

Remaking the Self in John Dunton's *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705)

Recent literary criticism has shown that John Dunton's texts contributed to the development of autobiography and the novel in the eighteenth century through such features as their relentless focus on the self, their stress on Dunton's individuality, and their exposure of private feelings and life events to public view.¹ It might seem strange, then, that Dunton's *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705), his first-person retrospective account of his life and his most substantial autobiographical record, should not have been the subject of a sustained study.² One might attribute this relative neglect to two things. Firstly, the fact that here Dunton is concerned not only to assert the self in ways outlined by J. Paul Hunter and others, who have rightly called attention to his ebullient style, tireless insistence on his originality, and vaunted refusal to be restrained by conventional ways of thinking and writing, but also to reject and reform this earlier version of the self by rewriting his life after a pattern more acceptable to God; this makes the *Life* a text that his current literary-critical reputation would seem only partly to fit. And secondly, the fact that the *Life* veers off mid-way through into characterising other people: family, friends, acquaintances and business associates, which makes it, as an exercise in life writing, highly generically unstable. Though Dunton prided himself on his "rambling" texts, he seems really to have outdone himself here. Section one of this article focuses on the early stages of the *Life* which read, in part, as a type of spiritual autobiography;³ here I will pay attention to the role Dunton envisages for print in his religiously inflected self-examination and self-representation, as well as to the ways in which a spiritual and secular sense of self play out. Section two, whilst making no claims for the *Life* as a unified work, suggests points of contact between its two main parts, and offers a possible reason for its puzzling shift in focus.

I. The Self

Dunton was a publisher, bookseller, and prolific writer of political, theological and (semi-)autobiographical material, who had enjoyed some success with his *Athenian Mercury*, a question-and-answer periodical promoting new scientific investigations into nature that ran from 1691-96. By the early 1700s, when *The Life* was written, he was in financial trouble, and forced into hiding at home from his creditors, which he called “living incognito.”⁴ Here he wrote texts that traded on his personal problems (not only financial but also marital), and that sought to shame his relatives into helping him settle his debts. Dunton may have been attracted to spiritual autobiography at this time not only as a source of comfort and consolation, but also because he could draw on the link found here between solitude or retirement and a religious-led self-examination in representing what was in fact an unwilling retreat from his business activities in London as an opportunity for sustained self-study leading to an increased self-awareness. It is this, he says, that has led him to repent of his past actions, to disavow his former self, and to revise his life in conformity to what he sees as God’s will. He notes, conventionally enough, that one discovers one’s true self in a turn to God that is predicated on a rejection of the world (thought to foster, conversely, a distorted view of the self). The demands of business, the pressure to conform to society’s expectations, the tendency to let others’ perceptions of us determine our understanding of ourselves, lead us to neglect the state of our soul, miscalculate ourselves, and fail to see what is in our own best interests. Dunton is now, then, on his own testimony, in a position to recoup his spiritual losses; he must have felt that publishing details of this reformation would help him recoup his reputational and financial losses, too.

It is well known that religion, in encouraging introspection, provided a key impetus to the growth of autobiography in the seventeenth century. In reflecting on his life, Dunton is

led to conclude that he has gone wrong through a lack of self-knowledge, which he tells us he has now come to see as rooted in a recognition that our earthly and spiritual happiness lie in conformity to God's will. Committing ourselves to God's plan for us both promotes and depends on self-scrutiny as the basis for self-knowledge; "the closest walking with GOD, is to consider him in all we do, which will require a strict Guard over our Thoughts, Words and Actions, that we be not meer strangers to our own Hearts" (222). Dunton shares with his contemporaries a perception of the need for an unblinking self-examination in devoting oneself to God. His text can be seen in part as a minor offshoot of what Charles Taylor describes as the "immense flowering of Augustinian spirituality across all confessional differences" (141) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is, Taylor reminds us, St. Augustine who requires us to look within ourselves (for "inward lies the road to God" (129)) and who gave rise to what Taylor calls "the inwardness of radical reflexivity" (131) whereby one considers one's own experiences from a first-person perspective. In *The Life*, Dunton follows St. Augustine in depicting, and distancing himself from, his errors as a youth; he also shares his preoccupation with the relationship between his former and present self, contrasting his past and present perceptions of certain events. Like St. Augustine too, Dunton makes his conversion, or turning point, "the primary and climactic event of his life story" (Dibattista and Wittman 6). D. Bruce Hindmarsh writes that, after St. Augustine, this turning point becomes "the dominant paradigm of autobiographical narratives of self-development and self-understanding" and is likely to be prompted by a "life crisis" (14; 6). (It is possible that Dunton's mounting and interconnected personal and professional difficulties may have been just such a "crisis.") Dunton takes this turning point and gives it a characteristically bold new spin by backing up, in discrete sections, prodigal and regenerate versions of the self: before and after conversion. His expressed aim in writing *The Life* is to "form an Idea of a new Life, and make it run Parallel with the former" (3), and this is realised in the structure, at

least initially, for Dunton starts by providing an account of his mistaken thoughts and actions followed by their revisions in which he gives a sense of how he would think and act if he had his time over again: this is, he says, an unliving of the life depicted, and a new form of writing (“an ORIGINAL IN ITS KIND” (388)). Throughout his career, Dunton aimed at, and prided himself on his, novelty, which, as Rachael King has noted, he tended to locate in the form rather than the content of his material.⁵ *The Life* begins methodically (self-consciously so), dividing Dunton’s life into key stages comprising these two versions of the self (unreformed and reformed), and with some of this material sub-divided into “Heads,” “for the sake of Method” (19; 53). J.B. Nichols’ view that *The Life* is a “desultory narrative” (v) written by one who “never attained the slightest arts of composition” (xiii), does not do justice to the telling structural arrangement of Dunton’s *Life* in its early stages. Dunton’s claim to be now living a “New Life” (244) - which is reinforced by this striking, bifurcated structure - must, one assumes, have had a certain appeal for him at this time: a reassurance that as “a NEW MAN” (405) he could expect soon to enjoy a new set of circumstances.⁶

