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FAME AND SECRECY: LEON MODENA'S *LIFE* AS AN EARLY MODERN AUTOBIOGRAPHY^{1*}

NATALIE ZEMON DAVIS

Leon Modena was a child in Italy in 1575 when the polymath Girolamo Cardano put the finishing touches on his *Book of My Life*, and in 1580 when Michel de Montaigne brought out the first edition of his *Essais*, that “incessant” study of himself. By the time Montaigne’s work had appeared in its first complete Italian edition in 1633, Leon, now a rabbi of Venice, had already written many pages of his own *Life*; when Cardano’s *De Vita Propria Liber* had its first printed edition in 1643, the septuagenarian Leon was complaining bitterly in his manuscript of the miseries of old age.² Leon’s *Life of Judah*, as he called it, is thus situated within the flowering of Renaissance autobiography, and it adds much to our notion of what was possible in the seventeenth-century presentation of the self. There is confession, a choice autobiographical mode, but in the Jewish life to distinctive ends; there is a quest for fame, but in the rabbi’s life, ever in tension with a catalogue of woes; and there is a contrast between the intimate life and the public persona somewhat unusual even among Leon’s expressive coreligionists.

European autobiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was fed by many currents,³ two of which we will consider here. The religious exploration

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1. I am grateful to Mark Cohen for assistance with the Hebrew texts used in this essay and want to acknowledge the contribution made to my thinking about Jewish autobiography by our joint seminar at Princeton on the Jews in Early Modern Europe. An excellent seminar paper on gambling by Howard Jacobson opened the comparison between Leon Modena and Girolamo Cardano, which is carried in other directions in my essay.

2. Girolamo Cardano, *De Propria Vita Liber* (Paris, 1643), republished in his *Opera Omnia*, ed. Charles Spon (Lyon, 1663), I, 1–54. It is available in English as *The Book of My Life (De Vita Propria Liber)*, transl. Jean Stoner (New York, 1962). Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, Book II, chap 6; in *Oeuvres complètes de Montaigne*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris, 1962), 358. Selections from Montaigne’s *Essais* appeared in Italian in Ferrara, 1590; a complete Italian translation by Marco Ginammi was published in Venice in 1633: *Saggi di Michel sig. di Montagna, overo Discorsi naturali, politici e morali*. For a study of Montaigne’s *Essais* as autobiography, see James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, 1972), chap. 2.

3. Among many publications on early modern autobiography, see Karl J. Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago, 1978); Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London and New York, 1969); and Gilbert Schrenck, “Aspects de l’écriture autobiographique au XVI^e siècle: Agrippa d’Aubigné et *Sa Vie à ses Enfants*,”

of the self that Augustine had established in his *Confessions* continued to inspire writers and readers as it had in the medieval period. The *Vida* of Teresa of Ávila is the most celebrated of the Catholic conversion stories, but there are others written by clerics and layfolk alike. Protestant autobiography of the early decades of the Reformation always included an account of how one was freed from papist shackles and discovered the truth of the Gospel. Subsequent Presbyterian “Lives” in England might document the author’s sinfulness or search his or her experience for signs of election.⁴

Another major impulse behind self-description among Christians was concern for one’s family—for recording its history, its triumphs and disasters and its recipes for living, and for passing this on with the patrimony to the next generation. In the Middle Ages a ducal family might appoint a learned clerk to compose its history, but by the late fourteenth century Florentine merchants were doing it themselves, expanding their account books with family events and other news. By the sixteenth century *ricordanze* or *livres de raison* were being kept in many French households, those of country gentlemen, city lawyers and merchants, and even of prosperous artisans. Sometimes these were spare, confined to births, marriages, illnesses, and deaths, bound in with account books or books of hours or Bibles; other times they were shaped memoirs and personal history, composed at intervals or all at once toward the end of one’s days.⁵ For instance, the Florentine historian and political figure Francesco Guicciardini wrote memoirs of his ancestors “to the glory of our house” and to serve as examples of virtue and vice for descendants, and a book of *ricordanze* about himself. The French Protestant

Nouvelle revue du seizième siècle 3 (1985), 33–51. For an important overview of the field and a valuable select bibliography, see *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, 1980). The writings of Philippe Lejeune (*L’Autobiographie en France* [Paris, 1971] and *Le Pacte autobiographique* [Paris, 1975]) are very suggestive, even though, like G. Schrenck and others, I do not agree that writing about the self before 1760 is the “pré-histoire” of autobiography. Georges May, *L’Autobiographie* (Paris, 1979) is also a valuable introduction with some examples chosen from the early modern period. For the Middle Ages, there is the classic work of Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, 4 vols. in 8 (Berne and Frankfurt, 1949–1969). (Vols. 2, 3, and 4, part 1 are on the medieval period; vol. 4, part 2 covers the Renaissance to the eighteenth century.) See also Paul Zumthor, “Autobiography in the Middle Ages?” *Genre* 6 (March, 1973), 29–48. Jewish autobiography of the early modern period has not yet been integrated into the historical and theoretical literature.

4. T. C. Price Zimmerman, “Confession and Autobiography in the Early Renaissance,” in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (Dekalb, Ill., 1971), 119–140. Teresa of Ávila, *Libro de la Vida*, published in her *Obras* (Salamanca, 1588). There is an English translation by E. Allison Peers: *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* (New York, 1960). An example of a Reformation autobiography with a conversion as a central thread is Thomas Platter’s *Lebensbeschreibung*, published by Alfred Hartmann (Basel, 1944) and in French translation by Marie Helmer, *Autobiographie (Cahiers des Annales* 22 [Paris, 1964]). Delany, *British Autobiography*, chaps. 3–6.

5. Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York, 1983), chaps. 12–13. Gene Brucker, “Introduction: Florentine Diaries and Diarists,” in *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence: The Diaries of Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati*, ed. Gene Brucker, transl. Julia Martines (New York, Evanston, and London, 1967), 9–18. I have given an introduction to and further bibliography on the writing of French family histories in “Ghosts, Kin and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France,” in *The Family*, ed. Alice Rossi, Jerome Kagan and Tamara K. Hareven (New York, 1978), 87–114.

captain, poet, and historian Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné (1551–1630) composed his *Life* at the request of his children, so he said; he wanted to lay bare “in paternal privacy” his honorable actions and his faults. These would be more useful than the Lives of the Emperors or the Great. Like Guicciardini, he instructed them never to let anyone outside the family read the manuscript.⁶

One school of interpretation, going back to Jacob Burckhardt's *Civilization of the Renaissance*, has seen this attachment to family as detracting from the exploration of the self. “In the Middle Ages,” Burckhardt wrote, “both sides of human consciousness — that which was turned within and that which was turned without — lay dreaming or half awake. . . . Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation — only through some general category.” The preceding examples above suggest that, on the contrary, certain forms of embeddedness — most especially in the family — could assist in consciousness of self. Not only were kinfolk imagined as the audience for which the life was recorded, but also playing oneself off against different relatives — helpless brothers or rebellious sons — was a major part of self-revelation.⁷

