his day using anecdote was primarily a conversational skill, in which wit rather than illumination was the goal.

The first definition of "anecdote" in the Oxford English Dictionary is "secret, private, or hitherto unpublished narratives or details of history." This was the only definition that Johnson gave in the 1753 edition of his Dictionary, and clearly he disapproved of this aspect of the anecdote. As James Sutherland points out, however, in the 1773 edition Johnson felt it necessary to add another meaning: "It is now used, after the French, for a biographical incident, a minute passing of private life."¹³ The difference between these two definitions is extremely important, as the word was used to describe both material that was designated secret and private and, presumably, best left that way, and also material that was considered appropriate to biography. The contradiction thus inherent in the word itself accounts for the apparent contradiction between Johnson's denunciation of the anecdote to Lord Shelburne and the fact that he not only encouraged

Boswell to use anecdotes in biography but used them himself in the Lives of the Poets. The second of Johnson's definitions of anecdote is explicitly concerned with the writing of biography whereas the first is not, but he never used the word "anecdote" in his various discussions of biography. The phrase "a minute passing of private life," however, immediately brings to mind the "minute details of daily life" that Johnson states it is the "business of the biographer" to record.¹⁴ In emphasizing the importance of the "minute particular" Johnson is advocating the use of anecdote in a specifically biographical context, but disassociates himself from the irresponsible uses of anecdote as gossip and wit.

The appearance of confusion in Johnson's view of the anecdote is paralleled in his opinions about biography itself. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bacon had remarked in The Advancement of Learning (1605), "For Lives, I find it strange, when I think of it, that these our times have so little esteemed their own virtues, as that the commemoration and writing of the lives of those who adorned our age should be no more frequent."¹⁵ A century and a half later Johnson echoed Bacon's sentiment, complaining of "the penury of English biography,"¹⁶ even though he also commented on and praised individual seventeenth-century lives. It would seem from the similarity between Johnson's and Bacon's statements that there had not been any development in biography in the intervening period, and post-eighteenth-century writers on the subject of biography have adopted as fact Johnson's implication that biography was a poor thing until his day. Rather than

recognizing and investigating Johnson's anomalous opinion, these critics credit him and Boswell with the invention of the modern genre as a literary form.

This notion is so pervasive that it would be impossible to cite each instance in which it is stated in modern biographical criticism, but it is important to note that even the more perceptive critics of seventeenth-century biography usually take this view. Donald Stauffer, for example, believes that biography did not become separate from history ~~until~~ the eighteenth century.¹⁷ James Clifford states that until 1750 (that is, until the publication of Johnson's biographical views in Rambler, No. 60), no one was concerned with the ethical question of how much intimate, personal material a biographer should use.¹⁸ Paul Kendall states directly that modern biography began with Boswell's Johnson,¹⁹ Richard Altick affirms that "until Boswell changed everything" no one wrote "modern biographical portraiture,"²⁰ and Donald Greene observes that "Johnson was, we know, the pioneer theorist as well as a pioneer practitioner of biography."²¹ These opinions are so entrenched that, as Kendall states, "Each year sees the appearance of more books and articles about Johnson and Boswell than about all the rest of our biographical heritage."²² Other periods and figures, especially those preceding the seventeenth century, are obscured by the sheer weight of material devoted to Johnson and Boswell.

Those critics who do analyse the seventeenth century tend to consider the period as lacking in mature, sophisticated biography. Paul Kendall's opinion of the seventeenth century, for instance, is that

"the biographical landscape is bizarre and busy rather than richly productive," and only the "latter part of the eighteenth century achieves what the previous hundred and fifty years had been groping toward."²³ Robert Gittings summarizes the history of the genre in his study The Nature of Biography (1978) and although he praises Walton, Aubrey, and North, he uses the seventeenth century as background preparation for his discussion of Johnson and Boswell: Altick, in his chapter entitled "Literary Biography Before its Time," includes the entire period from the earliest examples of English life-writing up to the mid-eighteenth century, and clearly indicates that he believes biography in general, rather than just the sub-genre of literary biography, was sadly deficient until the late eighteenth century.

One reason that critics focus their attention on Johnson and Boswell is the immense popularity of Johnson in his own day. He wrote prolifically and well, and he wrote for a wide audience to whom he was well-known. Frank Brady makes this point in the introduction to his edition of Boswell's Johnson:

The only period in English literature since the Renaissance to be named after a writer is the Age of Johnson. This label is a misnomer, since no period shows more divergent literary trends; nor is Johnson clearly the greatest writer of his time as Shakespeare and Milton are of theirs. But the name attests to the fascination Johnson exerted over his contemporaries. As he himself remarked to Boswell, "I believe there is hardly a day in which there is not something about

me in the newspapers."²⁴

Johnson had a gift for holding strong opinions about almost everything, and for setting them down in bold terms. On an astounding number of topics, including biographical theory, one finds memorable aphorisms stated in his peerless classical prose, that give the impression that further discussion would be superfluous. Thus it is hardly surprising that Johnson's dicta on biography, his own literary lives, and Boswell's Johnson should gain such currency and authority as to eclipse what had gone before. But Johnson's words in these pronouncements often bear a strong resemblance to those of seventeenth-century biographers and writers on biography. Even those opinions about biography that are generally thought to have originated with Johnson have seventeenth-century antecedents.

