Narrative or Network? Eighteenth-Century Feminist Literary History at the Crossroads

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A LITERARY HISTORY OF WOMEN'S WRITING IN BRITAIN, 1660-1789, by Susan Staves. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 536 pp. $184.99 cloth; $30.99 paper.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN POETS AND THEIR POETRY: INVENTING AGENCY, INVENTING GENRE, by Paula R. Backscheider. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 514 pp. $70.00 cloth; $37.00 paper.

Strolling through Hyde Park with their terrestrial guide Lady Intelligence, the goddesses Astrea and Virtue in Delarivier Manley's *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, Of Both Sexes. From the New* Atalantis, *An Island in the* Mediteranean (1709) spy a fine lady riding in a coach. Intelligence happens to be carrying a copy of an unpublished poem by the lady. Sharing it with the goddesses, she explains, "The Lady once belong'd to the Court, but marrying into the Country, she made it her business to devote herself to the Muses, and has writ a great many pretty things."[1] A didactic poem follows, addressing life's disillusionments and the virtues of retirement. Astrea responds to the poem with praise and a suggestion for improvement: "The Lady speaks very feelingly, we need look no further than this, to know she's her self past that agreeable Age she so much regrets. . . . if she had contracted something of the second and third Stanza, it had not been the worse" (1:171). Astrea also comments on the lady's privileged material circumstances, which she imagines must have given her time to polish her writing: "I presume she's one of the happy few, that write out of Pleasure, and not Necessity: By that means its [*sic*] her own fault, if she publish any thing but what's good" (1:171). As many contemporary readers would surmise, the "Lady [who] once belong'd to the Court" was Anne Kingsmill Finch, one-time maid of honor to Princess Mary of Modena. Finch had fled London for the countryside in 1689 and returned in 1708, one year before Manley's incorporation of her poem into *Atalantis*.[2] This scene—one of several in *Atalantis* in which Manley's female narrators read, discuss, and evaluate poems by female authors while

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also commenting on the latter's material circumstances—foregrounds for us issues such as the female readership, as well as authorship, of poetry; the circulation of verse in manuscript (and sometimes voice), as well as print; the contingencies affecting artistic production and aesthetic evaluation; and the diversity of women's writings (here, a formal, polished poem intended for genteel manuscript circulation and a hastily written, multivolume political scandal chronicle intended for commercial print). As such, this scene provides a useful point of departure for the following consideration of two of the most important works in eighteenth-century feminist literary history of this decade: Susan Staves's sweeping "narrative literary history of a national literature" (p. 1) and Paula Backscheider's genre-mapping "exploration of the forms in which women poets wrote" (p. xiii). An economically and ideologically motivated venture as well as an exuberant generic experiment, Manley's hybrid text also raises for us questions as to the extent to which the discipline of "English literary studies" can and cannot fully encompass our efforts to identify, study, and disseminate knowledge about early women's writings. Equipped with unprecedented tools such as searchable digital archives and electronic publishing, while also confronting institutional and market shifts likely to be as transformative as the eighteenth-century legal, political, and print trade developments that enabled the explosion of print commerce and the rise of "English literature" in the first place (not coincidentally in the same era), it behooves us to contemplate the future of feminist literary history even as we take this opportunity to identify and celebrate what has been achieved by these two major studies.

Staves's narrative tells a story of the gradual acceptance of women's writing, beginning in 1660 when female authors seemed an anomaly and ending in 1789 when women who exemplified certain qualities were conditionally accepted as authors. Her story is strictly chronological: she divides up the years 1660 to 1789 into seven shorter timespans of between thirteen and thirty years, and she discusses texts according to the date of their composition rather than publication. This strategy allows her to relate women's writings closely to the history (chiefly political and intellectual history) of the years in which they were written. The first chapter addresses "the Restoration to the death of Aphra Behn, 1660-1689," while the final chapter, "Romance and comedy, 1777-1789," begins with the War of American Independence and ends on the brink of the French Revolution. The chronological endpoint of the study, 1789, necessarily excludes women's political writing of the 1790s, including key texts by Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Helen Maria Williams.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is mentioned only in passing and her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) not at all.

On the geographical front, Staves is similarly clear about her territory and strict about keeping to it. On the one hand, she aspires to consider "women writing everywhere in Britain and the British colonies . . . so long as those colonies were part of the British Empire" (p. 6). On the other hand, she insists that after the Declaration of Independence, "women writers in the former North American colonies from henceforth would be part of another national literature" and "therefore, play no role in British literary history" (p. 363). While this statement is technically correct, this rationale seems unlikely to satisfy the growing community of scholars working on Anglo-American women's writings from a circumatlantic perspective. National political boundaries rarely match up exactly with ideological communities, and it is surely possible that an author such as Mercy Otis Warren continued to play a role in British literary history after 1776 even though she was not a British subject. Still, Staves is stronger on colonial American writers than on Scottish or Welsh authors; she makes no mention, for instance, of Welsh poet Jane Brereton (1685-1740) or Scottish poet Janet Little, who established a reputation as an author in the 1780s. Given the importance of this period in the history of English-Scottish relations, it seems significant that there is no entry in the Index for "Scotland" or "Scottish literature" to match comparable entries for "American literature," "American Revolution," and "War of American Independence." Nonetheless, Staves's reach extends further than most, with useful contextualizing discussions of subjects ranging from European classical and humanist traditions to Anglo-Indian relations. She wears her extraordinary learning lightly.

Today, many scholars are working to comprehend women's writing practices in their entirety. Feminist literary scholars now study a wide range of intersecting textual and verbal activities including the manuscript circulation of verse, the printing and publishing of books, the performance of drama, and the oral tradition of ballads and songs. Staves herself considers a laudably broad range of genres of women's public and private writings: "fiction, . . . poetry, drama, memoir, autobiography, biography, history, essay, translation, and the familiar letter" (p. i). In her polemical "Introduction," however, she undermines this historicist move when she sternly assigns different types of eighteenth-century women's writings to different twenty-first-century scholarly disciplines. She holds that "literature" and "writing" are clearly distinguishable categories, and she insists that "all writing by women can validly be studied by one scholarly discipline or another—by social history, for example—but it does not follow that all writing by women is the proper object of literary study" (p. 5). This division of knowledge is convenient, but it rests on a foundational

disciplinary assumption that is no longer universally shared: the assumption that our *post*-eighteenth-century system of scholarly "disciplines" appropriately determines the ways in which we approach early modern women's writings. As many scholars have now shown, in the eighteenth century "what we now assume to be separate fields of knowledge—the modern disciplines—had not yet been fully differentiated."[3] Staves briefly acknowledges the historicity of the category of "literature," suggesting that we can toggle back and forth between eighteenth- and twenty-first-century understandings. But she does not acknowledge the history of the discipline of "English Literature" that worked to institutionalize modern notions of literature *after* the eighteenth century or suggest how this history profoundly complicates any neat division of early modern women's writings into "literary" and "non-literary."