The significance of this turning point is underscored by the fact that, at the time of writing, Dunton had recently turned 40: a landmark that may have prompted, and at least gives psychological plausibility to, this act of taking stock of his life. St. Augustine had begun his *Confessions* when he was 43. And Thomas Whythorne’s self-reflective writings were prompted by the recollection that he was approaching 40 “at the which years begins the first part of the old man’s age” (Bedford, Davis and Kelly 5). Though, in his earlier *Art of Living Incognito* (1700), a series of letters between Dunton and an anonymous female correspondent on “Uncommon Subjects” (title-page), Dunton expressed the opinion that it is “a Great Madness to be laying new foundations of *Life*, when I’m half way through it” (3) this is exactly what he does in *The Life*. Although Dunton’s imagined reliving of his life can be dismissed as a self-indulgent fantasy, the vainest of vain regrets, there is a real poignancy

to a man of a certain age looking back over his life and wishing he had done pretty much everything differently. If he had his time over again he would use it more efficiently and productively. He would study the Bible; begin and end the day in prayer; attend two sermons on a Sunday; and receive the Sacrament once a month. He would stay on in formal education. He would apply himself with increased diligence to his career. He would be modest and temperate, and frame his ambitions to his capacities. He would be grateful for God's blessings, exercise charity, avoid melancholy, and give earlier consideration to his spiritual and moral condition. He would, in short, "serve GOD throughout the whole Course of my Life" (400) rather than starting to do so in middle age. *The Life* reads as an answer to a question that most of us will have asked ourselves at some point: "Would Time unweave my Age again to the first thread, What another Man wou'd I be?" (222). If I had used my time differently and made the most of my opportunities - if I had trained myself to think other thoughts and to seek out different kinds of experiences - how would this have impacted on my identity and my self-understanding, including my conviction of the likelihood of my own salvation?

In the *Life*, Dunton draws on other already-established tropes of spiritual autobiography. He could have found in such best-selling works of Protestant piety as Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* (1650) and *Holy Dying* (1651) not only his stoical claim that social withdrawal enables self-study mentioned earlier, but also his expressed commitment to daily examining his thoughts and actions, and his view that one is required to act on the lessons learned from a review of one's life. Indeed, Nichols indicates that Dunton planned to capitalise on Taylor's commercial success in publishing "a new Directory for Holy Living and Dying."⁷ It is better to repent of particular sins on a daily basis during the course of one's life than to have a "general repentance" (62) on one's deathbed, Taylor advises, for this puts our salvation at risk by omitting specific details of the life we have lived.⁸ Dunton is much

preoccupied in *The Life*, as in other of his texts, with what makes for a “good” death, and he deliberates here on how to manage his death so that his life proves acceptable to God.⁹ If this is “holy dying” then “holy living,” for Taylor, depends on a lack of concern for “worldly reputation,” and “Every degree of mortification is a testimony of the purity of our purposes” (25). *The Life* does not only describe Dunton’s repentance: his willingness to make his confession public is also represented as a form of penitence. He claims public confession as part of what he says is his increased humility, and represents it as an attempt further to mortify the self - to punish the sins of pride and self-love and to loosen his attachment to the world - in preparation for the hereafter. And yet, *The Life* is also a form of self-advertisement, of self-assertion as well as self-cancellation, and one that, as the next section of this article shows, places him firmly in a network of friends, acquaintances and business associates in London, Boston, and elsewhere.

There are yet other key influences on what Dunton represents as his new-found religious conviction. He models himself in places on Sir Thomas Browne’s non-partisan form of spirituality, and signals his wish to be known henceforth by the non-denominational term “Christian” rather than, as hitherto, “Presbyterian.” He tells us, too, that he has in preparation a book called “The New Practice of Piety – Writ in Imitation of Dr. Brown’s *Religio Medici*” (268). He also follows John Bunyan’s archetypal Protestant spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), in detailing his inability as a youth to maintain a religious frame of mind. Like Bunyan, Dunton recounts various “Providential Deliverance[s]” (*Life*, 10) as a boy; takes a “Survey of the natural Obliquity and Stubbornness of my Will; how passionately it is inclin’d to what is Evil, and how cold and disaffected to all that’s Good” (22); and identifies past sins in order now to distance himself from them. Like Bunyan too (and, as have seen, St. Augustine before him), Dunton makes his conversion the key element of his autobiography. Though the binary nature of his structure

might suggest that he has experienced some sort of epiphany, his claimed conversion (and, of course, we cannot know if there *was* such a conversion) seems rather to have come in the form of a gradual change as he edged closer to his forties. He nevertheless presents this as a once-for-all reformation, and in this he is very different to a Bunyan who recounts numerous fallings-off from positions of apparent security. “When once a Heart is affectionately devoted to its GOD, and effectually touched with Seraphick Love,” Dunton writes,

‘twill, like the Needle, be always pointing that way; direct it to what Point of the Compass you please, propose to it the Enjoyment of any Creature, ‘twill but tremble and be restless, till it turns again towards GOD and its final Happiness, and there it will fix and centre. (57)

Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* shows that fixity of this order is extremely difficult to achieve. Dunton shares nothing of Bunyan’s awareness of how conversion cannot be taken for granted, how vulnerable it can be to “back-sliding.”

There are further significant differences to Bunyan’s influential form of spiritual autobiography. Although Dunton expresses the occasional moment of doubt, he is generally assured of his salvation, despite the former sins he regales us with here (writing, with characteristic confidence, even arrogance, that “I am one of those GOD has ordained to eternal Life, and dare not make the least Question of it, upon Account of my Sins and Unworthyness...” (219-20)). He sees repentance as a wiping clean of the spiritual slate (“only *Believe* and *Repent*, and you shall be Pardon’d and Sav’d” (31)) and there is no self-scrutiny as to the depth and sincerity of that repentance. One is struck in turning from *Grace Abounding* to *The Life* by the simplicity of Dunton’s religious principles. All one needs to achieve salvation is faith in God, good works, a sincere repentance, and a willingness to embrace whatever grace is offered. The Bible seems to have been a source only of comfort to Dunton, and there is no sense here of how it can also be, as it had been for Bunyan, a source of recurring anxiety. There is nothing here too of Bunyan’s nervous watching for signs of election, and no veering between hope and despair, which is such a striking feature of

Bunyan's text. Neither is there anything of what the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* describes as a characteristic feature of spiritual autobiography: a "strong emphasis on internal struggle as the Christian tries to live out the ethical implications of his or her beliefs but experiences continued doubts, temptations, or 'backsliding'" (Barbour n. page); nor an indication that, in the words of Tessa Whitehouse, "The processes of spiritual development [. . .] are arduous and painful," requiring "[p]erseverance" (104; 108). Instead, doubts and temptations are foisted onto previous stages of Dunton's life that he now dissociates himself from. There is no "process" as such in *The Life*, simply a switch from one type of life to another: Dunton used be uncommitted, and is now committed, to God. And for all his talk of "the severe Sorrows of repentance" (25), that repentance tends to be treated in a perfunctory, formulaic way: I did x in situation y and should have done z; now I have performed a textual reformation, which will lead to a real reformation, and there's an end.

