New Essays on Life Writing and the Body

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Edited by

Christopher Stuart and Stephanie Todd

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FOREWORD

EVERY BODY'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

TIMOTHY DOW ADAMS

> "It is so much more difficult to live with one's body than with one's soul. One's body is so much more exacting: what it won't have it won't have, and nothing can make bitter into sweet."
>
> —D. H. Lawrence

New Essays on Life Writing and the Body is especially welcome at a time when both popular and academic interest in the human body have merged. The collection will serve as a scholarly companion to one of the most popular museum exhibitions in years, *Bodies: The Exhibition*, which provides a completely new way for the human body to be displayed. Making use of an innovative polymer preservation process which is applied to actual human bodies, the exhibit allows viewers to see a three-dimensional version—from the inside and out—of the traditional multi-layer transparencies once common to biology text books. Just as the popular exhibition allows viewers to see bodies in three dimensions, so this collection of scholarly essays, with its multiple perspectives, reveals body-centered life writing from new angles.[1]

Moving from the literary bodies of Wharton, Woolf, and Stein through such women's body issues as food, class, colonization, and athleticism, the essays also take up both racialized bodies and those described as disabled or disfigured by a range of physical and mental diseases. In doing so the collection demonstrates some of the many ways that the human body can intersect with the three major components of the three Greek words from which we derive the term autobiography: *autos*, *bios* and *graphe* (self, life, and writing). Because our sense of self is so often connected to both body image and body function, many life writers have demonstrated that even the most abstract metaphorical representation of their selves is often rooted in their changing corporal bodies. As Oliver Sacks has noted, our body sense is controlled by "three things: vision, balance organs (the vestibular system), and proprioception," or position sense.[2] While some authors want

to describe or create a consistent self, an inner sense of continuity from childhood through a lifetime, James Olney's description of *bios* as the "course of a life seen as a process," is a more accurate description of what most autobiography scholars call a sense of self.[3] The course of our lives is naturally complicated by the fact that everyone's body changes as we age,so that in effect all body-centered autobiographies can be characterized as attempts at reconciling one's sense of self with one's constantly changing body.

Those whose physical situations become radically opposed to their long-term body image, often experience a severe loss of self, as John Kotre explains in his *Outliving the Self*. On the other hand, for people whose lives have been interrupted by life-threatening circumstances, the significant altering of the concept of *bios* may also have a positive effect. As Arthur W. Frank asserts in his *The Wounded Storytelle*r, "Illness takes away parts of your life but in doing so it give you the opportunity to choose the life you will lead, as opposed to the one you have simply accumulated over the years."[4] The body is also constantly altered by the events of life itself–as evidenced by both the physical signs of life's wear and tear, the changes in our appearance and health brought about by major life altering events, and also by our physical and mental health. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have observed, "It is easy to think that autobiographical subjectivity and autobiographical texts have little to do with the material body. But the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge, as well as a textual surface upon which a person's life is inscribed."[5]

Not only are our embodied selves a kind of on-going textual narrative of the course of our lives, but they are also directly connected to *graphe*, our ability to produce life writing. Frank writes, "Stories are told not just about the body but through it."[6] Those for whom the act of writing is very difficult or not physically possible (because of their body's physical or mental situation) have had to convey their personal narratives in other ways, the autobiographical act echoing the embodied self. An especially effective example can be seen in the chaotic, non-chronological, repetitive narrative structure of Terri Cheney's *Manic: A Memo*ir, which parallels the chemical imbalances that produced her swings between an almost joyful euphoria and a deadening depression, her loss of equilibrium while achieving stability through medication, and her difficulty in remembering the sequence of events of her life with bipolar affective disorder. Christina Middlebrook's *Seeing the Crab: A Memoir of Dying* Before *I Do* is even more radical in its use of temporal disruptions, disassociation between personal pronoun and subject. Narrating after the period in which the

author lay recovering from peripheral stem cell replacement following breast cancer, she begins to write about her self in the third person: "'The zoo creature is very dopey. Its left eyelid sags. Its back is covered by a hideous, pussy rash that itches. . . . Worst of all, the zoo creature cannot think or remember. It says things in a language that makes no sense."[7]

Often life writing with physical bodies at its center takes the form of collaboration, a relative or friend narrating or helping when the situation prevents telling the story. Examples include Bernard Bragg's *Lessons in Laughter: The Autobiography of a Deaf Actor*, as signed to Eugene Bergman, and Jean-Dominique Bauby's extraordinary effort in using his ability to blink his left eye to compose *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly: A Memoir of Life in Death*, following a debilitating stroke which left him with "locked-in syndrome." Particularly useful in considering the ethics of collaborations such as these is Thomas Couser's V*ulnerable Subjects*, which is concerned with the trust-based relationship between people who are unable to represent themselves in writing and often have ambiguous relationships with those who are presenting their story.