Staves not only assigns different types of writing to different disciplines; she also asserts her right to assess which particular *examples* of a genre are literary works. With respect to the genre of the familiar letter (to which she gives valuable extended treatment), she says, "The vast majority of women's letters . . . do not seem to be appropriately part of the subject matter of literature" (p. 5). Again, the rationale she offers for this division of knowledge and labor is our modern system of disciplines. Most private letters, she suggests, "have little interest for readers today who are not social historians" (p. 231). In practice, though, the word "literary" in the title of her book signals a general polemical stance rather than an argument that is advanced in any sustained or detailed way throughout the book. Furthermore, the defensive tone of this and some other sections of the "Introduction" ultimately serves less to persuade than to suggest the extent to which feminist critical practice now generally tends in the opposite direction: towards an acceptance of all women's writing practices, both manuscript and printed (and sometimes also their oral and performative incarnations), as potentially legitimate and rewarding objects of study.

Staves claims that her chief criterion for evaluation is "[a]esthetic or literary merit" (p. 4). In the opening (and closing) pages of the book, she writes, "It cannot be a sin against feminism to say that some women wrote well and others wrote badly, that some were intelligent, reflective, and original, others dull, unreflective, and formulaic" (p. 4; see also p. 439). Aligning aesthetic judgment with experience, she asserts her right to judge some texts "bad." Her history is loaded with "best texts" statements: "Finch's *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (1713) is the most accomplished volume of poems published by a woman between 1660 and 1789" (p. 138); Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* (1763) is "the most brilliant book by any women [*sic*] writer of the Restoration and eighteenth century" (p. 211), and so on. In addition to her rankings of women writers' works, Staves has no qualms about ranking women writers themselves on

a scale of intelligence whose criteria she does not specify. Her practice of pronouncing one woman or group of women "more intelligent" or "more intellectual" than another becomes naturalized as a method for sorting and classifying authors. Catherine Trotter is the "most intellectual" of her fellow female dramatists in the 1690s (p. 108); Eliza Lucas Pinckney is "one of the more intelligent . . . mid-century letter writers" (p. 232; see also p. 235), and so on. While some readers may find Staves's bold judgments useful, others will find them off-putting and, more problematic for a scholarly study, "lacking evidential or argumentative support."[4] Staves never pauses to define her key evaluative terms and concepts (especially "aesthetic or literary merit"). As one otherwise enthusiastically positive reviewer observes, "many might wish for more complete explanations of what makes her consider some works and not others 'most original, most intelligent, best written, and most significant'—words she largely fails to define."[5] At least two of her implied criteria seem anachronistic: "some were . . . original, others . . . formulaic" (p. 4). How many pre-1800 authors shared our own post-Romantic emphasis on originality? How many pious or didactic authors disdained writing that was "formulaic"? Staves also never pauses to address the question of where a "best texts" approach gets us in our attempt to understand the larger landscape of women's writings. Where does it get us to pronounce a woman writer's works "bad"? What kind of projects (institutional, political, personal) are advanced? Nor does she address what I take to be the most important follow-up question to any assertion that a text is "good" or "bad": that is, good or bad *for what*?

I would argue that there are other evaluative criteria at work in this book that are more important to Staves than "aesthetic or literary merit." With remarkably few exceptions, she strongly prefers "intellectually vigorous writing" (p. 2) aligned with "moral seriousness" (p. 320). She pays valuable attention to various strands of "ascetic feminism" (p. 400). Less helpfully, she classifies select women writers as members of "the party of virtue" (p. 9, *passim*) and explicitly opposes them to other women she labels as "the transgressive writers" (p. 7, *passim*). In chapters and sections with titles such as "Partisans of virtue and religion" (chapter two) and "The voice of religion against the libertine" (pp. 217-25), she advances what is perhaps the most sustained argument of this book: that "the women writers of what I call 'the party of virtue' more powerfully rebutted certain misogynistic assumptions than the transgressive women writers did" (p. 9). While she can be alarmingly dismissive of those women writers she deems "transgressive," she goes out of her way to understand the attractions of works by "militantly virtuous" authors (pp. 289, 380, *passim*). She devotes six pages to a description of Mary Collyer's *Felicia to Charlotte* (2 vols., 1744 and 1749), a "novel of ideas" with an "intelligent and high-minded" heroine and a "virtuous and philosophical" hero (p. 237) and four to Clara

Reeve's *The Champion of Virtue* (1777). She provides a thoughtful reading of Penelope Aubin, whose novels were known for their "plots of militant female virtue" (p. 194) (and, one might add, near-rape scenes) rather than for any claim to "aesthetic or literary merit." Staves repeatedly critiques unnamed feminist critics for trawling women's writings for "useable foremothers" (especially socially and/or sexually outspoken ones) but in reality she is equally interested in identifying female role models (albeit of a different kind) (p. 7).

In itself, the close attention that Staves pays to various strands of "ascetic feminism" is tremendously useful (p. 400). Staves's determination to give certain kinds of historical "otherness" the benefit of the doubt is unquestionably one of the greatest strengths of this book. What is less helpful is the binary opposition of "virtuous" and "transgressive" authors that quickly emerges as one of this book's dominant classificatory strategies. To be sure, by 1700 the literary history of women was *already* a sharply polarized structure: at one pole, the outspoken, sexually scandalous writer for pay, Aphra Behn; at the other, the coterie poet Katherine Philips, who was celebrated "for her Verses and her Vertues both."[6] Unfortunately, this polarizing impulse—and the "typing" of women writers to which it has given rise—has structured the way that many authors have been written about ever since. Even today, Behn, Manley, and Eliza Haywood are almost invariably yoked together as what might be called the "triumvirate of transgression," even though there are as many differences as similarities between them (and Behn died before Haywood was born). Precisely because Staves is exemplary in having *read* all three of these authors carefully, it is all the more disappointing that she too adopts the practice of yoking together diverse women writers as "the transgressive writers" and opposing them to other authors designated the "party of virtue." Staves has a tendency to model complex questions pertaining to sexuality and morality as an either/or choice—not only for eighteenth-century women writers but also for feminist critics now. Sexuality comes across as suspect, dangerous, even a little degrading. Sexuality and libertinism are often collapsed, and "libertinism" tends to mean not a recognizable philosophical position associated with skepticism and bold unconventional inquiry but simply immoral, dissolute behavior. This tendency is especially apparent in her treatment of Behn. She acknowledges Behn's great importance to women's literary history, yet she ultimately judges her on moral grounds as a disastrous role model for later women writers. Staves argues that in Behn's staking her claim to authority on "a special womanly expertise on the arts and truths of love," she threatened "to reinforce misogynist stereotypes of woman as the lustful sex" (p. 88).