Even in those Renaissance texts where male writers were strongly concerned to show how particular were their qualities, the placing of the self in a family field was important to the story. Girolamo Cardano was not sure whether the readers of his *Life* would be kinfolk, students, or strangers; the literary models he mentioned were ancient ones, such as Marcus Aurelius; he devoted whole chapters to his appearance, tastes, habits, and feelings. Nonetheless, his self-portrait was partly established by measuring himself against his father, whose vocation of law he rejected for medicine and whose mathematical talents he surpassed; and his anxiety about his own reputation was more than matched in the *Life* by his “great discouragements” about his sons, one executed for poisoning his wife, the other a wastrel.⁸ And Montaigne, who claimed that he was the first to communicate himself to others “not as a grammarian or a poet or a jurist” but “by [his] universal being,” still compared himself with his father in height, appearance, agility, temperament, record-keeping and building activities, and thought that his adult self was in part a fulfillment of his father's design.⁹

The relation of embeddedness to the exploration of the self provides an in-

6. Francesco Guicciardini, “Memorie di Famiglia” and “Ricordanze,” in *Scritti Autobiografici e Rari*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari, 1936), 1–99. Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, “Sa vie à ses enfants” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. E. Réaume and F. de Caussade, 6 vols. (Paris, 1873–1892), I, 3–113. P. 4: “J'ay encores à vous ordonner qu'il n'y ait que deux copies de ce livre: vous accordants d'estre de leur gardiens et que vous n'en laissiés aller aucune hors de la maison. Si vous y faillez, vostre desobeissance sera chatiee par vos envieux, qui esleveront en risee les merveilles de Dieu en mes delivrances et vous feront cuire vostre curieuse vanité.”

7. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, transl. S. G. C. Middlemore (Oxford and London, 1945), 81. I have given further discussion to embeddedness and its relation to self-exploration in “Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France” in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas Heller, Morton Sosna and David Wellbery (Stanford, 1986), 53–63, 333–335.

8. Cardano, *Book of My Life*, Prologue, chaps. 5, 6, 8, 21, 31 and chap. 10, pp. 40–41 and chap. 30, p. 108.

9. Montaigne, *Essais*, I: 35, p. 221; II: 17, p. 625; III: 9, pp. 928–929; III: 13, p. 1079.

teresting perspective on Jewish autobiography in early modern Europe. Identification as a Jew was concrete and omnipresent, filtering experience as ghetto gates filtered people and the laws of Kashrut separated food. Still it did not efface distinctive family memories, which sorted Jews out within the often unpredictable life of their own communities. Genealogies were contrived and remembered, and passed on through expulsions and migrations. In the late eleventh century a Jew living in Calabria used “family documents and traditions” to trace his ancestors back to Titus’s destruction of the Temple and left an account of their doings in Italy and Egypt for the past two hundred years. Isaac Abravanel, writing from Naples after his expulsion from Portugal and Castile, insisted that his ancestors were all “worthy leaders,” descended from King David.¹⁰ Leon Modena’s family had a written genealogy that went back five hundred years to when his father’s ancestors had lived in France. Although it had slipped from his cousin’s possession, Modena reconstructed part of it in his *Life*, recording the Italian movements of his ancestors and the “tradition,” learned from his father, that “this family has always combined Torah with stature, riches with honor, and great wealth with charitableness.” Meanwhile in Alsace, Modena’s younger contemporary, the teacher, trader, and scribe Asher Halevi, was writing down his paternal genealogy back to his great-grandfather, an exile from Spain.¹¹

These genealogies and family pasts are a frame for Jewish life history, and they may be a more common form of self-expression in early modern Europe than has previously been thought.¹² The known examples do not indicate that the author considered such composition unusual for a Jew to undertake, nor do they resort to the Biblical Nehemiah or the unlikely Josephus as a legitimating

10. Ahimaaz ben Paltiel, *Sepher Yuhasin* (Book of Genealogies), transl. and excerpted by Leo W. Schwarz, *Memoirs of My People through a Thousand Years* (Philadelphia, 1960), 3–14; full English translation by Marcus Salzman (New York, 1924). Isaac Abravanel, Preface to his *Commentaries on the Former Prophets*, published in Hebrew in Pesaro, 1511/12 and transl. and excerpted by Schwarz, *ibid.*, 43–47.

11. Leon Modena, *The Life of Judah*, transl. Mark Cohen, fol. 46. Asher Halevi, *Die Memoiren des Ascher Levy aus Reichshofen im Elsass (1598–1635)*, transl. M. Ginsburger and published with the Hebrew text (Berlin, 1913), 67–69. (I am grateful to Paula Hyman for calling Asher Halevi’s autobiography to my attention.) In the late seventeenth century a Bohemian Jew opened his *Book of Remembrances*, “I can trace my family tree for four generations. I learned from my grandfather Jacob that his father, Abraham Halevi, had come to Bohemia from Poland as a young man . . .” Alexander Marx, “A Seventeenth-Century Autobiography: A Picture of Jewish Life in Bohemia and Moravia” in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York, 1944), 183.

12. For an introduction to Jewish autobiography, see the entry on “Biographies and Autobiographies” in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 vols., 4th printing (Jerusalem, 1978), IV, 1010–1015. Arnaldo Momigliano has written a fascinating essay on the twelfth-century autobiography of a Jewish convert to Christianity, Judas Levi, alias Hermannus, and has included information and bibliography on the autobiography of the contemporary convert to Judaism Obadiah (“A Medieval Jewish Autobiography,” *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* [Rome, 1984], 321–340). Alan Mintz has done a study of major importance for the modern period in “Guenzburg, Lilienblum, and the Shape of Haskalah Autobiography,” *AFS Review* 4 (1979), 71–110. David Roskies is currently undertaking a study of forms of Jewish autobiography. In Israel, studies are forthcoming by Israel J. Yuval on medieval German Jewish autobiography and by Moshe Idel on an autobiographical fragment by Jochanan Alemmano.

model¹³: not Modena, who was quick to note his pioneering in other of his writings (“no one to this day has written a book on that subject,” he said of his work on place-memorization); and not the German Glückel of Hameln, who as a late seventeenth-century woman writing her first and only book might have been expected to reflect on the novelty of her genre.¹⁴ As Christian parents were adding their lives to a family history and using them to help shape the future, so Jewish parents may have been increasingly doing the same thing in manuscripts still undiscovered or forever lost to our eyes.

