PROTEAN PEPYS: WRITING AND SUBJECTIVITY IN

THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS

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This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.
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Abstract

Samuel Pepys's *Diary* was left in manuscript at his death and preserved in six volumes in the library of Magdalene College, Cambridge. It is well known as a source of detail and perspective on life in Restoration London. Less attention has been paid to the nature of Pepys's writing in the *Diary* and the particular way he creates himself as a character in it. The contrast with his self-presentation in other writings, such as his letters, and his *NWB*, for example, is remarkable. In the letters and the *NWB* Pepys presents himself as a confident, self-possessed, self-disciplined and consistent person. In the *Diary* Pepys is protean, a fluid, inconsistent self. At times he shows a boyish, immoderately enthusiastic side. There is a clear separation between the observing self who writes and an unpredictable, surprising, not entirely knowable self who acts and feels. The labile Pepys is especially obvious when he writes about episodes of corrupt behaviour. There are multiple consciousnesses perceptible in the writing: an entity which engages in corruption, another upright entity which is aware of the immoral nature of the activity, and a third which comprehends the other two. In recording his dealings with women other than his wife, Pepys again brings multiple selves into play in his writing, a desiring self which will brook no refusal with lower-class objects of lust and a timid socially aware self which fears exposure by his wife and by society in general. The special quality of Pepys's recording of subjectivity in the *Diary* is highlighted if it is compared to three other substantial diaries of the Restoration period, those by Bulstrode Whitelocke, John Evelyn and Roger Morrice. There are interesting moments when Whitelocke betrays emotion and reveals uncertainties, but they are rare. Evelyn is a poised, self-assured, well-educated gentleman with a strong
sense of an audience. Morrice is focused on politics and matters of religion and writes as a commentator for an imagined public. None of these three can match the extraordinary immediacy of Pepys's *Diary*, its presentation of moment-to-moment sensation, or the sense that a carefully maintained public "character" is in abeyance. It is often said that Pepys's *Diary* reveals an inner self and allows unmediated, camera-like access to his experience. This is misleading. The *Diary*, in contrast to other parts of his overall documentary legacy, functions through the absence of a unitary written self, and presents interplay between multiple shifting selves which do not necessarily have any separate existence beyond writing.
Abbreviation and note

NWB refers to Pepys's Navy White Book, quoted from:


Early Modern spelling and punctuation is left uncorrected when quoting from Early Modern sources.