And yet, Dunton's text promises to be transformative in a deeply serious and significant way, by further enabling a rejection of one mode of life for another, better one. His life is, of course, still in the process of being lived, and text can play a crucial part in shaping the years to come in an attempt to achieve salvation by redeeming the past. "I confess my Errors, on purpose to shame my self out of Love with 'em, and do add to 'em, my Idea of a New Life, as a Testimony against my self, if ever I fall into the life again" ([A6^f]); "I have brought the whole of God's requiring Will into a narrow Compass, that I may keep a more distinct View of it so long as I live" (396). As these quotations suggest, Dunton envisages that *The Life* will serve as a kind of memorandum: a model on which to base his future conduct by showing what to avoid or guard against, and a prompt to keep to the rules formulated within its pages. Although the years cannot be recalled, Dunton plans "to conform my Life as near as possible, to this new Idea, in the Reality of Practice" (2). He is not only setting out *textually* to reform the life he has lived; he also expresses his intention to live out

the rest of his life after this revised pattern. Having said that, at the time of writing, the application of these lessons to the life to come exists only in intention, and one sometimes gets the impression that the printed amendment is to act as a substitute for a real one.

Dunton's tendency is to discuss what he would do if he could (but of course can't, that is, relive his life) rather than what he *will* do in applying the lessons he has learnt to the rest of his life. Whilst he repents of the "OLD Life," the "NEW" one is something "I wou'd (seriously) practice, might I live o'er my Days again" (412): a comment that does not fill us with confidence about the "serious" application of this reformed pattern of conduct to the life to come.

Dunton nevertheless suggests that the disciplinary effort required to represent and remodel his life is proof of the sincerity of his plan to *apply* the lessons he has learned. "I writ it with my own Hand," he adds, "as a REGISTER of my fix'd Resolution to practice it" (245). Dunton's account of his life points up the functional importance of writing in self-study and self-understanding; writing grows out of, and helps further to foster, a habit of self-reflection. More specifically, *The Life* gestures to the growing practice of keeping diaries which itself testifies to two features that Charles Taylor and others identify as key to the development of a modern sense of self: inwardness, and an appreciation of the value and importance of ordinary lives and everyday events.¹⁰ The publication of Dunton's *Life* is based on the assumption that individual lives are of widespread general interest and applicability - an assumption that also lies behind the publishing of querists' enquiries in his *Athenian Mercury*, which frequently includes biographical scenarios - and in conformity to this view, Dunton regales the reader with specific details of his life. In "mak[ing] the World my Confessor" (69) Dunton is of course catering to, and further encouraging, the public's interest in the most private details of individual lives.

Like the writers of more conventional spiritual autobiographies, Dunton aims to put this account of his transformation to the aid of the reader, who is exhorted to examine his/her conduct and to think seriously about the state of his/her soul. Though the focus is squarely on himself - his own understanding of his life, his own relationship to God, his own plans for the future - the avowed purpose of this personal interest is to instruct others. By and large, *The Life* imagines and invokes a sympathetic reader “whose Circumstances are a Kin to mine” (A3^v). It does not only advertise its aim to put repentance to the aid of Dunton’s own reformation, but also that of such a reader, who can either recall and repent of their former actions using Dunton’s *Life* as a pattern, or take his life as an example of what not to do. “[I]f any have been so unfortunate as to Copy after my REAL LIFE, I here take the Opportunity to tell ‘em, that I solemnly disown the Original” (A3^v) he writes, a comment that, as Hunter observes, points to Dunton’s habit of discussing his life as a “phenomenon of print” (“The Insistent I” 33).¹¹

[A]s I writ this Idea to influence (my own Practice) and to caution those who are yet unborn, or but just enter’d into the World; so I also Publish it for their sakes (who having seen their ERRORS) are desirous to Reform their Lives [. . .]; and I hope it will put all (especially Old Sinners) upon A NEW WAY of living. (246-7)

The aim, then, is for readers old and young, experienced and inexperienced, “to make their Advantage of my Errors and avoid ‘em.” Although this is, he says, “such a Piece of Self Flattery I can find nothing to Support it” (201) he nevertheless claims this important public function for his life writing. (He elsewhere hopes that because he claims to be a different man to who he was, this will protect him against any charge of presumption in making his own life the subject of his writing: “My Old Life is over, which makes an Account of it, much less a Solecism than it seems” (A3^v.)

The reader might also apply recommendations intended for the young Dunton to themselves, and to that end Dunton transcribes letters from family members, such as his father’s “dying Council” admonishing him - and through him any of his readers disposed to

apply these recommendations to their own lives - to work hard, pray regularly, read the Bible, seek moderation in all things, and “to Think, and Speak, and Act, as you may be willing to appear before GOD at Death and Judgment” (46). Such documents, then, help further to cement Dunton’s relationship with his readers, through their imagined joint pursuit of a “NEW Life” (A6^r). They also show how enmeshed in other lives is Dunton’s own life and, in this sense, anticipate the character sketches in the second half of the text which most obviously bear out the current critical view that early modern selves were conceived in social terms,¹² for they show various types of relationship between Dunton and a vast array of others: business associates, preachers, friends and family members. The inclusion of personal letters in the autobiographical part of *The Life* also shows Dunton’s concern with documentary evidence as part of his aim of self-defence and self-justification. A number of his family disputes were conducted in, and exacerbated by, print, which underscores his reputation at the time as one with no clear sense of an appropriate boundary between public and private matters.¹³ The most striking instance of his habitual airing of dirty laundry is, for me, his repeated attempts to coerce his mother-in-law, Jane Nicholas, into settling his debts, which are amply revealing of his character and conduct.¹⁴

The Life prints prefatory verses by what appears to be readers conforming to the role Dunton imagines for them. “[Y]our IDEA makes us NEW agen” writes one; another assures Dunton that they are “Directed by your Nobler Rules to cast, / And regulate the Future by the Past.” Indeed, Dunton aims to establish a kind of community of error and repentance, and even of confession, with the reader for he hopes that *The Life* will inspire his readers to publish similar memoirs. In an earlier text, *The History of Living Men* (1702), comprising character sketches of prominent royals, nobles, and ministers of state, he had gone a stage further in inviting readers to supply him with their own autobiographical accounts that he might publish them as the most authoritative guide to their own characters and experiences.

There is, then, in the *Life* and *The History of Living Men*, something of the exchange and interaction Dunton establishes with the reading public in the pages of his collaborative *Athenian Mercury*.¹⁵ Then again, whilst hoping for readerly sympathy, community, and impartiality, Dunton anticipates that his *Life* will meet with criticism and adopts at times an adversarial pose, challenging his enemies to prove that the account of his life is partial or incomplete, and threatening those who would seek to misrepresent him. Dunton knew, of course, that he was opening himself up to criticism by publishing his “Errors,” and these challenges of his to hostile readers seem to be a response to this felt vulnerability. Dunton quotes a verse by Daniel Defoe – “All Satyr ceases, when the Men Repent: / ‘Tis cruelty to lash the Penitent” (*Life* 344) – which casts repentance, interestingly, as a form of self-defence, a kind of pre-emptive strike. This is another attempt, then, to hide behind his proclaimed dissociation from his former self.

