Romancing the Self explores the relationship between early modern Englishwomen’s life writing and romance, a secular genre in which knights seek love and adventure. This project taps into current scholarly interest in early modern autobiographical writing and significantly alters several assumptions about this field by revealing the complex intersections between women’s life writing and romance. If, as I argue, romance was a powerful influence on early modern women’s autobiographical production, then spiritual autobiography was not the exclusive or even dominant autobiographical form as has been assumed. Furthermore, despite romance’s reputation as immoral, women’s personal writing suggests that they were intimately familiar with it, using the genre to structure their narratives and often combining romance with more traditional autobiographical models. These findings provide a more complex understanding of women’s self-construction in early modern England and of their participation in a textual world once thought to have been a primarily male sphere.
Romancing the Self: A Study of Early Modern Englishwomen’s Life Writing
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CATEGORY JUSTIFICATION
As an assistant professor in the second year of a tenure-track appointment at the University of Minnesota, Morris, I am applying for funds that will allow me to conduct research essential to both my current book project and an editing project.

Word Count: 41

PRESENT STATUS OF KNOWLEDGE
The study of early modern life writing, or autobiographical writing, has been invigorated in recent years by several trends. These include increased attention to early women’s contributions to autobiography; a greater awareness of the diversity and flexibility of autobiographical forms in the early modern period; and new respect for a manuscript culture in which handwritten documents were not only composed for private use but also copied and circulated among networks of friends and acquaintances. This particular trend has spurred a return to the archives of public records offices and research libraries, where so many women’s manuscripts have remained in relative obscurity. The result is an enhanced understanding of women’s writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when most women who wrote did not seek to publish their work in print but instead in manuscript form.

My work not only contributes to all of these trends but has in fact taken a leading role in drawing attention to the lessons learned when intersections between textual form (or genre) and early women’s life writing are examined more carefully. Indeed, Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England (the collection of essays I co-edited) “demonstrates how generic choice, mixture, and revision shape the construction of the female self in early modern England” (1) and reveals women’s complex participation in a textual world once thought to have been a primarily male sphere. My two current projects continue this work, revealing how women’s self-understanding in this period was largely influenced by the texts they read or—in some cases—were forbidden to read. Thus, in Romancing the Self: A Study of Early Modern Englishwomen’s Life Writing, I offer the first book-length study of the relationship between early modern Englishwomen’s life writing and the romance genre, a secular, fantastical genre in which knights seek love and adventure. And in my edition of seventeenth-century Englishwoman Dorothy Calthorpe’s recently discovered manuscript (one of the texts at the heart of my study), I provide in print for the first time her astonishing example of a romance-inflected family history.

These projects significantly alter several assumptions about early modern life writing by revealing the complex intersections between early modern women’s life writing and early modern romance. This relationship suggests that spiritual autobiography, long considered the major—if not only—autobiographical form in seventeenth-century England, did not exist in a vacuum. Furthermore, given the romance genre’s controversial reception as an immoral, trivial
genre—one likely to turn women’s assumed weaker brains to idleness and improper thoughts—
the fact that women were not only reading romance but also mimicking it in personal writings
has the potential to completely alter our understanding of how early modern women understood
themselves. Romance, with its unending tales of unrequited or unsatisfying love, spoke to
something in early modern women’s experience and offered a model by which they could
recount their own personal disappointments in a world where arranged marriage and often
loveless matches ruled the day. Romance texts further helped women explain, in ways likely to
invoke sympathy, how and why they may have ended up in situations that threatened their
reputations. The evidence of the romance genre’s influence on these women and their sense of
self can be found in multiple forms in female-authored life writing, including explicit mention or
discussion of romance (as in the life writing of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, and Elizabeth
Isham); autobiographical texts that bear varying degrees of resemblance to romance tropes, plots,
and characterizations (as in the work of Calthorpe, Ann Fanshawe, Anne Halkett, and Anne
Wyndham); and even texts in which the writers reject romance, since romance becomes the very
model against which women construct their identities. Therefore, whether constructing their
texts as anti-romances or modeling their life stories on the fictional tales of maidens in distress,
early modern women’s life writings undeniably bear the marks of romance’s influence.

And yet, as I argued in a recent essay, scholarly attention to how female life writers engaged
with the romance genre has—to date—been piecemeal and incomplete, failing to consider
multiple writers at the same time in order to discern patterns in women’s use of romance and
failing to consider what women’s efforts to disown romance might also tell us about the genre’s
power. Romancing the Self seeks to rectify these lapses and provide a more thorough and
nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationship by which life writing and romance informed
one another, including rare instances in which women authored romance, too. Ultimately, I
argue that, despite considerable efforts to trivialize it, romance was a force to be reckoned with
both as a genre and as the textual incarnation of an implied set of values by which women were
consistently measured. Therefore, in both its negative and positive uses, romance’s haunting of
women’s written lives reveals the powerful pressure it exerted over women and their early
textual efforts. Indeed, while it is easiest to see romance’s influence in those texts that
incorporate romance elements, I argue that the cases where romance is avoided or explicitly
rejected are even more compelling. In these cases, women attempt to construct virtuous images
of themselves in part by rejecting the stereotypical images of their sex that are frequently linked
to the scandalous romance genre. But in the process, of course, they are measuring themselves
by those very standards.