The most extreme example of Staves's tendency to evaluate women writers on moral grounds is her extended reading of the drama and fiction

of Manley. She acknowledges Manley's contributions to the history of the novel and to new "enlightenment . . . modes of truth-telling representation" (p. 146). However, in her discussion of Manley and Manley criticism, a pattern emerges wherein she acknowledges an existing feminist reading, then sternly rejects it with a statement of personal opinion damning Manley's text(s) and offering little if any further argument or evidential support. Despite her own special interest in political history, Staves substantially downplays Manley's labors as a Tory political propagandist. She mentions but does not discuss Manley's Tory journalism, and she describes *Atalantis* (for which Manley was arrested by the Whig government) as "less concerned with ideology or political issues than with purporting to offer shocking revelations of what went on in the bedrooms of the great and famous" (p. 146). Later, she again asserts without any further argument or textual support "the absence of serious or interesting political thought in *The New Atalantis*" (p. 149).

Staves rightly identifies sexual hypocrisy as a theme of Manley's works: "the alleged hypocrisy of respectable people who pay verbal tributes to virtue but who in secret act as lasciviously as those they condemn" (p. 111). Surprisingly, though, she then goes on to attempt to "explain" this theme by referencing Manley's biography. She begins a section on Manley's drama with the speculation that, "[h]aving been tricked or seduced into a bigamous marriage with her cousin and become the mother of an illegitimate child, Manley perhaps decided to make a virtue of necessity and to offer sympathetic portraits of women who had lost their chastity" (p. 111). (The category "women who had lost their reputations for chastity" also becomes normalized as a classification for women writers; see, for example, pp. 22, 64, 231, 270). She models Manley as consciously setting herself in opposition to members of the "party of virtue" such as Finch (p. 144)—even though, as we have seen, Manley explicitly praises Finch in *Atalantis*.

Throughout the remainder of her history, Staves uses Manley (and sometimes Behn and Haywood) as a negative moral touchstone for an extraordinary number of other authors. In addition to Finch, these include Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Mary Davys, Charlotte Lennox, Laetitia Pilkington, Teresia Constantia Phillips, Lady Frances Vane, Charlotte Charke, Elizabeth Griffiths, Frances Sheridan, Frances Burney, and Charlotte Smith.[7] Predictably, mid-century memoirists such as Lady Vane (who "plead[s] feminine weakness and naiveté as excuses for her elopement and illicit affairs," p. 275) are sorted into the "transgressive" group and compared to Manley (see, for example, pp. 22, 231, 273, 279). More surprising is the consistency with which Staves goes on to compare the heroines of much later fiction to Manley's female protagonists in works written as early as 1696. Manley's characters are negatively compared to the heroines of Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Griffith's

The History of Lady Barton (1771), Smith's *Emmeline* (1778), and Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782).[8]

Staves's treatment of Haywood is shorter and more dismissive. She devotes a single paragraph to Haywood's scandal chronicles, which she summarizes as "even less ideological and more simply personally libelous than Manley's" (p. 186), and three paragraphs to her phenomenally popular fiction *Love in Excess* (1719-20). Flying in the face of two decades of recovery work devoted to undoing reductive accounts of Haywood's long career, Staves returns Haywood to her former status as the century's most shameless huckster of "bad" fiction. She insists that her own evaluative criteria are aesthetic, and in this regard she aligns herself with Alexander Pope, who satirized Haywood in the *Dunciad* as a "prize in the booksellers' pissing contest": "Pope believed that his satire was aesthetically superior to Haywood's; most readers who accept aesthetic criteria at all, including me, have agreed with him" (pp. 189, 190). Disregarding her own valuable suggestion elsewhere that we would benefit from reading pre-1750 fiction as if "the novel" as we know it did not already exist, she faults Haywood's "rudimentary" characterization and "reductively simple narratives" (p. 193). But ultimately Haywood's chief crime in Staves's view appears to be her treatment of sexuality. Haywood's tales, with their "uncontrollably avaricious, vengeful, and lustful" female characters, work "against those women writers . . . who were attempting to establish the idea that properly educated women were capable of resisting the blandishments of seducers and the importunings of their own desires" (p. 193).

Staves joins other recent critics in questioning the place of the novel as "[t]he dominant genre of [the] modern canon" of eighteenth-century women's writings (p. 7). Her primary reason for wishing to redirect our attention to other genres, however, has nothing to do with recent research suggesting the novel's relatively minor place in the print market.[9] Rather, she says, the novel is "not at the center of [her] account" because "[m]uch of women's *most intellectually vigorous writing* was in nonfiction prose, not in the novel" (p. 2, emphasis added). Related to her concern with female role models is her emphasis on the gap between real women's concerns and the representation of women's concerns in domestic fiction. Staves deeply distrusts sentimental fiction, and she rightly points out that although sentimental conventions tend to "confine respectable women within narrow domestic spheres and strict conventions of conduct," these conventions are not "realistic representations of women's experience" (p. 24; see also pp. 2, 9). Attention to a wider variety of genres will reveal that women were "far more engaged in public and in worldly matters than the representation of women in the contemporary domestic novel would suggest" (p. 296; see also pp. 231, 359).

Staves argues that scholars of eighteenth-century women's writing need

to see "nonfiction prose, religious writing, and translation as having been more significant than they are in the twenty-first century operative canon" (p. 8). Her preference for "intellectually vigorous writing" strongly shapes her decisions as to which examples of these lesser-studied kinds of writing are worthy of our attention. In her treatment of religious writing, she is much stronger on Anglican authors than on dissenters such as Quakers, and she appears to have little if any patience for women's visionary or prophetic writings. In chapter one she acknowledges, "Almost 40 percent of all the first editions of books and pamphlets published by women between 1660 and 1690 were religious writings by Quaker women," yet she devotes only *two pages* to these materials (p. 29). Prolific and devoted Behmenist mystic Jane Lead, whose seventeen printed books and tracts circulated in her lifetime in three languages, earns only a three sentence mention, followed by a transitional sentence suggesting that Lead was less "intellectual" or "serious" than unnamed Anglican successors (p. 93). Staves's preference for intellectual history also shapes her treatment of the religious writings that she *does* consider; see for instance her handling of Rowe's "intellectual[ly] ambitious" poetry where she details Rowe's interests in Jansenism, Neoplatonism, and Quietism but says nothing whatsoever about poetic style or form (pp. 218-23).