The setting for the Jewish autobiographies may be somewhat different from the Christian ones, however. They were not ordinarily appended to or bound in with Holy Scripture or prayer books; indeed Jewish law prohibited any such desecration. (The parchment New Testament binding later added to Asher Halevi’s *Book of Recollections* was presumably for camouflage.)¹⁵ Neither do they appear to be a mere expansion from account books like the *ricordanze* or *livres de raison*. The events recorded by the Siennese Jew Giuseppe in his family’s account book from 1625 to 1633 concerned personal quarrels and litigation about promises, purchases, and payments instead of being steps in a whole life history.¹⁶ Perhaps the account book seemed too precarious a genre from which to

13. On Nehemia as autobiography, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, IV, 1010. The *Life of Josephus Flavius* was available in Latin printed editions by the early sixteenth century, along with his *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* (for example, the British Library has editions of these works published together in Paris in 1511, Basel in 1554, and Lyon in 1566). Josephus’s defense of his efforts to urge the Jews to surrender during Titus’s destruction of the Second Temple and his collaboration with the Romans would not have recommended his *Life* as a model for later Jewish autobiography even for those who read the text. An anonymous chronicle of the destruction of Jerusalem circulated among the Jews in the medieval and early modern period under the title *Sefer Yosippon*; it was believed to have been written by Josephus “for internal Jewish consumption” and took a very different view of events from those given in the *Jewish War* (Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* [Seattle and London, 1982], 34–35). The *Yosippon* did not contain a “Jewish” version of the *Life*, however.

14. Leon Modena, *Life*, fol. 20a. The autobiography of Glückel of Hameln (1646–1724) was written in Yiddish and first published in that language by David Kaufmann as *Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* (Frankfurt, 1896). A new Yiddish edition is being prepared in Israel by Chava Turiansky. A German translation was made by Bertha Pappenheim (*Die Memoiren der Glückel von Hameln* [Vienna, 1910]), and an abridged version was published in German by Alfred Feilchenfeld (*Denkwürdigkeiten der Glückel von Hameln* [Berlin, 1913]). Two editions exist in English: *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, transl. Marvin Lowenthal, introduction by Robert Rosen (New York, 1977) and *The Life of Glückel of Hameln, 1646–1724 Written by Herself*, transl. Beth-Zion Abrahams (New York, 1963). The Lowenthal translation is based on the Feilchenfeld German edition and is even further truncated to make it “tighter” (xii). The Abrahams translation is based on the original Yiddish edition and is the one used here. Glückel of Hameln, *Life*, 2. I am currently undertaking a study of the autobiography of Glückel of Hameln.

15. Halevi, *Memoiren*, 5. According to the *Magen avraham*, a seventeenth-century commentary on the Jewish law-code Shulhan Arukh, one should not insert quires into holy books or write one’s accounts in them or try one’s pen on them (Shulhan Arukh, *Orah Hayyim*, para. 154, citing the thirteenth-century *Sefer Hasidim*). This prohibition could be ignored, as in a Hebrew prayer book from Alsace that included a note on attacks on the Jews in 1475–1476 (J. Kracauer, “Rabbi Joselmann de Rosheim,” *Revue des études juives* 16 [1888], 85–86, 95–96). But on the whole Jews seem to have thought the holiness lost by breaking the prohibition was greater than the holiness gained by locating one’s personal or family news on a sacred book.

16. Cecil Roth, “The Memoirs of a Siennese [sic] Jew (1625–1633),” *Hebrew Union College An-*

develop a Jewish life: the pawn shop might be closed at any moment, the leased house withdrawn. The memoirs needed to be connected with a surer patrimony.

What played this role was the Jewish ethical will, encouraging, as did the genealogy, the writing about the self. (Indeed, nineteenth-century autobiographies of the Jewish Enlightenment still employed some of the conventions of the ethical will.)¹⁷ From the twelfth century on, Jewish wills had sometimes included, along with the disposition of the inheritance and the prescriptions for burial, pages of moral injunctions and rules for the children. Such testaments were still being composed in the seventeenth century, and not only by learned men but by merchant women like Pesselé Ries of Berlin, whose will was praised by Glückel of Hameln.¹⁸ Indeed, with reversal of fortune so common among Jewish traders and lenders and with ownership of real estate unlikely, the ethical bequest might loom larger than the economic one: “I have nothing to bequeath to you of worldly possessions,” said Leon Modena’s ruined father to him on his death bed, “except that you always remember to fear the Lord thy God and honor his creatures.”¹⁹

These ethical commands and practical regimens are partway to self-portrait, as Judah Goldin has astutely noted. Here one must speak as “I”;²⁰ one must reflect on oneself to another. In addition, there was the general confession expected of every Jew on the death bed.²¹ The next step was when one decided to write “all.” “I have made up my mind,” said Asher Halevi, “to record indelibly, for the preservation of the good and the bad, everything which has befallen me.”²² And Modena opened his *Life of Judah*:

I have desired with the soul within me to set down in writing all the incidents that happened to me from my beginnings until the end of my life, so that I shall not die, but live.

nual 5 (1928), 353–402. Giuseppe’s *ricordanze* are in the blank pages of a Hebrew business ledger kept from 1562 to 1567 by Jacob ben Eleazar Modena of Siena, perhaps Giuseppe’s ancestor. Giuseppe’s entries are in Italian, each one beginning “Ricordo,” with occasional words in Hebrew.

17. On the Jewish ethical will, see *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, ed. Israel Abrahams, with a new foreword by Judah Goldin (Philadelphia, 1976). On the use of conventions of the ethical will in the nineteenth century, see Mintz, “Haskalah Autobiography,” 76–77, 100. Christian wills of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries might include various formulas of devotion to the Lord and (in the Catholic case) to Mary and other saints, and might include prescriptions about future activities of the children, but moral teachings and rules for living are not part of the testament.

18. Glückel of Hameln, *Life*, 92.

19. Leon Modena, *Life*, fol. 11a.

20. Goldin, “Foreword,” *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 18. On the use of “I” in medieval Christian literature, see Zumthor, “Autobiography.”

21. Leon Modena, *The History of the Rites, Customs, and Manner of Life of the Present Jews, throughout the World*, transl. Edmund Chilmead (London, 1650), 230–231: “When any one thinketh he shall die, he then desireth, that Ten, or more Persons may be called unto him; among which, there is to be one *Rabbine*: yet sometimes they do not desire to have so great a Company called. When they are all met together, that are sent for, the sick Man begins to say that *Generall Confession* before spoken of . . . If he have any desire to confer Privately with the *Rabbine*, or ask his Counsel about anything, or commit any Secret to his trust, he hath liberty to do so.” Both men and women made these death-bed confessions, as can be seen from Modena, *Life*, fols. 10a, 12b, 37a, and Glückel of Hameln, *Life*, 21. All other personal confession was private, made only to God (Leon Modena, *Rites*, 228).

