

EARLY MODERN BOOKKEEPING AND LIFE-WRITING REVISITED: ACCOUNTING FOR RICHARD STONLEY

I

Like many kinds of historical document, account books might at first sight be taken for handy repositories of unvarnished facts. There is, on the face of it, a good fit between the purpose for which the records were created — to provide a reliable record of income and expenditure — and the needs of a certain kind of historian, searching for data relating to prices, living standards, the development of markets and the movement of commodities. Dedicated to the piecemeal itemization of dates, places, purchases and prices, account books are utilitarian documents that seem to have no ulterior motives or hidden designs to stand in the way of modern data-mining operations, whether large or small in scale.¹

Rash generalizations such as these inevitably crumble on closer inspection. Just as inventories from the early modern period have been shown to be highly partial documents that are shaped as much by contingent practices and conventions as by any reality that we might take them to represent, so account books were subject to cultural pressures that make them distinctly partial and often perilous guides to the past.² In James Aho's influential analysis, double-entry bookkeeping emerged in Italy in response to the ban on usury and the increasing insistence of ecclesiastical authorities on rituals of confession and penance. The new-model accountancy offered a form of mercantile self-scrutiny to parallel the intensified soul-searching of the Christian undergoing penitential confession. The account-book functioned as a rhetorical tool, designed to demonstrate that the merchant was honest, his profits just rather than sinful. 'How . . . can a written document lend credence to such claims? At a minimum, by being brief, concise, orderly,

¹ For recent editions and studies of account books, see Mark Merry and Catherine Richardson (eds.), *The Household Account Book of Sir Thomas Puckering of Warwick, 1521: Living in London and the Midlands* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2012); *The Business and Household Accounts of Joyce Jeffreys, Spinster of Hereford 1638–1648*, ed. Judith M. Spicksley (Oxford, 2012); Christopher Dyer, *A Country Merchant, 1495–1520: Trading and Farming at the End of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012).

² Giorgio Riello, "'Things seen and unseen': The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and their Representation of Domestic Interiors", in Paula Findlen (ed.), *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800* (Abingdon, 2013).

lucid, comprehensive, and above all, consonant with reality'.³ The 'reality' at stake in the account book is thus not the reality sought by the historian but a property manipulated to create the appearance of fiscal probity. Of course, we know that account books are, of all books, the ones most likely to have been 'cooked'. But what matters here is the work that went into creating the impression of honesty. For Adam Smyth, following Aho, the account-book was 'what truth looked like on the early modern page'. This show of veridicality was bolstered by a host of practices, chief amongst them the laborious transfer and refinement of entries across multiple documents, from waste-book to journal to ledger, which created an instant paper trail for the auditor.⁴

If we recognize that the realism of account books is, like all realisms, a fabrication, then what can we trust these documents to tell us? Recent scholarship suggests that financial accounts may be more valuable to the cultural than to the economic historian, and that early modern bookkeeping can inform us about a stage in the history of autobiography. If you scratch the surface of any early modern life-writing, you usually find the arts of accounting not far beneath. Samuel Pepys' diary was written up in a ledger-book from lists of his daily expenses; its record of each day's business and pleasure plays variations on the ground bass of a financial record.⁵ Matthäus Schwarz, compiler of the celebrated *Trachtenbuch* or 'book of clothes' in which he memorialized the numerous costumes that he wore between 1520 and 1560, was accountant to the Fuggers of Augsburg and author of the first northern European manual of double-entry.⁶ The account books of Benvenuto Cellini, who asserted his singular genius in a boisterous autobiography, still

³ James Aho, *Confession and Bookkeeping: The Religious, Moral, and Rhetorical Roots of Modern Accounting* (New York, 2005), 69. See also Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, 1998), 29–65; Ceri Sullivan, *The Rhetoric of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (London, 2002), 23–43; Jacob Soll, *The Reckoning: Financial Accountability and the Making and Breaking of Nations* (London, 2014), 19–28.

⁴ Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), 60.

⁵ Mark Dawson, 'Histories and Texts: Refiguring the Diary of Samuel Pepys', *Historical Journal*, xliii (2000), 416–17.

⁶ Ulinka Rublack and Maria Hayward (eds.), *The First Book of Fashion: The Book of Clothes of Matthäus and Veit Konrad Schwarz of Augsburg* (London, 2015); see also Valentin Groebner, 'Inside Out: Clothes, Dissimulation and the Arts of Accounting in the Autobiography of Matthäus Schwarz, 1496–1574', *Representations*, lxvi (1999); Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford, 2010), 33–79.

survive in Florence.⁷ Thomas Whythorne, who wrote his more modest life-story as a contextual frame for his manuscript 'book of songs and sonnets', kept accounts for William Bromfield, Lieutenant-General of the Ordnance.⁸ In seventeenth-century spiritual diaries and autobiographies, economic thinking became a model for understanding the tribulations of the soul; the devout Calvinist would refuse to go to bed until she had 'call[ed] herself to a strict Account in every particular, that the Errours of every Day past might be avoided in those, that were to follow'.⁹ Other forms of inner life proved comparably receptive to the language of bookkeeping. In Sonnet 30, Shakespeare summons the 'remembrance of things past' to an internal court hearing, 'the sessions of sweet silent thought'. But recollection rapidly turns into emotional accountancy, 'tell[ing] o'er / The sad account of fore-be-moanèd moan, / Which I new pay as if not paid before'.¹⁰ Shakespeare was following in the footsteps of Sir Philip Sidney, who in the guise of Astrophil described how painful it was for a besotted lover to submit to 'reason's audit', 'and by just counts myself a bankrupt know / Of all those goods, which heaven to me hath lent'.¹¹