While the human body has not always figured in an especially prominent way in life writing, in recent years many autobiographies with a strong component of body consciousness have begun to appear, matched by scholarly interest from a variety of disciplines. Leading the way among autobiography scholars is the work of Thomas Couser, especially his *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*. Other important work has been done by Paul John Eakin (*How Our Lives Become Stories* and *Living Autobiographically*) and Sidonie Smith (*Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body*). Other scholars have written about such issues as feminism and body image, illness and disease, deafness, trauma and the body.[8]

One of the noteworthy strengths of *New Essays on Life Writing and The Body* is its range; in addition to studies of illness, disfigurement, and dis/ability, the life stories of those whose bodies differ from culturally determined normative standards, the collection includes essays that take up cases where the physical body might at first seem unremarkable, issues of aesthetics, control, size, class, colonization, fitness, athleticism, family, intellectuality, and intimacy. While numerous exceptionally strong autobiographies are directly connected to dis/ability or illness, many others of value do not fall into that category. Thomas Couser makes the point that "unmarked" bodies seldom seem to require a corresponding narrative:

> In everyday life, for example, the unmarked case—the "normal" body—can pass without narration; the marked case—the limp, the scar, the wheelchair, the missing limb—calls for a story. Thus, people with anomalous bodies are often required to account for themselves. This might

> be an opportunity rather than an obligation, but despite the request for impromptu narration, the answer to the question "What happened to you?" is expected to relieve the auditors' discomfort in the presence of difference.[9]

Central though stories of corporal dysfunction have been to the rise of life writing and the body, imagining that only "marked" examples are significant is problematic because of the assumption that the non-normative aspects of anyone's body are the only parts of a person's story worth telling—that events in someone's personal narrative which don't relate directly to an abnormality are of little interest. Another problem with an exclusive concentration on bodies that deviate from the norm is that eventually everyone's body fits into that category; we all age, get diseases, have break-downs and die. Whatever might make a body non-normative also falls into the broad category of illness or inferiority or unruliness. When, for example, a body-centered personal narrative focuses on skin color or sexual orientation or deafness the differences inherent in the narrative are not necessarily thought of by the writer to be in the same category as stories connected to major illness.

While the human body was once notably absent from Western life writing for most of its history, in recent years the opposite situation has begun to prevail. An almost unlimited number of examples related to virtually every bodily situation have been published, in a wide variety of forms. Where body parts were once relegated to text books, the curious forced to read the long-running "autobiographical" series "I am Joe's Body," (articles told from the point of view of various body parts, culminating in the peculiarly title "I Am Joe's Man Gland"), now we can read about the complete body from many different points of view.[10]

For the remainder of this foreword, I wish to provide a preliminary guide to the multiple ways that life writing about the body has been published, my examples arranged roughly from head to toe, with excursions into skin, circulation, major diseases and other body systems. While many personal stories have concentrated on a single body part, because the body is an organic system, even the most limited concentration always includes the whole body as well and there are many cases where a narrative includes multiple categories. Such a taxonomy naturally emphasizes "unruly" or "non-normative" cases.

Head

The most celebrated example of life writing in this category is *The Autobiography of a Face* (2003), Lucy Grealy's devastating story of her changing sense of self as a result of her recurring surgeries and chemotherapy treatments for Ewing's sarcoma, a cancer that severely disfigured her face. That her facial features are connected to her entire body's image is made clearer by the short essay she published "Autobiography of My Body," and by the story of her friendship and ambiguous death as told in Ann Patchett's *Truth & Beauty* (2004). Another compelling story related to the head is Howard Dully's *My Lobotomy* (2007), in which he describes receiving a brutal and unnecessary transorbital lobotomy at the age of twelve, an experimental treatment caused primarily by his disturbed mother's anxiety over his behavior.