22. Halevi, *Memoiren*, 9.

I thought that it would be of value to my sons, the fruit of my loins, and to their descendants, and to my students, who are called sons, just as it is a great pleasure to me to be able to know the lives of my ancestors, forebears, teachers, and all other important and beloved people.

Modena wrote his first and second wills at the end of the manuscript; his *Life* has subsumed the ethical instruction.²³

Like Christians, Jews might start writing their autobiographies at different phases of the life cycle. Asher Halevi seems to have started his *Recollections* as a young man, but was already planning to leave space for his children's doings at the end of his manuscript. Glückel of Hameln composed the first part of her *Life* "to banish the melancholy thoughts which came to [her] during many sleepless nights" after her husband's death; the second part she wrote years later after she had remarried and lost her second husband. Modena had wanted to start his *Life*, so he claims, when his first child Mordecai was born; he turned to it only at forty-seven in the immense grief following Mordecai's death, and added the rest from time to time over the next thirty years.²⁴ In all three cases, their descendants realized at least one of the goals of the writers: they kept their manuscripts and presumably talked among themselves of the lessons of the *Life*.²⁵

What those lessons consisted of depended in part on what the authors had chosen to disclose—what they had selected from "all the incidents"—and what interpretation they had given to their experiences. In Modena's case, the *Life* is a combination of confession, of lament for his calamities, and of celebration of his achievements in preaching and writing.

As for confessions, Leon referred often to his "sins" in the plural, but he admitted only to gambling, an action much condemned by Jewish law in its compulsive form and freely allowed only at Hanukkah, Purim, and certain other feast-days.²⁶ He began to play games of chance on Hanukkah when he was twenty-three and returned to it at intervals throughout his long life, almost always losing (or so he reported it), gambling away daughters' dowries and family support and going heavily into debt. He explained it at first as Satan's tricks and the compulsion of the stars; but later in the *Life* it became part of himself, "the sin of Judah."

23. Leon Modena, *Life*, fols. 4a, 35b–38b.

24. Halevi, *Memoiren*, 9; Glückel of Hameln, *Life* 2, 149; Modena, *Life*, fol. 4a–b. A late seventeenth-century autobiography of Bohemian origin was written when the author was still a young man in his twenties ("A Seventeenth-Century Autobiography," 196).

25. Halevi's *Recollections* were kept by his brother-in-law, Jonah Cohen, who added notes at the end (*Memoiren*, 69–71). Glückel of Hameln's *Life* was copied by her son Moses Hameln, Rabbi of Baiersdorf, and other copies remained in the family (*Life*, xv; *Memoiren*, xi). The Vienna, 1910 edition was also a family affair, for the translator, Bertha Pappenheim, was a descendant of Glückel (see note 14 above). Leon Modena's *Life of Judah* stayed with his descendants for some time and was doubtless part of the inspiration for the autobiography *Medabber tahapukhot* composed by his grandson Isaac min-Ha-leviim some two decades or so after Modena's death (ed. Daniel Carpi [Tel Aviv, 1985]).

26. Leo Landman, "Jewish Attitudes toward Gambling," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s. 57 (1966–1967), 298–310; 58 (1967–1968), 34–62 (42 on the permitted times for games of chance). See also I. Abrahams, "Samuel Portaleone's Proposed Restrictions on Games of Chance," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1893), 505–515.

He also made sense of it by the way he ordered the gambling episodes in his narrative: they follow after some turn in the wheel of fortune as in 1620, when, after the death of his son Mordecai, “I returned out of great anxiety to the enemy . . . playing at games of chance.” Here Modena is playing with the argument of his youthful publication *Turn from Evil*, a dialogue on gambling between Eldad and Medad. Modena uses the criteria of the studious Eldad to dub himself a sinner for gambling, but it is the argument of the gambler Medad which guides the placement of games of chance in the autobiography:

For [the gambler, says Medad] has learnt the lesson by daily experience at the card-table, that when he thought to win, he lost; that it was a matter of ups and downs; and so he comes to understand clearly that there is no such thing with us mortals as constant and permanent possessions. Hence, should any calamity overtake him, he will “bless God for the evil as for the good,” and even though it might involve the absolute loss of his money, he will simply say to himself, “What can I do? Let me imagine I lost it at play.”

These are not the ups and downs of Machiavelli’s Fortuna, to be mastered as humans can. Gambling threads through Leon’s autobiography, a sin which underscores the unpredictable elements in the *Life*.²⁷

Similarly, gambling plays a double role in regard to the claims to genuineness in Modena’s autobiography. By Jewish law, as Eldad reminds Medad, the gambler is disqualified to serve as judge or witness. What kind of witness, then, can Modena be to his own deeds? Medad counters that there is no better test for human character than the way the gambler reveals himself at play—better than by his spending, better even than by his writing. The *Life of Judah* tells of gambling and of writing both; can it not, then, be guaranteed to reveal its author?²⁸

As for Modena’s calamities, they are foreshadowed from the first page: “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.”²⁹ Even his birth was ill-omened, as he entered the world rump first right after an earthquake. His miseries he classified in three ways. There was the agony of the loss of his sons, which he blamed not on God but on himself: “It is punishment for my sins and transgressions that of my three sons, one died, one was murdered, and one lives in exile.” He cast himself as Job, finding each day accursed. There was the intense fear of persecution at the hands of Christian authorities, as in 1637, when he imagined (as it turned out quite needlessly) that the Paris publication of his *Historia de’ riti hebraici* would bring the Inquisition down on his head and on other Jews as well. There was the bitter disappointment of the ills of old age and especially of his wife’s suddenly starting to quarrel with him “for no reason, when I had committed no wrong” (one wonders whether his daughters agreed when they read the manuscript after his death).³⁰

27. Leon Modena, *Life*, fols. 12a, 13a, 27b, 17b. Leon Modena, *Sur mera’* in *The Targum to “The Song of Songs”; The Book of the Apple; The Ten Jewish Martyrs; A Dialogue on Games of Chance*, transl. Hermann Gollancz (London, 1908), 204. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, transl. George Bull (Harmondsworth, 1961), chap. 25: “How far human affairs are governed by fortune, and how fortune can be opposed.”

