

Introduction

The written self

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That our modern world is obsessed with selves is self-evident. From Margaret Thatcher's claim in 1987 that 'there is no such thing as society' but only 'individual men and women' (and their families), to social network profiles replete with selfies, and the literary vogue of self-fiction (*autofiction*),¹ the individual subject seems to be the very core of economic orthodoxy and production, political institutions, social relations and artistic creation alike in this our neoliberal age. Yet even a cursory look suggests that these multiple modern selves imply very different understandings of what the individual is and means, as well as very different ways of exploring and expressing individual subjectivity.

Against (neo-)liberalism's promotion of the autonomous economic and political subject, too often at the expense of social justice, resistance movements have sought to combine (with more or less success) a commitment to individual freedom with an attempt at collective organisation,² or tried to do away altogether with the idea of *self* understood as bourgeois construct.³ Social networks allow at the same time a public amplification and propagation of the self and, by recording its multifarious incarnations, arguably provide the very continuity which John Locke (1632–1704) thought essential to the sense of personal identity; while selfies, pictures of oneself taken by oneself which, more often than not, are actually

group photographs, and certainly meant for public use and large-scale sharing, are both narcissistic self-contemplation and a means to relate to other, connected, selves. As to self-fiction, which turns private testimony into public narrative, one can see it as a careful exploration of individual subjectivity and a recognition of the individual's entrapment within himself or herself, the impossibility of a collective narrative.

Interestingly, this versatility of the self, hovering between individualism and collectivity, fragmentation and continuity, isolation and connection, is already quite manifest in the English literature of the long eighteenth century. The coincidence is unsurprising, since many of the ideas and institutions which developed in the late seventeenth century and contributed to the inflation of the self still hold good today: the rise, as the two revolutions of the seventeenth century helped to decrease state restrictions on freedom of enterprise and private property, of an economic doctrine (liberalism) committed to the defence of individual responsibility and ownership, of which Locke and, later, Adam Smith, were prominent theorists;⁴ the political shift from absolute monarchy to a representative government pledged to the protection of individual rights; the correlated development of an ideology of 'affective individualism' and 'self-awareness' championed by the urban, especially Protestant, commercial and professional middle classes;⁵ and the growth of a consumer society and market for cultural goods, which made both the practice and consumption of culture available to a greater number of people.⁶

Even allowing for the researcher's propensity to approach the past through the prism of his or her own present, eighteenth-century representations of the self are strikingly similar to our own. The attempt of Latitudinarian theologians and moral sense philosophers at vindicating the self by turning 'self-love' into a prompt to Christian charity and general benevolence; the playful exhibition or painful exploration of self-fragmentation through Augustan satire and diaries; the search through fiction for a symbolic solution to the problematic experience of inner division and discontinuity; the twin gestures, as the American and French revolutions confronted British selves with the spectacle of collective action, of Romantic retreat into nature and self, and radical effort at conjuring up a nationwide political community through public speaking and the popular press – all these are evidence of an eighteenth-century self-awareness which this volume proposes to investigate.

It is generally agreed by commentators that, as initiator of the debate on the nature of the self that ran through the century, pride of place should go to John Locke. It was he who first focused on and anatomised the theme of what he was to call 'personal identity' in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* first published in 1689, to which the chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity' was added in the 1694 second edition.⁷ To put it another way, it was Locke who put the (philosophical) cat among the (religious) pigeons (although the *Essay* is, at first sight, and above all to modern eyes, a rather discreet and inoffensive cat). It provoked reaction from philosophers, theologians and churchmen, in part because of what were considered to be its internal inconsistencies and aporia, in part because it seemed to negate, in a sense by neglect, belief in an afterlife and thus to work counter to Christian dogma. But in his *Essay*, Locke, a self-professed Protestant, was above all a philosopher. The 'self' that Locke sought to define was very much a modern, secular, psychological entity. He sought to look at the notion from scratch, to start, as was his wont, with a clean slate, a *tabula rasa*.

This volume seeks to record some of the mutations, literary expressions and distinctive voices of the 'self' that can be observed, read and heard during the long eighteenth century, starting with Anne Killigrew, poet and artist, and the divines Isaac Barrow and John Tillotson, then moving through an array of writers and thinkers to William Blake, William Wordsworth and the English debate about the French Revolution. Together, these voices create a narrative, a patchwork chronicle, a multilogue that will illustrate the diversity, resilience and unity of the notion of the self, however elusive the object 'self' may prove to be in the long run. In assembling them, the aim has been to explore how authors in different domains, with varying objectives and from distinctive perspectives, envisage and express the notion of self. While charting the changes and variations evident across the period in approaches to, and the experiences and understanding of, the self, we have to allow that this something called the 'self' remains somehow intact or at least indispensable. It is something at once very much a part of us and yet apart from us.

However fragile and vulnerable the self may prove to be, it is ultimately a refuge, something one can return to, or hope to return to. Alternatively, it can be viewed and experienced as something that one fashions and shows to the outside world, a mask, a *persona*. This raises the question of the 'true' or authentic self that Shakespeare

teasingly includes in Polonius's self-satisfied and homely advice to Laertes prior to his son's departure for France: 'This above all: to thine own self be true, / And it must follow as the night the day / Thou canst not then be false to any man.'⁸ Putting a finger on exactly *what* it is, is quite another matter. 'Self' here, then, acts as a prism, exemplifying a principle of unity, through which the various novelists, poets, philosophers, churchmen and writers of the long eighteenth century foregrounded in these twelve chapters can characterise themselves and their ways of perceiving the self.

