Early Modern Writing and the Privatization of Experience. Nick Davis. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. viii + 236 pp. $110.

In the last two decades, scholarship has become increasingly interested in the medieval and Renaissance narrative strategies by means of which texts construct their respective temporalities and reflect attendant issues of periodization. Focal to such inquiries are often articulations of subjectivity, the dominance of — and the self's potential emancipation from — collective discourses, partially, one suspects, on account of the enigmatic evasiveness of premodern self-performances, but certainly also in view of present-day debates about individual autonomy. Nick Davis's *Early Modern Writing and the Privatization of Experience* investigates the transformation of conceptions of selfhood across the period divide. Against the conceptual frameworks favored in cultural materialist/New Historicist studies of early modern subjectivity, self-fashioning, or authentic individuality, Davis pits privatization and experience, offering a revisionary account that traces the relationship between collective and individual mind-sets within discursive and cultural practices not usually at the forefront of such investigations. Davis's book aims to chart the underexplored, non-unilinear transformation from "the placing of predominant trust in the self's shared, publicly acknowledged or mediated experience" toward the "identification of a person's individual, self-scrutinizing mind . . . as the primary locus of authentic perception, thought and feeling" (2). With brief reference to medievalist caveats regarding teleological arguments vis-à-vis subjectivity (Patterson, Aers), Davis proceeds from the assumption that there is something new about Hamlet's oft-discussed proclamation that he has "that within which passeth show," insofar as it "serve[s] as one marker of a genuine shift in the ambient culture's account rendered and evaluation of what is experienced as private" (5). What needs telling, according to Davis, is an uneven and non-unilinear "story of transformation," in the course of which "special importance is transferred to the community-detached self as a locus of valued experience" (5). At the heart of this inquiry is the textual technology "*making for* a sense of individually lived separation from the lives of others" (7).

The book's opening chapter discusses "degrees of separation" between private as well as communal discourses and introduces three cultural discourses and practices in which instances of privatization manifest themselves, which are then discussed in detail in the three parts of the book, consisting of two chapters each. The increasing fragmentation of cosmomorphism, an affective sympathy (in the Stoic sense) between macro- and microcosm, a "shared human connectedness with an enfolding environment" (19), is the subject of the first two chapters. As evidence for the fracturing of cosmomorphism, Davis offers readings of Donne's representation of melancholia in his early poetry (contextualized by contemporary visual, medical, and literary texts) and Shakespeare's coincidental eclipses in *King Lear*, which are read against Seneca's *Thyestes* with a view to

opposing conceptualizations of human-cosmos relationships: from hopes for the restoration of cosmomorphism to the exposure of the latter as a "potentially useful fantasy" (77). The second part of the book evinces instances of the privatization of experience within symbolic narratives, which are usually believed to mediate collective experience through commonplaces. In chapters on *The Faerie Queene* (as compared especially to Langland's *Piers Plowman*) and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (as compared especially to Hobbes's *Leviathan*), Davis demonstrates the suspicion with which Spenser and Bunyan treat the common as indicative of a deconstruction of traditional modes of representing the collective. Contextualized within accounts of the opposition of cultivated and uncultivated selves regarding the accommodation of individual experience (inter alia with reference to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Erasmus), the last two chapters of the book are concerned with the "establishment of reflective positions on communal play where it is becoming or has become perceptibly 'common' in a pejorative sense" (32). Here, Davis studies the social role and representation of shared play and festivity in their various modes of establishing community (Turner, Nancy) in two chapters that deal primarily with the tavern/Falstaff scenes in *Richard II* to *1 Henry IV* and the shearing festival in *The Winter's Tale*.

Davis's book not only offers innovative and richly contextualized readings of individual texts, but it also brings into view transformations within discursive traditions and cultural practices hitherto underappreciated in work on the diverging conceptualizations of (pre)modern selfhood. As such, the book will hopefully encourage further work on the complex negotiations of private and public around the period divide, perhaps also with a view to the still-frequently neglected fifteenth century.

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