In the first place, Johnson is often credited with initiating the isolation of biography as a separate genre, to be distinguished from history. Johnson made his case for biography over history in Rambler, No. 60 (1750). "The general and rapid narratives of history," he said, ". . . afford few lessons applicable to private life . . . which never descend below the consultation of senates, the motions of armies, and the schemes of conspirators." By the same token, "no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition."²⁵ But Bacon voiced this opinion in strikingly similar terms at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Of the

three kinds of history Bacon identifies--chronicles, lives, and narratives--chronicles, he says, "share the greatest esteem and reputation, but lives excel in advantage and use, as relations do in truth and sincerity:"

For chronicles represent only grand public actions, and external shows and appearances to the people, and drop the small passages and motions of men and things . . . whereas lives, if wrote with great care and judgement, proposing to represent a person, in whom actions both great and small, public and private, are blended together, must of necessity give a more genuine, native, and lively representation, and such as is fitter for imitation.²⁶

Secondly, Johnson's belief that anyone's life was worth recording, not simply that of an exceptional person, was also held by John North. Johnson stated that "I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not prove useful."²⁷ North also advocated the writing of "histories of men, and things of common condition," for:

There is no subdivision of mankind, be it so low as soldiers, pedlars, gypsies, and tinkers, but their actions and behaviour, well related, would be a capital learning to men of the same condition and not amiss to those of a better, nay of the best, education, and highest employment.²⁸

The blending together of "actions great and small, public and private," in Bacon's words, is another cornerstone of biography that we usually associate with Johnson, who insists that "the business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life."²⁹

Bacon, however, also directed biographers to examine the private lives of their subjects, because "'a man's nature is best perceived in privateness, for there is no affection [affectation].'"³⁰ Roger North agreed, saying "the private state, even of a great man, is what I demand in his history, and by no means is to be omitted."³¹

Johnson's famous statement that "more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree and ended with his funeral" does not convey any particularly new idea, though the image is striking.³² His belief that knowledge of a man's domestic life yields a truer picture than perusal of his "publycke papers" was held by Walton, Aubrey, Wood, and North, among others. Similarly, Johnson was not the first to recognize that the fruits of such intimate acquaintance are precious because "the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition."³³ Aubrey, for example, was well aware of the importance of his collection of this type of material, remarking in the Brief Lives, "How these curiosities would be quite forgott, did not such idle fellows as I am

putte them downe."³⁴ Finally, Johnson warned against the temptation to panegyric that a biographer may feel in writing the life of a friend:

There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyrick, and not to be known from one another, but by extrinsick and casual circumstances.³⁵

We have seen how violently opposed both North and Wood were to panegyric in biography. John Toland, a contemporary, was also careful to state that his Life of John Milton (1698) would not suffer this defect: "For it is commonly seen, that historians are suspected rather to make their hero what they would have him be, than such as he really was . . . but I am neither writing a satyr, nor a panegyric upon Milton, but publishing the true history of his actions, works, and opinions."³⁶

Just as for each of Johnson's main theoretical statements about biography we find corresponding sentiments in seventeenth-century works, many of the features of biography as practised by Boswell are also less original than is generally thought. Boswell is seen by modern critics as the pre-eminent practitioner of biography, even though the critics themselves often compare individual late seventeenth-century biographers favourably with Boswell. Waldo Dunn, for instance, perceives a strong correspondence between the personalities of Boswell and John Aubrey. He bases his assessment of

Boswell's superior genius on the fact that Boswell completed his great biographical work while Aubrey was unable to do so.³⁷ Peter Millard repeatedly remarks upon the parallels between North's biographies and Boswell's, making comments such as:

North arrived at a concept of life-writing that was revolutionary in its implications and that anticipated the vivid, full, and personal biography that developed later in the century and culminated in our greatest work in that genre, Boswell's Life of Johnson.³⁸

In a four-page section of description of Roger North's biographies, Donald Stauffer cites no less than nine significant points of close resemblance to the work of Boswell or Johnson or both.³⁹ Richard Altick finds a correlation between Boswell and Aubrey, saying that Aubrey had no effect on the biography of his time because his work remained in manuscript notes, and thus "the talents that might under happier conditions have revolutionized English biography toward the end of the seventeenth century had to await reincarnation in the more methodical person of James Boswell."⁴⁰

For these and other critics, however, the fact that these seventeenth-century biographers had satisfied the requirements of biography long before Johnson and Boswell is of little significance and such similarities are treated as coincidental. These opinions are understandable insofar as such comparisons to seventeenth-century biography seem to occur to critics in passing and are not pursued in a systematic

manner. No single critic mentions more than a few points upon which seventeenth-century biography affords parallels with Johnson and Boswell, or extends the comparison from one early biographer to another. But if the critics have not recognized a tradition predating the mid-eighteenth century, Johnson and Boswell were themselves aware of their predecessors, though they responded to this tradition in quite different ways.

Johnson, for instance, greatly admired Walton's Lives, which Boswell reports "was one of his most favourite books. Dr Donne's Life, he said, was the most perfect of them."⁴¹ The first paragraph of Johnson's "Life of Cowley" consists of a brief critical review of Sprat's Cowley,⁴² and in his life of Rochester Johnson mentions the earlier lives by both Wood and Burnet, describing the latter in glowing terms. The brevity of Johnson's "Rochester" in comparison to the other Lives of the Poets seems due to his conviction of the excellence of Burnet's version: "It would be an injury to the reader," says Johnson, "to offer him an abridgement."⁴³

Boswell also read Walton but, as Novarr reports, was chiefly impressed by the piety expressed in the Lives rather than by Walton's biographical skill. Boswell even considered taking upon himself the re-edition of Walton's Lives when Johnson suggested that a new edition was required.⁴⁴ Apart from repeating Johnson's opinions in the Life of Johnson Boswell tended not to mention earlier biographers by name, though clearly he knew of them. He states in the opening pages of Johnson that "I flatter myself that few biographers have entered upon

such a work as this, with more advantages; independent of literary abilities, in which I am not vain enough to compare myself with some great names who have gone before me in this kind of writing."⁴⁵

Boswell's seeming modesty here is misleading, for the tone of the entire introduction is one of self-congratulation. He implies that his method of writing Johnson is his own invention and that the resulting biography will be the best ever written.⁴⁶ As with Johnson, modern critics tend to take Boswell at his word. But Boswell does not try to suggest, for instance (as many critics have done on his behalf), that the use of conversation in biography is his own idea. He says, rather, "What I consider the peculiar value of the following work, is, the quantity it contains of Johnson's conversation" [my emphasis].⁴⁷

Boswell seems aware here that his innovation lay in the sheer weight of conversational material in the biography, not in the use of conversation itself.

There is thus a wealth of evidence that Johnson and Boswell were anticipated in virtually every aspect of their biographical theory and practice by their seventeenth-century counterparts. There are a number of possible reasons for this. It may be that both Johnson and Boswell read more widely in seventeenth-century biography than they reveal in their works, and developed their opinions directly from those of their predecessors. Alternatively, all of these correlations may be coincidental, a view that would be difficult to defend given the evidence to the contrary. A third possible explanation is that it may not have been necessary in the eighteenth century to read seventeenth-century

biography in order to encounter the principles outlined above, which may have been by this time too firmly entrenched in received opinion to require the support of an earlier authority.