Taken together these examples suggest that bookkeeping has a powerful claim to consideration in the search for what Charles Taylor has called 'sources of the self'.¹² The most important recent attempt to explore that claim is Smyth's *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, an exemplar of the 'archival turn' that calls attention to forms that are usually left out of critical accounts of life-writing — including almanacs, commonplace books, parish registers and account books — and that pays serious attention to the material shapes and structures of these forms. Somewhat contentiously, Smyth elects to use the word 'autobiography' to describe his material, whilst leaving open the question of what might count as autobiography in the early modern period. Many scholars would have dismissed the term as straightforwardly anachronistic, a nineteenth-century coinage that necessarily distorts any older texts that it attempts to subsume. Smyth argues that its retention can

⁷ Basil S. Yamey, *Art and Accounting* (New Haven, 1989), 128.

⁸ *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. James M. Osborn (Oxford, 1961), 143.

⁹ Effie Botonaki, *Seventeenth-Century English Women's Autobiographical Writings: Disclosing Enclosures* (Lewiston, NY, 2004), 49.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. John Kerrigan (Harmondsworth, 1986), 91.

¹¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones (Oxford, 1989), 159 (*Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 18).

¹² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989).

be heuristic, bringing into focus ‘the difference and variability of early modern life-writing’.¹³

The versions of autobiography that Smyth explores unsettle our assumptions about the genre in a variety of ways. Commonly, they have more to do with likeness than difference; they are less keen to assert the singularity of the subject than to find exemplary models or structural continuities with lives already lived. They are fissured and fragmented, not differentiating clearly between public and private histories and not troubling to create a narrative logic to give meaning to the succession of events. They are more closely engaged with objects — things in the world and their financial values — than with subjects (insofar as that term implies subjectivity and inwardness). Finally, they are always in process, made in the movement of materials from one form of record to another, rather than being planned and produced in a singular creative act. Thus we might witness a fragment of autobiographical text migrating from an almanac to an account-book to a diary to an autobiography, sometimes over many years, with each of the different formats leaving its imprint upon the trace of a life.¹⁴

Like several recent accounts of early modernity, Smyth’s intervention functions paradoxically both as an account of a past and alien world and as the revelation of a truer way of thinking about the nature of our own being in the world.¹⁵ A post-romantic notion of selfhood, which privileges subjectivity, and ‘subjectivity founded on difference and individuality’, cedes to a notion of the self as rooted in the material world and as always profoundly social. Identity is reconceived as ‘a form of social being’, and the scripts for identity, however individualized it may seem, are recognized as shared, social scripts.¹⁶ In this more devolved vision of the self, the agency of the writer begins to dissolve into the material medium. Thus, Smyth can speak of Lady Anne Clifford as ‘drawn up by her accounts’. ‘The methods Clifford deployed in her life-writing . . . are not simply distractions from Clifford’s character, or a veil to be pushed aside in pursuit of who Clifford really was’. Rather, socially produced codes — the rules of financial accounting — constituted the life, conditioning Clifford’s personality and day-to-day dealings as well as her

¹³ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10–11, 13–14, 54.

¹⁵ Compare for example Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge, 2000), which offers a genealogy of the Western belief that the subject precedes the objects in which it is invested; and Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (London, 2001), which identifies forms of authorless or commonplace discourse.

¹⁶ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 34, 52.

textual representations.¹⁷ The writer is written by textual practices that they seemed to command — so much for ‘autobiography’. Perhaps it is time to try to do without that term; perhaps also, pushing Smyth’s project a stage further, to jettison ‘the self’ as a rubric for thinking about early modern cultures of documentation.¹⁸

This essay explores this possibility through a consideration of the archival traces of an obscure Elizabethan, Richard Stonley. Stonley, whose long life stretched from around 1520 to 1600, was an accountant by trade. As one of the four Tellers in the Exchequer of Receipt, he was responsible for taking in, doling out and reckoning up the wealth of the state. But Stonley also needed to keep track of his private expenditure and this he did in a series of journals, three volumes of which survive today. The volumes are erratic in their coverage, the first spanning a period from 15 June 1581 to 31 December 1582 in 100 leaves, the second running from May 14 1593 to May 24 1594 in 92 leaves, and the last starting on 31 March 1596/7 and ending on 18 May 1598, in 77 leaves. The first volume introduces us to a life divided between houses in London and Essex, in which professional and domestic duties were combined with property-speculation and sermon-gadding. The second shows its compiler in increasing financial trouble, in hock to a usurer and forced to answer to the Lord Treasurer, William Cecil, for his dealings in office. The final volume was written during Stonley’s incarceration in the Fleet, to which he had been consigned when he was convicted of having embezzled around £13,000 from the Exchequer over the course of his career. This conviction also generated a second key source for any reconstruction of Stonley’s life, an inventory of the movables in his house in London’s Aldersgate Street.¹⁹ Moving room by room through what must have been a substantial property, the inventory suggests that this early modern bureaucrat was a committed collector of printed books: it lists more than four hundred titles, in no obvious order. The journals allow us to place some of that book-buying in the context of Stonley’s day-to-day expenditure.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92–3.

¹⁸ Among various versions of posthumanism, that of Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010) is particularly pertinent here.

¹⁹ National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), E159/412/435.