The self and the sense of self are usually, in the eyes of many, thankfully or unthinkingly, taken for granted. 'Self' has become so pervasive a term that it passes unnoticed in everyday speech and verbal exchanges. It is the sense of identity – individual, personal identity – that makes one recognisable to others, in society at large, in family, social and professional circles, and indeed familiar to oneself, that gives the impression one can have of always being the 'same' person despite all the changes that take place in a person's life. This, however, is not always the case as experience and language testify in the most banal utterances: 'I'm not feeling myself today'; 'to be beside oneself' with anger or joy, etc. (Locke provides similar examples), and more dramatically in experiences of alienation, of feeling estranged, of losing one's mind, one's identity, or memory as in amnesia. Madness and depression, for instance, can make us 'strangers to ourselves', to employ (and displace) Julia Kristeva's phrase.⁹ Some torture techniques aim specifically at the depersonalisation of the victim, as though the ultimate cruelty and punishment one could inflict on someone was to make them lose their sense of identity. Locke does not dwell on such extreme psychological dramas in his seminal addition to the second edition of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 'Of Identity and Diversity', but does, tellingly, acknowledge discontinuities in the sense of self, some of which occur on an everyday, recurrent basis, between 'the *Day* and the *Night-man*' for instance, and more dramatically between the '*Sober Man*' and the '*Mad Man*'.¹⁰ Locke's arguments turn on the fundamental notions of consciousness, continuity and memory and his anatomy of personal identity and self-consciousness underpins the volume taken as a whole. It was precisely this insistence on a problematic continuity that was to be at the heart of the contestation of Locke's arguments by Bishop Butler in his addition to *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), later in the century by David Hume, and then

by Thomas Reid's 'common sense' examination of the theme of personal identity.¹¹ However rich the debate and the objections that followed, however valid some of the latter may be seen to be, it was Locke, on his Irish friend William Molyneux's prompting, who had set the agenda.¹²

Another feature of the self, apart from its capacity to endure not only through individual lives but also across the centuries, is the fascination and attraction it exerts across a wide range of disciplines and fields of inquiry. The notion of the self is obviously central to biography and autobiography which otherwise could not and would not exist, but also to literature, to the theatre, poetry and the novel, as well as to psychology and psychoanalysis, to painting, to photography, to gender studies, to philosophy, and to the hard sciences, where the nature of the self and self-consciousness remains a mystery.¹³ The number of studies devoted to the subject in these various genres and disciplines remains impressive and shows that the term has in no way lost its currency but retains its relevance, urgency and abiding interest. In a word, the 'self' has managed to preserve, down the centuries, its impressive status of conundrum.

The making of the modern self

Raymond Martin and John Barresi speculate towards the end of *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (2006) – a title that allusively suggests that the territory of the self (and the soul) could be compared to an empire – that 'very early, in prehistoric times', our ancestors, the Neanderthals, or 'some group of early hominids or humans', 'seem to have originated a future-oriented concern with death' and that the first manifestations and glimmerings of the soul or the self in the course of time thus take the form of the material traces of burial.¹⁴ Burial rites can be taken as evidence that the disappearance of a person was accompanied by a collective recognition of that person's integrity and specific identity, the sign too of a possible belief that some part of the individual would somehow survive the physical decomposition and continue its existence in an afterlife. The soul, in the sense of a spiritual self, would thus have been with us as a defining feature of humankind from the mists of time. The awareness of death, of the death of others, the apprehension of one's own demise, and the rituals that accompany it, that leave and

have left visible, durable and tangible traces are, then, signs of reflexivity, of consciousness.

More readable are the signs left by pen and paper (or its ancient equivalents of stylus and tablet) and the genesis of the self becomes easier to trace from Greek philosophy onwards. Plato's injunction to control one's passions and desires through reason, his doctrine of self-mastery, is thus the starting point of Charles Taylor's masterful study of 'the making of the modern identity'.¹⁵ But Plato's self-mastery is a move outwards, from one's individual appetites to the recognition of a pre-existing, cosmic, rational order;¹⁶ and it is only with Augustine and the claim, central to the *Confessions*, that it is not through the external world but in one's self that God can be found, that Taylor sees the beginning of an inward turn leading on, though in a more secularised form, to Descartes and Locke.¹⁷

Many more stops ought to be made in this express history of the self: in the Middle Ages, at a time when, as David Aers has forcibly argued, selfhood was defined through reference to various communities – courtly, religious, national, sexual;¹⁸ or in the Renaissance, at a time when Robert Ellrodt and Charles Taylor identify a major turning-point in Montaigne's *Essais*,¹⁹ from the self-exploration bent on achieving a sense of unity and stability which had dominated ancient thought, to a self-exploration willing to acknowledge, if not to celebrate, fragmentation and discontinuity, the perplexing multiplicity of selves, perhaps best seen in Montaigne's often-quoted claim that 'moi à cette heure, et moi tantôt, sommes bien deux'.²⁰ Yet this dispersion of self in time can be redeemed, for both Descartes and Locke, through thinking and consciousness: 'I think therefore I am', declares Descartes in the *Discours de la méthode* (1637), while Locke argues in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that through consciousness and sensation, and memory, a human being can come to consider 'it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places':

to find wherein *personal Identity* consists, we must consider what *Person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it: It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will any thing, we know

that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present Sensations and Perceptions: And by this every one is to himself, that which he calls *self* ...²¹

Locke premises continuity as an essential element of personal identity, and thus memory, which enables consciousness to persist over time, to be aware of past actions and events, to acknowledge them, to 'own' them, as it were, to reassemble and re-appropriate them, but also to be accountable to oneself and to others. Thus consciousness re-joins and encompasses the notion of conscience – the moral and ethical, personal, and social quality of consciousness – without exactly coinciding with it. This ethical element of 'self' or selfhood, the self not only as informing an individual conscience but as a social self existing and interacting within a community, is, as we shall see in several chapters in this volume, a central feature of debates on the self in the long eighteenth century.

