Notandum,
A rat had gnawn my spur-leathers: notwithstanding,
I put on new, and did go forth: but, first,
I threw three beans over the threshold. Item,
I went, and bought two tooth-picks, whereof one
I burst, immediately, in a discourse
With a Dutch merchant, 'bout ragion del stato.
From him I went, and paid a moccenigo,
For piecing my silk stockings; by the way,
I cheapened sprats: and at St Mark's I urined.

There being no novel form in 1606 with which to mock or mimic the noting of events in a diary, Jonson’s Volpone has to stand as the first piece of literary irony aimed at the diary form.¹ More important still, the very existence of such an ironical comment suggests that the writing of diaries was a recognised social fact at the time, and the formula with which a Lady Margaret Hoby ended one immensely boring account of a day in 1599 (‘And so to bed’) prefigures Pepys, the innovating genius, by over 60 years.²

While the scope of our inquiry into diary novels makes it unnecessary to analyse in any depth the early centuries of diary writing, it should be pointed out that William Matthews’s Annotated Bibliography of British Diaries (1950) goes back as far as 1442 for its first example: it would be very strange if the aims and characteristics of such journals did not vary enormously in the course of more than 500 years.

Fifteenth-century lists of daily events are to be found both in Britain and in France, with an extension in the sixteenth century to accounts of life in the city or at court: the Journal of Héroard, Louis XIII’s doctor, is a notable early example. But the major distinction between such diaries, which describe things and people in the outside world, and what people nowadays think of as a diary, concerns the private or inner life of the diarist. In the
middle of the seventeenth century John Beadle's *Journal or Diary of A Thankful Christian* shows not only an explicit equation of terminology in the title, but also the importance of religion in making people reflect on their inner life, and this religious element was vital in later self-examination by Methodist writers. Even when there was no explicit intention of writing such religious work, Dr Johnson could aim his *Journal* at self-scrutiny and the need 'to resist sloth and ... methodise my life', while other eighteenth-century diarists examined their own personalities for self-knowledge as much as for self-improvement.

If the English dissenting bourgeois found the diary an ideal vehicle in the eighteenth century, the form was slower to be exploited in France. Although Robert Chasles's *Journal d'un voyage fait aux Indes orientales* (1721) is referred to by Jean Rousset as a 'private diary in spite of itself' because of the way in which Chasles finds himself becoming the subject of what started as an official record, its central purpose is not that of self-revelation — this trait, quite symbolically, was to emerge only after the Revolution. Restif de la Bretonne's *journal intime*, entitled *Mes inscriptions*, recounts events of 1780–7, but was published only in 1889, while the surviving pages of Mme de Staël's *Journal de mon cœur*, written in 1785 when she was nineteen, show that the habit of personal reflection (as opposed to external notation) was gaining ground at this time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, George Sand could explicitly refer to the great number of people who were keeping private journals, and it is significant that, although the first four diarists singled out by Alain Girard in his work on the *journal intime* were all born in the eighteenth century, they wrote mostly in the nineteenth, with publication coming only after their deaths.

In France, as in Britain, the emergence of nineteenth-century Romanticism made emotion a much more obvious part of literature, encouraging the literary interest in diaries by virtue of its overlap with a form that was primarily concerned with the charting of emotion. Dorothy Wordsworth, Scott and Byron all kept important diaries, with Byron's having an immense effect in France; the great *intimiste*, Amiel, was explicitly influenced in style and in mood by the reading of Byron's journal, while in his turn André Gide took up diary writing just months after reading Amiel for the first time. In Germany, too, the end of the eighteenth century saw a great flowering of Romantic diaries by Goethe,