None of these explanations offers an adequate solution to the problem of the apparent contradiction between Johnson's remark about the "penury of English biography" and his acknowledgement of seventeenth-century lives. The ambiguity disappears, however, if we consider that Johnson's complaints were directed not at his predecessors but at the biographical milieu of his own day. Like Bacon, Johnson felt that his contemporaries were not writing biography as he believed it ought to be written. His pronouncements on the genre appear to be correctives rather than a summary of current attitudes. If we examine biography in the first half of the eighteenth century we find good reasons for Johnson's viewpoint and a convincing explanation for the disproportionate attention paid to him by later critics.

Between Roger North and Johnson no major figure can be identified as a contributor to the theory and practice of biography. North represented the culmination of the developments of the preceding century, but he was not directly succeeded by heirs who built upon his achievement. Admittedly, North's biographical works were not published in his lifetime, but the fact that no comparable lives appeared at the end of the seventeenth century or soon after suggests that the further development of biography was temporarily obstructed. Ironically, the trends that had modernized biography in the late seventeenth century continued to become ever more popular after the turn of the century, but rather

than carrying biography to higher levels of sophistication and refinement, individual features of the new biography effectively supplanted biography itself for several decades.

The trend toward more personal portraits, which led to the replacement of moral, exemplary lives with private, intimate biography in the seventeenth century, was taken to extremes in the early eighteenth century. The result was a vogue for scurrilous and sensational lives featuring a lavish use of anecdote and other personal details. The best-known proponent of this practice was Edmund Curll, who in the first few decades of the eighteenth century produced a huge number of full-length biographies of the recently dead, employing ranks of Grub Street hacks to supply the demand. And demand was high, for Curll's works appealed to appetites that a century before had been satisfied by criminal lives in pamphlet form catering to public interest, just before and after criminal executions. Many of Curll's offerings were themselves criminal biographies, but there were also accounts of famous men and women, whose reputations suffered because their deaths caught Curll's notice. The reaction was two-fold: on one hand, men of letters were appalled, sharing Addison's opinion that:

This manner of exposing the private concerns of families, and sacrificing the secrets of the dead to the curiosity of the living, is one of those licentious practices which might well deserve the animadversions of our government, when it has time to contrive expedients for the many crying abuses of the press.⁴⁸

On the other hand, by appealing to the "curiosity of the living" Curll was at the same time creating a demand for intimate, anecdotal lives, albeit not on a very elevated literary level. Given the juxtaposition of these two responses it is not difficult to see how the anecdote acquired its still somewhat suspect reputation. This contradiction may also go some way toward explaining why no intimate, anecdotal lives were written during this period by serious scholars and men of letters. The stigma of comparison with Curll must have been a strong deterrent.

Similarly, the growing fashion for conversation in late seventeenth-century biography was replaced in the early eighteenth century by popular interest in conversation itself. Rather than continuing to be an important means by which character could be illustrated in biography, the collection and publication of the conversation of great men became an end in itself. After the turn of the century, the coffee-house milieu became highly fashionable, and for the frequenters of the coffee-house the chance to spark personal acquaintance with the leading men of the day and hear them speak was everything. But the ideals of amiability and the free exchange of ideas that had prevailed in the seventeenth century did not apply to the early eighteenth-century interest in conversation, which was principally valued for its wit. The popular demand for wit led to the creation of a new literary genre, that of "ana" and anecdotes gleaned from the conversation of celebrated men.

Joseph Spence, one of the most famous "anecdotalists," began to record actual conversation in about 1727. As he proudly announced in a

letter to a friend, Spence collected literary men and women as assiduously as he did their sayings:

You know I was always a mighty man for getting acquainted with authors . . . I have lately faln flounċe with no less than four new ones: the author of Pamela, the writer of a Comedy which is to appear the 13th of next Month; a very pretty young lady that writes verses; & old Colly Cibber.⁴⁹

Spence never published his collection, which he provisionally entitled "Observations, Anecdotes & Characters of, Books & Men. Collected from Conversation." The vogue for anecdotes increased as the century proceeded, and it was more usual for anecdotes and conversation to be published as they stood (that is, in a form similar to that in which Spence left his collection) than for them to be incorporated into biography, as Johnson did.⁵⁰ Boswell himself was probably more influenced by anecdotalists than by Johnson's views on biography, since he seems to have fashioned his Life of Johnson as a narrative tying together his huge collection of anecdotes about Johnson, rather than as a biography that made liberal use of those anecdotes.

This movement away from biography sapped the genre of its vitality throughout the early eighteenth century, and Johnson's perception of the "penury" of biography in his own day is thus understandable and justified. It is equally understandable that critics echo Johnson's view and conclude that he produced an original biographical theory rather than a restatement of the principal elements of late

seventeenth-century biography. Partly because of the power of their works and partly because of their own opinions about their antecedents, Johnson and Boswell have been adopted as the creators of the genre by critics who seek to establish an historical model of biographical evolution.

If anecdote had not become so overwhelmingly fashionable in the eighteenth century, it is possible that the biographical achievements of the seventeenth century would not have been lost sight of in the confusion about the genre that followed. Once anecdote is assigned its true place in biographical theory the grave misjudgement that has been made of the developing genre becomes obvious. By assessing seventeenth-century biography itself, rather than subsequent perceptions of the period, taking as one's standards the revelation of individual character and the use of anecdote, it becomes clear that however deeply entrenched are opinions to the contrary, the genre of modern biography was fully formed in the late seventeenth century.

Notes

Chapter One

- ¹ Donald J. Winslow, "Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing. Part I," Biography, 1 (Winter 1978), 62.
- ² James Sutherland, ed. The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. viii.
- ³ Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (1918; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948), p. 9.
- ⁴ Strachey, p. 9.
- ⁵ Strachey, p. 126.
- ⁶ Strachey, p. 112.
- ⁷ Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey: A Biography, rev. ed. (1971; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 20.
- ⁸ Holroyd, p. 20.
- ⁹ Humphrey Carpenter, W.H. Auden: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 48n.
- ¹⁰ Henry James, "The Art of Biography," in Selected Literary Criticism: Henry James, ed. Morris Shapira (London, 1963; New York: Heinemann, 1964), p. 58.