28. Modena, *Sur mera’*, 193–194, 196, 203.

29. Modena, *Life*, fol. 4a and note 1. The quotation is from Jacob’s speech to Pharaoh.

30. Modena, *Life*, fols. 21b, 26a, 25a–b, 27a. It is not at all clear whether Modena intended his

Balancing this story of an accursed life is the story of Modena's achievements. They, too, begin early, as he pictures himself at two and a half—the Jewish prodigy—reciting Scripture in the synagogue. He grew up to become a preacher (in Italian) so celebrated that “all the congregations gave great praise and thanks” and Catholic friars and foreign notables crowded into the Great Synagogue to hear him. And he grew up to publish books on so many subjects in Hebrew and Italian that he believed he could count on “everlasting reputation.” The list of his writings he inserted just after his terrifying description of the murder of his son Zebulon before his eyes by Jewish enemies. His books, at least, are “a source of great comfort”; through them [his] “name will never be blotted out among the Jews or in the world at large.”³¹

How can we relate this construction of a life to contemporary Christian autobiography and to Jewish representation of the self? On the whole it fits well with one of the great autobiographical strategies identified by the critic William L. Howarth, that of autobiography as oratory (as contrasted with autobiography as drama or as poetry).³² The writer both persuades by his or her life and relives its lessons. Great expert in rhetorical skills,³³ Modena shaped much of his narrative to such didactic purposes.

Howarth's category of autobiography-as-oratory includes but is not confined to those patterned after Augustine, and this makes it helpful in thinking about Modena's *Life*. The rabbi's account of his insatiable gambling lacks one element ordinarily present in Christian confessional autobiography of the medieval and early modern period, namely, a definitive conversion. Even though the Christians retain their capacity to sin throughout their days, the life leads up to a conversion: Teresa of Ávila finally dominates her flesh and her imagination; a Puritan finally understands the need for true repentance. Modena's life is not told as a development; he knows gambling is a sin from the start. The years are strewn with broken vows; and though he applies Job's laments to himself, he does not go through Job's change of heart. He does change his mind about a few things, as when he moderates his belief in astrology and makes a negative remark about his early interest in alchemy,³⁴ but most of the time he presents his life as a repetition of motifs.

daughters to read his *Life* or whether they had sufficient Hebrew to do so. Modena praised his aunt Fioretta as “a woman very learned in Torah and Talmud” (*Life*, fol. 5b), but never says whether he taught his daughters Diana and Esther to read Hebrew. In any case, they must have learned of the autobiography after he died, for Modena made his grandson Isaac, the son of Diana, his literary executor, and the manuscript passed into his hands.

31. *Ibid.*, 14, 36, 88–89, 102, 78.

32. William L. Howarth, “Some Principles of Autobiography” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, 88–95.

33. Not only was Modena a celebrated preacher, whose sermons were published and widely appreciated for their “pleasant words and clear language” (*Life*, fol. 20a), but several of his other publications concerned rhetorical matters, such as his book on place-memorization, *Lev ha-aryeh (Heart of the Lion)* (*Life*, fol. 20a and historical notes to fol. 15b), his book on letter-writing (*Life*, fol. 20a and historical notes to 20a), and his Italian-Hebrew dictionary, *Novo ditionario Hebraico e Italiano* (Venice, 1612).

34. Modena, *Life*, fols. 16b, 22b, 14a, 16a and historical notes to fol. 14a. Modena did not make

Is this way of describing one's spiritual life characteristic of other Jewish autobiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? For a Marrano like Uriel da Costa, certainly not, for his *Exemplar humanae vitae* of 1640 was built around his conversion to the faith of his Jewish ancestors and his subsequent disenchantment with rabbinical Judaism.³⁵ Likewise for Glückel of Hameln during the few years in which she believed that Sabbatai Zevi might be the Messiah, for she saw that time of joy and penance as a special moment, even though it came to naught. But the rest of her life she portrayed as imbued with a continuous sense of her sins, a continuous experience of God's power and a continuous fear of the unpredictable. The decisions she described as significant concerned remarriage and the resolution of her dilemma about living with her children in her old age.³⁶ The Jewish spiritual life seems more likely to have been interpreted as a constant trial than as a pilgrimage.

As for Leon Modena's quest for fame in this world, it is very much like that of other learned men and artists of his day. To be sure, Modena would never have gone so far in his *Life* as Montaigne did in his "De l'affection des pères aux enfans" and ask whether Augustine would have rather buried his writings, "from which our religion receives such fruit," or his children (Montaigne speculates that Augustine would have chosen to bury the children), but then few contemporary Christian fathers would have set up such a choice either.³⁷

Where Modena's *Life* may differ from Christian autobiography is in the character of the interplay among achievements, sins, and calamities. Montaigne's self-exploration is unbound by such categories; the relation between his enormous sense of loss at the death of his friend La Boétie and his writing of his *Essais* is too complex to be weighed in account. The voyage of "De la vanité" (III:9)

explicit that his attitude toward kabbalism had cooled over the years, as Howard Adelman and Benjamin Ravid point out (historical notes to fol. 20a). As the *Life of Judah* does not stress spiritual transformation, so it does not stress intellectual transformation. Cf. the presentation of intellectual growth in the *Life* of Giambattista Vico, written in 1725–1731 (*The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, transl. Max H. Fisch and Thomas G. Bergin [Ithaca, 1944]) and in the eighteenth-century autobiography of Solomon Maimon, discussed below. The brief *Autobiography* of the scholar Joseph Scaliger, 1540–1609 (ed. George W. Robinson [Cambridge, Mass., 1927], 29–33), documents his early growth in learning, but not his change in views. See also Anthony Grafton "Close Encounters of the Learned Kind: Joseph Scaliger's Table Talk," *American Scholar* 57 (1988), 581–588.

35. Uriel da Costa, *Exemplar vitae humanae* (1640), published by Philippe van Limborch in *De veritate religionis christianae: Amica collatio cum erudito judaeo* (Gouda, 1687), 346–354 and reprinted in Latin with a Portuguese translation in Uriel da Costa, *Três Escritos*, ed. A. Moreira de Sá (Lisbon, 1963), 36–69. Schwarz gives an English translation based on the Limborch version in *Memoirs of My People*, 84–94.

36. Glückel of Hameln, *Life*, 45–46 and Books 6–7.

37. The classical statement of the desire for fame in the Renaissance is, of course, in Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance*, 87–93; a recent major study of the quest for fame is Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York and Oxford, 1986), especially 25–361 on the Renaissance and seventeenth century. Montaigne, *Essais*, II: 8, pp. 364–383, "De l'affection des peres aux enfans." I have treated this theme more fully in "A Renaissance Text to the Historian's Eye: The Gifts of Montaigne," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985), 47–56. For a sensitive treatment of the issue of fame in Montaigne, see Steven Rendall, "Montaigne under the Sign of *Fama*," *Yale French Studies* 66 (1984), 137–159. For Montaigne's reservations about fame, see *Essais*, II:16, pp. 601–614, "De la gloire."

is through a more densely populated mental landscape than Modena's, with stopping places like autonomy which the rabbi does not mark. Benvenuto Cellini's *Life*, on the other hand, is simpler in structure than Modena's, for it moves dramatically from artistic creation to narrow escape to revenge without moral assessment.³⁸