²⁰ For details of the books, see Leslie Hotson, ‘The Library of Elizabeth’s Embezzling Teller’, *Studies in Bibliography*, ii (1949–50); the *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* website <<http://plre.folger.edu>> (accessed 7 June 2016); and Jason Scott-Warren, ‘Books in the Bedchamber: Religion, Accounting and the Library of Richard Stonley’, in John N. King (ed.), *Tudor Books and Readers* (Cambridge, 2010).

Hitherto, the historical significance of Stonley's journals has been defined by the purchase of a single book. On 12 June 1593 he recorded among his miscellaneous expenses his acquisition of a copy of Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*:

vittell	for vittell -----	x s
Bookes	for the Survey of Fraunce with the Venus & Adhonay per Shakspere -----	xij d
Apparell	for thre dosen of Scotishe Buttons ---- for ij yardes dimidium of Serge for ij pere of Canions -----	xij d ij s
vittell	for vittell ----- To Margery for vittell-----	vjd ixs xjd ²¹

This entry has been known to Shakespeareans since the late eighteenth century, when the three volumes of journals resurfaced.²² Since then, it has been of some interest to editors seeking to date the publication of *Venus and Adonis*. Stonley's note has earned him 'the minor distinction of being the first recorded purchaser of Shakespeare's first publication', and has gained his journals their entrée into the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, which has recently done them the honour of wholesale digitization.²³

The Shakespeare reference has become, in a sense, the point of the journals, and has even started to shape their material form. While the first and third volumes have been left in a state of advanced decay, the second has been carefully conserved and rebound, partly to render it fit for repeated display.²⁴ The volume's perceived value is tied to Shakespeare's exceptional status and to the Folger as a custodian of that status. It is used to put Shakespeare on a pedestal, whilst also suggesting his connections to the circuits of London life and to the cultural history of the period (which is the library's broader remit).

²¹ Folger Shakespeare Library (hereafter FSL), MS V.a.460, fo. 9^{r-v} ('dimidium' means 'a half'; 'canions' were tube-like extensions to breeches). Page references to the journals (V.a.459, 460 and 461) will be given in abbreviated format ('460/9^r') in the main text. Contractions in manuscript sources have been silently expanded.

²² See Bodleian MS Douce d 44, a notebook kept by Francis Douce between c.1780 and 1832, which contains extensive notes on the volumes.

²³ Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* (Oxford, 1977), 176; <<http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~648791~144036:Diaries-of-Richard-Stonley>> (accessed 8 May 2016). Due to the ready availability of these digital images, I have not included reproductions from the manuscript in this essay.

²⁴ See for example Heather Wolfe (ed.), *'The Pen's Excellencie': Treasures from the Manuscript Collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library* (Washington DC, 2002), 75–6.

A more-than-cursory inspection of the journal entry, however, suggests its capacity to challenge the narrative into which it is conscripted. For, while Stonley perhaps surprisingly names Shakespeare as the author of *Venus and Adonis* — the author was not named on the title-page of his work, although he did sign the dedicatory epistle — he gets the title of the work slightly wrong, and he makes it play second-fiddle to another newly published book, John Eliot's *Survey of France*.²⁵ This was a culture in which precedence mattered; the only reason why the woman comes first in the title of *Venus and Adonis* is because she happens to be a goddess. The affront is compounded by the fact that the two books together cost as much as twelve buttons, and considerably less than is spent on the cloth and food. Although *Venus and Adonis* would prove to be a popular best-seller that helped to make Shakespeare's name over the course of the 1590s, there is little here to herald that fact.²⁶ Instead of separating it out, the account-book draws *Venus* into a metonymic field along with foodstuffs, buttons and fashion accessories. Like the controlling subjectivity of the autobiographer, the prestige of the canonical classic is apt to dissolve into what Smyth dubs the 'dramatic inclusivity' of the account-book.²⁷

How well do the journals work as evidence for the early modern self? The first thing to note is that these are, at many levels, fractured sources. Gaps are the very essence of the account-book, which presents us principally with a list, a textual structure that simultaneously brings things together — in terms of their cost and their proximity in time and space — and keeps them apart.²⁸ But gaps are also conspicuous in the wider format of the journals, for these are not simply accounts. Instead they present a complex composite that brings together elements of the almanac, the account-book, the diary and the commonplace-book. Stonley's method was to commence each daily entry with a heading, indicating the day and date. Sometimes he noted the saint's day and, especially in the final volume, he added snippets of astrological information likely culled from almanacs. Next he entered a textual excerpt, copied by rote from a printed book. In the first volume these snippets were taken from the Geneva Bible; in the second and third they came from collections of proverbs and adages gathered by Erasmus and translated by Richard Taverner from the

²⁵ John Eliot, *The Survey or Topographical Description of France* (London, 1592, STC 7575).

²⁶ On the development of Shakespeare's reputation, see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge, 2013).

²⁷ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 85.

²⁸ On the list form, see Paul Tankard, 'Reading Lists', *Prose Studies*, xxviii (2006); Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwen (London, 2009).

late 1530s.²⁹ Then, when his day had involved some expenditure, Stonley copied down the details of his purchases, usually adding marginal categorizations such as those we have already seen for ‘vittell’, ‘bookes’, and ‘apparell’. Finally, he added what we might think of as a diary entry: a short summary of the day’s activities. One of the main challenges the journals pose is how we should understand the relationship between these various elements.