Chapter Two

- ¹ Sir Philip Sidney, A Defense of Poesie (1595).
- ² Richard Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie (1589), p. 39.
- ³ Donald J. Winslow, "Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing, Part I,"

Biography, 1, No. 1 (1978), 76.

⁴ Puttenham, p. 39.

⁵ Richard Brathwaite, The Schollers Medley, or An Intermixt Discourse upon Historicall and Poeticall Relations (1614), p. 116.

⁶ Brathwaite, p. 13.

⁷ Walter Raleigh, Preface to The History of the World (1614), as quoted in Lily B. Campbell, "The Use of Historical Patterns in the Reign of Elizabeth," Huntington Library Quarterly, 1 (1937-38), 138.

⁸ There is considerable debate about whether the saints' lives display variety. For the view that saints' lives are anti-individual see Waldo Dunn, English Biography (London: Dent, 1916), p. 16, and Richard Altick, Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 6-7. Alexandra

Hennessy Olsen refutes this opinion in "De Historis Sanctorum": A Generic Study of Hagiography," Genre, 13, No. 4 (1980), 424-25.

⁹ William Hallen, "John Foxe and the Puritan Revolution," in R.F. Jones, The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope (Stanford: Stanford University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 5.

¹⁰ Lily B. Campbell, Tudor Conceptions of History and Tragedy in "A Mirror for Magistrates" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), p. 11.

¹¹ Brathwaite, p. 116.

¹² Winslow, p. 76.

¹³ Notable examples of eulogistic biographies written by friends.

are John Evelyn, The Life of Mrs. [Margaret] Godolphin (c. 1678), and Edward Walsingham, Brittanicae Virtutis Imago. Or. The Effigies of True Fortitude. Expressed to the life, in the famous actions of that incomparable Knight, Major General Smith (Oxford, 1644). Some intimate lives written by spouses are Richard Baxter, A Breviate of the Life of Margaret . . . Baxter (1681), Lucy Hutchinson, Memoirs of the Life of Colonel [John] Hutchinson (c. 1664-71), and James Webb, An Encomium or Short Character of the Gracious and Virtuous Mrs. Lucy Webb (Dublin, 1698-99).

14 Thomas Blundeville, The True Order and Methode of Wryting and Reading Histories (1574), sig. C.1j.

15 Blundeville, sig. A.1j.

16 Sir Fulke Greville's Life of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Nowell Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), Introduction, p. vi.

17 Greville, pp. 129-130.

18 Greville, p. 2.

19 Greville, p. 108.

20 Greville, p. 39.

21 Edgar Johnson, One Mighty Torrent: The Drama of Biography (New York: Stackpole, 1937), p. 69.

22 Paul Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 93.

23 Even Nowell Smith, Greville's editor, takes this view: "In all that he writes, except the love poems of the series named Caelica, Greville writes as a political philosopher and moralist." Greville,

Introduction, p. vi.

²⁴ Donald Winslow is the only biographical critic who refers to Greville's Sidney as an elegy (p. 75).

²⁵ The most important of these was Thomas North's translation of Jacques Amyot's version of Plutarch's Lives (1579), which was very popular, going through five editions by 1631. Also popular was Sir Henry Savile's rendition of the Annals and the Agricola of Tacitus, six editions of which appeared between 1591 and 1640. Philomen Holland's translation of Suetonius's Lives of the Caesars (1606) was also influential. Less directly relevant but also noteworthy are Holland's Livy (1600), Hobbes's Thucydides (1633), and Heywood's Sallust (1633). See Vivian de Sola Pinto, English Biography in the Seventeenth Century: Selected Short Lives (London: Harrap, 1951), p. 20.

²⁶ For example, Thomas Hobbes's translation of Balthazar Castiglione's The Courtier was published in 1556 and reissued in 1561. Niccolo Machiavelli's The Prince was circulated in printed Italian editions and in English translations in manuscript from the 1580's into the seventeenth century, but Edward Dacre's English translation was not published until 1640. See Felix Raab, The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 52-53, 274-75.

²⁷ Some critics have perceived a direct development from the Mirror for Magistrates to the principally political lives that began to appear at the turn of the century, stating that the Mirror was intended as a handbook for princes, along the lines of the political

guides written by Machiavelli and Castiglione. For defences of this view see Lily B. Campbell, Tudor Conceptions of History and Tragedy in "A Mirror for Magistrates" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), p. 11 and Donald Stauffer, English Biography Before 1700 (1930; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 52. The Mirror's resemblance to political life-writing, however, lies only in its use of episodes from the chronicles and its presentation of individual lives as exempla.

²⁸ Samuel Daniel, The first part of the historie of England (1612), as quoted in Lily B. Campbell, "The Use of Historical Patterns in the Reign of Elizabeth," Huntington Library Quarterly, 1 (1937-38), 139.

²⁹ See Campbell, "Historical Patterns," p. 137. Other commentators are in agreement upon the importance of this idea in the early seventeenth century. See also J.P. Kenyon, The Stuarts: A Study in English Kingship (1958; rpt. London and Glasgow: Fontana, 1970), p. 26, and Dugdale Society, English Historical Scholarship in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, ed. Levi Fox (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 53.

³⁰ Campbell, "Historical Patterns," pp. 136-37.

³¹ For arguments on both sides of this question, see Lily B. Campbell, "The Use of Historical Patterns in the Reign of Elizabeth," Huntington Library Quarterly, 1 (1937-38), 135-68, and Margaret Dowling, "Sir John Hayward's Troubles over his Life of Henry IV," The Library, II (1930), 212-24.

32 John Hayward, The First Part of the Life and Raigne of Henrie VIII (1599), Preface.

33 F.J. Levy, ed., The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh, by Francis Bacon (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 23.

34 See M.B. McNamée, "Bacon's Theory of Literary Decorum," St. Louis University Studies, 1 (1950), 45, and Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 61-83.