Historically, there are many changes in the seventeenth century which can account for this new emphasis on the individual, comprehensively connected to each other in Christopher Hill's *Century of Revolution*.²² the needs of the expanding economy and pressure of merchants and capitalist landowners to free business and investment from government restrictions and monopolies; the Puritan commitment to individual conscience and introspection, manifest in the many Puritan diaries and autobiographies; the diffusion through the Royal Society of Baconian science, which pushed forward the frontiers of learning, 'kill[ing] traditional ideas that the heart is "nobler" than the blood, the sun "nobler" than the planets, just at the same time as the political revolution killed the idea of hierarchy in law and politics';²³ the Civil War, which did away with the absolute power of the King, and patriarchal society of vertical dependence from God to King to Lord to tenant; the Glorious Revolution which completed the victory of Civil War Parliamentarians and culminated in a Bill of Rights guaranteeing individual liberties – all this favoured the development of a sense and theory of self by setting the (propertied) individual free from the iron links of the 'great chain of being'. At the same time, practical changes were favouring self-exploration too: more comfortable houses (through the use of coal, glass windows, and chairs instead of benches) which allowed for greater privacy, perhaps the mirror too, Hill suggests, helped develop self-consciousness.²⁴ The democratisation of the

press, as Civil War pamphlets, post-Restoration coffee-houses, and the appearance and popularity of periodical newspapers in the early eighteenth century contributed to the emergence of a ‘public sphere’, also created the material conditions in which self could be explored and expressed.²⁵ Within the pale of this volume, however, such reasons for the rise of the self can only be touched upon.

A French connection

At the beginning of the period that this volume covers, the French polymath, mathematician, philosopher and religious thinker, Blaise Pascal (1623–62), was to foreground and comment on, and even, for all intents and purposes, to invent, the substantive form of a personal pronoun, and what is one French equivalent or approximation of ‘the self’, ‘le moi’. In the unfinished and posthumously published *Pensées* (1670), he famously wrote: ‘le moi est haïssable’,²⁶ a phrase translated by Joseph Walker in 1688 as ‘The *Me* is to be hated’ and in the early eighteenth century by Basil Kennet as ‘SELF is mean and scandalous.’²⁷ The ‘me’ or ‘self’ in question here refers more to self-love or rather self-centredness, and the desire to dominate and assert oneself, than the ‘self’ *per se*, as a dispassionate object of intellectual enquiry, and indeed Pascal looks at the ‘moi’ from various perspectives in the course of the reflections that were to become his *Pensées*. Regina Maria Dal Santo and Jeffrey Hopes in Chapter 2 on Barrow and Tillotson, and Chapter 3 on Mandeville and Hutcheson, will show that self-love can be viewed in other and more positive lights.²⁸ But this *invention* of the ‘moi’ in French as it has been called by Étienne Balibar and by Vincent Carraud,²⁹ is at least as much a reference to an innovation in terminology, a needful change, as it is the claim that the ‘self’ had suddenly come into being. The ‘self’ as a term does, however, seem to have come to the fore in the latter half of the seventeenth century.³⁰ Locke himself, who, as Balibar has argued, really created and developed the notion of ‘self-consciousness’, always attentive to the uses, misuses and abuses of language, was to emphasise the necessary distance between the term and what it designates, the signifier and the signified, as he writes earlier in this chapter: ‘every one is to himself that which he calls *self*’.³¹ Locke tends, if not to ignore, at least to put on hold, the question of the self’s immateriality and above all enters into no real discussion concerning its immortality, while the

soul's (and not the self's) immortality was obviously central to Pascal's thought, and a literally crucial notion in his or, one may suppose, any apology of the Christian faith.

Locke, like Alexander Pope after him, sought to clarify the objectives of the fledgling science of man, what Pascal called 'l'étude de l'homme',³² by establishing the limits of our knowledge, and identifying how far human inquiry could extend and be considered as valid. Pope is prudent in the formulation of his own ambition in the first Epistle of *An Essay on Man* (1733–34):

The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find)
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
No pow'rs of body or of soul to share,
But what his nature and his state can bear. (I. 189–92)³³

After Pascal, both chronologically and in terms of influence and restraint, Pope was to begin Epistle II of his *Essay* with a no-nonsense assertion of the object of man's quest for knowledge. Pope seems to be on the verge of providing a roadmap for self-knowledge as he neatly edges God out of the picture and places Man centre stage (as Locke himself does). He appears (albeit briefly, as briefly as the couplet lasts) to make things sound clear and full of promise: 'Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; / The proper study of Mankind is Man.' All well and good. A vast programme but one that is immediately compromised and knowingly self-sabotaged by the poet as he goes on to list a whole series of paradoxes, oxymorons and antitheses that combined make up a portrait of the chaotic moral identity of man, aiming to establish less his potential powers, than his pretensions, contradictions and shortcomings:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer,
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:

Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
 Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
 Created half to rise, and half to fall;
 Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
 Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
 The glory, jest, and riddle of the world! (II. 1–18)³⁴

At the same time Pope, throughout the passage, but at the end in particular, is condensing and versifying elements of Pascal's *Pensées* which he was acquainted with both in the original and through Kennet's translation.³⁵

What a Chimæra then is Man! What a surprising Novelty! What a confused Chaos! What a Subject of Contradiction! A profess'd Judge of all Things, and yet a feeble Worm of the Earth; the great Depository and Guardian of Truth, and yet a meer Huddle of Uncertainty; the Glory and the Scandal of the Universe.³⁶

The self, a universal not an individual self, the identity of Man, as it emerges in Pope's heroic couplets, is presented as the quarry to be pursued, but the lines are the simultaneous acknowledgement of the inevitable failure of the enterprise of 'knowing' such a being who is at once 'The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!'. But beyond that lie the questions: who exactly is doing the pursuing and to what end? Pascal, Locke and Pope approach the self as the object of their study, rather than expressing and examining it through recording personal, subjective experience. Pope's more extrospective approach to the question of self is light years from Wordsworth's poetic quest. We appear to move progressively, not in leaps and bounds, from Pope's contained study of man, through the emotionally heightened literary age of sensibility, with the rehabilitation of emotion (though the word 'rehabilitation' is inexact and too strong as emotion was, of course, never absent) to the intensity and subjectivity of the romantic era and the expressive self. This again sounds rather too neat.

The modern self, however, did truly come into its own in the eighteenth century, albeit less as a given object than as a work in progress. Several modern commentators argue that the self came to displace the notion of the soul at that time. In M. H. Abrams's discussion of the secularisation of religious terms inherited from the past, the soul, though far from disappearing, came to occupy a rather different and uneasy, more secondary and indefinite space,

and the self, a more secular, then, but also psychologically oriented and ‘neutral’ notion, was to become an object of study *per se*. It is possible to see in the rise of the self (and the preoccupation with ‘personal identity’) an example of what Abrams refers to as ‘the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking’.³⁷ The self, as we will see in the following chapters, is also the theatre of anguish and doubt (in Samuel Johnson, for example) as much as a source of joy or positive sentiments. Here too, Abrams, with a generous smattering of compounds featuring the ‘self’, was to chart the progression from the universal and religious theodicy, to the experience of personal redemption:

the Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life (if we want to coin a term, we can call it a ‘biodicy’), belongs to the distinctive Romantic genre of the *Bildungsgeschichte*, which translates the painful process of Christian conversion and redemption into a painful process of self-formation, crisis, and self-recognition, which culminates in a stage of self-coherence, self-awareness, and assured power that is its own reward.³⁸

The change is a sea change, and Wordsworth’s quest establishes a new sort of personal, individual soteriology. This ‘biodicy’ can be read as a culmination of sorts, one of the later manifestations of what Charles Taylor, quoted in Jeffrey Hopes’s Chapter 3, refers to as the Augustinian ‘inward turn’.³⁹

The circular self

At the heart of the question of the self, and including notions that can be considered as approximately related terms – the soul, the person, the mind, subjectivity, etc. – lies the quest for a stable, discernible, describable human identity, and indeed the supposed bedrock of each individual, the personal and singular ‘self’. This personal identity (identity being derived from the Latin ‘idem’, i.e. same), this sense of ‘sameness’, has come to be accepted and prized, at least in the Western world, as, one is tempted to say, the ‘inalienable’ essence of an individual. This is the progression mapped out by Martin and Barresi who see an evolution from the spiritual soul, to the philosophical and psychological self and, finally, to the scientific mind.⁴⁰ Much overlap remains, however, between these terms and changes, and there are many grey areas.

The focus in this volume is on writing the self, putting it into words, as a theoretical, an ethical, and a religious or spiritual notion, a way of construing, conducting and constructing oneself, as the expression of doubt and moral and mental distress, when the self and the sense of one's identity is felt to be in jeopardy, but also as the assertion of a necessary and reassuring social identity and recognition. But 'self' is also a fertile source of linguistic innovation. Prior to the end of the seventeenth century, 'self' was mostly used as an adjective or a pronoun, but for a lone substantive use in Spenser's *Amoretti* in 1595 ('but in my selfe, my inward selfe I mean') where it is implicitly pitted against an antithetic sinful self and is roughly synonymous with 'better self'.⁴¹ As to the Shakespearian 'to thine own self be true', it is, arguably, more an emphatic form of the personal pronoun (thyself) than a genuine substantive use of the word 'self'.⁴²

The term 'self' is now used in what can appear to be an unending series of compounds.⁴³ If it does seem in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to have superseded the term 'soul', the two have, of course, continued to exist side by side. It is perhaps not totally frivolous to note that the various forms of both words behave differently. Thus 'selfless' is a positive term whereas 'soulless' is not. 'Selfish' has negative connotations whereas 'soulful' is positive. We can enjoy 'soul' music but not (as yet!) 'self' music.

'Self' has, then, proved to be a term capable of linking up with any number of other words to form compounds. The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) devotes some twenty-nine pages to entries and examples either specifically related to 'self' or to its very numerous compound progeny. As a substantive, and in the general understanding and use of the term, two definitions categorise the 'self', in turn, as a succession of states, and then as an accumulation, an ensemble of disparate dispositions:

4a. What one is at a particular time or in a particular aspect or relation; one's nature, character, or (sometimes) physical constitution or appearance, considered as different at different times. Chiefly with qualifying adj., (*one's*) *old, former, later self*.