Maria Dibattista and Emily O. Wittman note that “Since Augustine’s *Confessions*, the manifest paradox confronting the autobiographer within his act of textual composition has been his experiencing his past self as at once the same as his present self, continuous with it, and yet strangely, uniquely, as other to it” (7). In Dunton’s *Life* such sameness is largely disavowed, and text is enlisted to reinforce this split between past and present self. *The Life* ends with an echo of Prince Hal’s rejection of Falstaff in Shakespeare’s *2Henry IV*, when Dunton cites approvingly a man’s response to a prostitute’s enquiry as to whether he remembers her: “Yes ... but I am not the same Man” (251). Sameness is not, however, completely denied, but serves another of Dunton’s aims in writing *The Life*. Central to Dunton’s continued sense of self (and, in marketing terms, one of his main “USPs” as a writer), is his love of “rambling,” both physical and textual. By this, he means a lack of purposive action, a failure of concentration, and a tendency towards distraction manifesting itself in wandering and digression. (His love of rambling is an offshoot of his love of novelty;

his word for publications that might arouse hostility because they are new and surprising is “maggots,” and to be maggoty is also to be mercurial, “unfixt” (246.) Dunton had amply indulged this side of himself in his semi-autobiographical *Voyage Round the World* (1691), which, together with the *Athenian Mercury*, is the text on which, today, his reputation mostly depends. The structure of *The Life*, with its prodigal followed by reformed versions of his life, enables Dunton both to indulge and to curtail this rambling humour. Whilst the reformed sections seek to repress this instinct, they also identify both this and the compulsion to write as aspects of his nature too ingrained to be capable of rooting out. Dunton describes himself as “Born to Travel”: “I have a great deal of Mercury in my Natural Temper, for which I must have allowance; but the best Men are the most charitable, and no Man (if he considers himself) will blame that in me, which I can’t help” (322). This claimed continued inability to brook restraint can work to counterbalance current critical claims that, in this period, a sense of self is firmly dependant on social roles, responsibilities and interactions. Rambling forms a kernel of identity that defies social expectation, cuts across his various social identities (schoolboy, apprentice, businessman, and husband) and connects the various stages of his life. It leads him to neglect his studies, abandon his apprenticeship, slack his business and leave his wife for protracted periods of time. Whilst Dunton’s social identities change, this aspect of his self-understanding and self-presentation persists. It is true that in the reformed part of stage four of his *Life*, on his travels and his first marriage, he proffers his plans for a more regulated form of travel than that which he has managed hitherto. This is an implicit indictment of the wanderings recounted in the prodigal part of this stage, which describes his desultory travels in and around the principal towns of Boston, Holland and Germany. Yet he also includes at the very end of *The Life* an advertisement for his planned *Ramble through Six Kingdoms* featuring his “*Juvenile Travels*” and here Dunton works against the grain of his

book by following reformed with prodigal versions of himself. How like Dunton to end his text by plugging a book that makes copy out of the “Errors” he has just repented of!

In commenting on the extent to which the self is socially constituted, Conal Condren writes that “The more autonomous the agent seems, the more in fact it is being delegitimized” (46). This is only partly true for Dunton, for whilst his former rebellious self is “delegitimized” when he offers an account of his life to God, it is sanctioned in narrative terms as a source of energy and thinly disguised pride. To borrow a phrase of Lawrence D. Kritzman, reading Dunton’s account of his past shenanigans “revitalizes the self” he claims to disavow (50). In so far as Dunton follows stages of his lived life with retractions in the shape of a revised and reimagined textual life, the structure of his text privileges the reformed over the prodigal Dunton. But the narrative interest is located largely in these prodigal moments, such as his youthful wanderings and infatuations which interfere with his application to his studies and his trade, and in the series of pranks and personations with which he regales the reader. (His act of cross-dressing whilst under house arrest for debt in order that he might go to hear one of his father-in-law Dr Annesley’s sermons, is a particularly memorable one.) Such instances show that Dunton’s *Life* does not fit Debora Shuger’s description of how seventeenth-century life writings “maintain an obdurate silence on matters of absorbing interest to modern biographers and autobiographers” (64); instead, it amply illustrates Dunton’s vanity, ingratitude, recklessness, and amorousness in a series of engaging vignettes and anecdotes. Dunton makes copy out of the wrestle between contrary impulses. On the one hand, mindful of the mode of spiritual autobiography to which he is in part attaching himself, he is aware that to dwell too long on acknowledged mistakes is tantamount to recommitting them; his tempering of these entertaining aspects speaks to his wish to hold fast to his claimed repentance, and to his sense of the danger of slipping back into his old ways. But on the other hand, the official version of why such episodes find their way into the narrative –

that they serve as a reminder to himself and others of what to guard against – is belied by the sense of delight that Dunton shows in recounting such episodes. This surely speaks to his awareness that the book’s commercial appeal lies not only in its piety but also in its stylistic verve and in the expression it gives to a burgeoning sense of individuality. Glossing Dunton’s conceit of unliving his life, Greene notes that he can amend his former “Errors” without sharing them with his readers (“he can simply let the printed version of his new method for living take the place of the original, lived experience and circulate in its stead” (129)), but self-reform is only one of Dunton’s aims in this text: he also aims at entertainment and at novelty, and, for these, the earlier, prodigal versions of his life - which are designed to sit alongside the reformed versions, and to pull against them - are crucial.

Early modern selves tend to be described in current critical work on autobiography as a composite of spiritual and secular influences and pressures that also make themselves felt in life writing. Shuger describes the contrast between “social and supernatural, outward and inner” as “the basic polarity organizing early modern representations of self-hood” (74), a comment that fits *The Life* rather well given its moves between reflecting on Dunton’s duty towards God and recalling his immersion in various social scenarios. One finds in the *Life* a double view of the self: the self in conformity to God, which is said to occasion this reappraisal of his life (though, as Hunter notes, this is not “the whole story” (34)), and the self as part of a network of others: family, friends, servants, and colleagues, with some of these relationships having a devotional element. Of course, historically speaking, the secular influence on Western notions of selfhood would ultimately win out, and Michael Mascuch notes that whilst from the mid-seventeenth century the “concept of personality is still latent, and altogether pious” there is starting to develop “a tendency to place the person before the piety” (96). Indeed, he sees Dunton as one of a number of figures who “accelerated the drift of their culture toward secular institutions, of which the modern autobiography was one”

(136). Charles Taylor agrees that “by the turn of the eighteenth century, something recognizably like the modern self is in process of constitution [which] holds together, sometimes uneasily [. . .] forms of self-exploration and forms of self-control” (185). *The Life* demonstrates this amply (its opening structural organisation polarises the two), and it shows that, contrary to Taylor’s view, this was not restricted to “the social and spiritual elites” (185). Yet something happens to this dialectic between individuality and conformity as the text proceeds. This tension between secular and spiritual aspects of Dunton’s identity, which is advertised so neatly in the opening structural arrangement, is followed by a substantial shift away from this level of focus on the self as Dunton immerses us in the contemporary London scene with hundreds of cursory biographical sketches (“characters”) of secular and religious figures. It is as if Dunton has taken Montaigne’s dictum that “there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others” (qtd. in *Life* 50) and illustrated it by means of the two main parts of *The Life*: the autobiography in the first half, and the characters in the second.