35 Francis Bacon, De Augmentis Scientiarum, Bk. II, Ch. i, in Henry VII, p. 295.

36 Brathwaite, pp. 117-18. Stephen Greenblatt explores this idea more fully in Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

37 That Bacon's Henry VII is an exemplum is generally agreed, though the specific lesson being taught is a point of contention. M.F. Schuster, in "Philosophy of Life and Prose Style in Thomas More's Richard III and Francis Bacon's Henry VII," PMLA, 70 (1955), reacts strongly to Bacon's secular orientation:

Bacon's Henry VII is an exemplum of the political philosophy outlined in De Augmentis. It presents a King who lived successfully in a divided totality, taking care of things temporal by a standard of expediency rather than of morality. Its theme is that it is important and legitimate to strive for temporal ends without reference to a moral code.

(p. 481).

F.J. Levy's assessment is somewhat simpler: "The wisdom needed for kingship, and the means of acquiring it, form the leitmotiv of the reign of Henry as Bacon saw it." (p. 45).

38 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 221.

39 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 115.

40 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 126.

41 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 246.

42 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 242.

43 Bacon, Henry VII, p. 244.

44 Peter Burke, The Renaissance Sense of the Past (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 105.

45 Kendall, p. 31.

46 Hayward, Preface, n.p.

47 Brathwaite, p. 13.

48 Burke, p. 105.

49 Puttenham, p. 41.

50 Peter Burke clarifies this point: "During the Renaissance, history was often thought of as a branch of rhetoric. Form was sometimes thought of as more important than content; a good style more important than an interest in what actually happened or why." (p. 105)

Chapter Three

¹ Thomas Fuller, History of the Worthies of England (1662), Ch. 1; rpt. in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism 1560-1960, ed. James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 10.

² Richard Brathwaite, The Schollers Medley, or, An Intermixt Discourse upon Historicall and Poeticall Relations (1614), p. 22.

³ John Dryden, "The Life of Plutarch," prefixed to Plutarch's Lives, Translated from the Greek by Several Hands (1683-86); rpt. in Clifford, p. 18.

⁴ Francis Bacon, The History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh, ed. F.J. Levy (Indianapolis, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 147.

⁵ Bacon, p. 219.

⁶ Bacon, p. 245.

⁷ Bacon, pp. 223-24.

⁸ Bacon, pp. 233-34.

⁹ Bacon, p. 87.

¹⁰ Bacon, p. 95. The interpolations are Levy's.

¹¹ See, for example, Waldó Dunn, English Biography (London: Dent, 1916), p. 44; Paul Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 80-81; Vivian de Sola Pinto, ed., English Biography in the Seventeenth Century: Selected Short Lives (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), pp. 18-19; and Donald Stauffer, English Biography Before 1700 (1930; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), pp. 52-54, 123-25, and 263-67.

¹² Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956), p. 71.

¹³ See, for example, Arnaldo Momigliano, The Development of Greek Biography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 45.

and Richard S. Sylvester, "Cavendish's Life of Wolsey: The Artistry of a Tudor Biographer, : Studies in Philology, 57 (1960), 44-71.

14 This is one of the main themes in Judith Anderson's Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

15 Bacon, pp. 246-47.

16 John Hayward, The First Part of the Life and Raigne of Henrie the IIII (1599), p. 52.

17 Hayward, p. 86.

18 Hayward, p. 122.

19 Hayward, p. 122.

20 Hayward, pp. 45-48.

21 Edmund Bolton, Hypercritica Or a Rule of Judgement for writing or reading our Historys (c. 1618); rpt. in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Springarn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), I, 109.

22 Brathwaite, p. 27.

23 Brathwaite, p. 27.

24 Thomas Heywood, Englands Elisabeth: Her Life and Troubles. During her Minoritie. from the Cradle to the Crowne (1631). Heywood's awareness of popular demand is evident in the subjects he chose for this and his other biographical works, The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine the most worthy women of the world: Three Jewes. Three Gentiles. Three Christians (1640), The Life of Merlin . . . His Prophecies. and Predictions Interpreted . . . Being a Chronographically

History (1641), and The Generall History of Women, Containing the Lives of the most Holy and Prophane, the most Famous and Infamous in all ages, exactly described not only from Poeticall Fictions, but from the most Ancient, Modern, and Admired Historians, to our Times (1624).

Donald Stauffer remarks that "Heywood's works make an interesting study of classical and romantic anecdotes told as biography." (p. 326)

²⁵ Richard Brathwaite, The Lives of All the Roman Emperors (1636).
p. 68.

²⁶ Brathwaite, Schollers Medley, p. 83.

²⁷ Brathwaite, Schollers Medley, pp. 82-83.

²⁸ Brathwaite does not demonstrate any particular biographical method in the Roman Emperors. Each life consists of half a dozen sentences, each conveying a fact, apparently chosen at random, representing a separate aspect of the subject's life. The result is a series, of largely unrelated statements about, for example, the subject's accomplishments in war or in great civic projects, his character, his public reputation, his sexual life, his treatment of Christians, and the manner and date of his death. Comparison of Brathwaite's work with classical accounts, namely Tacitus and Suetonius, reveals few points of similarity, suggesting that Brathwaite relied on medieval or contemporary versions of these lives. Brathwaite's selection from whatever accounts were available to him appears to be at best workmanlike, and reveals no intention beyond possibly the desire to flesh out more sensational material with such facts as might convey the impression of scholarship and thus legitimate the work.

29 The best discussion of the original Theophrastan character occurs in Arnaldo Momigliano, The Development of Greek Biography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 65.

30 Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 81.

31 Vickers, pp. 77-78.

32 Sir Thomas Overbury his Wife . . . New News and Divers More Characters, 9th ed. (1616); rpt. in Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry, ed. Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957), p. 203.

33 Witherspoon, pp. 196-97.

34 The Character of the Famous Odcombian, or rather Polytopian, Thomas the Coryate . . ., prefixed to The Odcombian Banquet, by Thomas Coryate (1611) n.p.