Other examples in this group include life writing about blindness and deafness, including Helen Keller's classic *The Story of My Life* (2004), which of course discusses both, John M. Hull's *Touching the Rock* (1992), and Ved Mehta's eleven part autobiography series *Continents of Exile* (1972-2004), which tells the progressive story of his early blindness, coming to America to study at the Arkansas School for the Blind, and eventual years as a writer. An unusual book about blindness is *Scattered Shadows: A Memoir of Blindness and Vision* (2004) by John Howard Griffin. Griffin's temporary blindness, a result of combat in World War II, is somewhat similar to his temporary "blackness," as described in *Black Like Me* (2003), the odd story of his having dyed his skin black and traveled around the Southern United States.

Deaf autobiographies range from those which make use of American Sign Language, signed or transcribed to others or delivered by video; those written by people with sufficient hearing or hearing loss after English acquisition to write in standard written English; and the personal stories of hearing children of deaf adults (CODA's), who have tried to bridge the gap between the worlds. Strong entries of the first type, in addition to the already named Bernard Bragg's *Lessons in Laughter: The Autobiography of a Deaf Actor* (1989), and the titles reprinted (accompanied with a DVD) in the anthology *Signing the Body Poetic: Essays in American Sign Language Literature* (2006), edited by H-Dirksen L. Bauman. Deaf performance artists such as Terry Galloway, whose *Out All Night and Lost My Shoes* (1993) has received universal praise, have also used that form to tell the story of their lives. Examples in the second group include Henry Kisor's *What's That Pig Outdoors?* (1990), Hannah Merker's *Listening*

(1974), and Terry Galloway's *Mean little Deaf Queer* (2009). Noteworthy examples of the third type include Leah Hager Cohen's *Train Go Sorry* (1994), Ruth Sidransky's *In Silence* (1990), and Lou Ann Walker's *A Loss for Words* (1986).

Because chemical imbalances within the brain are directly connected to mental illness, the substantial number of mental illness autobiographies also fall into this group, including such classics as *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* (schizophrenia) by Marguerite Sechehaye (1994), *Darkness Visible* (depression) by William Styron (1992), *An Unquiet Mind* (bipolar disorder) by Kay Redfield Jamison (1997), *Nobody Nowhere* (autism) by Donna Williams (1994), *Girl, Interrupted* (borderline personality disorder) by Susanna Kaysen (1994), John Elder Robison's *Look Me in the Eye* (2007, Asperger's Syndrome), and John J. Gunther's *Death Be Not Proud* (1949, brain tumor).

Torso

Nora Ephron's *I Feel Bad About My Neck* (2006) provides a transition from the head to the torso, a category which includes books about heart disease such as William O'Rourke's *On Having a Heart Attack* (2006), Paul West's *A Stroke of Genius* (1995), as well as Matthew W. Sanford's *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence* (2006), (paralysis), *Fortunate Son* by Lewis Puller (2000, Vietnam wounds), Anatoyle Broyard's *Intoxicated by My Illness* (1993, prostate cancer), Tim Brookes's, *Catching My Breath* (1995, asthma), Joan Weimer's *Back Talk* (1996, herniated disk), and Reynolds Price's *A Whole New Life* (2003) and Robert Murphy's *The Body Silent* (2001)—both about spinal tumors. Of the many compelling breast cancer narratives, Betty Rolin's *First, You Cry* (1996); Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980) and *A Burst of Light* (1988); and Jo Spence's *Putting Myself in the Picture* (1988), a photographic autobiography which she referred to as phototherapy, are especially important.

Feet /Legs

Oliver Sacks's many case studies of neurological conditions began with *A Leg to Stand On* (1987), his autobiographical account of a leg injury which eventually led to the necessity of his learning to walk and an odd sense of disembodiment in which he became alienated from his own limb. Other memoirs directly related to this category include Pang-Mei Chang's *Bound Feet and Western Dress* (1999), Christy Brown's *My Left*

Foot (1990, cerebral palsy), Mary Felstiner's *Out of Joint* (2008, arthritis) and Kenny Fries's *Body, Remember* (2003, deformation of legs and feet).

Skin

In addition to numerous autobiographies by persons of color in which skin color is central, dermatological life writing includes such books as John Updike's *Self-Consciousness* (1989, psoriasis), Dorothy Allison's *Skin* (2005, whiteness), Caroline Kettlewell's *Skin Game* (2007, self-mutilation), and Lee Thomas's *Turning White* 2007, (the story of an African-American with vitiligo).