The diaristic entries — representing the journals’ main claim to be thought of as ‘autobiographical’ — are at once formulaic and highly various. Their basic form is something like: ‘This day after morning preyer I went to westminster kept ther till xj came home to dynner kept home all the Afternone at my bokes & so ended that day with thanks to god at night’. On Sundays the formula usually varies; Stonley spends the morning going to church and the afternoon ‘reading the Scriptures’. Stonley often expands his daily entries to chart his movements during the day and to make brief notes on matters of business, including the progress of legal proceedings; he also lists the guests present at dinner and supper. Occasionally he will note the weather or record an item of news. Significant personal or public events are marked with a marginal manicule or pointing hand, as if to direct the attention of an anticipated future reader. There is no evidence that the journals were read, but to write an account-book was inevitably to anticipate various forms of audit.

Where is the self in all this? The initial notation, focused on the ‘I’ who goes to Westminster, returns home for dinner, and spends the afternoon at its books, looks remarkably individualized. Though we cannot know exactly what ‘at my books’ means — presumably it means ‘working on my accounts’, though other kinds of reading and writing might be implied — it comes across as a distinctly unsociable activity.³⁰ The fact that the journals more generally are obsessed with property — both the small ‘moveables’ of Stonley’s daily expenditure and larger transactions associated with his burgeoning property portfolio — might encourage us also to see them as evidence for individualist selfhood, in a world where ideas of identity and ownership were closely intertwined.³¹ Such impressions are counteracted by the listing of ‘strangers’ at dinner and supper, and the regular evidence

²⁹ These include *The Garden of Wysdom* (London, 1539, STC 23712.5), *Prouerbes or Adagies with Newe Addicions Gathered out of the Chiliades of Erasmus* (London, 1539, STC 10437), and *Catonis disticha moralia ex castigazione D. Erasmi Roterodami* (London, 1540, STC 4843).

³⁰ On a few occasions Stonley specifies that he spent the afternoon working on his accounts, as for example at 459/33^r.

³¹ Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, 11.

that Stonley provides of his interactions with colleagues, patrons, friends, family members and servants. Even purchases in the marketplace usually come with a notation of the seller's name and whereabouts, and Stonley appears to have been on friendly terms with several of his suppliers. The solitary bureaucrat/reader and the sociable householder are juxtaposed but discontinuous.

Equally hard to reconcile are the other-worldly and the everyday elements of the journals. Snippets from the Old Testament or Erasmus sit uneasily alongside the worldly goods of everyday life, as when a tailor's bill for three new doublets, a mourning gown and a frize jerkin, which stretches across two and a half pages, is preceded by a biblical excerpt on the 'Calamities that god sent to his Church . . . for the triall of his Childerne' (459/77^v–78^r). The apparent tension is mitigated somewhat if we think of Stonley's moral and scriptural excerpts as elaborations of the formulae (such as 'In the Name of God and Profit') that merchants had long since written in their ledgers to redeem their business dealings from the taint of usury; or if we read them as antecedents of the sort of anodyne 'thought for the day' that is still sometimes printed on diaries and calendars.³² Stonley's bookending of his daily activities by prayer, and of his weeks by the religious activities of the Sabbath, encourages us to make some such accommodation between the pious or moral textual excerpts and the quotidian matter. We might also argue that the journals resemble other hybrid life-writings of the period — including manuscripts that mix everyday expenditure with spiritual reckonings — insofar as their juxtapositions reveal the kindred logic of distinct documentary modes. That is to say that while it may have been common, as Smyth shows, for entries in an almanac to underlie an account book, or for entries in an account book to underlie a diary or autobiographical narrative, Stonley's journals set the various forms side-by-side. The argument feels plausible to some extent, but it also feels like papering over the cracks, a making of coherence where it is by no means obvious. In order to really get to grips with the journals, we need to pay detailed attention to their physical format, learning to read their body language from the ground up.

II

We should begin by noting that, although these journals exhibit a high degree of regularity, they intermittently surprise us with local variations and unexpected extras. So, for example, the first volume opens with a list of payments

³² Bolstering the first interpretation is the fact that Stonley adds a pious motto at the start of the first volume: 'Adsit deus in principio meo nunc et in evum'. I am grateful to Andrew Preston for this point.

that Stonley made to his wife for housekeeping, and ends with a list of miscellaneous receipts, probably repayments on loans. Then, entries for the whole of the year 1582 are crossed through in the margins — something which does not happen anywhere else (459/39^v–99^r). In the second volume, from January 1593/4, Stonley starts noting ‘Profit’ and ‘Losse’ at the foot of each page, perhaps as the result of a misguided new year’s resolution; but he gives this up within three weeks, probably because there is never any profit to be noted in what is essentially a record of expenses. At the end of 1593, Stonley adds a note of the numbers of people who have died and been christened in London in the past, plague-stricken year. He goes on to tot up the year’s outgoings in a table that he calls ‘The Pye of my Expences this yere ending at Christmas 1593’ (460/49^v, 51^{r–v}). The *OED* defines a ‘pye’ as ‘an alphabetical index to rolls and records’; conceivably such indexes developed out of the church books known as ‘pies’, which enabled their users to determine the dates of movable and immovable feasts. Stonley’s index is however not alphabetical, nor does it reference rolls and records.³³ The second volume ends with a list of ‘Arrerages of desperat debts Receuid since the xiiijth of May 1593’, reflecting Stonley’s increasing financial desperation (460/89^r). In the third volume of journals, written in the Fleet, Stonley starts recording not only his dining companions but also the food that was served at dinner and supper. This may have been a way to compensate for the paucity of day-to-day expenditure. But midway through the volume he stops transcribing his bills of fare, adding a note that ‘from this day ther is a nother booke which I terme the weekboke or kytchin book wherin I note all thinges & somes of money laid out all kynde of weyes . . . that in the end of the yere I may raye owt euery thinge in ther proper places’ (461/36^r). From this point forward, the entries become bipartite, with textual excerpts and summaries of the day but no ‘stuff’; the only intrusion of money now comes in the form of fortnightly receipts, signed by the deputy warden of the Fleet, for chamber rent.