II. Others

Hunter observes that *The Life*’s “most significant formal literary achievement lies in its conflation of spiritual autobiography with the broader and less personal public memoirs” though he does not analyse this conflation nor these characters, possibly because it is this he has in mind when he says that parts of *The Life* are “boring beyond belief” (“The Insistent I” 25; 22). Approximately half of Dunton’s text is devoted to himself, and half to characterising others. These are characters of people whom Dunton either knows personally, on however slender a basis, or whose qualities he gleans from their writing or conversation. Dunton reveals something of himself through characterising these others, but it is not interiority that is disclosed. Instead, they point up the various ways in which he is connected to hubs of

commercial activity in contemporary London (and Boston), and this accounts for why the *Life* is now regarded as an important source of information on the early eighteenth-century publishing scene.

In its early stages, Dunton had located the novelty of his book in the conceit that it unlives the life it depicts; a tight structure of prodigal followed by reformed versions of his life points up this unique form of revision. As the book proceeds, Dunton seems to shift his perception of where its novelty lies onto the fact that it depicts a life by means of characters (“I take this NEW-WAY of writing my Life [. . .] by way of Characters” (356)), and living ones at that. The structure established in its early stages begins to disintegrate as we veer away from contrary takes on Dunton’s earlier life - before and after conversion - to hundreds of micro-pictures of those whose lives are lived at a tangent to his. This move into characterising others takes place whilst we are still in the unreformed part of the fourth stage of Dunton’s life, and it begins with his characters of Boston clergymen, booksellers and more general “ACQUAINTANCE” which are measured against what he sees as the general Bostonian temperament (practical-mindedness and a “STARCHEDNESS of Carriage” (145)). Although Dunton just about holds the structure together by following this unreformed part with the expected “Idea of a New Life,” it had swelled to some seventeen times the length of its counterparts in the three earlier stages of his life (childhood, apprenticeship, and bachelorhood). And these characters of others are so voluminous that we forget to expect the reformed part of this stage of his life. *The Life* has become, by this point, a quite different kind of book. In any case, the pattern of unreformed followed by reformed versions of his life no longer seems quite to fit the particulars of Dunton’s life (at least as he represents it), which may be one reason for his growing lack of interest in sustaining his opening structure. For instance, as Dunton’s marriage to his first wife, Elizabeth Annesley, was, on his own testimony, happy and harmonious, there is no need to rewrite this stage of his life.

There is the occasional suggestion here that Dunton has not quite abandoned the structure he started with. The first part of stage four follows a mass of characters of others with some brief auto/biographical information (“A Comprehensive view of the life and death of Iris [his pet name for Elizabeth],” an exchange of letters between she and Dunton shortly before her death in May 1697, and a short discussion of the cause of his present marital difficulties with his second wife, Sarah Nicholas (whom he married in October 1697, and whose pet name was Valeria)), but this focus is not maintained and Dunton goes on to list people he “forgot to characterise” earlier in the chapter, including Dryden, Locke and Congreve. He also includes amongst his many characters of booksellers, a lengthy character of himself, which further suggests that he is losing sight of his opening remit at this point, for doesn’t the whole book start out as a character of himself? We ultimately reach no further than stage four of a work that planned to treat Dunton’s life in seven stages (after the seven stages of man). Later stages of Dunton’s life - his widowhood, his second marriage, and his “present unhappy Life of Incognito” (368) which ought to have made up stages five to seven of the present volume - will, he says, appear in its sequel, as will further and fuller characters of his contemporaries. Except they never did. Dunton frequently promised more than he delivered.

Although Dunton claims to have written his own life “*by way of Characters*” of others (356; my italics), they seem implicitly to point in different directions. The earlier systematic reformation of the self had been cast as a preparation for death and the hereafter, but these characters immerse Dunton in contemporary worldly affairs. And whilst the life writing is a product of, and aid to, a thorough self-analysis, the characters are snapshots of a plethora of other selves which in places reduce his contemporaries to one governing characteristic in comments like “Nice Cruttenden – Humble Leak – Church-Unity Monckton – Amorous B-set (deceas’d) – Slovenly Wire” (364). When in confessional mode, Dunton had reminded the

reader that there is no necessary relationship between how one appears to others and how one appears to oneself, advised us that we should take our own measure, and assured us that “my Business is to correct my self, and not to make Reflections upon others” (86-7), but this is forgotten in his summary judgements on the lives and characters of others. One might add to this the fact that a sole focus on the self in the earlier stages of *The Life* is followed by merely tangential references to the self when characterising others. The reader is bound to feel that, far from enhancing his/her picture of Dunton, these characters are a distraction from it. Mascuch’s view that Dunton included family documents in order “to avoid rather than to attempt representation of his life and errors” (138) might more accurately be made about these characters, for it is these that largely take the focus off Dunton himself, at least in so far as his own understanding of his life and character are concerned.

There are nevertheless implicit points of contact between these characters and Dunton’s representation of his own “Life and Errors.” Although in his characters of others Dunton largely loses sight of the book’s ostensible project (to review and revise his own life in preparation for heaven) he sees this main aim as a guarantee of the accuracy and impartiality of the characters he provides. Dunton claims to obey the voice of conscience in telling him to deal justly with those he characterises, which is especially important given that most of these people were still alive at the point of publication. In his earlier publication of character sketches, *The History of Living Men*, he had posited a relationship between the attempt to understand others and self-understanding, albeit in fairly unenlightening terms, noting that, by publishing characters of those still living, “we shall begin to know one another a little; and, which is much better, shall arrive to the Knowledge of our selves” (Preface). The *Life* is more specific about the involvement of these two forms of knowledge, for here Dunton says that he has formerly “been mistaken in Judging of others by my self” (213); the

characters can be read as an attempt to understand these others, having spent the first half of the book attempting better to understand, and express, himself.