4b. An assemblage of characteristics and dispositions which may be conceived as constituting one of various conflicting personalities within a human being.⁴⁴

A definition concerned with the philosophical use of the word insists, however, on the idea of the self as a unity, something perceived as single and unified despite its fluctuating nature:

3. That which in a person is really and intrinsically *he [sic]* (in contradistinction to what is adventitious); the ego (often identified with the soul or mind as opposed to the body); a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness.⁴⁵

This last definition draws attention to the inescapable circularity of dictionaries, words dutifully referring to, and calling on, the help of other words to elucidate their meaning. It introduces several related terms – soul, mind, subject, ego, consciousness – which are closely related to the notion of self. It also brings to mind David Hume's description of the mind's functioning where he unequivocally disowns this 'permanent subject'. Of the self-affirmer, the defender of the notion of the self, Hume notes: 'He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls *himself*; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me.' He continues:

But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.⁴⁶

Continuing his spirited defence of the rigours of philosophical inquiry against common sense and 'natural propension', Hume deploys the metaphor of drama and role-playing:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.⁴⁷

There is no stasis or stability in Hume's account and perception, but a constant flux, a disorderly stream of consciousness *avant la lettre*; the self appears to dissolve before our very eyes, or rather it becomes at best a mirage, a figment of our thought and imagination.

The author of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) draws attention to the artifices, ruses and unceasing mobility of the mind that seeks to maintain the notion of its own identity. This identity, the very self, would be a fiction: ‘The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one...’.⁴⁸ Perhaps, but the ‘I’ that does the analysing and debunking here (as Hume was well aware) continues its own assertions and finishes its elegant sentences. The same ‘I’ has come down to us as the philosopher, historian and essayist David Hume, author also of ‘My Own Life’, ‘The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself’ which he wrote a few months before his death in 1776.⁴⁹

The self has always remained problematic and plural in nature. At the end of the timespan we are concerned with here, what John Keats, in his letter to Richard Woodhouse dated 27 October 1818, referring to William Wordsworth, was to dub the ‘egotistical sublime’, if not relevant to all writers of the time, did at least highlight the perception of the exalted self, a valorisation of individual feeling and thought as a way of being in, and expressing, the world. Keats was to valorise in his letter what looks on paper to be the exact opposite, an absence of self, a merging of subject and object, Keatsian empathy:

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character— ... A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—.⁵⁰

Keats presents two antagonistic selves, at least in poetic terms, the self-centred and the self-less. He is paradoxically affirming his own identity as a writer (his ‘poetical character’) as one of non-identity, or of total identification with the perceived and contemplated external object. But the exaltation of the self is arguably another way of merging with the outside world not totally different from Keatsian fusion through the non-self.

To return to the present, the ‘self’ in all its apparent complexity can be eloquently illustrated by a contemporary piece of self-writing, a text entitled ‘L’autographe’, where the psychoanalyst and writer Jean-Bertrand Pontalis summons up glimpses and fragments from

his own past, again seeking out and querying those notions of continuity, logical and chronological progression we take for granted – which paradoxically include a sense of ‘otherness’ and discontinuity – the progress of a life, a ‘self’ (or, here, ‘*le moi*’) that apparently survives across time, through the different phases in a human life, and which, despite its trials, tribulations and transformations, somehow remains recognisably the same. Here is Pontalis’s reflection on the passing of time and the nature of the inner self:

When looking at a photograph of yourself taken in the distant past – your childhood or youth –, sometimes you are happy to discover the same features as those you have today. But this is rarely the case: you have difficulty imagining that you were once this laughing child with a fringe hiding his forehead, this boy with plastered-down hair celebrating his First Communion, this somewhat melancholy young man walking along the banks of the Seine, this thirty-year-old pretending to be sure of himself when in fact he really wasn’t at all ... You hesitate between a reassuring impression of continuity (I may have changed but, all things considered, I’m still the same person) and a sense of radical discontinuity, as if your life was just a succession of losses, of separations, the impression that each stage of your life separated you from the preceding one, that you had no stable identity and were nothing but a series of characters in search of an author.⁵¹

These photographs that Pontalis evokes and verbally holds up before the reader’s gaze, these snapshots of the self (taken in a pre-selfie era) serve to remind us that there is indeed a past self that the present self can again ‘reflect’ on and seek to connect with and relate to. The ‘self’ as unity here becomes the self as process or series. Behind this apparently simple strategy lies the vast question of what words, paintings and photographs really reflect of the initial ‘object’ or ‘subject’.

That Pontalis concludes the passage with an allusion to a work of literature, Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), and that the work in question is a play, is a telling final detail. It implies that the whole question of ‘person’ and ‘character’ and ‘self’ is a *mise en scène*, even a *mise en abyme*, not a single reflection but a hall of mirrors, but also a construction, a creation. Where does the notion of ‘person’ (in life), or indeed ‘character’ (in a novel), come from? Who is its ‘author’, who brought it into being and fashioned it? These questions can quickly appear unsolvable and discouraging, perhaps even perfectly futile, and yet going back

to the apparently firm ground of the self-assured couplet of Alexander Pope quoted above, the self, however elusive and protean its nature and identity, seems to be that ‘something’ which reflectively governs (in the nautical sense) and oversees personal identity in spite of the sense of contradiction, fragmentation, dispersal and estrangement that a person can at times experience. If the self is indeed a fiction, it is no doubt a necessary (and, in a sense, salutary) fiction, a shared and social one – a historical one too as this volume seeks to show – and an ultimate refuge, in constant search of an author (and reader).