Whole Body

Besides the life writing examples I have provided within these smaller categories, there are of course others which concentrate on the whole body or on various body systems which affect more than a single area. Examples include the life stories of those who suffered severe damage from accidents: Andre Dubus's *Broken Vessels* (1992) and *Meditations from a Movable Chair* (1999, car accident), Peggy Shumaker's *Just Breathe Normally* (2008, near fatal cycling collision), as well as the memoirs of athletes: Samuel Wilson Fussell's *Muscle* (1991, body building, bulimia), Leslie Haywood's *Pretty Good for a Girl* (1999, track, body building), and many memoirs from dancers, including Martha Graham's *Blood Memory* (1991), Allegra Kent's *Once A Dancer* (1997), and Suzanne Farrell's *Holding On to the Air* (2002). In addition, since American Sign Language, which concentrating on the human hand, uses the entire body to convey subtleties, all deaf autobiography involves the entire body. As Galloway notes, "Deafness has left me acutely aware of both the duplicity that language is capable of and the many expressions the body cannot hide."[11]

In many cases life writing about the whole body results from a particularly debilitating disease. Examples include Leonard Kriegel's *Falling into Life* (1991) and Brenda Serotte's *The Fortune Teller's Kiss* (2008)—both about polio, Nancy Mairs's *Waist-High in the World* (1996)and *Plaintext: Essays* (1992, multiple sclerosis), Tom Andrews's *Codeine Diary* (1998, hemophilia), Jean Baréma's *The Test* (2005) and Alice Wexler's *Mapping Fate* (1995)—both about Huntington's disease, and Joseph Heller and Speed Vogel's *No Laughing Matter* (2004. Guillain-Barré syndrome).

Sexual Orientation

Books under this heading include autobiography and biography related to HIV/AIDS, such as Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast* (1997), Arthur Ashe's *Days of Grace* (1993), Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time* (1988), Harold Brodkey's *This Wild Darkness* (1996), Susan Bergman's *Anonymity* (1994), and Mary Fisher's *My Name is Mary* (1996). Authors of HIV/AIDS narratives range from those infected through transfusion and sexual activity, and those narrated by lovers or family members. Of course gay writers also write about their bodies without reference to disease, as in Mark Thompson's *Gay Body* (1997), which discusses relationships between his physical body (including such topics as drugs and sadomasochism) and his spiritual life. Transsexual and trangsgendered narratives range from Jan Morris's *Conundrum* (1974), Aaron Raz Link and Hilda Raz's *What Becomes You*, (2008, which describes a daughter's transformation into a son), Minnie Bruce Pratt's *S/he* (1995, the story of a gay woman's love for a woman born female but living as a male), and Norah Vincent's *Self-Made Man* (2006), in which a gay woman passes as a male for a year. An unusual example of a partially transgendered life is Ken Baker's *Man Made* (2001), the story of the author's sexual dysfunction brought on by a brain tumor which produced an abundance of the female hormone prolactin for much of his early life.

This brief catalogue of body-centered life writing is by necessity incomplete, the examples I've provided only a sampling of the rich body of work on the human body. Like any taxonomy, my categories are not air tight, many writers falling into more than one section. Terry Galloway, for instance, fits into both the deaf and gay categories. Paul West is both an autobiographer who wrote about his stroke—and subsequent aphasia—and a biographer of a deaf daughter. Lewis Puller was both a paraplegic and an alcoholic, this last a disease with so many life writing examples that I have not included it. While I've listed primarily written autobiography, numerous strong examples exist for each category in other formats, including photographic, graphic, drama and motion pictures.

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Notes

[1] *Bodies: the Exhibition*, produced by Premiere Exhibitions. http://www.bodiestheexhibition.com/

[2] Oliver Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On* (New York: Perennial, 1987), 46-7.

[3] James Olney, "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princteon UP, 1980), 241.

[4] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 1.

[5] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001). 37.

[6] Frank, 3.

[7] Christina Middlebrook. *Seeing the Crab: A Memoir of Dying* (New York: Anchor, 1997), 55-6.

