

James Helgeson. *The Lying Mirror: The First-Person Stance and Sixteenth-Century Writing*.

Les seuils de la modernité 14. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012. 334 pp. \$67.20. ISBN: 978-2-600-01545-5.

James Helgeson's general aim, in *The Lying Mirror*, is to explore ideas of outwardness, intentionality, and aboutness without reference to the modern self or even to selfhood more generally. The focus on inwardness that drives discussions of selfhood, Helgeson contends, obscures much of what is really at stake in the first-person stance. Helgeson thus works through the first-person perspective in terms of an inherently intersubjective ethos. The aim in doing so is a "redirecting of the inward focus of self-knowledge to the outward vector of rhetorically situated speech" (49).

Helgeson argues strongly that directionality, not the self, should be taken as a first term in discussions of the early modern first person (69). The result is an ambitious and fascinating study of how we might think through concepts of intention, sincerity, and friendship with recourse not to an inward self but to an ethos neither wholly inward nor wholly outward. The book will be of definite interest to those interested in the history of selfhood, in theories of intersubjectivity, and in how literary works help us to conceive of both.

*The Lying Mirror* is admirably wide ranging, and includes chapters too numerous and varied to be listed here. I will merely mention some of the most impressive. One chapter focuses on the "aboutness" or "directionality" involved in perception and looking in Alberti, Descartes, and Pascal. This is followed by a chapter on Erasmus, Montaigne, Guerre, and the topos of friendship as "hetero autos," "alter ipse," "un autre soi-meme"; all three, Helgeson argues, reflect on "personhood" largely, although not entirely, from a third-person perspective" (100). Further on we find a chapter on Erasmus and the habits of insincerity, and more specifically, on how letters can be both intimate and public, "standing uneasily between what we might call the 'public' and 'private' spheres" (146). There is also a chapter on Rabelais, reading, writing, and intention; here, what emerges is a sense of "vagueness about where meaning comes from: the mind of the author or from the act of understanding" (211). I should also mention the chapter on lyric

poetry in which Helgeson carefully delineates the existence of an I that suggests neither a self nor the death of the self and that instead simply evinces an ethos.

For all its virtues, the book does occasionally leave this reader wishing for more. To begin, given its philosophical investments, Helgeson does not engage with theory as much as I might like, and, therefore, does not offer a particularly broad or robust sense of his interventions in thinking about (or outside) selfhood. Second, the capaciousness that usually is a virtue also at times seems a vice, leaving Helgeson with little room to explore certain ideas in much detail; his survey of models for understanding friendship, for example, is glancing, and leaves me wondering how, exactly, Helgeson's own argument about friendship fits in. Lastly, too much of the book is taken up with reiterating what the first-person stance he describes is not (indicative of a self), and not enough with what that stance is. So doing, Helgeson does not clearly outline how this stance might represent a hitherto unnoticed form of life. Still, this is strong work, and worth serious attention.

JAMES A. KUZNER  
Brown University