This change draws our attention to the fact that the journals were, as Smyth’s analysis would lead us to expect, just one element in an interlinked series of concurrent notebooks, including volumes of kitchen expenses and of sermon notes; and, more broadly, in a series of textual receptacles, such as the boxes and presses that Stonley used to store legal bills or correspondence. The inventory of Stonley’s Aldersgate Street house lists a plethora of containers in

³³ *OED*, ‘pie, *n.*3’, sense 2 (the term is an abbreviation of ‘pie book’). The earliest entry, an injunction that ‘the said Clerkis of the Brevements’ should ‘mak up the Pyes of th’ Expendunturs at every moneth end’, comes from *Regulations and Establishment of the Houshold of Henry Algernon Percy, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland* (London, 1770), 67, and is dated c.1527.

‘the Galery next the Bedchamber’, including four cases of boxes, one ‘nest of boxes’, seven chests, and ‘A great presse for lettres’.³⁴ Stonley seems to have identified his various boxes by letter: there were legal bills in ‘the Box of A.’, a ‘Booke of the diettes’ stored ‘emonge my other matters in the Box of D’, and a list of pawned plate ‘in the Box of .P. in the Gallary’.³⁵ His journals are comparably labelled: the first volume is ‘Z’, the second ‘KK’, and the third ‘OO’, with doubled letters indicating a second alphabetic sequence that followed on from the first, which means that the original sequence comprised at least 40 volumes, and probably began around 1560. Recent research has pointed to a close relationship between books, chests and boxes in the early modern period. Books, whether printed or handwritten, were often textual store-houses rather than through-composed and unified works.³⁶ Such research may suggest a different way of conceiving of the journals, as more a set of storage spaces than a coherent project.

This thought might prompt us to reconsider the physical structure of Stonley’s manuscript pages. Although it is not immediately clear to the eye, he wrote his entries in a compositional grid, a frame made up of vertical and horizontal lines. Discussing Jan Gossaert’s ‘Portrait of a Merchant’ (c.1530), Peter Stallybrass has called our attention to the artist’s wonderfully detailed rendering of the paper on which the merchant — recently identified as Jan Snoeck, collector of river tolls at Gorinchem — is writing (see Plate 1).³⁷ The painting makes clear that, before he takes up his pen, Snoeck has folded his page twice so as to make four vertical columns that will serve as the guidelines for his accounts. Stonley uses exactly the same technique to articulate his page-space. (There is a cautionary tale for users of digital facsimiles here, because the high-grade digital reproductions on the Folger’s ‘Luna’ database render the folds completely invisible). Cutting across the vertical lines created

³⁴ TNA, E159/412/435 (unpaged).

³⁵ FSL, MS V.a.459, fos. 3^v, 38^v; FSL, MS V.a.460, fo. 20^v; for the reference to ‘my note booke of of [*sic*] Sermons’, see FSL, MS V.a.459, fos. 47^r, 70^r.

³⁶ Jeffrey Todd Knight, ‘“Furnished for Action”: Renaissance Books as Furniture’, *Book History*, xii (2009); Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (Philadelphia, 2013). For another analysis of Stonley’s journals in terms of their textual compartments, see Alan Stewart, ‘The Materiality of Early Modern Life Writing: The Case of Richard Stonley’, in Zachary Leader (ed.), *On Life-Writing* (Oxford, 2015).

³⁷ Peter Stallybrass, ‘Ephemeral Matter’, unpublished paper presented at a conference on ‘Ephemerality and Durability in Early-Modern Visual and Material Culture’ (University of Cambridge, 24–25 May 2013); Herman Th. Colenbrander, ‘The Sitter in Jan Gossaert’s “Portrait of a Merchant” in the National Gallery of Art, Washington: Jan Snoeck (c.1510–85)’, *Burlington Magazine*, clii (2010).



Jan Gossaert, 'Portrait of a Merchant', c.1530. Oil on panel. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

by paper-folding are the horizontal lines that Stonley drew with a ruler. These rules are not used to divide one day from the next, as we might expect and as indeed we would demand in a printed diary today. Instead, they divide the textual excerpts from the daily expenses and the daily diary that follows. The excerpts are also often distinguished by their use of Latin, rendered in italic script; in some sections of the journals there are pairs of rules, separating the

Latin sentence from its English translation, and the English translation from the day's affairs.³⁸

The proximity between Stonley's ruled lines and his moral or biblical excerpts invites us to reflect on the ambiguity in the word 'rule' and the connections that early modern writers made between straight lines and moral rectitude. References to the 'rule of reason' or the 'rule of righteousness' are commonplace in the literature of the period, and are often elaborated in ways that make it clear that these rules are by no means dead metaphors, but are imagined as physical rulers. The exiled English recusant Benet Canfield offers an example of this kind of thinking when he writes in *The Rule of Perfection* that

as the materiall rule is the thing wherby to drawe a line straight, and wherby wee trie whether any thing be right or crooked; so the *vwill* of God is that wherby wee may drawe only the course of our life, and the intention of our works, words, or thoughts, and wherby wee may knowe whether they bee straight by right intention, or crooked by any blind affection.³⁹

Anyone familiar with allegorical writing from the period knows that the primrose path of dalliance is winding and errant while the straight and narrow path leads directly to virtue. All of this means that as he drew his horizontal rules, underlining spiritual or moral points, Stonley may have been focusing the regulating energies of his writing practice in his journals more generally — driving the verbal point home on a haptic level.