It is Cardano's *Vita Propria* which lends itself readily for comparison with Modena's *Life*, for it has some of the same motifs: pride in his many books on varied subjects, despair about his sons, and admissions of his "vices," one of which was gambling. Indeed, it is conceivable that Modena read Cardano's *Vita* when it was published in 1643 (he had connections with its editor Gabriel Naudé) and that it had some influence on the organization of the late pages of his own manuscript, where like Cardano he adopted a topical treatment of "Miseries of my heart in brief" and of citations of his work by other scholars.³⁹ Nonetheless,

38. Montaigne, *Essais, Ibid.*, I:28, pp. 181–193, "De l'amitié." Among many treatments of the relation between Montaigne's loss of La Boétie and the writing of his *Essais*, see Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (New York, 1965); Richard Regosin, *The Matter of My Book: Montaigne's Essais as the Book of the Self* (Berkeley, 1977); François Rigolot, "Montaigne's Purloined Letters," *Yale French Studies* 64 (1983), 145–166; and Barry Weller, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's *Essais*," *New Literary History* 9 (1977–1978), 503–523. For an important discussion of Montaigne's "De la vanité" (III:9, pp. 922–980), see Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1985), chap. 3. *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, transl. John Addington Symonds, 4th ed. (London, 1896). Howarth, "Principles of Autobiography," 98–104.

39. Bibliophile, librarian, and independent thinker on religious and political subjects, Gabriel Naudé had acquired the manuscript of Cardano's *Vita* during his stay in Italy from 1631 to 1641 under the patronage of the Cardinal Gianfrancesco de' Conti Guidi da Bagno (Gabriel Naudé, *Vita Cardani ac de eodem iudicium*, in Cardano, *Opera Omnia*, I, fol. ii^r; Jack A. Clarke, *Gabriel Naudé 1600–1653* [Hamden, Conn., 1970], chap. 3). Leon Modena had both direct and indirect connections with Naudé. The indirect ones went through Jacques Gaffarel, Prior of Saint Gilles, Hebraist and scholar of religious customs, to whom around 1634–1635 Modena gave a copy of his *Riti Hebraici* for eventual publication in Paris (*Life*, fol. 25a and historical notes to 25a). Gaffarel was a long-time friend of Naudé, and while in Venice in 1633 was in correspondence with him (Gabriel Naudé, *La Bibliographie Politique* [Paris, 1642], dedication to Jacques Gaffarel, 3–6; this book was written at Gaffarel's request and was first published in Venice in 1633). But Modena also had direct connections with Naudé, so we learn from Gaffarel's prefatory letter to the *Riti* in the spring of 1637: "you had been before informed" (he says to Leon Modena) "by our Learned Countryman Naudaeus that I had already, in a just Volume, written . . . concerning the Observation of Dreams" (*Rites*, transl. Chilmead [1650] fol. Bl^r). That Modena might have heard about the publication of Cardano's *Vita* by Naudé in 1643 and acquired the book itself is not unlikely.

Modena's "Miseries of My Heart in Brief" on fols. 34b–35a of his autobiography seem to be a topical rethinking of his life around 1645, the date of the last entry. He had previously used the topical mode only for the list of his books. Here items are added—such as a cryptic reference to what may be homoerotic activity between his son Mordecai and other men—that are not treated earlier in the *Life*. Folios 35b–36a of the manuscript then turn to evidence of "what fame I have had," citing Selden and others. Cf. Cardano, *Vita*, chap. 30: "Pericula et casus, et de insidiis multiplicibus, variis et assiduis" ("Perils, Accidents, and Manifold, Diverse and Persistent Treacheries," *Book of My Life*) and chap. 48: "Testimonia clarorum Virorum de me" ("Testimony of Illustrious Men Concerning Me"). Of course, the similarity between Modena and Cardano could be accidental. If Modena took some of his inspiration from the learned Christian gambler Cardano, however, it makes all the more significant the difference in spirit between the two *Lives*.

For an early seventeenth-century Jewish scholar definitely familiar with and influenced by Cardano's scientific writings, see David Ruderman's discussion of Abraham Yagel in "Three Contemporary Perceptions of a Polish Wunderkind of the Seventeenth Century," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 4 (1979), 156–159.

the overall moral economy of the two *Lives* is different. Cardano's book is made up of many small parallels, his virtues and vices, his friends and his enemies, his honors and dishonors, and the like. His sense of sin is weak — he even brags a little about his “shrewdness” and “skill” in games of chance — and his chapter on “Religion and Piety” celebrates God's gifts to him more than it does God's awesome majesty.⁴⁰ The wins and losses of Modena's *Life* are much starker, the relationship of books, sorrow, and sin the central line of the narrative.

In short, Cardano's glory and complaints delimited a secular sphere within the large Christian universe of meaning, while Modena's were still closely tied to God's tangled relations with His chosen people. In an impressive book on *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Yosef H. Yerushalmi has emphasized the persistence of liturgical and ritual forms of remembering in the spate of Jewish historical writing following the Spanish expulsion.⁴¹ Every historical experience was ultimately interpreted as part of the sufferings of exile, either punishment for the sins of the Jewish people or a test of their faith, as Abraham was tested by the command to sacrifice Isaac. I think we can see a similar process at work in Jewish autobiographical writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and specifically in the *Life of Judah*, in which the distinctive details of person and family are organized in terms of the collective model of suffering as a punishment or a test; the expression of feeling is deepened by biblical language. And the other elements of the historical model are here too: Torah and survival. In Modena's initial plan for his funeral, foreseen in a dream, he wanted his books to be present, piled on top of his coffin, while the cantors were to chant Psalm 25, “His soul shall abide in prosperity and his seed shall inherit the land.” In this image, like those of his birth and the wunderkind reciting Scripture, the collective and the particular come together: Modena had gambled away his family's inheritance, but he had furthered the Torah through his preaching and writing, and chances were that his seed would survive through his grandson Isaac.⁴²

Modena's funeral plan also had a warning in it: care must be taken lest someone

40. Cardano, *De Propria Vita Liber*, chap. 13: “Mores, et anima vitia et errores”; *Book of My Life*, chap. 13, pp. 54–55; chap. 22, pp. 78–80.

41. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, chaps. 1–2.

42. Leon Modena, *Life*, fol. 38a. On the collective model of the wunderkind, see Ruderman, “Three Contemporary Perceptions,” 149–153.

Glückel of Hameln's *Life* has the same structure: her sufferings are the loss of her first husband and some of her children and the bankruptcy of her second husband; her sins are not fully specified, but include her unwillingness to accept her fate and lamenting too much, and they are connected with her suffering (“we were sinful in sorrowing so much” over the death of daughter Mattie [73]; “this is because of my sins and I shall always mourn” the death of husband Chaim [110]); her achievements are her Jewish progeny and her book describing a Jewish life.