In comparison to the two pages she devotes to Quaker women's writings, Staves goes on in the next section of chapter one to spend *ten pages* on two biographies, Margaret Cavendish's *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince, William Cavendishe* (1667) and Lucy Hutchinson's *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (written 1664-71). Staves is especially interested in historical writing; she devotes her longest discussion of any single text (ten pages) to Catherine Macaulay's *The History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* (8 vols., 1763-83). She focuses on the *History* as an "unprecedented . . . intellectual and literary event" and on Macaulay's historiography and Whig politics (p. 327). Surprisingly, though, given the length of this discussion and her stated concern with issues of "aesthetic or literary merit," she says nothing about Macaulay's style (sentence structure, diction, figures of speech, and so on). Staves's handling of historical writing, like her handling of religious writings (and translations, discussed below), continued to raise for me a key question as I read this book: what exactly *is* literariness for Staves?

Along with religious writings and histories, Staves makes a persuasive case for translation as an important form for women writers. Translation allowed some women to "engage significant subjects conventionally thought beyond the[ir] purview" and others to earn much-needed cash (p. 208). Here too, Staves's preference for intellectually and morally serious writing shapes what *kinds* of translations she chooses to discuss. She only briefly mentions women's translations of novels (p. 207), yet she provides

detailed discussions of Aubin's *Genghizcan* (1727), "a very *serious* and fascinating scholarly book" (p. 208); Susannah Dobson's *The Life of Petrarch* (1775) and "two additional works of *serious* scholarship" by Dobson (p. 374); and Elizabeth Carter's *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758), which proved that "women ought to be taken *seriously* as citizens of the republic of letters" (p. 310, all emphasis added). She provides lucid summaries of these works and ably suggests their significance for contemporary readers. However, there is little sense of these translations as *literary artifacts*, and no discussion of the translators' linguistic agency (their diction, style, and other intellectual and aesthetic choices at the level of the sentence). To be sure, we cannot expect Staves to have mastered six different languages, but her particular *handling* of translations, which foregrounds historical and intellectual issues and says almost nothing about linguistic and stylistic ones, again raises questions about what constitutes "literariness" for Staves.

Staves categorically excludes "occasional political writing," a significant class of eighteenth-century women's writings (p. 5). No mention is made of the more than one hundred separate titles (pamphlets and broadsides) written, printed, and distributed by printer-author Elinor James over a period of nearly forty years (fl. 1681-1716). A more surprising omission, though, is Catholic and Jacobite novelist and poet Jane Barker, whose works can readily be defended on aesthetic grounds.[10] She briefly mentions laboring-class women's writings in a two-paragraph section titled "Servant Authors," followed by a section on Mary Leapor in which she again aligns herself with Pope, who never read Leapor (p. 259). Perhaps the oddest treatment of any *included* author, though, is that of Phyllis Wheatley, the first African woman to publish a book of poems in English. Staves devotes only two paragraphs to Wheatley's verse, discussing it (in a section titled "Rome and France"!) as an example of the period's interest in the legacy of ancient Rome. Although she works to emphasize women's interest "in public and in worldly matters" (p. 296), her brief treatment of laboring-class authors and of Wheatley, her exclusion of political occasional writings (including most abolition writings), and her decision to end her history in 1789 has something of a cumulative effect of downplaying women writers' actual agency (as distinct from interest) in the public political sphere.

In its clear chronological organization, its lucid and authoritative overviews of major political and intellectual developments, and its welcome emphasis on relatively neglected genres, Staves's narrative literary history will go a long way towards charting a path for future students of eighteenth-century women's writings. Although its authority is somewhat undermined by its unexamined assumptions, this book is an impressive, indispensable work of scholarship whose production values (both those of

the author and of Cambridge University Press) should set the standard for all future print-based surveys of this type.

"Having done moralizing upon [a] Story," Virtue and Astrea follow Lady Intelligence into Kensington Palace (*Atalantis*, 1:84). From the balcony, they detect a funeral procession. They ask Intelligence what she knows about the deceased, and she responds by pulling another poem out of her satchel.[11] Intelligence apologizes for the poem in advance, noting the circumstances of its composition and the dire straits of the literary "Labourer" who wrote it (most likely Manley):

> I know *Astrea*, upon the top of *Parnassus* . . . is an undoubted Judge of good Writing; but because we don't pretend so much merit for this Piece, I'll only tell you, that a certain Poet, who had formerly wrote some things with success . . . procur'd another Brother of *Parnassus* to write this Elegy for him, and promis'd to divide the Profit. The Reward being considerable and sweet, he defrauded the poor Labourer of his Hire. (1:89-90)

"[J]ustly incens'd" by this cheat, the "poor Labourer . . . resolve[d] to own and print this Piece in the next *Miscellanea*" (as Manley effectively did when she printed the poem in the *Atalantis*) (1:90). Astrea once again offers a discriminating yet sympathetic evaluation of the verse: "We that are us'd to the genuine Elegies of *Melpomene*, and other Performances of the Daughters of *Parnassus*, find but a faint Relish of the Muses in this Poem; however, since he has something of a *Genius*, we will be indulgent to the Attempt" (1:97). With this modest encouragement, Intelligence pulls out another elegy by the same "poor Labourer," "just warm from the Muse; finish'd but Yesterday, and newly communicated to me, to be distributed abroad" (1:98). Intelligence notes that this piece does not catch their "Mightiness's applause," yet she insists that "'tis well enough" (1:104). Verses should not be evaluated "like Melons," to be discarded "if they have not something in their flavour approaching to Perfection" (1:105). For if only writing of the highest aesthetic or literary merit was to be encouraged and enjoyed, the modern reader (as well as, presumably, the writer for pay) must resolve "not to . . . eat at all, or at least without the *Bon Goust*" (1:105).