But as well as registering their ethical significance, we might also want to think about those ruled lines materially. A ruler is, to us, an unremarkable tool, but it is possible that Stonley's version was rather more exclusive. Among the collections of the British Museum is 'the sole surviving example of an Elizabethan drawing set', dated circa 1570.⁴⁰ Made of gilt brass, this tall case of instruments is engraved on four sides with allegorical figures of Peace, Abundance, War and Poverty; inside, it has spaces for scissors and knives, a pen, pencil-holder and pricker, a whetstone, several sets of compasses and dividers, and a folding rule. We know who made this case, because it is signed by Bartholomew Newsum or Newsham, a clockmaker. Newsham was active in London from the 1560s, and during the 1580s seems to have served as

³⁸ See, for example, FSL, MS V.a.460, fos. 3^r–22^r.

³⁹ Benet Canfield [Benoît de Canfield], *The Rule of Perfection* (Roan, 1609, STC 10928), C1^r.

⁴⁰ British Museum 912,0208.1; for reproductions, see <<http://tinyurl.com/jt7mcjh>> (accessed 8 May 2016); Anthony Gerbino and Stephen Johnston, *Compass and Rule: Architecture as Mathematical Practice in England 1500–1750* (New Haven, 2009), 60–1; see also 50–3 on the increasing sophistication of carpenters' rules in the period.

mender of the Queen's clocks; the *ODNB* describes him as one of the first English clockmakers whose skills could compare with those of his foreign contemporaries and as a harbinger of London's later growth as a centre of European clockmaking. Stonley was acquainted with Newsham; on 1 June 1582 he recorded a payment of 15s 4d 'to Bartholmew Newsham for mending my Clockes at sondry times' (459/61^r). This connection may illuminate a tantalizing entry in the inventory of Stonley's London house, for 'a little latten [brass] ymplement belonginge to a standishe [inkstand] to putt bodkin in. Compasses &c in'.⁴¹ Since this implement was appraised at sixpence, it was presumably smaller or less elegant than the British Museum's example, but it sounds like a relation of Newsham's set.

Newsham's *oeuvre* creates a kinship between the regulation of time and the regulation of writing that is also clear in the format of Stonley's diary entries, with their insistent yet somewhat tokenistic genuflections to clock time. As well as bookending the day with morning and evening prayer, Stonley almost invariably stays at his Westminster office 'till xj.'; his time of arrival, and the timing of other events in the day, is not normally deemed worthy of note. The significance of 'xj.' is presumably that it heralds the dinner-hour, and so serves as a prelude to Stonley's detailing of his dining arrangements. It may be significant that Stonley's clockmakers were regularly employed to set up or mend the mechanical turnspits in his kitchens; thus time and food were associated not just by customary practice but also by technology.⁴² The significance of time-discipline to Elizabethan officialdom is encapsulated in an anecdote explaining how one of the Barons of the Court of Exchequer became known as 'Baron Tell-Clock': 'And that nickname Baron *Tellclock* came up first in Baron *Southertons* time, who when he felt the Chimes ring in his Stomach towards dinner, he was us'd to tell chief Baron *Tanfield*, *My Lord 'tis twelve a clock*'.⁴³

⁴¹ TNA, E159/412/435.

⁴² See on FSL, MS V.a.459, fo. 8^v a payment of 60 shillings 'To Iohn Williamson Cloksmyth for the new Clocke at Duddingherst and settinge vp the same with the old Cloke to Bote', of 33s 4d 'To the same for a new Turnbroche set vp at Estham [East Ham]' and of 2s 'To the same for one yerres wages keping the Turnebroche at London ending at mydsummer last' (this annual payment is repeated on fol. 88^r). On FSL, MS V.a.459, fo. 68^v Stonley pays 10 shillings 'To the Cloksmyth in full of his Bargaen made with Thomas Cook (and settinge vp the newe) for the old Clokes turnbroches and settinge vp the new at Duddingherst'. FSL, MS V.a.459, fo. 66^v records a payment of 10s 'To the Clockman for a dyall', and FSL, MS V.a.460, fo. 55^v a payment of 12d 'for a Stringe to my gold watch'.

⁴³ James Howell, *Londinopolis: An Historicall Discourse or Perlustration of the City of London* (London, 1657), 213^f (p. 369). The Baron in question was Stonley's Aldersgate neighbour John Sotherton (1562–1631?).

To focus on Stonley's ruled lines is thus to open a set of relationships between the spatial and the temporal that might well send us back to the diary entries in the journals. Let us recall the standard template: 'This day after morning preyer I went to westminster kept ther till xj came home to dynner kept home all the Afternone at my bokes & so ended that day with thanks to god at night'. What is perhaps most obvious about such an entry in the light of the preceding discussion is the extent to which it operates as a kind of chronotopic wallpaper. Stonley's journals create, for the modern reader, a number of perplexing gaps, but the one gap they will not leave is a gap in time and space. In this, they anticipate the diaries of Samuel Pepys, with their 'Up . . . and so to bed' rhythm, although they inject greater religiosity into the daily round. While Pepys's fame rests on the pains he takes to detail the particulars of each day's activities, Stonley's default mode is reiteration — as sometimes becomes explicit: 'This day after morninge prayer I kept at my bookes as the day before with thanks to god at night' (461/66^r). It is hard to resist the conclusion that his entries are essentially space-fillers that exist in order to cover a certain ground — geographical, temporal or bibliographic — rather than to document a self.