The rationale Dunton gives for his inclusion of these characters is that to omit to describe those people with whom he has come into contact would render the account of his own life “unfinisht,” “imperfect” (354; 356). “[M]y Life, and Affairs, have been so closely interwoven, with those of other People, that there was no avoiding it” (A4^f), he writes. These sketches provide some insights into Dunton, through what he chooses to emphasise about others, as well as through the capacity in which these others are known to him. For example, he gives the characters of the authors whose work he printed, together with a brief account of his personal relations with them; he also includes testimonies by some of these authors to his own capabilities as a printer. Characters of the most prominent members of the Company of Stationers are designed to recall us to the fact that Dunton was also a former member and to give a sense of the scope and nature of Dunton’s business engagements. Indeed, in a characteristically ambitious sweep, he provides “The whole History of the Stationers Company, so far as my Life and Actions have been any ways mixt with them” (A4^f) including characters of prominent booksellers, auctioneers, printers, stationers, binders, engravers, cutters, and licensers.

The characters of others are seen not only as necessary to the creation of a complete and comprehensive account of Dunton’s own life, but also as models for the lives of both he and his readers. Some of these are characters in the sense of exemplary types. A Mr Heath, for example, stands as “the Character of a Pious Merchant” (130), a Mrs Green as “the Character of a good Wife” (143), and a Mr Sewel as “the Mirror of Hospitality” (176).

A History of Living Men (besides the Novelty of it) will be of Great use to promote the Reformation now on Foot; for we are led by Examples, more than Precepts, and *A History of Living Men* will invite us to Transcribe their Vertues into our own Practice (356)

he writes. Examples have a long-and well-established didactic function - they were also a standard feature of spiritual autobiography - and here Dunton imagines a particular public use for them in furthering and supporting the work of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, whose *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners* he printed in 1694.¹⁶ Even when Dunton is writing characters in the sense of pictures of individual traits and qualities, the expressed aim is for the reader to read these characters self-reflexively - to see themselves and/or their own associates in them, and to use them as a guide in making necessary adjustments to their own lives - and in this sense they recall the earlier autobiographical material in the *Life*.

I hope these Characters of my Learned Brethren, &c. will be of good use, both for Caution and Pattern; for we may learn by their failings (where we see any) to fortifie our Selves against 'em; and by the Regularity of their Conduct, to form our Manners on the same model – So that if we take it right, the Reading of these Characters, is as good as living over again by Proxy, for they furnish us with a set of Maxims, to steer by, at anothers Expence. (353)

These characters serve as examples of what to imitate and what to avoid, just as Dunton's own life is envisaged as doing earlier in the book; they too can enable a "living over again by Proxy."

Many of Dunton's characters are a textual memorial of their subject's good qualities, and this conforms to his reformed view that one should be more concerned with one's own faults than with detecting those of others. But Dunton also delineates certain errors that he wishes people will live to repent of, and redress, just as he had done with certain family members in the earlier autobiographical section of the text. With a self-serving faith in the instrumentality of print (its ability to elicit certain forms of behaviour from the reader) he names and shames people who owe him money in the hope that they will pay up, and threatens further exposure if existing or future debts are not settled, using print as a weapon against those who "provoke" him (229), and thereby as a means to prevent further real or perceived insults. The fact that the person characterised is also a potential reader who might

be led by a negative picture of himself to mend his ways is a local application (and a cynical and self-serving one at that) of Dunton's general and apparently disinterested claim that these characters offer examples to the reader that are morally and spiritually beneficial. Though Dunton attempts to capture in words, and record for posterity, people's essential character, he also points up the provisional nature of his characters in this respect: a positive character in a planned future publication is held out as a promise of reward for those who mend their treatment of him.¹⁷ This is a variation on what King describes as Dunton's "sense that any text was open to future improvement and emendation through an ongoing cycle of provocation and response" (125) in that a textual alteration will be a "response" to an imagined improvement at the merely behavioural level. *The Life* is potentially transformative, then, not only because Dunton creates a textually reformed life in the autobiographical section as the supposed basis for an actual reformation, but also because, in these characters, he expects that certain readers (and not only those presented with a picture of their own failings, weaknesses or vices) will reform their ways and deal more squarely with him (and, presumably, others) in the future. (There is something here of the relationship with the public established in the pages of the *Athenian Mercury*, where exchanges with individual querists are seen to be of general applicability and interest.) Dunton also puts print to a less purposeful end, in giving vent to feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment, even when there is no hope of redress. His negative picture of his brother-in-law Samuel Wesley, for example, with whom he had collaborated on the *Athenian Mercury*, is "all the Satisfaction I ever desire for his DROPPING an old Friend" (229).

Comparisons between the two main sections of Dunton's text aside, one is bound to be struck by how unbalanced a text these characters make *The Life*; indeed, their inclusion makes it seem almost like two books in one. The fact that Dunton loses sight of himself as his primary subject is surprising given that he had, from the start, hit upon an effective structural

organisation capable of carrying him through to the present day. What *was* he thinking? For Hunter, “Dunton got rather carried away in describing his first marriage and simply outwrote his plan” (22), but, whilst psychologically appealing, this does not seem to be quite right. The point at which Dunton gets “carried away” (in the sense both of losing sight of his initial remit and of failing to reign himself in) is in his ramble to Boston in the self-advertised fourth stage of his life, where he offers his first tranche of character sketches; although he was married to Elizabeth at this point in his life, this stage of his autobiography is not primarily *about* her. Though, as mentioned earlier, we get a biography of Elizabeth, an account of her death, and something of his present problems with Sarah, Dunton is here, by his own standards, self-restrained. After this, he swaps a focus on his own life for his characterisation of others, and the timing of this substitution is, I think, significant. The loss of his first wife and his swift remarriage saw an escalation not only of Dunton’s personal but also professional troubles, and there is something in the sheer volume of these characters that suggests that Dunton is wilfully distracting himself (potentially endlessly) from these pressing personal considerations.¹⁸ Their inclusion reads, moreover, as an attempt to triumph over his present situation. Dunton substitutes for the promised focus on more recent stages of his life (where the story is one of financial straits, ailing health, marital strife, and a damaged professional reputation) an immense block of material recalling us to his heyday as a printer and publisher, in which he advertises his professional credentials and points up the extent of his experience and the range of his personal and professional connections in an attempt to revive his flagging fortunes. In providing a character-led account of the contemporary London (and Boston) scene - an ambitious scale-up from his earlier texts *The Post-Angel* (1701) and *The History of Living Men* - he is even, I think, aiming to be taken seriously as a documenter of his social, cultural and historical moment.¹⁹ His vast character project is another perceived novelty offered enthusiastically to the public that shares in the fault that

Dunton sees as characterising all of his work: that he had so “OVER-DONE it, wrought it so, Back-side and Fore-side, that I have run it out of Breath” (389).