[8] Scholars from many disciplines have begun to produce significant work related to the topic, including Rosemarie Garland Thomson (*Extraordinary Bodies)*, Susan Bordo (*Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*), Anne Hunsaker (*Reconstructing Illness)*, Arthur Kleinman (*The Illness Narratives*), Sander Gilman (*Disease and Representation*), Susan Sontag (*Illness as Metaphor)*, Judith Butler (*Bodies that Matter*), Ross Chambers (*Untimely Interventions*), Leslie Haywood *(Dedication to Hunger*), Mary Elene Wood (*The Writing on the Wall)*, Diane Price Herndl (*Invalid Women*), Lennard J. Davis (*Enforcing*

Normalcy), Elizabeth Grosz (*Volatile Bodies*), Peter Brooks (*Body Work*), Suzette Henke (*Shattered Subjects*), Katie Conboy (*Writing on the Body)*, Einat Avrahami (*The Invading Body)*, Cheryl Mattingly (*Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*), Daniel Punday (*Narrative Bodies*), and an updated version of the classic *Our Bodies, Ourselves.*

[9] G. Thomas. Couser, "Paradigms' Cost: Representing Vulnerable Subjects," *Literature and Medicine* 24.1 (2005): 19.

[10] The "I Am Joe Series," which originally appeared in the *Reader's Digest*, is now availableon CD Rom. See http://www.pyramidmedia.com/series.php?title_id=1698

[11] Terry Galloway, "I'm Listening as Hard as I Can," in *With Wings: An Anthology of Literature by and About Women with Disabilities*, ed. Marsha Saxton and Florence Howe (New York: Feminist P, 1993): 8.

INTRODUCTION

GENDER, RACE, AND DISABILITY: THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE BODY IN LIFE WRITING

CHRISTOPHER STUART

In a scene from her 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison describes a painfully shy little black girl attempting to buy some candy in a shop owned by a white, middle-aged Polish immigrant:

> She pulls off her shoe and takes out the three pennies. The gray head of Mr. Yacobowski looms up over the counter. He urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her. Blue eyes. Blear-dropped. Slowly, like Indian summer moving imperceptibly toward fall, he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year old white immigrant store-keeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary.[1]

This instance of a white man failing to see an actual black girl standing right in front of him is also an instance of reading. In this case, the white man reads Pecola's body as a text, one that requires merely a glance to tell him all that he needs to know. He perceives that she's black and small and a girl, which means he need read no further. For the rest, as a subject, she's invisible. Where Ralph Ellison describes the plight of the invisible man in America, Morrison reminds us in her novel that there are also invisible little girls.

Morrison's Polish grocer both reads and fails to read Pecola's body as text. As soon as he perceives her, he recognizes from her female, racialized body that she is nothing more than a present absence, a body of

marginal significance. Reading her body, he relegates her to the merely material, the merely bodily, something he does not have to engage as a subject any more than he would engage a squeaky hinge or any other material annoyance that disturbs his peace. Paradoxically, only words can save Pecola, restoring to her a presence the white male denies her. Through her analysis of the dynamic between white, Catholic, Polish man and black, shy, little girl, Morrison thus makes Pecola present to the reader in a way she cannot be present to the grocer. Where in reality (despite the fact that the scene itself is a fiction) Pecola's very body makes her invisible, Morrison's textual (re)construction of the moment restores her subjectivity and agency. Where the grocer is confronted by Pecola's bodily presence but can only see through her, Morrison's fabric of mere signs makes Pecola realer and more present to the reader than she ever can be to the grocer.

This little scene is, of course, drawn from a work of fiction and not from an autobiography, but it nevertheless illustrates why the extra-textual, the outside, "real," material world of bodies and objects has in recent years become central for many critics to the analysis of autobiographical texts, despite the arguments of earlier deconstructive critics who argued that the remains of our own histories can never amount to more than the disfiguring residue of language. Groundbreaking, interdisciplinary works by critics such as Sidonie Smith, Leigh Gilmore, Paul John Eakin, and G. Thomas Couser have reminded us that, however language might disfigure the self, the body is itself an inescapable signifier, one which marginalized individuals like Pecola Breedlove can rarely forget or even briefly imagine out of existence, and which thus play a crucial role in their written accounts of themselves. Inspired by the work of these writers and others, my co-editor and I organized a panel on "Autobiography and the Body" at the 2007 Northeastern Modern Language Association convention in Philadelphia. Given the overwhelming number of abstracts we received for what was merely a regional conference panel, we decided to issue a call for essay contributions to a possible anthology on the subject. The result is a collection that brings together new work from established authorities and from emerging scholars focusing on life writing in English over the last century and a half and reflecting the thoroughly interdisciplinary nature of the current field of life writing studies.