Space-fillers, in the narrow, palaeographical sense of marks that have no content and serve merely to fill out a line, or a page, have a particular place in early modern bookkeeping. Their purpose is to ensure transparency and accountability by guaranteeing the stability of the record; medieval notaries could be cast out from their guild for defacing an account book, and in the eighteenth century excise men were warned not to 'erase, deface, or alter any figure, letter, or character' in their minute-books, 'on pain of being discharged'.⁴⁴ Stonley's practice is clearly guided by such considerations; he regularly adds a series of diagonal or curling lines to otherwise blank areas of the page in order to ensure that the record cannot be falsified.⁴⁵ But if we accept Aho's account of the rhetorical character of early modern bookkeeping, we will be bound to think of space-fillers as a show of transparency and accountability. As it happens, we have good evidence that Stonley's accounting was as much rhetorical as financial, in the regularity with which his numbers fail to stack up. The first volume contains 51 sums, 12 of which Stonley gets wrong (23.5 per cent). The second contains 73 sums, of which Stonley miscalculates 19 (26 per cent).⁴⁶ We may

⁴⁴ Aho, *Confession and Bookkeeping*, 72; Rebecca Elisabeth Connor, *Women, Accounting, and Narrative: Keeping Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2004), 47.

⁴⁵ Sullivan, *Rhetoric of Credit*, 32. For diagonals, see for example FSL, MS V.a.460, fo. 36^v and FSL, MS V.a.461, fo. 37^r; for curls, FSL, MS V.a.459, fo. 31^r and FSL, MS V.a.459, fo. 93^v. By the same token, Stonley is usually keen to ensure that deleted materials remain clearly legible, although there are some striking exceptions to this rule.

just be witnessing the financial incompetence (or corruption?) that led to his ruin, but the more compelling implication is that the journals are something of a front.

The diary entries in the journals are part of this front. Their aim is to assert the industry and piety of the subject rather than to document the self. If the journals are a box, or a case of boxes, the daily entries are one of the things that fills it, along with snippets of text, lists of dining companions and foodstuffs, commodities and news. But they are also a kind of alibi, testifying to the good behaviour of their subject irrespective of what he was actually doing. There is little evidence for overt fictionalization, although I have argued elsewhere that Stonley may be deliberately obscuring the complexities of his confessional identity in the journals.⁴⁷ But there are good reasons to think that Stonley's life was not being recorded in them. As he ruled in a certain version of the truth, Stonley ruled out another version, which is only visible through gaps and interstices in the record.

There is room here to cite two examples. The first comes on 8 May 1594, when Stonley notes the payment of a single penny 'for a Booke in commendacion of the Ladye Branche' (460/82^v). The book in question was an elegy for Helen Branche, the wife of Stonley's brother-in-law Sir John Branche, a draper who served as Lord Mayor of London in 1580–1. Stonley seems to have been very familiar with Sir John, dining with 'the Lord mayer' on several occasions during his spell in high office. So it is unsurprising that Stonley should have wanted to read a book in praise of Branche's wife when she died in 1594, five years after her husband. But it is curious that there should be no reference to Helen Branche's death in Stonley's diary entry for 10 April. And, although there is a reference to her funeral at St Mary Abchurch, Stonley does not say whether or not he attended it, although he was in London at the time — he was at Westminster until 11 and then 'kept home all the day' (460/75^v, 80^v). This is striking in part because the journals are full of christenings, marriages and funerals; the very first entry in the 1593 volume is for a payment 'To mistres Townly at the Christning of her Child this day named Richard' (460/3^r).

The evidence here is distinctly equivocal; any number of factors could have kept Stonley away from the funeral, and he could have attended the funeral without recording that he did so. But if he kept away, choosing instead to mark her death by reading a poem in praise of her virtues, a motive for his decision is close at hand. A set of court depositions from 1588 records a tempestuous family argument that centred upon Helen Branche.

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Dunstan Roberts for compiling these figures.

⁴⁷ Scott-Warren, 'Books in the Bedchamber', 246.

According to the deponents in the London Consistory, this venerable worthy of the parish had, some Sundays past, been subjected to a series of verbal assaults both in the church and in the streets.⁴⁸ The tongue that lashed her belonged to her husband's niece Grace Dorrell:

after the communion ended and as they were departing owt of the church / the sayd Grace dorrell being in her pew hastily came owt & overtooke the Lady Branche and in the churche porche . . . began after a raging sorte to rayle against the sayd lady Branche sayeing these worrdes . . . I mervale yow . . . can receave the communion and beare such mallice to me & Sir [John] Branches kynred for that you cannot abyde nor think well of any of them but wishe they were all hanged.