The characters might be read as a very lengthy digression from his main remit (and therefore as an implicit expression of the rambling, prodigal self that Dunton had earlier partly reigned in) if Dunton ever recovered the distinctive form of the early stages of the book. Instead, he follows a raft of characters of others with a cursory non-sequitur (“Thus have I describ’d my LIFE AND ERRORS in the several Stages of it....”) followed by an “After-Thought: Or, A further Account of the Life and Errors of JOHN DUNTON, with the Manner how he’d Correct (or shun ‘em) might he live over his Days again” (201) which runs through “Faults I have forgot to insert” (201) in the main body of the text. Dunton also refers to this “After-Thought” as a “Supplement,” a term that, as Derrida shows, carries the sense of both an addition and a replacement. Here, in the final pages of the book, Dunton recovers his initial remit, rediscovering his interest in the soul-searching and self-scrutiny of the book’s early stages, and reflecting anew on how he is not the man he was. He also extends this earlier material by addressing the state of his soul with increased urgency, fittingly so given his claim that the “greatest Affliction” he has is that in “having been too remiss in the FIRT [sic] PART OF MY LIFE, I have now (if I get to Heaven) a great way to go by a Setting Sun” (217). Writing as a middle-aged man, Dunton laments that in the early course of his life he was not mindful of the significance of its end. Here, in this “Supplement,” he fast-forwards to the very end of that life, closing the text with a transcript of the prayer he intends to make on his deathbed: a final attempt to assure himself and us of the strength of the religious conversion that, on his own testimony, gave rise to his earlier dual focus on prodigal and reformed versions of his life. For, as he perhaps realised, his lurch away from religious considerations into character sketches suggests a probable lack of *sustained* religious commitment on his part. If, as Hindmarsh writes, “Narrative wholeness” - the “beginning,

middle, and end” of the “highly emplotted” form of conversion narratives - “corresponds quite literally ... to what these writers understood to be spiritual and moral wholeness” (10) then Dunton’s drift into secular and commercial concerns in characterising others has clear implications for his (and, by extension, our) sense of the security of his conversion.

How, ultimately, are we to regard the *Life*? Whilst it was seen by Nichols in 1818 as a “genuine [. . .] narrative” (xx) it was for Mascuch in 1997 an act of “entrepreneurial chicanery” (137). It sometimes seems that in our current critical focus on Dunton as idiosyncratic, sensationalist, opportunistic and self-obsessed (characterisations that are all true) we are ready to believe almost anything of him but that he is also capable of sober, serious self-reflection. Jody Greene writes that, in the *Life*, “the debts he hopes to acquit are monetary rather than spiritual ones” (128; my emphasis), but why “rather than”; why not “*also* spiritual ones,” even if these may well have been of secondary importance? Dunton’s reputation as a one-trick-pony need not, I think, disqualify him from consideration as one who was also interested, in this and other texts, in pressing moral and spiritual concerns: the state of his soul, his debt to God, and the question of whether reformation can redeem his former sins. It is true that the *Life* is likely to have been motivated primarily by a wish to reclaim his reputation as a writer and publisher and to recoup his financial losses, and we have reasons to be sceptical about the existence and/or strength of the religious conversion he testifies to here (there is something too tidy about that bifurcated structure, and too contrived about the “After-Thought”), but we cannot, of course, know, and should not perhaps assume, that the spiritual reflections we find here (the hopes, convictions, concerns and good intentions) are not sincerely meant.

However seriously intended this self-reformation was, it is not Dunton’s only, and perhaps not even his main, aim in writing and publishing *The Life*. There are a heady mix of intersecting motives at play in this text: self-expression, self-examination, self-understanding,

self-improvement, self-promotion, self-assertion, self-cancellation, self-justification, self-defence. *The Life* reads as a spiritual autobiography only in part, and then a most unusual one. Its early structure, which backs up real against ideal versions of the self in early stages of Dunton's life, brings that self into line with Christian tradition, but it also regales the reader with a range of features that give a heightened sense of Dunton's individualism, even modernity: his vaunted originality, love of novelty, humorous self-appraisals, and appetite for personal disclosure. Dunton draws on key aspects of spiritual autobiography - most notably, the concept of a turning point - but these are also grist to the mill of his appetite for authorial experimentation and hopes for the commercial appeal of novel forms of self-expression.²⁰