The twelve chapters presented here all look at the way the idea of the ‘self’ is constructed in the writings of the time. Philosophers and theologians explicitly discuss the question of the self, contending for a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ self, while novels, poems or diaries allow writers to explore the riddle of the self as experienced by the subject, and particularly its problematic fragmentation. As such, they complement and further the construction of the ‘self’ that goes on in sermons and treatises; but they are also, as some of the essays point out, nourished and shaped to a great extent by such theoretical writings on the self. The chapters look at this construction of the self through writings during a century in which, from Locke’s claim that personal identity is founded on memory, to Romantic portrayals of the isolated self, something like the modern self can be said to have emerged. Rather than sketching out a Whig history of the self, in the sense of a progressive movement, with regular staging posts on the way to some final apogee and fulfilment of the self, and while acknowledging that the perception and rise to prominence of the self as a notion are in part necessarily historically determined, these chapters bear witness to the existence of different, competing ways of thinking and representing the self in the long eighteenth century. If they help to identify three distinctive paradigms in the representation of the self through the century, each yielding something like its own dominant idea of the self, it is decidedly no three-act Self’s Progress from foul to fair.

In the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writings this volume begins with, the self comes across as an essentially moral question. Poets, preachers, novelists and philosophers alike are engaged in a similar attempt at vindicating the self and purging it from its negative implication of selfishness by reconciling it with Christian virtue and sympathy for others. Anne Killigrew, a painter,

poet and unmarried woman at the court of Charles II, tones down her self-assertion as an artist by carefully fashioning herself as a deeply religious woman: if she is to be a wit, as Laura Alexander points out, she must be a 'spiritual wit', as if the self had to be excused away.

There is no sense of excuse, however, in the writings of clergymen like John Tillotson or Isaac Barrow, who, as argued by Regina Maria Dal Santo in Chapter 2, distinguish in their sermons between a bad, 'inordinate' self-love and a good self-love which prompts Christian obedience and charity. Thus from being an (unruly) associate of Christian virtue, the self becomes its very foundation, and self-love, more than obedience to an external rule, the motivation for virtuous actions. This internalisation of virtue, relocated within the self, is continued by the moral sense philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. In Chapter 3 Jeffrey Hopes shows that in his answer to Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, Francis Hutcheson also distinguishes bad self-interest from good 'self-approbation', which is the pleasure one feels in doing right: no longer an evil passion, the self is now integral to one's 'moral sense' and altruism. Interestingly, even if in the novels of Eliza Haywood a similar conciliation of self-love (as distinct from destructive self-interest) and love of others and virtue is usually reached, the alloy is imported, Orla Smyth claims in Chapter 4, from the seventeenth-century French novelists and philosophers on which Haywood draws, rather than on contemporary British responses to the self-love/benevolence dilemma.

William Flesch in Chapter 5 underlines the debt of evolutionary biology and modern theories of cooperation to this eighteenth-century probing of self-approbation and the paradoxical pleasure it yields, because it is a pleasure based on self-sacrifice rather than self-indulgence. From Hutcheson's (and Hume's and Smith's) recognition that going against one's self-interest can be ultimately more rewarding because it secures one's own, and other people's, approval, is derived the modern understanding of selflessness as a 'costly signal': it implies a sacrifice of one's self-interest, but ends up working for one's self-interest, as selflessness is socially valued and rewarded.

In the course of the century, however, a new paradigm seems to have taken the place of the self-as-self-love. The self no longer presents itself as a moral question, but rather as a psychological question of personal identity. Diaries, novels by letters or narrated

in the first person singular, stage individuals grappling with the inconsistencies of a self they experience as discontinuous or divided, while writers devise original ways to represent such fragmentation. In Pope's *Dunciad*, claims Clark Lawlor in Chapter 6, the poet conjures up a series of grotesque alternative selves, embodying various threats to his identity (as writer, as male, etc.), against which he is finally able to establish his own 'epic self'. In Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz's Chapter 8 shows that it is the alternation of interior and exterior scenes which conveys a sense of Pamela's inner division between obedience and rebelliousness to the master's law; after the marriage, the two spaces symbolically merge, as the once dangerous garden becomes the *locus amoenus* where Pamela and Mr B. enjoy pleasant 'airings'.

All divisions of self, however, do not necessarily result in a final restoration of the self's lost unity. As Allan Ingram points out in Chapter 7, both Samuel Johnson and James Boswell emerge from their various writings as profoundly divided selves; but, while Johnson urges self-coherence in spite of inner conflicts, Boswell is less reluctant to expose his own self in its helpless division. *Tristram Shandy*, on the other hand, as Gioiella Bruni Roccia argues in Chapter 9, is no mere (gleefully parodic) testimony to the self's discontinuity: it is also an account of the way in which the self constructs itself and reaches some kind of poise dialogically through its conversing and interacting with other selves.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, as the country is shaken by the revolutions in America and France and the violent counter-revolution it provoked in England, Romantic poets and radical politicians alike reflect on the individual's place in the world and its relation to the community as a whole: the self is no longer (or less so) internally divided, but rather is at pains to find its place in relation to others and the external world. Wordsworth's poetry, argues Laura Quinney in Chapter 10, is permeated with a Neoplatonic sense of the alienation of the self on earth from the transcendental realm of ideas, which it can now but glimpse at. But in the experience of the sublime, as shown by Eva Antal's Chapter 11, the forlorn romantic self can escape its earthly prison, and be united for a time, out of itself, with something greater than itself.