As the above exchange suggests, "poetry in the eighteenth century was written for more reasons than we can imagine" (Backscheider, p. 3). This is also one of the simplest yet most important messages of *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*. Spurred by the explosion of the print trades, the growth of the periodical press, the appearance of canon-making anthologies, and other factors, poetry in Britain between 1700 and 1800 went "from being a political or coterie activity to addressing a large, diverse,

engaged audience that both cared about quality and followed fashion" (p. 14). Women writers and readers were central to these developments, and the number of women printing their poetry increased dramatically in each quarter of the century. Britain eventually saw the "widespread public acceptance of women as poets" on conditional terms (p. 5), and a few female worthies were touted as among the "glories of the British nation" (p. 382).

The purpose of Backscheider's award-winning book is "to lay a foundation for future study of eighteenth-century women poets, their poetry, and the literary histories to which they belong."[12] Backscheider describes her study as neither a "systematic introduction" nor "a unified, progressive argument" but rather "an exploration of the forms in which women poets wrote" (p. xiii). Although she makes a powerful case for the aesthetic excellence of several women poets, she is most interested in models of literary historiography that give us a "different, fuller landscape" (p. 110). Noting how much has been accomplished over the last few decades by scholars of eighteenth-century women's fiction, she suggests that "the study of women poets will yield the same kinds of major revisions in literary history" (p. xix). By exploring major kinds of women's poetry ("By *major* I mean . . . both respected, canonical kinds and the most popular forms," p. xx), she maps out one possible productive route.

After the "Introduction" provides an overview of women's poetry (kinds, purposes, and audiences) and suggests some critical issues for discussion, chapters two and three begin to answer the question, what did women write? (As I will suggest below, this seemingly straightforward question yields some of the book's most revelatory answers.) Chapters four through eight provide case studies of women's contributions to five highly respected kinds of poetry: religious verse, friendship poems, retirement poems, elegies, and sonnets. Chapter nine considers obstacles to women's writing and publishing poetry and to our studying their work today. "The greatest barriers to serious study and a just assessment," Backscheider says firmly, are "lingering [critical] attitudes" (p. 399). Mapping the "landscape" of women's poetry will mean reading broadly and carefully, then devising appropriate criteria of evaluation:

> we need to . . . survey the landscape carefully, open-mindedly, and in detail. We need to recognize and compensate for the barriers, and we need to assess the value of the poems we are rediscovering in new and even radical ways. . . . we need to do no less than rewrite the history of entire decades and poetic genres in the period. (p. 386)

While "[a] few women have been recognized as excellent poets" (pp. xvii-xviii), "talented, early modern women poets with a significant body of work . . . remain untouched" (p. 217). To a considerable extent, this

lack of critical attention means that "the reassessment of Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry remains to be done" (p. 402). In the meantime, the "doors of reception" need to be kept wide open.[13] Backscheider frankly acknowledges "the contingent nature of aesthetic judgments and the canon" (p. xv). She also briefly defines her use of the term "aesthetics": "by *aesthetics* I mean simply 'the sense of the beautiful.' I am aware that *aesthetics* is a highly political category that has never been demonstrated to be separable from time and culture, and I treat it as such" (p. 415, n. 35).

Backscheider works hard to convince us of the aesthetic excellence of much poetry by eighteenth-century women, and she will succeed in convincing everyone who can be convinced. In my view, a more original and ground breaking move is the way that she does not cordon off everything else (the masses of women's verse unlikely ever to please the goddesses of Parnassus). One of this book's signal achievements is the way that it charts a path for us to begin to come to grips with genteel women's occasional verse—their "everyday" poetry and *vers de société*—and their widespread participation in what Margaret J. M. Ezell has conceptualized as "social authorship."[14] While we rightly attend to "career poets" (a key concept for Backscheider, discussed below) and to "serious" poetry, an enormous amount of occasional verse was circulated in polite circles as a form of entertainment. Poetry was not always written with the goal of leaving a legacy for posterity: "[C]ultured women were expected to be able to write a polished verse, just as they were expected to dance and sketch" (p. 29). This "everyday" poetry, along with the deservedly admired accomplishments of authors such as Finch, calls on us to rethink our notion of women as poets, our ideas about the evolution of genres, and perhaps even our notion of what "poetry" is.

Backscheider emphasizes that many eighteenth-century women writers were "career poets." Although a few had success in turning poetry into a profession, "career" here chiefly means "experimentation, progress, and incremental mastery of the craft's skills" (p. 24). "Bookend chapters" on Finch and Charlotte Smith illustrate "how a woman might construct and live out a poetic career" (pp. xxii-xxiii). With these two exceptional artists, "we can map a career, a *poetic* career demonstrating more sustained dedication than we find in the lives of many of the canonical men" (p. 25). Chapter two, "Anne Finch and What Women Wrote," focuses on Finch as a case study of the "self-conscious artist" (p. 60). Chapter three, "Women and Poetry in the Public Eye," suggests how Finch and authors such as Montagu, Rowe, Mary Chudleigh, and Sarah Fyge Egerton "set the stage for the first flowering of British women's poetry" (p. 80). Not coincidentally, these women were exceptional not only in their sustained dedication to their craft but also in their material circumstances: "Never married, childless, widowed young, separated from their husbands, or living

largely in retirement, these women were all comfortably affluent or even wealthy" (p. 81). Backscheider pays special attention to Montagu and Rowe, two of the most anthologized women poets of the century. Thanks to the labors of Isobel Grundy, Robert Halsband, and others, Montagu has already been widely recognized as a sociable author who wrote fluently in all the popular forms of the day (such as ballads), but Backscheider emphasizes that she also wrote formal verse satires, Horatian and Ovidian epistles, and odes and should be seen as "a serious, experimental poet who . . . saw her writing as an integrated, essential part of her identity" (p. 84). Throughout this book, Backscheider liberally uses the phrase "structures of feeling" (pp. 74 twice, 86, 98, 216, 227, 257, 366, 391 twice, 398). She observes, for instance, that Montagu shared "structures of feeling and the same literary public sphere" as Pope (p. 86). A voracious reader of theory, Backscheider has a tendency to absorb theoretical concepts from other critics without pausing to explain how these concepts translate to the study of the subject matter at hand. She presumably borrows "structures of feeling" and "literary public sphere" from Raymond Williams and Jurgen Habermas, although neither Williams's chapter on "Structures of Feeling" in *Marxism and Literature* nor any work by Habermas is cited.