The Death of the Body and the Life of the Mind

In his forward to the present volume, Timothy Dow Adams rightly suggests that "the human body has not always figured in an especially prominent way in life writing." Indeed, we might go further and suggest that in Western culture the body has never figured so prominently in life writing and in the critical analysis of life writing as it has in the last twenty years and that this development has everything to do with a Polish Catholic grocer's inability to see a young, black girl. The medieval Christian tradition, of course, privileged the life of the spirit over and above the life of the body so that in medieval painting saints were typically represented in two dimensions with one saint hardly distinguishable from another in terms of their physical appearance. So it was also in their life writing. For example, the lives of the saints of the *Aurea Legenda* compiled by Jacobus de Voragine (1275), does not in any real sense relate the lives of actual individuals. Rather, they are truly formulaic legends, a monotony of martyrdom and resurrection where the life recorded, the only life that matters and thus worth preserving, is the life of the saint's soul. Neither, however, is Augustine's much earlier and much more influential *Confessions* (387) an autobiography in any modern, conventional sense. Tellingly, Augustine addresses God Himself, so that his work is ultimately a prayer in which, as James J. O'Donnell puts it, "the autobiographical narrative that takes up part of the work is incidental content."[2] If the facts of Augustine's own life are merely incidental, the story of his body is only more surely marginalized as the story of a struggle with sensuality and temptation. In short, O'Donnell explains, "God and the soul are all Augustine wants to know."[3] Appropriately, the climax of Augustine's conversion narrative is an ecstatic moment experienced with his mother a short time before her death in which "the very highest sense of the carnal pleasures…seemed by reason of the sweetness of that [spiritual] life not only not worthy of comparison, but not even of mention." At that moment, Augustine writes, "we did gradually pass through all corporeal things...came to our own minds...and went beyond them."[4]

In the seventeenth century, the Early Modern philosopher René Descartes adjusted Augustine's terms but not the essential dynamic of his dualist Christian concept of the self. For the rationalist Descartes, the true, essential self is the "mind" or "soul," terms which he employs interchangeably and which Descartes seems to imagine as stable, finite, and thus knowable. This mind, he argues, is "a substance the whole essence or nature of which is simply to think, and which, in order to exist,

has no need of any place nor depends on any material thing."[5] The mind as Descartes conceived it is "entirely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than the body, and even if there were no body at all, it would not cease to be all that it is" (19). To record the life of the body, then, would be to record the life of an inessential, and even less-knowable, appendage. Therefore, the life worth recording is the life of the mind, or in other words, the career, as Descartes' own autobiographical *Discourse on Method* reminds us. There he describes in "Part Two" how the application of his native ability to reason led to his success at the Jesuit school at La Fleche and to his rejection of Scholasticism. He further relates how his search for truth led him to join the army in order to travel and see more of the world. Finally he arrived at his discovery of the "method for discovering the truth through the sciences" which famously came to him, he claimed, during an instance of doing nothing but thinking while he was detained in the isolation of a small "stove-heated room" (7). Descartes's autobiography focuses, then, not on the life of his white, male, European body, which in fact, he does not so much as mention, but on the life of his mind and the development of his education. In the work of later English philosophers, the mind, which is not to say the brain, remains the privileged "organ," as in the work of John Locke which famously constructs the body as merely the conduit for sensory impressions that are then imprinted and organized on the "tabula rasa" of the mind.

Where the new philosophy and the new science retained the traditional Christian bias against the body as a mere vessel containing the essential self, the seventeenth-century Puritans of England and America were, of course, in some respects throwbacks to a medieval tradition of life writing that imagined the central story of the Christian life is the conversion narrative, the life of the Augustinian spirit on its road to Christian redemption. For the Puritans, as it was for Augustine, the body was precisely what the Christian pilgrim must overcome, and its primary value lay in its capacity for suffering which can lead the wayward spirit back to God. *John Winthrop's Christian Experience* (1637) tells of Winthrop's repeated attempts to overcome the "the flesh" and "to bid farewell to all the world" until his "heart could answer, Lord what wilt thou have mee to doe."[6] In his oft-anthologized "Personal Narrative," the early 18th-century Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards focuses from the first sentence on "a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul, from my childhood" and proceeds to narrate how in his youth he engaged "to fight with all my might, against the world, the flesh and the devil, to the end of my life."[7] Implicitly equating "the flesh" with the "world" and the "devil," Edwards typically characterizes the body as either the source of his "wicked

inclinations," or as the site of a redemptive suffering, as when "it pleased god...to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell."[8]