35 Thomas the Coryate, n.p.

36 Thomas the Coryate, n.p.

37 Paul Delany's assessment of Clarendon's memoirs, An Account of the Life of Lord Clarendon (c. 1668-72), in British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), illustrates this point:

The book's fame rests on the 'characters' of Clarendon's friends and enemies which it contains; these brief and brilliant sketches of their subjects are in the tradition of the contemporary character-books. Yet this tradition was a dangerous one for an autobiographer to work in, because of

its emphasis on wit and aphoristic generalizations at the expense of searching psychological analysis of the individual subject." (p. 120).

Chapter Four

¹ David Novarr, The Making of Walton's "Lives" (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 131. Novarr's exhaustive study details as far as possible the depth of the relationship between Walton and his subjects and the acquaintances they had in common. See also F.P. Wilson, Seventeenth-Century Prose (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 52.

² James Boswell, Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. George Birkbeck Hill and L.F. Powell, II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934-50), 363-64.

³ As quoted in Novarr, p. 110. Novarr emphasizes the importance of Morley to Walton's career; it was Morley, for instance, who asked Walton to write the Life of Sanderson. Furthermore, says Novarr, they were extremely close:

In 1678, their friendship was almost half a century old; for almost two decades they had lived under the same roof.

Morley gave Walton more than a home. He watched over the careers of Walton's son and his young brother-in-law Walton was grateful not only for this patronage but also for the chance of learning and study which he himself had under so expert a tutor and to know the most eminent divines of two generations. (p. 382)

⁴ Izaak Walton, The Life and Death of Dr Donne, late Deane of St Pauls London (1640); rpt. in John Donne, Poetry and Prose with Izaak Walton's Life, ed. H.W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. xvii.

⁵ Novarr, p. 489.

⁶ Izaak Walton, The Life of Mr. Richard Hooker (1665); rpt. in The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker; with an account of his life and death by Isaac Walton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), I, 3.

⁷ Hooker, p. 4.

⁸ Hooker, p. 4.

⁹ Hooker, p. 4.

¹⁰ Hooker, p. 13.

¹¹ Hooker, p. 18.

¹² See Novarr, pp. 270-75.

¹³ Hooker, p. 18.

¹⁴ Izaak Walton, The Life of Mr. George Herbert, 2nd (rev.) ed.; rpt. in English Biography in the Seventeenth Century: Selected Short Lives, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), pp. 84-85.

¹⁵ See, for example, Izaak Walton, The Life of Sir Henry Wotton, Late Provost of Eaton College (1675); rpt. in The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert & Robert Sanderson, ed. George Saintsbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 106, and Izaak Walton, The Life of Dr. Sanderson, Late Bishop of Lincoln

(1678); rpt. in *Saintsbury*, p. 361.

¹⁶ Irene Coltman, Private Men and Public Causes: Philosophy and Politics in the English Civil War (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 54.

¹⁷ Coltman, p. 141. This was, of course, the period when French salon conversation had become a literary genre in its own right. In seventeenth-century France the art of the conversation was refined to a much greater degree than in England, and the influence of the salon on literature and social custom was consequently much more perceptible. The ideal of the honnête homme, the gentleman and man of taste, was a powerful model, and helped create a social code based on manners, courtesy, and civility. The taste for parlour games such as le jeu des portraits and for the analysis of passions, especially love and jealousy, led to the subtle psychological analysis that was such a prominent feature of seventeenth-century French literature. The aphorisms and maxims of La Rochefoucauld, for example, were believed by his contemporaries to be the distillation of his observation of the behaviour and characters of leading lights of French society that he encountered in the salons. It may have been the habits of mind engendered by the salon that were responsible for the early establishment of a strong biographical tradition in France.

¹⁸ As quoted in Coltman, p. 141. Hobbes ultimately rejected the whole concept of Great Tew, believing that the dream of peace achieved through the cult of friendship was primarily responsible for the Civil War. They were not formidable, and thus weakened the social order, thought Hobbes, and in Leviathan he denounced in bitter terms many of

his former friends and the doubts they had expressed freely at Great Tew.

¹⁹ In The Development of English Biography (London: Hogarth, 1928), Harold Nicolson describes Clarendon as "the first Englishman to regard history . . . from the literary point of view":

Clarendon was the first to lay down the principle that history deals not only with facts but with human beings, that the problems of history are concerned primarily with human personality. For him the historian should do more than chronicle events; he should introduce 'a lively representation of persons,' and his own history therefore is in fact a gallery of portraits. (p. 44).

²⁰ Sanderson, pp. 393-96.

²¹ Gilbert Burnet, Some Passages of the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester (1680); rpt. in Pinto, pp. 98-148.

²² Rochester, p. 141.

²³ Donald Stauffer, English Biography Before 1700 (1930; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 262.

²⁴ James Sutherland, English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century; Vol. VI of The Oxford History of English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 251.

²⁵ Rochester, p. 106.

²⁶ As quoted in Stauffer, p. 253. Similarly, Burnet announces that in his life of Hale he will say "little of his domestick

Concerns," and will "draw a Vail over all these, and shall avoid saying anything of him but what may afford the Reader some profitable Instruction." (As quoted in Pinto, p. 40)

27 As quoted in M. Bottrall, Everyman a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography (London: Murray, 1958), p. 160.

28 James Sutherland, On English Prose (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 69.

29 Novarr, p. 469.

30 Herbert, p. 52.

31 Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley" (1668); rpt. in Abraham Cowley, Poetry & Prose, with Thomas Sprat's life, and observations by Dryden, Addison, Johnson and others, introd. L.C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), p. xxx.

32 Pinto, p. 40.

33 Abraham Hill, Some Account of the Life of Dr Isaac Barrow, to the Reverend Dr Tillotson, Dean of Canterbury (1783); rpt. in Pinto, pp. 149-62.

34 Hill, pp. 159-60.

35 Hill, p. 161. The interpolations are Pinto's.

36 Anthony Powell thoroughly examines the course of Aubrey's relationship with Wood in John Aubrey and His Friends (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1948). He concludes that:

These two men were so different in so many ways that their twenty-five years of working together in comparative harmony is certainly to be wondered at, in spite of the interests

they shared: for, although Aubrey was on easy terms with all kinds of persons, he mentions more than once his dislike of 'surliness and Inurbanitie,' defects which were so integral a part of Wood's disposition, to say no worse. (p. 130)

37 Aubrey's scholarly accomplishments receive the attention they deserve in Michael Hunter's comprehensive John Aubrey and the Realm of Learning (New York: Science History Publications, 1975).

38 Allan Pritchard, "According to Wood: Sources of Anthony Wood's Lives of Poets and Dramatists," (Part Two), Review of English Studies, 28 (1977); pp. 419-20.

39 Pritchard, Part One, p. 269.

40 Anthony Wood, The Life and Times of Anthony a Wood, ed. Llewelyn Powys (London: Wishart, 1932). Wood records the attacks that his colleagues at Oxford directed at him and his own defence against them. The president of Trinity, for example, called Wood to his dining room,

where he scouted me againe on his owne dung-hill. Told me that in Robert Hayman I said that 'most poets were fantasticall'; that Hayman was no poet; that he never heard of him; that he was a ballad singer; that I spake ill of the lord Falkland in saying that 'the Church of England had no loss in him' -- I told him I had that from Peter Helylyn. He spoke then against Helylyn etc. . . . Dr. Bathurst should have given me thanks for what I had done and rewarded me, as

others have done; but like a poore spirit and snivling fellow, he fell foul upon me, as Gilbert Ironside did in 1674.
(pp. 285-86)

A few months later Wood records "my book has been a subject of discourse in Oxford for a month together," and catalogues a long list of various responses to the work. For instance, "Balliol Coll. say I call Parson Hodges a cuckold, because his wife was 'dishonest to him', that 'they are careless of their MSS.' because Dr. Thomas James took some away--so he did from Merton." (pp. 288-89)

41 As early as March 10, 1673 Wood writes "Dr. Ralph Bathurst told me that he was told that I used to listen at the common chamber and elsewhere and that 'I never spoke well of any man.'" (p. 171)

42 Wood, p. 288.

43 Wood, p. 295.

44 Wood, p. 300n.

45 Pritchard, Part One, p. 268.

46 Pritchard, Part Two, p. 417.

47 As quoted in Walter Raleigh, "Early Lives of the Poets," in Six Essays on Johnson (1910; New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 114.

48 As quoted in Raleigh, p. 114.

49 Powell, p. 13.

50 Powell's account of Aubrey's technique clearly reveals his reliance on personal knowledge:

His method of work was to inscribe the name of the subject of

his biography at the top of the page of a folio book. He would then note below all he could remember of the man's personal appearance and eccentricities, friendships, actions, or writings. If he could not recollect a name, a date, or the title of a book, he left a blank and put a mark of omission. Sometimes he wrote alternative words and phrases (he was forever pursued by afterthoughts), transposed paragraphs, or added new material. (p. 180)

51 "Speaking of himself, Aubrey wrote, 'Cos, a wheatstone, exors ipse secandi, eg. [my] universall character." Powell, p. 268. The interpolation is Powell's.

52 John Aubrey, Aubrey's Brief Lives, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 308.

53 Aubrey, p. 311.

54 Aubrey, p. 315.

55 Aubrey, p. 313.

56 As quoted in Powell, p. 179

57 Wood, for instance, had written to warn him before Aubrey began the Life of Hobbes, recording in his journal "I sent to Mr Aubrey to have a care what he does if he hath a hand in it--that he write faire things or else somebody will be upon his back." As quoted in Powell, p. 178.

58 As quoted in Powell, p. 179. Michael Hunter gives an excellent account of Aubrey's differences of opinion with his advisors concerning the purpose of biography, p. 79.

59 As quoted in Powell, p. 183.

60 As quoted in Powell, p. 183-84.

61 Peter Millard, Introd., General Preface & Life of Dr John North, by Roger North (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 25.

62 North, p. 62. Elsewhere, North elaborates, saying, "according to that pattern where the person wrote of hath been concerned with the state or public; so much must necessarily be comprised else his story is not true, and not the worse because great; but yet the private state, even of a great man, is what I demand in his history and by no means is to be omitted." (p. 64)

63 North, p. 64.

64 Francis North was Keeper of the Great Seal under Charles II and James II, Dudley North was a prosperous merchant, a customs official, and a sheriff of London, John was a Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Roger himself was Temporal Steward to the See of Canterbury, Solicitor General to the Duke of York, and Attorney General to James II's queen.

65 North, p. 82.

66 North, p. 82.

67 North, p. 63.

68 North, p. 80.

69 North, p. 77.

70 North, p. 94.

71 Chief among these, says North, and even worse than "the popish

legends" is "Baxter's Life", which is no better than a harangue for presbytery and nonconformity." (p. 64)

72 North, p. 72.

73 North, p. 95.

74 North, p. 32.

75 North, pp. 109-10.

76 North, p. 103.

77 North, p. 103.

78 North, p. 103.

79 North, p. 141.

80 North, pp. 141-42.

Chapter Five

¹ Richard Popkin summarizes Montaigne's position clearly in The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (Assen, Netherlands: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1960):

If we could even recognize the appearance of truth, or the greater probability of one judgement than another, then we should be able to reach some agreement about what a particular thing is like, or probably like. But, with each change in ourselves, we change our judgements, and there is always disagreement either with ourselves or with each other. . . . Our own powers, Montaigne shows, change with our bodily and emotional conditions, so that what we judge true at one moment, we see as false or dubious at another. In the light of

this, all we can do is accept the Pyrrhonian conservatism, that is, life with the laws and customs of our own society."

(p. 50)

² Michel de Montaigne, Essays, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 92.

³ Montaigne, p. 287.

⁴ Montaigne, p. 288.

⁵ "Inviting a Friend to Supper," Epigrams, 101 (1616); rpt. in Ben Jonson: Poems, ed. Ian Donaldson (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 55-56.

⁶ Ben Jonson, "Conversations with William Drummond" (c. 1619); rpt. in Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems, ed. George Parfitt (1975; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp. 461-80.

⁷ Several critical surveys of biography locate the origins of biography in Renaissance individualism, among them Richard Altick, Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 9; Margaret Bottrall, Everyman a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography (London: Murray, 1958), p. 141; Paul Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 107; and Donald Stauffer, English Biography Before 1700 (1930; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 235.