In chapter four, "Hymns, Narratives, and Innovations in Religious Poetry," Backscheider provides a reading of Rowe as one of the century's most important religious poets and as a role model for other women writers. Backscheider uses Rowe as a touchstone to discuss kinds of religious verse, including scriptural paraphrase, narrative tales based on biblical stories, "devout soliloquies," and especially hymns (p. xxiii, *passim*). Today we think of hymns "as songs for congregational worship," but Backscheider provocatively suggests that with further study, we may come to see these intensely personal poems as the purportedly "missing" personal lyrics of the eighteenth century (pp. 137, 144).

Backscheider describes *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* as "a book dedicated to probing issues of agency" (p. xxii). She provides a classic twentieth-century liberal feminist definition of agency as "the ability and will to act purposefully, independently, and self-consciously," as well as a more specialized definition of agency as "that mark of self-consciousness that opens the door to setting an individual 'signature' on a body of work" (pp. 22, 24). Her idea of agency is closely linked to identity formation and autonomy. Certain kinds of verse illustrate "the ways literature can nurture independence, identity formation, and imaginative self-realization" (p. xxiv). But feminist ideas of agency have been rigorously reexamined in the past decade; especially vigorous debates have centered around the question of the appropriateness of liberal feminist notions of agency for understanding nonliberal traditions and religious women's conceptions of agency. In her work on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

Quaker women, Phyllis Mack has shown that these women, while among the most active in the public sphere, did not typically understand themselves as aspiring to agency in the sense of self-determination. For Quakers, agency implied "self-emptying" and "self-negation" as much as the pursuit of self-determination.[15] Along similar lines, Saba Mahmood's work on Muslim women's devotional practices in Egypt suggests the incompatibility of liberal feminist notions of agency with these women's conceptions of the self and moral agency. Many devoutly religious women hold not autonomy and self-realization but "subordination to a transcendent will . . . as [their] coveted goal."[16] Given these important scholarly debates and the foregrounding of "agency" in the title of her book, it is surprising that Backscheider largely takes for granted the liberal feminist notion of agency and its applicability to eighteenth-century women. Backscheider's dual need to insist that women poets had "agency" and "careers" sometimes seems to be a personal response to the legacy of critical trivialization of women poets. She laments that "women are not seen as serious professional poets dedicated to a life of mastering their craft" (p. 396; see also pp. 22-24). Foregrounding the seriousness and dedication of some eighteenth-century women poets is an understandable response to the critical legacy of trivialization. But at times this book seems not so much to "probe issues of agency" as to insist that some women poets had it, in order to incorporate them into the modern canon. In addition, the emphasis on eighteenth-century women poets as "constuct[ing] and liv[ing] out . . . poetic career[s]" sometimes seems at odds with what is arguably the more groundbreaking move of this book: the re-framing of the writing and reading of poetry as an everyday sociable activity for genteel men and women (p. xxiii).

In her next three eloquent, interlocking chapters, Backscheider continues her survey of the forms in which women wrote, focusing on three richly intersecting genres: friendship poetry, retirement poetry, and elegies. In chapter five, she examines "the only significant form of poetry that eighteenth-century women inherited from women: the friendship poem" (p. 175). She begins by tracing the influence of Katherine Philips, whose passionate poems to her female friends interweave same-sex desire, Neoplatonic philosophy, metaphysical conceits, and royalist politics. She then introduces some of the major kinds of women's friendship poems, arguing for Jane Brereton as "[t]he most important friendship poet after Philips" (p. 177). The friendship poem was a vehicle in which women could share advice, commemorate occasions, experiment with styles, and "express all manner of opinions, dissatisfactions, and desires" (p. 193). Feminist critics have learned to be wary of reading women's imaginative writings as transparent "evidence" of their own personal situations and views, but Backscheider makes a persuasive case for the potential rewards of reading women's friendship poetry as a neglected "source of new

evidence about early modern women's lives and opinions" comparable to letters and diaries (p. 176). These poems "give us access to the lives of intelligent gentry women" (p. 217).

Backscheider's use of case studies of representative authors and poetic kinds allows her largely to avoid narrative pressures to integrate women poets into a single "female literary tradition." As feminist scholars now routinely acknowledge, we cannot speak of a "tradition" of women's writing in English without adding a host of qualifiers acknowledging major differences. At the same time, though, the social and textual crossings in this period can surprise us. As we have seen, Manley and Finch moved in entirely different circles of social propriety, yet somehow manuscript copies of Finch's poems reached Manley. In turn, Manley's Tory political satire was eagerly read by her vast social superior Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an ardent Whig. Backscheider helpfully suggests that the best case that can be made for a "female literary tradition" is the one that several of these women made for us by reading, responding to, and sometimes celebrating one another's works.

Chapter six focuses on women's contributions to the tradition of English retirement poetry. Retirement poems often "represented a person without political or public power" and so "had much to offer women" (p. 234). Finch specialized in retirement poems after 1689, and Philips's "A Country Life" was one of her most frequently anthologized poems. Unlike in men's country house poems, however, "what women own in retirement poems is not an estate but time" (p. 261). Backscheider pays special attention to linguist and poet Elizabeth Carter, whose circle of friends included other women writers. The traditions of friendship poetry, retirement poetry, and philosophical verse all come together in Hester Mulso's celebration of Carter's landmark translation of Epictetus in "An Irregular Ode, To E. C., Who had Recommended to Me the Stoic Philosophy, as Productive of Fortitude, and who is going to publish a Translation of Epictetus" (1755). Backscheider suggests that while male retirement poets often "court melancholy," women's retirement poems typically "rise beyond melancholy to religious revelation" (p. 248). In Mulso's poem, stoic philosophy and female friendship promise to supplement Christian consolation.

Chapters seven and eight address two forms in which women poets made a major contribution to "mainstream literary history": the elegy and the sonnet (p. 270, *passim*). Chapter seven surveys major forms of the elegy, paying special attention to Mary Whateley Darwall and Anna Seward. By the end of the century, "the elegiac mode had penetrated almost every form" (p. 271). The elegy has been "eloquently identified with male bonding," but elegies were also an important variety of female friendship poetry (p. 311). Seward's elegies helped to make her "the most famous woman poet in England" (p. 286). In a section on "The Elegy and

Same-Sex Desire," Backscheider offers a reading of Seward's *Monody on the Death of Major André* (1781) as at once a patriotic lament for a British soldier hanged by the Americans and a passionate expression of desire for her friend Honora Sneyd.