Lucette Valensi has noted the same cultural shaping of autobiographical accounts today among the Jews of the ancient community of Jerba in Tunisia, though with the loss of the messianic hope: “The Jews of Jerba situate their identity at the very heart of sacred history. . . . The first experience of writing in the first person, just as the oral recounting of a life, re-establishes ties with the legacy of the religious tradition, with the perception of a collective destiny, the refuge of the book, the recurring theme of exile. But the exile is now without redemption. . . . only mourning remains” (“From Sacred History to Historical Memory and Back: The Jewish Past,” *History and Anthropology* [Special issue “Between History and Memory”] 2 [October, 1986], 291, 303).

lay hands on his manuscripts.⁴³ His worry calls up a last trait of his *Life*, which was, of course, among those texts to be protected from gentile and most Jewish eyes: the strong contrast it suggests between secret life and public life, between different representations of the same person. Christian autobiographies varied enormously in the way they mediated between the intimate life and the public life, the variation involving both their definition of the secret and whom they wanted to hear their secrets. Teresa of Ávila put her personal torments and her known convent reforms all together in a work published a few years after her death; the holy life was to be transparent to every reader. In contrast, in 1639 a Presbyterian settler in Bermuda recorded a half century of his life with such private attention to sexual guilt, nightmares, and visits from Satan that a modern reader comments on the difference between the hysterical Norwood of the *Journal* and the stable Norwood of “external evidence.” “In everyday life he was a successful colonist who was quite moderate in the outward practice of his religion.”⁴⁴ Montaigne’s *Essais* made the knotty relation between the public and the private a central theme, while Cardano’s manuscript *Vita* seems written with the intention of erasing the distinction between the secret and the open. Unlike those who wrote of their own lives as they thought they ought to be and not as they were, Cardano’s book would be “a sincere narrative” (*sincera narratio*). He portrayed himself in all his settings – as a physician attending the Archbishop of Saint Andrews in Scotland, as a man accused of “abusing boys,” as an extemporaneous lecturer.⁴⁵ He wanted to give a single representation of a many-sided man.

Modena in his *Life* listed his many ways of making a living (“trying without success,” he added), but did not show himself fully in all his public roles. As Howard Adelman and Benjamin Ravid have documented, during months in which Modena described all his doings as “worthless,” he was in fact busily teaching the laws at the synagogue, instructing pupils and preaching.⁴⁶ That is, of course, part of the literary strategy of Modena’s autobiography. Leon entitled his manuscript *The Life of Judah*, the Hebrew name given him at his circumcision. The secret agony of the gambling rabbi could go beyond sons to students and to “others who know me” – it was already familiar to his fellow gamblers, creditors, and patrons – but it was not for the general Jewish public, let alone for gentile eyes. Especially not for Christian eyes were other Jewish secrets that Modena tells here about the ghetto, about how it feels to be part of a community where all are blamed for the crime of one, how it feels to be turned from “being loved by all” to being “the object of scorn and hatred.”⁴⁷

43. Leon Modena, *Life*, 147.

44. Teresa’s *Libro de la Vida* was written “by herself at the command of her confessor” (*Autobiography*, 65). Written between 1561 and 1565, it remained in manuscript until 1588, two years after her death, when her *Obras* were published at Salamanca by Fray Luis de León.

The Journal of Richard Norwood is described and discussed by Delany, *British Autobiography*, 57–62.

45. Cardano, *De Propria Vita Liber*, chap. 13, p. 10; chap. 40, p. 32; chap. 30, p. 20; chap. 12, p. 9; *Book of My Life*, p. 49 (“straightforward narrative” for *sincera narratio*), pp. 177, 108–111, 44.

46. Modena, *Life*, fols. 28b, 15b; historical notes to fol. 15b.

47. Modena, *Life*, fols. 13b, 21a, 22b, 24b.

Nothing demonstrates so well this inner character of Modena's *Life* as the contrast with his *History of the Rites, Customes and Manner of the Present Jews Throughout the World*, composed in Italian in 1614–1615 for King James I of England and published in Paris in 1637 and in Venice in 1638.⁴⁸ Archrhetorician, he claims he writes “forgetting I am a Jew, fancying myself a simple and neutral relater.”⁴⁹ In fact, he never forgets his goal for a moment in his text, which (as Mark Cohen has shown⁵⁰) was to present the Jews in a way acceptable to gentiles, as nonsuperstitious, benevolent, moderate, and modest. No words of games of chance here, not even on the allowed days of Hanukkah, Purim, and the New Moon; no word of the hatred and passion of the ghetto in his picture of “this Nation . . . very full of Pitie and Compassion toward all people in want whatsoever”; no sense from the description of “their” mourning customs—he refers to the Jews as “they” not “we”—of how Modena would burst out, “My bowels, my bowels, I writhe in pain” for the loss of a son whose illness had begun even while he was writing the *Riti*.⁵¹

These Jewish secrets were quite well kept, except perhaps from those Christians who were regular habitués of the ghetto. If Shakespeare had lived to read the *Riti*, he might have pondered the rabbi of Venice who had reservations about taking usury from Christians,⁵² but the *Life of Judah*, hidden from Gentiles, is discrepant from Shylock on almost every page: a Jew who chances his money with thriftless abandon, who cries for revenge against Jewish slayers of his son, who basks in Christian admiration, and who invokes against Christian scorn

48. *Ibid.*, fol. 25a-b and historical notes to that folio.

49. The Italian phrase in Modena's Preface is “Nello scriver, in verità, che mi sono scordato d'esser Hebreo, figurandomi semplice, e neutrale relatore.” *Historia de' riti hebraici: Vita e osservance degli Hebrei di questi tempi* (Venice, 1638), Proemio. Interestingly enough, when the work was translated into English by Edmund Chilmead he mistranslated the phrase as “And, in my Writing, I have kept myself exactly to the Truth, remembering myself to be a Jew, and have therefore taken upon mee the Person of a Plain, Neutral Relater onely.” (*Rites*, transl. Chilmead [1650], fol. C5^v).

50. Mark R. Cohen, “Leone de Modena's *Riti*: A Seventeenth-Century Plea for Toleration of Jews,” *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1972), 287–321.

51. Modena, *Rites*, transl. Chilmead (1650), 121, 161–167, 50–55, 239–242; *Life*, fol. 17a. For a treatment of grief and mourning in Christian autobiography of the fifteenth century in Italy, see Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), 172–185 (on the mourning of merchant Giovanni Morelli for his son Alberto); and George W. McClure, “The Art of Mourning: Autobiographical Writings on the Loss of a Son in Italian Humanist Thought (1400–1461),” *Renaissance Quarterly* 39 (1986), 440–475. Margaret King analyzes fifteenth-century humanist letters of consolation to Jacopo Antonio Marcello at the loss of his son in “An Inconsolable Father and his Humanist Consolers,” *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1987), 221–246. Modena's recurrent mourning in the *Life of Judah* differs from both the ritual mourning of the merchant Morelli and the rhetorical consolation of the humanists; only Giorgio Bevilacqua's letter to Marcello makes an argument for prolonged mourning. On the literary conventions for and anxiety about repressing or expressing grief in English poetry of mourning, see G. W. Pigman III, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge, 1985).

52. Leon Modena, *Rites*, transl. Chilmead (1650) 73–77 for Modena's opinion that the Deuteronomic permission “Unto a Stranger thou mayst lend upon Usury” (23:20) applied only to the Seven Nations of Canaan and not to “those Nations, among whom they are at this Present dispersed.” The Jews “allege it to be Lawful” now because they have no other way to make a living. See discussion of this text and rabbinical reaction to it in Cohen, “Leone da Modena's *Riti*,” 310–311.

not merely a common humanity, as does Shylock, but an ancient lineage and learning.⁵³

This sense of a protected inner space points to a distinctive Jewish construction of the Renaissance contrast of inside/outside. Christian writers, in their frequent meditation on masking and dissimulation, usually assumed the inside/outside contrast to apply to the individual and to be bad but inevitable in a society of advancement and preferment. One told one's secrets to oneself, to one's confessor (if one was Catholic), to one's immediate family perhaps, but beyond them the world was unsafe. The transcending of this predicament is one of the great gifts of Montaigne's *Essais*.⁵⁴ In the Jewish case, the *inside* was defined not only as the individual and his or her family, but also to the wider Jewish community. In the historical circumstances of the exile, the contrast was often necessary and not always bad. Some secrets it was dangerous to let out to Christians; better to drown them in the noisemaking against the wicked oppressor Haman at Purim. Some secrets it was imprudent to let out: certain rabbis were critical of Jewish scholars who taught Hebrew and Kabbalah to Christians, as no good could come from it.⁵⁵

That the inner/outer contrast is found so acutely in Modena is surely a product of his experience of moving between the two worlds, using the Italian language, motifs, and genres and being listened to seriously by Christians. But it can also be found, if less explicitly, in the *Recollections* of Asher Halevi, who sometimes mediated between the Jews of Alsace and the civil authorities, and in the *Life* of the merchant Glückel of Hameln, who traded with Christians and drew her moral tales from both Jewish and Christian sources.⁵⁶ How might this contrast feed the process of self-exploration? It offered a range of situations which could be described to others in Hebrew or Yiddish with frankness and with a vehemence of personal feeling that went beyond Biblical borrowings; possibly, too,

53. Cf. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, especially Act I, scene 3 and Act III, scene 1. For Christians who did frequent the Ghetto of Venice, see Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550-1670* (Totawa, N.J., 1983), 160-167.

54. On Montaigne's condemnation of lying and false appearance and his ultimate means of reconciling himself to appearances while telling the truth about himself in his book, see Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*. On Renaissance concern about masking, see N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), especially chaps. 4, 6, 10, and the poem of the French man of letters Guillaume de La Perrière in regard to an emblem about masks. Whereas in classical times, masks were worn only for special occasions, now they are used all the time: "Chacun veult feindre et colorer sa ruse./ Trahison gist souz beau et doux langage./ Merveille n'est si tout le monde abuse./ Car chacun tend à faulser son visage." *Le Theatre des Bon Engins* (Lyon, 1549), Emblem V.

55. D. Kaufmann, "Elia Menachem Chalfan on Jews Teaching Hebrew to Non-Jews," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 9 (1897), 500-508 and Moshe Idel, "Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah: 1480-1650," a paper given at the conference on "Jewish Societies in Transformation in the 16th and 17th Centuries," Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, January 6-8, 1986.

56. Halevi, *Memoiren*, 60. Glückel of Hameln, *Life*, 114-126, for the business activities of Glückel after the death of her first husband. She does not give the names of any Christians with whom she did business, but it is clear from her activities selling stockings, seed pearls, and other items and her attendance at fairs at Leipzig, Brunswick, and Frankfurt-on-Oder that some of her clients must have been gentiles. Moral tales with non-Jewish motifs are found on pp. 52-53 (Charlemagne) and 93-94 (Solon and Croesus).

it offered a double perspective from which to regard the self. Not that one literally reported everything about the inside to the insiders: Modena did not elaborate on the quarrels with his wife or on a cryptic reference in “Miseries of my heart” to his son Mordecai “with Raphael Spira . . . and afterwards, till his death, with the Morisco.”⁵⁷ But Asher Halevi could tell his descendants he had a nocturnal emission on Yom Kippur night (an omen of premature death) and went to his wife’s bed and wept with her. And the *Book of Remembrances* by a would-be Jewish scholar and trader of Bohemian origin took the step, unusual in any sixteenth- or seventeenth-century autobiography, of blaming his parents for his failures: the neglect of his father and stepmother had brought him to his mid-twenties “devoid of wisdom and intelligence, without sons and spouse.”⁵⁸ If early modern Jewish autobiography was sustained by the recurring application of the Jewish myth of exile, suffering, and survival to the individual life, it could move to surprising discovery, generated by the contrast between outer and secret worlds.

Because they were rarely published except in snippets in learned Hebrew prefaces or in the unusual case of the Latin apologia for Uriel da Costa, Jewish autobiographies remained a genre for relatives and familiars until the late eighteenth century. In 1792, when the Berlin philosopher Solomon Maimon published his *Lebensgeschichte* in German, the Jewish Life was given a very different shape.⁵⁹ In it there is a full conversion from village Jewish genius to outrageous participant in the mixed city salon; intimate yearnings and Jewish secrets are revealed in print and both Christianity and Judaism are found wanting; the comic mood has taken over from the lamentation, even when things go wrong. Maimon’s autobiography owes much to Enlightenment experiences and models, but it was also nourished by some of the traditions of rhetoric and self-exploration that the reader will meet in Leon Modena’s *Life of Judah*.

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57. Modena, *Life*, fol. 34b.

58. Halevi, *Memoiren*, 49. “A Seventeenth-Century Autobiography,” 196.

59. *Salomon Maimon’s Lebensgeschichte: Von ihm selbst geschrieben und herausgegeben von K. P. Moritz. In swei Theilen* (Berlin, 1792–1793). An English translation was made by J. Clark Murray and published in 1888; it was reissued as *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon with an Essay on Maimon’s Philosophy*, by Hugo Berman (London, 1954). A condensation of Murray’s translation is in *Solomon Maimon: An Autobiography*, ed. and with a preface by Moses Hadas (New York, 1967).