But this reaching out of the Romantic self beyond the world to abstract Nature and God can be seen as a conservative shying away from reform. Radical activists, at the same time, were trying hard

to keep up a sense of national community in the face of governmental repression. They used the written or oral form of the ‘self-defence’, as Rachel Rogers cogently argues in Chapter 12, not only to suggest, through their personal case, the general necessity of reform, but also, by addressing directly the people at large, to bring into existence as they wrote the all-inclusive political community without which there could be no reform.

Such a tidy narrative of the self’s protean progress through the long eighteenth century is bound to over-simplify things, as narratives do. There is clearly room for more work and bulkier studies, foregrounding other perspectives – economic, political and legal ones, for instance – as the editors are well aware, but the volume as it is will, they hope, contribute to a better understanding of the way in which literature (in its broad sense), at a time when many of the foundations of the world as we still know it were being laid, helped eighteenth-century men and women, philosophers, churchmen, politicians and poets alike, to articulate, probe, and devise solutions to many of the riddles (the self’s identity through discontinuity, the conciliation of self and other, self and community, self and world) which still daily confront our brave new selves.

Notes

- 1 See François Cusset, ‘Contretemps: l’expérience de la revue de littérature générale’, in François Cusset (ed.), *Une Histoire Critique des Années 1990* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014), p. 141.
- 2 See for example David Harvey’s analysis of May 1968 in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 41–3.
- 3 See Thomas Frank’s account of the Occupy Wall Street Movement: ‘To the Precinct Station’, *The Baffler*, 21 (November 2012).
- 4 See J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980). See also Alan Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- 5 In his seminal work on *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), Lawrence Stone distinguishes between the ‘restricted patriarchal nuclear family’ of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the ‘closed domesticated nuclear family’ of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While Stone points out that in early modern England there was a decline of

the ‘open lineage family’ based on kinship among the landed classes (which did not preclude a reinforcement of patriarchy within the family), it is only after the mid-seventeenth-century Civil War that the *bourgeois* ideal of ‘affective individualism’ and domesticity spreads from the commercial and professional middle class to the upper landed classes. See pp. 222–69.

- 6 See John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
- 7 Christopher Fox’s *Locke and the Scriblerian: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1988) remains the most precious and succinct discussion of the questions arising from, and provoked by, Locke’s added chapter. Udo Thiel provides a comprehensive study of the philosophical background to the question in his *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 8 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), I, iii, lines 78–80. See Ulrike Tancke’s commentary on the nature of Polonius’s advice in ‘*Bethinke Thy Selfe*’ in *Early England: Writing Women’s Identities* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), p. 131. For a study on the ‘rise’ of the self in the Renaissance period see Robert Ellrodt, *Montaigne and Shakespeare: The Emergence of Modern Self-Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015). Ellrodt sees in Montaigne and Shakespeare ‘the fountainhead of an evolution beginning in early modern times and culminating in our own age’, p. vii.
- 9 Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
- 10 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). Locke’s *Essay* was originally published in December 1689; the chapter ‘Of Identity and Diversity’ was added in the second edition in 1694. For the discussion of the night self and day self, and of the sober and the mad man, see pp. 342–5. Original emphasis.
- 11 Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, ed. W. E. Gladstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896). Facsimile edition, *The Works of Joseph Butler*, vol. 1 (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1995). Butler discusses the theme of personal identity in the first of two dissertations added to *The Analogy of Religion*: ‘Dissertation I, Of Personal Identity’, pp. 388–96; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), ‘Of personal

- identity', bk I, pt 4, sect. 6, pp. 251–63; Thomas Reid, Essay III, 'Of Memory', Chapters 4–6, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes, intro. Knud Haakonssen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 262–79.
- 12 See Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, p. 97.
- 13 A *New Scientist*, Special Issue was entitled 'The Self. The Greatest Trick Your Mind Ever Played', 23 February 2013, pp. 32–43. It starts with the statement that the 'intuitive sense of self is an effortless and fundamental human experience. But it is nothing more than an elaborate illusion. Under scrutiny, many common-sense beliefs about selfhood begin to unravel. Some thinkers even go as far as claiming that there is no such thing as the self.' However it also acknowledges that 'Our whole way of living relies on the notion that we are unchanging, coherent and autonomous individuals', p. 37.
- 14 Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 290–1.
- 15 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.
- 18 David Aers (ed.), *Culture and History 1350–1600* (New York, London and Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).
- 19 See Ellrodt, *Montaigne and Shakespeare* and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 177–84.
- 20 Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, ed. Pierre Villey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), III, 9, p. 964. 'My selfe now, and my selfe anon, are indeede two', *The Essayes of Michael, Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio, vol. 3, ch. 9, 'Of vanitie' (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, n.d.), p. 206.
- 21 Locke, *An Essay*, bk II, ch. 27, §9, p. 335. Gioiella Bruni Roccia quotes this passage from Locke in Chapter 9 of this volume, note 2.
- 22 Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution* (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1961; 1980).
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 217. See, on the question of the mirror, subjectivity and reflexivity, Deborah Shuger, 'The "I" of the Beholder: Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind', in Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (eds), *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999).
- 25 The idea of the emergence in the late seventeenth century of an oppositional public sphere, rooted in coffee-houses and periodicals, in which the rising middle class could articulate its grievances against