Intersections between the elegy and the sonnet are evident in Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), an "elegant edition . . . with a genteel title" published when she was living in King's Bench Prison with her debtor husband (p. 317). Smith is now held to be one of the eighteenth-century poets most responsible for the revival and popularization of the sonnet. In chapter eight, "The Sonnet, Charlotte Smith, and What Women Wrote," Backscheider suggests that instead of reading *Elegiac Sonnets* as "the record of [Smith's] unstinting depression and complaints about her hard life . . . we should read the sonnets on their own terms, as we would those of a man . . . writing a sonnet sequence" (p. 329). Along with Finch, Smith is one of Backscheider's two key examples of a female "career poet," but unlike Finch, Smith was a commercial author whose success "demonstrated to [other women writers] the potential readership for serious poetry and the rewards" (p. 339). Discussing other poets of Smith's day such as Helen Maria Williams, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Darby Robinson, and Joanna Baillie, Backscheider vividly conveys a sense of these women reading and engaging with each other's works. Backscheider also considers representative examples of Smith's work in other forms besides the sonnet. She concludes chapter eight by arguing that Smith should be seen as a major transitional figure whose poetry exemplifies aspects of both "Augustan" and "Romantic" verse—and in so doing puts these period divisions into question.

In the case of Smith, Backscheider provides detailed readings of representative examples of one woman writer's political poetry: here, *The Emigrants* (1793) and *Beachy Head* (1807). With most of her statements about political poetry, however, Backscheider is comfortable remaining at a high level of generality, pointing out a road map for other scholars. She tells us that "Behn, Jane Barker, Finch, and other women wrote eloquently about the Stuarts," yet she does not discuss either Behn (d. 1689) or Barker (*A Collection of Poems Refering to the Times*, 1701) and she is not primarily concerned with Finch as a Stuart poet (p. 14). She tells us that Rowe and Barbauld "represent the end points of an unbroken line of Nonconformist women poets who used religious verse fearlessly for social and political protest," yet because of the book's organization around genres and case studies, we do not get a sense of this "unbroken line" (p. 147). She tells us that "a torrent of war and abolitionist poetry by Yearsley, Seward, Amelia Opie, More, and other women pours forth at the end of the eighteenth century" (p. 14), yet she categorically omits abolitionist poetry (for reasons addressed below).

Backscheider notes her decision "not to write about poets, groups of poets, or subjects of poetry that had already received sophisticated, recent critical attention," and given the scope of her project, this decision would seem to be entirely understandable (p. xix). However, it seems significant that she makes "two exceptions" to her own policy, devoting "bookend chapters" to two of the most technically accomplished (and widely applauded) poets of the century: Finch and Smith (pp. xix, xxiii). Meanwhile, she leaves out "the working-class and abolition poets" (p. 414, n. 23), expressing special regret for leaving out these two categories of poetry. These particular omissions do indeed seem regrettable, not only because of the historic importance of this poetry (and because these works are far from having received exhaustive treatment), but also because these bodies of poetry foreground important and challenging questions about the nature of value in literary studies. For many political writers, the pursuit of technical virtuosity was a distinctly secondary concern; meanwhile, few laboring-class authors had the luxury of sustained leisure to polish their craft. Accordingly, their poetry would have served as useful test cases for how many *different* ways we can validly respond to the (often hostile) question, "but is it any *good*?" Confronted with the "so what?" question, we do need to teach others how to recognize the exemplary technical accomplishments of some women poets. But as Backscheider herself is well aware, much is at stake for scholars of early modern women's writings if we choose to privilege *any* one form of literary value (such as aesthetic value) to the exclusion of all others.

In her "Conclusion," Backscheider asks, "[h]ow great were the barriers to writing poetry for women?" and what are the barriers to studying eighteenth-century women's poetry today? (p. 377). Although "the female poets of Great Britain" would become a marketable commodity in themselves, Backscheider agrees with many other critics (including Staves) regarding a mid-century narrowing of acceptable topics and modes for women writers. Precisely because more women were writing and printing their works, "legislating every aspect of women's behavior became a national preoccupation" (p. 213). Eighteenth-century women poets must be recognized "as an extremely diverse group facing markedly different levels of encouragement" (p. 385). Ironically, the same outlet that gave women new opportunities for print publication—periodicals—often makes their work especially difficult to locate today. Magazine poetry was often published anonymously, and magazines themselves are ephemeral forms. Furthermore, "there are no neutral collections" (p. 388). Backscheider suggests that instead of selecting poems by women "that can be placed in relation to the canonical male poems," anthologists need to select "poems that are representative of women poets' best work (whatever that might mean to the time and the anthologizer) *or* a representative selection of the kinds

of poetry they wrote (either content or kinds)" (p. 394, emphasis added). Note that the two options Backscheider proposes here are likely to produce significantly different results. For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologists, Philips's "best" works were her poems that demonstrated her devotion as a wife and mother and her renunciation of public involvement, such as "A Country Life." Meanwhile, a "representative selection" of Philips's work would also have to include her passionate poems to her female friends, her sometimes scathing royalist poetry, and perhaps also her youthful argument *against* marriage.[17] For two decades now, revisionary collections such as those edited by Roger Lonsdale and Joyce Fullard (to name only two) have made it clear that "we need to . . . gain experience with the works of a wide range of poets."[18] However, print anthologies inevitably necessitate rigorous selection. If substantially changed views will only come "from actual experience with the broad range of women's poetry," then we need to have teachable access to the broadest possible range of women's writings (p. 400).

For this and other reasons, both of the books under review could use substantially more reflection on current and future forms of mediation of women's writings. Staves recalls how students in her 1978 course "The Woman of Letters, 1660-1800" were compelled to read excerpts from texts she had transcribed on a typewriter, and she briefly notes the increased accessibility of women's writing in diverse formats from microfilm to digital facsimile (pp. x, 16). Both scholars acknowledge the most important electronic archive in this field: *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, which provides facsimile images of and full-text search capability for more than 136,000 separate titles. But neither scholar seems to have fully grappled with the ways in which electronic resources (commercial and noncommercial) and the collaborative research communities they foster have already profoundly changed the ways we learn about, locate, study, and share knowledge about women's writing. Digital humanities are not only giving us an unprecedented degree of access to texts but also allowing us to access texts differently. Staves notes that feminist criticism has substantially transformed "the operative canon, that is, the set of texts being published, commented upon by people trained in literary studies, and taught in departments of literature" (p. 2). However, she seems to assume that "literary studies" will continue more or less business as usual—adding select worthy authors to the "operative canon" through a process of similarly trained scholars engaging in a common debate according to mutually agreed-upon rules. There is little sense here that digital technologies have already substantially challenged the practice, idea, and even inevitability of canons (as well as conceptions of the rules). To be sure, there are no neutral databases any more than there are neutral print collections, and with commercial databases, especially, we continue to face inequities in