END

Works Cited

- Barbour, John D. "Spiritual Autobiography." *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*. Ed. Margaretta Jolly. London: Routledge, 2001. 30 March 2017
<http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/routlifewrite/spiritual_autobiography/0>.
- Bedford, Ronald, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly. *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Bhowmik, Urmi. "Facts and Norms in the Marketplace of Print: John Dunton's Athenian Mercury." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 36.3 (2003): 345-65.
- Bunyan, John. *Grace Abounding, with other Spiritual Autobiographies*. Ed. John Stachniewski and Anita Pacheco. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; repr. 2008.
- Condren, Conal. "Specifying the Subject in Early Modern Autobiography." Bedford, Davis and Kelly 35-48.
- Dibattista, Maria and Emily O. Wittman. *Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Dunton, John. *The Art of Living Incognito* [. . .]. London: John Dunton, 1700.
- , ed. *The Athenian Gazette: or Casuistical Mercury, Resolving all the most Nice and Curious Questions Proposed by the Ingenious*. London: John Dunton, 1691.
- . *Athenianism: or, the New Projects of Mr. John Dunton* [. . .]. London: Tho[mas] Darrack, 1710.
- . *The Case is Alter'd: or Dunton's Re-Marriage to the Same Wife*. [. . .] *To Which is Added, the Tender Letters that Pass'd between this New Bride and Bridegroom* [. . .]. London: A. Baldwin, 1701.
- . *The Case of John Dunton, Citizen of London: with Respect to his Mother-in-Law, Madam Jane Nicholas, of St. Albans; and her Only Child, Sarah Dunton. With the Just Reasons for her Husband's Leaving Her*. London: A. Baldwin, 1700.
- . *Dunton's Whipping Post: or, a Satyr upon Every Body. To which is added, a Panegyrick on the Most Deserving Gentlemen and Ladies in the Three Kingdoms*. [. . .]. London: B. Bragg, 1706.
- . *The Hazard of a Death-bed-Repentance* [. . .]. London: [n. pub.], 1708.
- . *The History of Living Men: or, Characters of the Royal Family, the Ministers of State, and the Principal Natives of the Three Kingdoms. Being an Essay on a Thousand Persons that are now Living*. London: E. Mallet, 1702.
- . *The Life and Errors of John Dunton (1705)*. Ed. Stephen Parks. Garland Series: The English Book Trade 1660-1853. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1974.
- . *The Living Elegy: or, Dunton's Letter (being a Word of Comfort) to his Few Creditors*. London: [n.pub.], 1706.
- . *The Night-Walker: or, Evening Rambles in Search after Lewd Women* [. . .]. London: James Orme, 1696.
- . *The Post-Angel (or, Universal Entertainment). In Five Distinct Parts* [. . .] *With a Spiritual Observator upon each head*. London: [n. pub.], 1701.
- . *Upon this Moment Depends Eternity: or, Mr. J. Dunton's Serious Thoughts upon the Present and Future State*, [. . .]. [London]: S. Popping, [1723].
- . *A Voyage Round the World: or, a Pocket-Library*, [. . .]. *The like Discoveries in such a Method never made by any Rambler before* [. . .]. 3 vols. London: Richard Newcome, [1691].
- Greene, Jody. "Ego non sum Ego: John Dunton and the Consolations of Print." *The Eighteenth Century*. 50.2 (2009): 127-44.
- Hindmarsh, Bruce D. *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- H.N. *The New Practice of Piety: Writ in Imitation of Dr. Browne's "Religio Medici" [. . .] By a Member of the New Athenian Society*. 3rd edition. London: [n. pub.], 1705.
- Howard, Jean E. "Textualizing an Urban Life: the Case of Isabella Whitney." Bedford, Davis and Kelly 217-233.
- Hunter, J. Paul. *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1990.
- . "The Insistent I." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. 13.1 (1979): 19-37.
- King, Rachael Scarborough. "'Interloping with my Question-Project': Debating Genre in John Dunton's and Daniel Defoe's Epistolary Periodicals." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*. 44 (2015): 121-42.
- Kritzman, Lawrence D. "Montaigne and the Crisis of Autobiography." Dibattista and Wittman 49-57.
- Mascuch, Michael. *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791*. Cambridge: Polity, 1997.
- Nichols, J. B. *The Life and Errors of John Dunton, Citizen of London: with the Lives and Characters of more than a Thousand Contemporary Divines, and other persons of Literary Eminence [etc.]*. London: J. Nichols, 1818.
- Shakespeare, William. *King Henry IV Part 2*. Ed. James C. Bulman. The Arden Shakespeare. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Shuger, Debora. "Life-Writing in Seventeenth-Century England." *Representations of the Self from the Renaissance to Romanticism*. Ed. Patrick Coleman, Jayne Lewis and Jill Kowalik. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 63-78.
- Societies for the Reformation of Manners. *Proposals for a National Reformation of Manners, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of our Magistrates and Clergy [. . .]*. London: John Dunton, 1694.
- Starr, G.A. "From Casuistry to Fiction: the Importance of the *Athenian Mercury*." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 28.1 (1967): 17-32.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Taylor, Jeremy. *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying in which are Described the Means and Instruments of Preparing our selves, and others respectively, for a Blessed Death [. . .]*. London: R.R., 1651.
- . *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living in which are Described the Means and Instruments of Obtaining Every Vertue and the Remedies Against Every Vice [. . .]*. London: Francis Ash, 1650.
- Whitehouse, Tessa. "Structures and Processes of English Spiritual Autobiography from Bunyan to Cowper." *A History of English Autobiography*. Ed. Adam Smyth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 103-117.
- Wood, Anthony à. *Athenae Oxonienses: an Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the University of Oxford [. . .]*. 4 vols. London: for F.C. and J. Rivington, 1813-20.

End notes

¹ See Hunter *Before Novels* and “The Insistent I,” and Starr “From Casuistry to Fiction.”

² For other of Dunton’s (semi-)autobiographical texts, see his *A Voyage Round the World* (1691), *The Art of Living Incognito* (1700), *The Case of John Dunton* (1700) and *The Case is Alter’d* (1701).

³ Tessa Whitehouse has shown that what we now refer to as spiritual autobiography was not a unified genre but a “composite” of “myriad narrative forms and documentary assemblages” (103; 104).

⁴ See, for example, *The Art of Living Incognito*.

⁵ King notes Dunton’s “self-perceived prominence as a generic inventor,” and identifies that his version of “intellectual property [. . .] located originality not in the author’s writing but in the print worker’s novel use of genre” (122).

⁶ See Jody Greene, who argues that, in the *Life*, Dunton aimed primarily “to be other than himself,” and that throughout his career he viewed print as offering “possibilities for transformation” (128; 130).

⁷ See Dunton’s *Upon this Moment Depends Eternity* (1723) which, in its extremely long title, reflects on the benefits of “dying daily to this Life and World” and markets itself as “a new Directory for Holy Living and Dying” drawn from Dunton’s own experiences.

⁸ See also Dunton’s *The Hazard of a Death-bed-Repentance* (1708).

⁹ See, for example, letter eight of his *The Art of Living Incognito*, entitled “An Essay upon his own Funeral,” and his *The Living Elegy* (1706).

¹⁰ See Taylor 206 for a succinct account of the range of social, cultural, historical and religious influences on the growth of a modern identity, including, but by no means restricted to, habits of self-scrutiny, the demand for literary originality, and the development of the new science.

¹¹ King agrees that Dunton “viewed his own life as a printer’s ‘case’ to be set, impressed, and altered like so many pieces of type” (125).

¹² See, for example, Bedford, Davis and Kelly’s *Early Modern English Lives*, particularly the essays by Howard and Condren.

¹³ For example, Nichols’ edition of *The Life* prints a letter from one J.W. (John Woodward?) dated 5 November 1718 reproaching Dunton for his lack of discretion, and ending with the line “There is no writing to a man that prints every thing” (xxx).

¹⁴ See the second volume of Dunton’s *Athenianism* (1710) for the projects he tells the reader he has planned, many of them vitriolic attacks on his mother-in-law.

¹⁵ See Urmi Bhowmik for an account of how Dunton creates the sense of a collective in the pages of the *Athenian Mercury*.

¹⁶ For examples of Dunton’s interest in moral matters see his *The Night-Walker* (1696) and *Dunton’s Whipping Post* (1706). Mascuch notes that though by the close of the seventeenth century “the momentum of the movement for moral reform had abated considerably the public consciousness of vice it had helped to stimulate, and the correlative interest in private life in general, as well as the confessional mode of representing it in discourse, [. . .] gained momentum” (157).

¹⁷ Some of these characters are provisional for another reason, which makes Dunton sound very like Montaigne, namely, his occasional inability to form a clear view of his subject owing to his avowed inconsistency.

¹⁸ Whilst some characters are taken from Dunton’s earlier texts, including *The History of Living Men*, and then worked up, many more seem to be newly written.

¹⁹ As part of this seriousness of purpose he challenges the picture of certain of his contemporaries provided by Anthony à Wood in *Athenae Oxonienses* (1691-2), claiming superior veracity and perspicuity for his own characters.

²⁰ These hopes were here misplaced in that the *Life* proved to be a commercial failure.