Dorrell reportedly went on to accuse the Lady Branche of trying to have her killed and of consorting with witches to discover when her husband was going to die. We have no way of judging the veracity of these allegations, but it is striking that in her will, Helen Branche asked to be buried in St Mary Abchurch as close to her first husband, John Mynors, 'as convenyently may be' — which, given that both of her husbands were buried in the church, looks rather pointed.⁴⁹

Contextualizing a journal entry in terms of its silences as well as its declarations thus brings us close to a moment of affective subtlety that cannot be accommodated by it. A second occasion on which this happens is when Stonley is imprisoned for debt in 1597, and embarking on the last surviving volume of his journals. For anyone seeking signs to understand the psychological toll of indebtedness and imprisonment on someone who had once enjoyed great personal wealth and status, Stonley's journals offer rather slim pickings. Granted, his accommodation was probably of a superior variety — he refused to cede it to another prisoner, since he 'was thus settlyd & in good Eyre [air] towards the garden', a garden in which he sometimes went walking (461/10^r, 65^v). Nor was he entirely quiescent. His diary entries report frequently on his attempts to sell off his lands and to plead his case before judges, including Edward Coke, whom he describes as 'enve[igh]ing sore agenst [him] & denyinge the Allownce of all [his] peticions', because 'though he knew the Lawes yet in this matter he vnderstande not the course of thexchequer' (461/17^r). Stonley expresses some harsh judgments on those who were trying to force him to sell his estates at a knock-down

⁴⁸ Corporation of London Archives, DL/C/213/394. The individual depositions are unnumbered.

⁴⁹ TNA, PROB 11/83/291.

rate, including one pair who ‘cam to [his] wyf threteninge hir as though she had byn his Kytchin may[d] to yeld hir good will’ to a sale — ‘which two the honest neighburs ther abowt cold be glade they dwelt further of[f]’, he adds tartly (461/18^r). Perhaps his most explicit statement about his situation comes when he learns from a letter that his wife is sick, at which point he writes: ‘god helpe her & send vs some conforte yf yt be his will for yf my seruice were concenterd as yt ought to be or yf her maiestie knew yt I shuld be otherwise considered to my owne comfort & my frendes &c’ (461/24^v). We might also note that, in the midst of his tribulations, and for one day only, he comes up with an entirely innovative formula for his daily activities: ‘This day I walkyd in my vocacion & preyer with thanks to god at night’ (461/28^r). Aside from these references, though, we are left to infer Stonley’s deteriorating condition from scratchy penmanship and the increasingly erratic layout of the journals.⁵⁰

Something interesting emerges, though, if we pay close attention to the extracts that Stonley transcribed each day from Richard Taverner’s translated collections of Erasmian commonplaces. Whereas in the 1593–4 volume he was quite careful in his transcriptions, Stonley was notably less patient in 1597–8, frequently abbreviating materials; he may have been incited to do this by the length of some of the anecdotes contained in the first volume from which he copied, *The Garden of Wysdome*. However, there is at least one case where an omission is clearly motivated by the content of the book rather than by adventitious circumstances. This is in the tales relating to Alfonsus, King of Aragon, which are told early in the second book of the *Garden*. The first story begins:

A Certayne knyght had ryotously & prodigally wasted al his patrimony & landes which were very greate, and moreouer had indebted hym selfe excedyngly moche. His frendes in the courte were sutors to the kynge for hym, that at least hys bodye myght not be imprisoned for hys debtes.

The King is unflinching:

Yf he had bestowed this so great ryches eyther in the seruice of me hys prynce or upon the commune weale of hys countrey, or in releuyng of hys kynsfolkes, I coulde heare your sute. Now syth

⁵⁰ See for example FSL, MS V.a.461, fos. 37^r, which has no text; 52^v–53^r, where dates are muddled; 57^r, where a day is omitted; and 74^v, where Stonley was perhaps writing in the dark.

he hath spent so great substaunce vpon hys body, it is mete, that his body suffre for it.

Taverner points the moral:

Let thys be a lesson to all prodigalities chyl dren to plucke backe theyr fete betymes ere all be wasted, leaste yf they do not, they happen to be serued as this wyse gentylman was.⁵¹

The clinching detail here is that Stonley does transcribe the stories relating to Alfonsus that come *after* this particular episode, but the original from which he is copying does not separate out each story, so there is no possibility that the omission could have resulted from ‘eye-skip’ or simple carelessness. Clearly, the tale of the prodigal knight was simply too near the bone for the imprisoned Teller. And, while he might have disputed every detail of the narrative in terms of its relevance to him — he was not a knight, he had not inherited wealth only to waste it, and he had probably not spent all of his money on goods of the body — the logic of the narrative of bodily suffering for self-interested expenditure can only have been painful. This is another moment of affective intensity that appears to be strategically excluded from the journals, reinforcing the point that they were concerned to obscure rather than to record the self.

This essay has argued, contra Smyth, that there may be good reasons for resisting the use of terms such as ‘autobiography’ or even ‘life-writing’ to describe documents like Richard Stonley’s journals. While there can be an heuristic benefit to the adoption of such terms, there is also a danger that they will distort the nature of the archive, sending us in search of a subject that is in important respects specifically excluded from the text in hand. My exploration of the rhetorical and material structures of Stonley’s journals has revealed them to be just a few of the material receptacles that were maintained in the interests of accountability, and cognate with the chests and boxes that were increasingly prominent in the material culture of the home.⁵² The

⁵¹ Richard Taverner, *Second Booke of the Garden of Wyседome* (London, 1539, STC 23712.5), A3^v–A4^r.

⁵² Lucy Razzall, ‘Containers and Containment in Early Modern Literature’ (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2013). Thomas Whythorne reported that during his time spent working as an accountant for William Bromfield he took care to file different writings in ‘several boxes, in [his] counting house or desk made for the purpose, to the end that when I should be called to mine account I might the readilier find them’, *Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. Osborn, 143 (orthography modernized).

lessons for the 'social history of the archive' are that we need to carry on deepening our understanding of the social codes and practices that underwrote early modern record-keeping, and that we ought not to let the search for selfhood distort sources that have a distinctly narrow interest in the individual.

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