⁸ Bottrall, p. 141. See also William Matthews, "Seventeenth-Century Autobiography," in Autobiography, Biography, and The Novel, ed. William Matthews and Ralph W. Rader (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), p. 5; John C. Metcalf, Introd., The Stream of

English Biography: Readings in Representative Biographies (New York: Century, 1930), p. 11; Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography (1928; London: Hogarth, 1959), p. 54; and Alan Shelston, Biography (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 24.

⁹ Peter Millard, Introd., General Preface & Life of Dr John North, by Roger North (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 20-21; James Clifford, "How Much Should a Biographer Tell? Some Eighteenth-Century Views," in Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography, ed. Philip B. Daglian (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 74.

¹⁰ Vivian de Sola Pinto remarks on the scientific influence on Aubrey's work in English Biography in the Seventeenth Century: Selected Short Lives (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), pp. 26-28, while Bruce King makes the same point with reference to Gilbert Burnet in Seventeenth-Century English Literature (New York: Schocken, 1982), p. 260.

¹¹ R.F. Jones, "Science and English Prose Style in the Third Quarter of the Seventeenth Century," in Seventeenth-Century Prose: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Stanley Fish (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 54.

¹² Walter Raleigh, "Early Lives of the Poets," in Six Essays on Johnson (1910; New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 38.

¹³ James Sutherland, ed., The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. viii.

¹⁴ Samuel Johnson, Rambler, 60 (1750); rpt. in Essays from the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler, ed. Walter J. Bate (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 111.

- 15 Francis Bacon, De Augmentis Scientiarum, 1st Engl. ed. (1605), Bk. II, Ch. vii; rpt. in Historie of the Raigne of King Henry the Seventh, ed. F.J. Levy (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1972), p. 311.
- 16 Samuel Johnson, "Abraham Cowley," in Lives of the English Poets, introd. John Wain (London: Dent, 1975), p. 1.
- 17 Donald Stauffer, The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 518.
- 18 James Clifford, "How Much Should a Biographer Tell? Some Eighteenth-Century Views," in Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography, ed. Philip B. Daghljan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 72.
- 19 Paul Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 113.
- 20 Richard Altick, Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 7.
- 21 Donald Greene, "The Uses of Autobiography in the Eighteenth Century," in Daghljan, p. 53.
- 22 Kendall, p. 13.
- 23 Kendall, p. 96.
- 24 Frank Brady, Introd., The Life of Samuel Johnson, by James Boswell (New York: Signet, 1968), p. 7.
- 25 Johnson, Rambler, p. 110.
- 26 De Augmentis Scientiarum, Bk. II, Ch. vii; as quoted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism 1560-1960, ed. James L. Clifford. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

- 27 Johnson, Rambler, p. 110.
- 28 Roger North, General Preface & Life of Dr John North, ed. Peter Millard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 62.
- 29 Johnson, Rambler, p. 111.
- 30 Francis Bacon, Essays (1889; London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 97.
- 31 North, p. 64.
- 32 Johnson, Rambler, pp. 112-13.
- 33 Johnson, Rambler, p. 113.
- 34 John Aubrey, Aubrey Brief Lives, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 261.
- 35 Johnson, Rambler, p. 114.
- 36 As quoted in Helen Darbishire, ed., The Early Lives of Milton (1932; London: Constable, 1965), pp. 84-85.
- 37 Waldo Dunn, English Biography (London: Dent, 1910), p. 124. It is worth noting that Dunn finishes his examination of the seventeenth century before he begins his chapter entitled "Modern English Biography," in which he discusses the eighteenth century. Throughout this chapter, however, Dunn repeatedly refers back to the work of seventeenth-century biographers, including Aubrey, Wood, North, Toland, Burnet, and Sprat.
- 38 Peter Millard, Introd., General Preface & Life of Dr John North (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 17. Other such comparisons that Millard makes include "North tells the story of the subject's life chronologically from birth to death, but will break the sequence to group information around certain themes--a process much the

same as that followed by Boswell in the Life of Johnson" (p. 31), and "North's awareness of the similarities between drama and biography is yet one more characteristic he has in common with Boswell." (p. 30)

³⁹ Donald Stauffer, The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 354-58.

⁴⁰ Altick, p. 27.

⁴¹ James Boswell, The Life of Johnson, ed. Christopher Hibbert. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 185. In The Making of Walton's "Lives" (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), David Novarr, observes that,

On the same day (March 20, 1776) that Johnson advocated a new edition of the Lives, he made his celebrated comment on biography: 'It is rarely well executed. They only who live with a man can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination; and few people who have lived with a man know what to remark about him.' In the light of his own standards, Johnson's estimate of Walton is high praise indeed.

(p. 9)

⁴² Johnson, English Poets, p. 1.

⁴³ Johnson, English Poets, p. 108.

⁴⁴ Novarr, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Brady, p. 30.

⁴⁶ Boswell declares,

Indeed, I cannot conceive a more perfect mode of writing any

man's life, than not only relating all the most important events of it in their order, but interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought; by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him actually live and to 'live o'er each scene' with him as he actually advanced through the several stages of his life. Had his other friends been as diligent and ardent as I was, he might have been almost entirely preserved. As it is, I will venture to say that he will be seen in this work more completely than any man who has yet lived. (Brady, p. 31)

⁴⁷ Brady, pp. 31-32.

⁴⁸ Joseph Addison, Freeholder, 20 (1716), as quoted in Dunn, p. 84.

⁴⁹ James W. Osborn, Introd., Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from Conversation, by Joseph Spence, I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), xxii.

⁵⁰ Richard Altick shares this opinion:

Swept-together anecdotes and conversation fragments attributed to the age's leading poets and wits--'Swiftiana,' 'Walpoliana,' 'Hogarthiana,' and so on--enjoyed wide popularity

But biographical materials do not make biography, and this flood of personal literature . . . had the actual effect of diverting the biographical impulse into a side channel. The compilation of 'ana' relating to identified

individuals occupied energies that might otherwise have been devoted to the writing of formal lives. (pp.33-34)

Donald Stauffer elaborates this point in The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941),

pp. 486-95.

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