the state, dates back to Jürgen Habermas's classic thesis, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). Habermas's model has since been contested, reviewed and refined by historians. While Edward P. Thompson and Terry Eagleton, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, have drawn attention to those, women and the working class in the 'making', left aside by the Habermasian model, Joad Raymond and Sharon Achinstein have emphasised the role played by Civil War pamphlets and newsbooks in the development of public discussion, thus pushing back the birth of the public sphere to the mid-seventeenth century. Recently, Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus have argued for an even earlier birth date, tracing the development of a European public sphere, to the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. Yet, even Pincus and Lake acknowledge a quantitative and qualitative shift between the Elizabethan period and the Interregnum on the one hand, and the 1680s on the other hand: they describe the first two as a 'prerequisite' and a 'transitional period' to the 'fully fledged post-Revolutionary public sphere' which they locate, as Habermas did, at the turn of the eighteenth century. See Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England', in Lake and Pincus (eds), *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963); Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (London: Verso Books, 1984), p. 36; Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780–1850* (London, Melbourne and Sydney: Hutchinson, 1987). On Civil War pamphlets and newsbooks, see Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

- 26 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, text of the Brunschvicg edition, introduction and notes by Ch.-M. des Granges (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 190.
- 27 *Monsieur Pascal's Thoughts, Meditations, and Prayers, Touching Matters Moral and Divine as they were found in his Papers after his Death*, Done into English by Joseph Walker (London: Printed by Jacob Tonson, 1688), p. 214. *Thoughts on Religion, and other Curious Subjects*, trans. Basil Kennet, 2nd edn (London, 1727), p. 246. Kennet's translation was first published in 1704, and editions followed in 1727, 1731 and 1739/1741.
- 28 Alexander Pope subscribes to this benevolent and measured view of self-love in Epistle II of *An Essay on Man*, according self-love a central role in Man's moral identity: 'Two Principles in human nature reign;

- / Self-love, to urge, and Reason to restrain;’ (II. 53–4) and reaffirms this interdependent system of checks and balances a few lines further down: ‘Self-love, the spring of motion, acts the soul; / Reason’s comparing balance rules the whole. / Man, but for that, no action could attend, / And, but for this, were active to no end;’ (II. 59–62). In the following Epistle he claims that self-love reconciles private and public good, the two no longer being viewed as antagonistic but complementary, each aiding and sustaining the other (III. 269–82). Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. Maynard Mack, vol. III i (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). First published in 1950 by Methuen & Co. Ltd. See also a recent edition of the poem, with a substantial introduction and textual commentary, Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. Tom Jones (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- 29 See Étienne Balibar’s *John Locke: Identité et différence. L’invention de la conscience* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1998), p. 250, and Vincent Carraud, *L’invention du moi* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010).
- 30 See below, note 43.
- 31 Pierre Coste, the French translator of Locke’s *Essay* (1700), chose to translate Locke’s ‘self’ as the ‘le soi’ rather than Pascal’s ‘le moi’. See Balibar, *John Locke: Identité et différence*, p. 14.
- 32 Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 115.
- 33 Pope, *Essay on Man*, ed. Maynard Mack.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 See the section Émile Audra devotes to the influence of Pascal on Pope in *L’Influence française dans l’œuvre de Pope* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1931), pp. 480–504.
- 36 *Thoughts on Religion, and other Curious Subjects*, trans. Kennet (1727), p. 162. The original French is as follows: ‘Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l’homme? Quelle nouveauté, quel monstre, quel chaos, quel sujet de contradiction, quel prodige! Juge de toutes choses, imbécile vers de terre; dépositaire du vrai, cloaque d’incertitude et d’erreur; gloire et rebut de l’univers.’ Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 184.
- 37 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company and Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 12.
- 38 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 96.
- 39 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 177.
- 40 See Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), Chapters 3–5.
- 41 C.I.4.b., *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, vol. XIV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989/1991), p. 907.

- 42 *Ibid.*, C.I.1.a
- 43 The *OED* notes: 'The number of *self*- compounds was greatly augmented towards the middle of the 17th cent., when many new words appeared in theological and philosophical writing, some of which had apparently a restricted currency of about 50 years (e.g. 1645–1690), while a large proportion became established and have a continuous history down to the present time.' *Ibid.*, p. 907.
- 44 *Ibid.*, C.I.4.a., C.I.4.b.
- 45 *Ibid.*, C.I.3., pp. 906–7.
- 46 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 252.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- 49 David Hume, 'My Own Life', in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 169–75.
- 50 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, vol. 1, 1814–18 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), letter no. 118 to Richard Woodhouse dated 27 October 1818, pp. 386–7.
- 51 'Quand vous avez sous les yeux une photographie de vous prise dans des temps lointains – enfance, jeunesse –, parfois vous êtes heureux d'y retrouver vos traits d'aujourd'hui. Mais c'est rarement le cas: vous avez du mal à imaginer que vous avez été cet enfant rieur avec une frange lui couvrant le front, ce premier communiant aux cheveux gominés, ce jeune homme quelque peu mélancolique se promenant le long de la Seine, ce trentenaire feignant d'être sûr de lui alors qu'il l'était si peu ... Vous oscillez entre un sentiment rassurant de continuité (j'ai beau avoir changé, tout compte fait je suis toujours le même) et celui d'une discontinuité radicale, comme si votre vie n'était qu'une succession de pertes, de séparations, que chacune de ses étapes vous séparait de la précédente, que vous n'aviez aucune identité stable et n'étiez qu'une série de personnages en quête d'auteur.' J.-B. Pontalis, *Avant* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), p. 125. English translation by John Baker.