The Calthorpe edition is a natural and exciting outgrowth of the book volume, offering a
concrete example that illustrates many of the arguments in my book while also making readily
available the work of a “new,” or little-known, early modern woman writer. In addition to the
romance, Calthorpe’s manuscript includes love poetry and a Garden of Eden narrative, both
likely to attract scholarly interest.

In order to complete these projects, for which I have already done extensive reading and
compiled copious notes, I need to take multiple research trips to archives and research libraries in
the United States and England to consult manuscripts by early modern Englishwomen that are
either not available in print or that are available in incomplete or inadequate print editions.
Publisher interest in both projects and the current popularity of life writing scholarship make this research even more urgent. Furthermore, I have a research leave in Fall 2009 that will allow me to immediately incorporate the results of Summer 2009 research into my working draft of Romancing the Self.

Word Count: 1060

PLAN OF WORK
I intend to conduct research simultaneously for Romancing the Self and the Calthorpe edition. Although I would like to consult several original manuscripts, I have prioritized the individual texts (and corresponding travel) in order of immediate importance to my project.

July – August 2009:
I will spend roughly two weeks at Yale University (New Haven, CT) in order to:
(1) Read the Calthorpe manuscript at Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library to double-check the transcription I made of this text in March 2008. This manuscript is central to my book project because Calthorpe’s romance, based on her father and grandfather’s adventures, explicitly combines romance and life writing for the seeming purpose of increasing her family’s reputation. Since initially transcribing the manuscript, I have honed my paleography skills by attending the Mellon Summer Institute in Early Modern English Paleography at the Huntington Library and now need to double-check my transcription for accuracy (especially important for the Calthorpe edition) and examine another volume owned by Calthorpe that could not be located during my trip to Yale last year but has since been found.

(2) Read the microfilm version of an autobiographical manuscript by Alice Thornton, a prolific seventeenth-century life writer. As the original manuscript is now missing and no acceptable print edition is available, the microfilm version housed at Yale offers my only access to this text. Thornton’s autobiographical writings are essential to my project, since so many of her experiences as an unmarried woman echo the often traumatic encounters of romance heroines.

(3) Search the Beinecke for printed books owned by early modern women that may contain their marginalia. This research is important because it could yield valuable insights for my chapter on women’s reading (currently the chapter for which I have the least-developed notes). Although it has always been difficult to determine exactly how early modern women approached the written word, especially since women’s education was less institutionalized than men’s and is thus generally unrepresented in pedagogical material from the period, recent work by scholars like Heidi Brayman Hackel and William H. Sherman has begun to demonstrate the value of attending more carefully to the handwritten comments that so frequently fill books’ margins. Hackel has already done a comprehensive study of early modern women’s marginalia in copies of Sir Philip Sidney’s romance, Arcadia, thus providing an excellent model for my own inquiries. The only way to find women’s annotated texts is to work with an archivist at a research library like Yale. Since I already need to go there, it is a good opportunity to conduct this research.

I will spend an additional two weeks at the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington, D.C.) to continue my examination of early modern women’s marginalia. Although I am unsure what I will find at the Beinecke, archivists at the Folger have already begun a list of books in the...
Folger’s collections that are known to contain women’s marginalia, and I have continued this research via the Folger’s sophisticated online database. Therefore, I already have an extensive list of texts that I want to look at, and I’ve been in contact with Heather Wolfe, curator of manuscripts at the Folger, about the project. My hope is that studying these texts will inform and enrich my current approach to women’s reading habits, especially when it comes to romance.

In August 2009, I will also submit a proposal for the 7th Biennial International Auto/Biography Association Conference, to be held in England at the University of Sussex in June 2010. My proposal will be based on my summer research, in particular on the complexities of transcribing and editing a volume by a woman like Calthorpe, about whom very little is known.

**September 2009 - January 2010:**
I will devote my research leave from UMM to drafting the book, writing my book prospectus, and sending it to potential publishers. Although Ashgate—one of the top presses for scholarship on early modern women—has already expressed interest in my book, it is also notoriously expensive. Therefore, I intend to submit proposals to other highly respected publishers as well.