individual and institutional access to available resources. Regardless, new forms of mediation are changing the ways we approach women's writing far more radically than to construct new "operative canon[s]." To give only one particularly impressive example, 2006 saw the publication by Cambridge University Press of *Orlando: Women's Writings in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*, an electronic literary history with exceptionally high-quality information about more than 850 women writers.[19] This interactive literary history allows users to navigate the textbase according to their own needs, searching by author, genre, or theme in a timespan of their choice. As Ezell predicted more than a decade ago, rather than contributing to the formation of new canons and monolithic models of women's literary past "in which every piece neatly fits the predetermined design or is excluded and devalued," the electronic medium seems likely, as the editors of *Orlando* propose, to succeed in "keeping the stories multiple."[20]

Electronic archives also allow for nearly infinite expansion and updating, an especially important capability in this area of study where new knowledge is being discovered rapidly. In her book published in 2005, Backscheider states of Jane Brereton, "this fine poet is almost entirely unknown" (p. 217), but a few seconds' search in *Orlando* (2006) reveals that a considerable amount of research has, in fact, been done—including work tracing Brereton's uncollected poetry published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Another new resource is *The Poetess Archive* database, which aims to provide an online scholarly edition and database of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women poets. Currently chiefly a bibliography of more than 4,000 entries that can be searched and organized any way the user wishes, *The Poetess Archive* (along with some commercial resources such as the *Eighteenth-Century Journals Portal*) promises to help remedy the problem Backscheider identifies concerning the special invisibility of women's poetry published in periodicals. Users will be able to search by author to identify all known works published in periodicals as well as collections—then access digital facsimiles of original texts.[21]

In her "Conclusion," Backscheider muses, "Inseparable from career is permission—permission to write, to make writing one of the most important things in life" (p. 397). Some of the statements in her book on eighteenth-century women poets also seem to describe the challenges faced by pioneering twentieth-century women scholars. Without the "discipline" of feminist literary historians such as Backscheider and Staves (and Grundy, Janet Todd, Ezell and many others who could be mentioned), we would not be in the position we are now, where we can begin to question the extent to which the discipline of English literature can and cannot effectively encompass the study of eighteenth-century women's writings (let alone their other textual and verbal practices).[22] Equipped with these two

indispensable books, as well as with new ways of accessing texts and new forums for the production and exchange of knowledge, we are closer than we have ever been, if not to agreeing on the "ends" of our collective labors, then to learning how to understand and appreciate the extraordinary diversity of "texts by individual women at particular historical moments" which in fact "constitute[s] the history of women's writing."[23]

NOTES

I am grateful to Toni Bowers, Johanna Devereaux, and Kathryn King for their astute comments on an earlier version of this essay.

[1] [Delarivier Manley], *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality, Of Both Sexes. From the New* Atalantis, *An Island in the* Mediteranean, 2 vols. (London: John Morphew, 1709), I, 168. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[2] There is no evidence that Manley and Finch ever met. Barbara McGovern suggests that a copy of Finch's poem may have reached Manley through their mutual friend Jonathan Swift; see McGovern's *Anne Finch and Her Poetry: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 120-21.

[3] Clifford Siskin, "Gender, Sublimity, Culture: Retheorizing Disciplinary Desire," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28 (1994), 37. See also Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), especially chapter five, "Delimiting Literature, Defining *Literary Value*," pp. 285-335.

[4] Patricia Meyer Spacks, review of *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, by Susan Staves, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 69, No. 3 (2008), 423.

[5] Toni Bowers, review of *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, by Susan Staves, *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (2008), 426; quoting Staves, p. 5.

[6] Sir Charles Cotterell, preface to *Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, The Matchless Orinda* (London: Herringman, 1667), n.p. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Paula McDowell, "Consuming Women: The Life of the 'Literary Lady' as Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Genre*, 26 (1993), 219-52.

[7] See, for example, pp. 25, 224, 267, 269, 344, 346, 350, 389, 416, 417, 427, and 433-34.

[8] See, for example, pp. 25, 344, 346, 350, 389, 416, 417, 427, and 433-34.

[9] James Raven estimates that "the proportion of all fiction (new titles and reprints) to total book and pamphlet production" was 1% for 1700-09, rising to 4% for the 1750s and 1760s; see his *British Fiction, 1750-1770: A Chronological Check-List of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), p. 10.

[10] Staves mentions that Edmund Curll published Barker's translation of François Fénelon's *The Christian Pilgrimage* (1718), but she does not discuss any text by Barker. For James's works see Paula McDowell, ed., *Elinor James*, The Early Modern

Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works, Printed Writings 1641-1700, Series II, Part Three, Volume 11 (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2005).

[11] The elegy is not for the recently deceased lady but for her husband who had died six months earlier.

[12] Backscheider, p. xxii. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* was co-winner of the 2006 James Russell Lowell Prize awarded by the Modern Language Association.

[13] Backscheider acknowledges the argument along these lines in Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt, eds., *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

[14] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[15] Phyllis Mack, "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism," *Signs*, 29, No. 1 (2003), pp. 154, 156.

[16] Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections of the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology*, 16, No. 2 (2001), p. 204.

[17] For a discussion of the anthologizing of Philips's poetry in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, see my "Consuming Women."

[18] Backscheider, p. xv. The works Backscheider refers to here are Roger Lonsdale, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Joyce Fullard, ed., *British Women Poets, 1660-1800: An Anthology* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1990).

[19] See http://orlando.cambridge.org (accessed 2006).

[20] Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 164; Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy, Sharon Balazs, and Jeffrey Antoniuk, "An Introduction to The Orlando Project," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 26, No. 1 (2007), p. 133.

[21] See *The Poetess Archive*, http://unixgen.muohio.edu/~poetess (accessed 2006); for the *Eighteenth-Century Journals Portal*, see http://www.amdigital.co.uk/Collections/Eighteenth-Century-Journals-Portal (accessed 2006).

[22] As Sharon M. Harris bravely acknowledged in 1996, for instance, approaching the writings of pragmatically literate authors (such as Deborah Read Franklin whose writings "evidence borderline literacy") requires a shift in disciplinary assumptions and methodologies as well as ideologies; see Harris, ed., *American Women Writers to 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5.

[23] Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, p. 8.