Other eighteenth-century thinkers such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson more thoroughly embraced the implications of seventeenth-century philosophy, and their life writing implicitly accepted Descartes' rationalist, dualistic model of the self, imagining that the recordable life was the life of the mind and that of the public career. From printer's apprentice to diplomat and scientist, the story Franklin famously tells is that of the figureless public figure, the man as known not by his countenance or bodily presence but by his intellectual and entrepreneurial accomplishments. For women and people of color, such accomplishments were by law or convention forbidden. Defined as body in a world where the body was un-narratable, they had no life story to tell. And as we should expect, the history of Franklin's physical self—his growth of girth into middle and old age, his illnesses and recoveries, the history of his domestic comforts and discomforts, his relationship with his wife, his well-known sexual promiscuities, and the children who would have reflected his physical self in their very faces and gestures—all receive nary a mention in the unfinished work that has come to be known as his *Autobiography*.

In certain respects English and American Romantics can be read as reacting to the rationalist attitudes of those like Franklin or Jefferson; throwbacks to the 17th-century Puritans, Romantics such as William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson sought to restore the spirit or soul to prominence above and beyond the rational mind. In doing so, however, they perpetuated the relegation of the body to the domain of the un-narratable. Life for them took place not in the body but in the spirit that animates it. Like Augustine, they described the heights of self-actualization as an ecstatic moment in which the body is put to sleep while the spirit remains awake, "that serene and blessed mood," Wordsworth writes, when:

> ...even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul;
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.[9]

The "life of things" is not for Wordsworth to be found in the "things" themselves but in the pervasive spirit that unifies them. Echoing

Wordsworth's terms, Emerson famously describes the ecstatic, transcendental moment as one in which, freed from the body and "all mean egotism," he becomes "the transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the current of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."[10] If nature and the body are celebrated in the Romantic view, they nevertheless remain what they were for the Puritans: that which must be overcome, set aside, or seen through in order to achieve the highest states of being, the greatest reality.

In the autobiographical works of Henry Adams and Henry James at the turn of the next century, we find that the terms have turned back once again from an emphasis on the essential self as spirit to the self as mind, as consciousness, and thus as career. In their texts, the body remains as elusive, invisible and un-narrated as ever. In *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) and *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), the story James tells, as F. W. Dupee describes it, is that of "his discovery of a vocation for writing, a true 'calling.'" As in his art, in which James strived to be "one of the people on whom nothing is lost,"[11] so it is in his autobiographies that the adventures which most fascinate him are the inner adventures of his own human mind, the cerebral twists and turns of an individual striving to record the development of his own consciousness. Like the typical hero of his novels, James describes himself as one "in whom contemplation takes so much the place of action."[12] He had ever and always been, he reflects in *A Small Boy and Others*, one of "those whose faculty for application is all and only in their imagination and their sensibility."[13] Where James the artist describes himself as all imagination and sensibility, his gloomier friend and peer Henry Adams imagines himself as all intellect, but a drifting and lifeless one at that. *The Education of Henry Adams* delivers precisely what the title promises, focusing narrowly on the history of Adams' intellectual development throughout his career, as he rises from a childhood at the feet of his grandfather the former president John Adams, to becoming his father's secretary in London during the Civil War, to his appointment teaching history at Harvard, and beyond. Expressing his utter alienation not only from his body but from his own life and times, Adams describes himself in his preface as a mere "manikin" who "must be treated as though it had life."[14] Since a manikin can hardly be expected to write his life story, Adams writes about his "manikin self" exclusively in the third person, imagining his narrator as the "tailor" who "adapts the manikin as well as the clothes to his patrons' wants" (xxiv). In this, Adams's manikin life, the central tragedy is not the suicide of his beloved wife, as one familiar with his biography might expect. Rather, it is the tragedy of the intellectual who feels he has been bypassed by history and