**June - August 2010:**
I will travel to England for up to two months in order to:
1. participate in the Auto/Biography Conference at the University of Sussex, where I can meet and discuss my findings with colleagues from around the world.
2. visit the Shrubland Park Estate in Suffolk—the residence where Calthorpe’s manuscript was last housed before being sold to the Beinecke—and research Calthorpe family history in county records offices. For my edition of Calthorpe’s work, I need this expertise about her and her family.
3. read a manuscript of a romance by Hester Pulteney at the University of Leeds so that I can incorporate this unpublished female-authored romance in my chapter on women’s romance.
4. meet and compare notes with other scholars of early modern women’s life writing at the University of Warwick, many of whom I have already corresponded with.
5. consult two important autobiographical manuscripts at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University: Elizabeth Delaval’s *Meditations* and Dionys Fitzherbert’s autobiographical narrative.
6. consult Grace Mildmay’s autobiography at the Northampton Central Library in Northampton.
7. spend remaining time in London, researching pertinent manuscripts at the British Library (including Fanshawe’s Memoirs, Halkett’s Autobiography, Rose Throckmorton’s Memoirs, and Rich’s lengthy Diary) and continuing to draft *Romancing the Self* while within reach of many important libraries and resources.

**Late Summer 2010 - early January 2011:**
The rest of the grant period will be spent writing, with the goal of bringing both projects to completion shortly after the last research trip.

Word Count: 926
Total Word Count: 1986
**BUDGET JUSTIFICATION**

I am requesting a total of $23,145. In order to complete the research described above, I primarily need funds to cover travel expenses. However, I also require substantial funds for copying manuscript, microfilm, and other library source material; for printing documents and drafts of my manuscript (paper & ink costs are not covered by the UMM Humanities Division); and for a laptop that will allow me to effectively work at archives and libraries away from home.

**Trip to Yale in July/August 2009:**
- Mileage to and from Minneapolis-St. Paul airport: $176.00
- Round-trip airfare to Hartford, CT: $500.00
- Parking at Minneapolis Airport: $234.00
- Rental car for time at Yale (New Haven, CT): $350.00
- Per diem in New Haven, CT ($160 per day x 13 days): $2080.00

Subtotal for Yale trip: **$3340.00**

**Trip to Folger Shakespeare Library in July/August 2009:**
- Mileage to and from Minneapolis-St. Paul airport: $176.00
- Round-trip airfare to Washington D.C.: $500.00
- Parking at Minneapolis Airport: $234.00
- Public Transportation in Washington D.C.: $150.00
- Per diem in Washington D.C. ($229 per day x 13 days): $2977.00

Subtotal for Folger trip: **$4037.00**

**Trip to England in Summer 2010:**
- Mileage to and from Minneapolis-St. Paul airport: $176.00
- Round-trip airfare to London: $1300.00
- Britrail England Flexipass (travel to many cities over many days): $579.00
- Per diem in Brighton ($241 x 5 days): $1205.00
- Per diem in Ipswich/Suffolk County ($241 x 5 days): $1205.00
- Per diem in Leeds ($309 x 3 days): $927.00
- Per diem in Oxford ($251 x 6 days): $1506.00
- Per diem in Northampton ($251 x 3 days): $753.00
- Lodging in London, remaining time (39 days max): $2900.00
- *Not per diem since long-term expenses should be less*
- Food expenses in London, remaining time (39 days max): $3000.00
- *Not per diem, since long-term expenses should be less*
- Misc. travel costs in England (subway, etc.): $350.00

Subtotal for England trip: **$13,901.00**

**Miscellaneous Supplies:**
- Laptop for archival research, etc.: $1200.00
- Manuscript/Microfilm copies ($400) and photocopies ($200): $600.00
- 1 box paper for office printer: $35.00
- 1 toner cartridge for office printer: $32.00

Subtotal for misc. supplies: **$1867.00**
NEED JUSTIFICATION
To include as representative a sample of early modern women’s life writing in my project as possible, it is essential that I commit a fair amount of time to working in the archives. One reason why it has taken us so long to fully appreciate the complexity of women’s life writing in early modern England is the failure to attend to the entire corpus of women’s work. To produce a book that repeats this same error would be egregious. However, neither the $700 provided annually by my department for travel nor the available Faculty Research Enhancement Funds are adequate for the amount of travel I have outlined above. Grant-in-Aid funds will allow me to see all the texts that I need to see for my two current projects, while also allowing me to solidify my expertise in early modern women’s life writing and editorial practice.

Because of the nature of archival research, which involves looking at extremely old and fragile texts with nothing but a pencil in hand, a laptop is an essential tool for note-taking, transcribing manuscripts, and downloading digital images of manuscript pages when possible. Although laptop computers can be borrowed for brief periods from the UMM Humanities Division, I need a laptop that I can take on lengthy research trips and on which I can download the software required for digital imaging.

SELECTED SECONDARY REFERENCES: