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CONSUMING WOMEN: THE LIFE OF THE "LITERARY
LADY" AS POPULAR CULTURE IN EIGHTEENTH-
CENTURY ENGLAND

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Female Biography is not only the height of the present Mode of Writing, but
has at length obtain'd the Sanction of Ecclesiastical Authority.

—*The Female Dunciad* (1728)

i

In a recent survey of the year's work in Restoration and eighteenth-century studies, Paula Backscheider has observed that it is now common to see "a regrettable narrowing of acceptable subjects and language systems and of personal and professional options" for British women writers over the course of the eighteenth century, and to a lesser extent, to see the contemporaneous establishment of "female moral authority" in British literature and culture as an important compensation for those restrictions.¹ While it is possible to counter that "female moral authority" is difficult to measure (how are we to assess its exchange value in material terms?), it is no longer possible to deny that between 1700 and 1800 English women writers' subject matter, styles of expression, and especially modes

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¹Backscheider, "Recent Studies" 587, reviewing Todd, *Sign of Angellica*. The term "narrowing" is perhaps too linear (see note 3).

of authorial self-representation underwent radical change. Contrary to the impression given by current anthologies of early women's writing (along with editions and reprints, and feminist literary theory and criticism) recent statistical surveys have revealed that the first literary arena into which women writers entered en masse was politics and religion—and that the overwhelming majority of women's published writings before 1730 consisted not of fiction or belles lettres, but of didactic and polemical materials and religio-political pamphlets and tracts.² While mid- and later eighteenth-century women writers, faced with narrowing conventions of acceptable feminine behavior, were forced to find new ways of authorizing their participation in the public political sphere, the first generations of British women writers appear to have had relatively few qualms about expressing their opinions directly on the major national affairs of their time.³

Feminist literary historians have been seeking for some time now to untangle the complex web of social, political, and economic transformations in British society which might account for the changing nature of women's literary production over the course of the eighteenth century; the "reconstruction of difference," if you will, and changing cultural construction of British women. It seems surprising, then, that literary historians have not paused to consider whether the origins of *English literary history* might have had anything to do with it. It is in this period, after all, that we see the beginnings of "English literary history" as we

² For statistical surveys of women's published writings before 1730, see Crawford, Smith and Cardinale, and Stanton. Elaine Hobby's "Discourse so unsavoury": Women's published writings of the 1650s" is a helpful overview of women's published writings in the first decade of their mass entrance into print.

³ While I agree with those scholars convinced that the growing ideology of femininity contributed to a delimiting of options for women writers over the course of the eighteenth century, I am also convinced by Raymond Williams that "a lived hegemony is always a process. . . . it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance." Rather it is "continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (112). I see a historically consequential, *largely discursive* "depoliticization" of women writers over the course of the eighteenth century—*alongside* continuing resistance. Women writers have never stayed out of the public political sphere, and it is well known that the French Revolution, in particular, gave rise to a vigorous period of polemical activity by women. But mid- and later eighteenth-century women writers were increasingly forced to find new, *gender-based* ways of authorizing their public political speech—drawing on their supposed "moral authority," for instance, to address questions of national concern. Strategies of subversion have had to be continually reinvented, and this essay considers how in one historical period an existing legacy of political activity by women writers was erased.

For book-length studies documenting the changing nature of women's literary production over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Hobby, *Virtue*, Spencer, and Todd, *Sign*.

know it: the new subgenres of literary biography and autobiography, the mass marketing of anthologies and collections, and the introduction of English as a university subject.⁴ It is in this period that we see the emergence of a notion of "literature" something akin to its meaning today—a notion that excludes or marginalizes explicitly didactic, polemical, and political forms. And most troubling, given British women's increasing literary confinement and ongoing political and economic exclusion, I will argue here that it is just after the 1730s that we see the formation of the first public "canons" of British women's literature—the emergence of the classification "woman writer" that made such canons possible, and the consolidation of a sexual division of literary labor that still remains in evidence today (a division of labor that was *not* in place at the beginning of the century, I would argue).

In an important recent article on the historiography of Renaissance and seventeenth-century women's literature, Margaret J. M. Ezell has critiqued current-day feminist literary canons and the generic hierarchies on which they are based, in which the very literary forms early women writers most commonly practiced "do not count."⁵ The limiting orthodoxies of certain forms of twentieth-century feminist literary historical recovery work, Ezell has suggested, have paradoxically contributed to the ongoing *erasure* of a substantial part of the "female literary tradition" feminists have sought to preserve.⁶ In attempting to trace feminist literary critical blind spots to their origins, Ezell points to Virginia Woolf, creator of what Ezell calls the "myth" of Judith Shakespeare: the embattled, isolated, and above all *inconsequential* woman writer Woolf imagines in *A Room of One's Own*. While I agree with Ezell that we need to be aware of the critical assumptions and values on which our "female literary tradition" is based, I would suggest that Woolf and the generations of feminist literary critics she has empowered should be seen not as the initiators but as the *inheritors* of a tradition of literary historiography begun two hundred years earlier, with the beginnings of English literary history itself. It was precisely through the establishment of a "female literary tra-

⁴ On the introduction of English as a university subject, see Court.

⁵ Ezell, "The Myth of Judith Shakespeare: Creating the Canon of Women's Literature." Ezell's book, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) appeared after this essay was completed.

⁶ The limiting orthodoxies of feminist literary historical recovery work on late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women writers have included the neglect of women's religious and religio-political writings, a disproportionate emphasis on the novel, and what Donna Landry calls "the fetishization of the aristocratic foremother" ("Traffic" 181). The phrase "limiting orthodoxies" is Landry's (180).

dition” in the first place, I will argue, that oppressive new norms for female literary activity were constructed, and by which older, more subversive traditions of women’s writing were displaced. The origins of a distinct literary history of women, and mass marketing of the “literary lady” in anthologies, miscellanies and collections, functioned to contain and control what was by the eighteenth century recognized as a genuine threat to the existing social order: the unprecedented opportunities inherent in the new literary marketplace for women’s public political and social critique. The eighteenth-century origins of English literary history initiated a process of “positive erasure,” which still seriously distorts our understanding of the nature and history of early modern women’s literary production today.

ii

The initial emergence in late seventeenth-century England of the beginnings of literary biography—the practice of prefacing writers’ works with biographical sketches, or publishing collections of literary lives—should be seen as a function of a burgeoning publishing industry, as much as the conscious invention of a new species of genius. Early literary lives were an entrepreneurial technique—designed primarily to encourage interest in, and boost sales of, an author’s works.⁷ To modern scholars whose *vade mecum* has been *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, it tends to come as something of a surprise to learn that women writers were the serious subjects of mainstream English literary history at its beginnings. Edward Phillips’s *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675), for instance (a more comprehensive version of his *Compendiosa Enumeratio Poetarum* [1670], usually said to be the first chronological history of literature in English) contains dedicated sections on “Women Among the Ancients and Moderns Eminent for Poetry,” including a total of over seventy women. While Phillips’s *Theatrum* lists male and female poets separately, I would suggest that this gesture should be

⁷ The posthumous “History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs. Behn” prefixed to Aphra Behn’s *Histories and Novels* (1696), for instance, was compiled by the hack Charles Gildon, while Delarivier Manley’s pseudo-autobiographical *The Adventures of Rivella, or the History of the Author of the “Atalantis”* (1714) was written by her in response to the threat of a similar compilation by publisher Edmund Curll. Generally speaking, of course, it is anachronistic to speak of “literary biography” before the eighteenth century, for it was not until the late seventeenth century that authorship began to be seen as a distinct occupation. Richard Altick, however, designates Thomas Specht’s 1598 life of Chaucer as the first literary biography in English.

interpreted as a typographical convention (comparable to the separate listing of actors and actresses in playbills) rather than as a sign of a sexual division of literary labor firmly in place. For to a remarkable degree, Phillips’s work and the important early collections that followed it (Gerard Langbaine’s *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* [1691], Charles Gildon’s *Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets* [1699], John Downes’s *Roscius Anglicanus* [1708] and Giles Jacob’s *Poetical Register* [1719])⁸ considered male and female authors alongside one another—according to the same criteria, and in the same stylistic manner. A woman writer such as the poet and dramatist Katherine Philips, for instance—later a model of female poetic virtue, as much as aesthetic excellence—is in these works still assessed almost entirely on the basis of her literary merits. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, there are the makings of two separate “traditions” for male and female authors—and two separate sets of questions to be asked. Early collections of male and female literary lives increasingly gave way to single-sex compilations, such as George Ballard’s *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) or John Duncombe’s *Feminead* (wr. 1751, pub. 1754). While Theophilus Cibber’s⁹ mid-century *Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753) was reminiscent of earlier literary historical collections in containing fifteen female poets, Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81) was typical of highly respected literary histories of its own time in containing none.

The tentative beginnings of a distinct literary history of women, I would suggest, are more helpfully understood as an extension of certain longstanding traditions of popular culture, than as a parallel phenomenon to the eighteenth-century origins of a distinct literary history of men. Unquestionably the most important of these popular culture traditions was the tradition of “female worthies,” and the genre of the exemplary list or catalogue.¹⁰ Extending back at least

⁸ See Appendix, “Some Collections of Lives Including or Devoted to Women, Anthologies of Poetry by Women With Brief Biographies, and Related Works” (below).

⁹ According to Altick, “Cibber’s” *Lives of the Poets* (1753) was actually written by Robert Shiels, the Scot who assisted Johnson with his *Dictionary*. For the sake of convention, however, I have referred to this work throughout as “Cibber’s” *Lives of the Poets*. The fifteen women writers included are Katherine Philips, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Killigrew, Aphra Behn, Mary Chudleigh, Mary Monck, Anne Winchelsea, Susanna Centlivre, Delarivier Manley, Elizabeth Rowe, Elizabeth Thomas, Mary Chandler, Catherine Cockburn, Constantia Grierson, and Laetitia Pilkington.

¹⁰ Other popular culture influences include rogue and whore narratives, criminal biography, and other subgenres of early popular fiction. There are close links, for instance, between eighteenth-century literary “lives” of actresses and playwrights such as Aphra Behn, Susanna Centlivre, and Elizabeth Inchbald, and various kinds of female picaresque such as whore biography.

as far as Plutarch in *Mulierum Virtutes* (1st. c. A. D.), Boccaccio in *De Claris Mulieribus* (1359), and Chaucer in the *Legend of Good Women* (1385/6), the female worthies tradition continued to flourish in England throughout the seventeenth century, in works such as Thomas Heywood's *Gynaikeion* (1624), Charles Gerbier's *Elogium Heroinum* (1651), James Strong's *Joanereidos; or, Feminine Valour* (1645, rpt. 1674), and John Shirley's *The Illustrious History of Women* (1686). Perhaps the most enduring genre in women's history, it remains an important influence in women's literary history in our time.¹¹

For the modern reader, the most salient characteristic of early female worthy collections is likely to be their contents' *diversity*. The women included are from several ages and nations, and from ancient and modern history, legend, fiction, and Scripture. They are considered exemplary for their leadership, learning, spiritual strength, and martial spirits (*virtu* in the classical Latin sense, as much as "virtue" in the eighteenth-century sense, i.e. chastity¹²). Thus one sees the religious martyrs, such as the ubiquitous Lady Jane Grey and Anne Askew. But one also sees women poets and philosophers of antiquity and the Renaissance (Sappho, Hypatia, Diotyma); biblical and mythological women such as the Virgin Mary and "the nine muses and twelve sibyls"; and fictional female creatures such as "Hippo, daughter of Chiro the Centaur" and "Michaele, a She-Centaur."¹³ One finds a small army of female military leaders, rulers, and queens (Zenobia, Artemisia, Semiramis, Nicaule, Camilla, Boadicea). And in the *précieuses'* lists of *femmes fortes*—Madeleine de Scudéry's *Female Orators*, for instance—one finds not only bold, heroic women, but lengthy examples of female public speech.¹⁴ One also encounters female "unworthies," of course (Cleopatra and Joan of Arc, for example, or Dalila and Agrippina, who resurface

¹¹ I am indebted here to Natalie Zemon Davis.

¹² *Virtu* derives from the Latin *virtus*, and thus from *vir*, or "man." In its classical sense, "*virtu*" signified primarily military heroism and civic activism (public virtue). By the mid-eighteenth century in England, however, when the term was used in reference to women, it signified primarily sexual conduct (as in *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*).

¹³ Hippo is praised in the anonymous *Biographium Faemineum* (1766), and Michaele in Edward Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675).

¹⁴ Among other titles, Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les Femmes illustres* (1642) was translated into English as *The Female Orators: or, the Courage and Constancy and divers Famous Queens, and Illustrious Women, Set forth in their Undaunted Defenses and Noble Resolutions: Worthy the Perusal and Imitation of the Female Sex* (3rd English ed., 1728). Many modern readers are unaware of the extent to which Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes*, too, praises women's *public* virtues. A major theme is the Greek heroine's civic duty (McLeod 19).

in Henry Fielding's *Amelia*¹⁵). But the distinction between worthy and "unworthy" women is not yet clear. It is especially unclear because we do not yet know how women *read* these female "unworthies." The Wife of Bath's list of "wycked wyves," for instance, is a tool she uses to prove a point.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, female worthy collections would generally become increasingly homogenized. George Ballard's important mid-century collection, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), is deeply indebted to the female worthies tradition, but his female worthies are all British, all Anglicans, all learned or literary, and all women of impeccable sexual reputations.¹⁶ The first public canons of women writing in English may be seen as a particularly homogenized kind of "female worthy" collection. The degree to which these first female literary canons and collections are indebted to older exemplary lists may be seen in a remark like the Reverend Richard Polwhele's in *The Unsex'd Females*, that the writer Hannah More had "the learning of Lady Jane Grey, without the pedantry." Polwhele's readers presumably understood the comparison, even though Grey (perhaps the preeminent British female worthy) had been dead for over two hundred years.¹⁷

¹⁵ Fielding describes the adulterous Miss Matthews as expressing "sentiments becoming the lips of a Dalila, Jezebel, Medea, Semiramis, Parysatis, Tanaquil, Livilla, Messalina, Agrippina, Brunichilde, Elfrida, Lady MacBeth, Joan of Naples, Christina of Sweden, Katherine Hays, Sarah Malcolm, Con. Philips, or any other heroine of the tender sex, which history sacred or prophane, antient or modern, false or true, hath recorded" (*Amelia*, 1751, ed. Blewett [bk. 1, ch. 7, pp. 35-6]). Fielding's list of female "unworthies" captures the incongruity of early female worthy collections precisely. As we shall see, however, his inclusion of a woman *writer* in his list of female "unworthies" (Teresa Constantia Phillips) is a definitive eighteenth-century development.

¹⁶ It is significant that Ballard owed the idea for his collection of learned and literary Englishwomen to an unfinished catalogue of female worthies in the notebook of Anglo-Saxon scholar Elizabeth Elstob—a catalogue which was to include diverse women of all ages and places (Bodleian. MS. Ballard 64 [1709]).

¹⁷ The subversive force of older, more heterogeneous female worthy traditions was kept alive by a small number of later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collections and through parody. The eccentric *Biographium Faemineum* (1766), for instance, includes over two hundred women from all walks of life—including the more "public" female worthies of the past alongside newer, *quieter* female exemplars. The effect of the juxtaposition in a single work of radically different ways of conceiving female excellence is one of what Foucault calls "the disconcerting. . . proximity of extremes. . . the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other" (*Order* xvi). Several eighteenth-century life-writers, too, make startling comparisons of their genteel female subjects to older, more public female worthies. John Duncombe's comparison of poet Anne Irwin defending her sex to warrior queen Camilla defending her country against the Trojans, for instance, is an anachronism characteristic of this period, searching for new models of female authorial representation.

Finally, for now, older female worthy traditions were also kept alive through parody. The anonymous *Female Dunciad* (1728) contains a section parodying female worthy collections, which like Henry Fielding's satirical list of female worthies in *Amelia* (n. 15) preserves even as it parodies earlier catalogues.

If in the eighteenth century a "female literary tradition" became a recognizable phenomenon, in the spirit of the Enlightenment *and* of the marketplace, it therefore became a definable and anthologizable phenomenon. Eighteenth-century lives of "literary ladies" reflect a larger Enlightenment preoccupation with classification and arrangement. Literary life-writers constructed a taxonomy and iconography of the new "woman" writer, not unlike Pope's female sexual typology in *The Rape of the Lock* (with its shrews, old maids, prudes, and coquettes). A diverse body of women was divided up into a series of types (the learned lady, pious exemplar, *momento mori*, female rogue or adventurer, and so on)—a dividing and particularizing gesture, yet one, paradoxically, whereby historical diversity began to be erased.

Susan Stewart has suggested that "the collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization" (155). In late seventeenth and eighteenth-century England, political, economic, and other social transformations had made the articulation of radical differences between the sexes a new cultural must.¹⁸ Eighteenth-century literature is obsessed with the need to prescribe new sex roles in a changing world; to set up and police new categories of gender. New gender ideologies attempted, never wholly successfully, "to confine women's political and bodily desires within the walls of the bourgeois family home" (Barash 414), and women's literary history became an important mechanism by which new conventions of sexuality were produced and maintained.

At one level, certainly, the new gendered literary history worked to applaud female capacities and achievements. At another level, however, it also worked to define those capacities' proper boundaries. By the mid-1750s, the primarily sexual purpose of women's literary history was clear. As John Duncombe put it in his own roster of literary female worthies, *The Feminead* (wr. 1751, pub. 1754):

These names the praise and wonder shall engage
Of every polish'd, wise, and virtuous age;
To latest times our annals shall adorn,
And save from Folly thousands yet unborn.
(p. 31, ll. 367-70, my emphasis)

At once celebratory and constrictingly normative, Duncombe's female literary history worked to identify appropriate models of feminine literary conduct, and

¹⁸ On the role played by the scientific revolution in articulating new conventions of sexual difference, see Laqueur.

so save women writers from themselves (and more specifically, I think, to save the status quo from the more threatening potential consequences of women's new access to print).¹⁹ Select women writers would become part of the popular consciousness ("the matchless Orinda," "mad Madge," "the poetess of Frome," "the swan of Lichfield," and so on), while whole areas of women's writing would be erased (Quaker women's religio-political polemic, for instance, which is now believed to have constituted almost half of women's literary production in the seventeenth century).

In order to test my hypothesis that the eighteenth-century origins of a distinct literary history of women in fact functioned to erase as much as it preserved (and in particular, to erase the oppositional religious and political origins of the female literary tradition), I will first give an example of the process of "typing" I have identified. I will then consider eighteenth-century literary history as a mode of collecting—and especially, consider the power relations inherent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collections of female literary lives. I will conclude by outlining what I take to be some of the most important consequences for the history of women's writing in English, of the eighteenth-century origins of a distinct "female" literary tradition. A brief coda will suggest some of the implications of my thesis for feminist literary historical practice at this time.

iii

Foucault talks about what he calls the *late* eighteenth-century emergence of the "man-and-his-work" category of literary criticism ("Author" 115), but for British *women* writers, venturing into print has *always* meant granting one's public the right to make one's private life a public commodity. In seventeenth-century England, new marketing strategies quickly transformed an existing interest in the woman writer's personal character into an obsession. The woman writer, *as much as her works*, was caught up in a circuit of property values, and a host of new consumer items (encomium poems, frontispieces, engravings, busts) transformed the female writerly body itself into an *objet d'art*.

Katherine Fowler Philips (1632-1664), the first woman writer in English to achieve something of the status of a cult figure, is as good an example as any of

¹⁹ Regrettably, limitations of space prevent me from discussing eighteenth-century feminist appropriations of literary histories such as Duncombe's in this article (e.g. Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate; A Poem. Occasioned By Reading Mr. Duncombe's "Feminead"* [1774]).

the ideological uses to which literary "lives" can be put.²⁰ (She is also a fascinating example of the uses to which these women writers continue to be put in our time.)²¹ Though she died at thirty-two, Philips continued to serve as the single most important model of female poetic virtue until well into the nineteenth century. Two centuries after her death, she was still the standard by which other women writers were judged. In 1848, editor Frederic Rowton compared Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Katherine Philips, and found *Barrett Browning* wanting. Barrett Browning was chastised for her formidable learning, while Philips was praised for having "sh[one] out from the thick cluster of learned ladies who surround her."²² Philips was made to serve as a model of youthful piety, conjugal duty, maternal affection, and the transcendence of physical pleasures and worldly desires; Ballard, for instance, quoting Aubrey, tells us that she "had read the Bible through before she was full four years old" (268). To trace Philips's fate in popular literary lives over the course of the eighteenth century is to begin to understand the complex process by which the canon of British literary female worthies was constructed—and to begin to imagine its consequences.

To be sure, Katherine Philips herself took care to cultivate "feminine modesty," and even in her lifetime was celebrated "for her Verses and her Vertues both."²³ But later life-writers lost sight of the difference between authorial self-representation and biographical fact, and Philips's own self-representations were increasingly (and *selectively*) foregrounded almost to the exclusion of all else. Philips was a more complex writer, I would suggest, than any of her various camps of admirers have made her out to be. Today, even feminist scholars

²⁰ For biographical information on Philips in addition to what I provide below, see Thomas and Souers. Philips's known writings during her lifetime consisted of a volume of manuscript poems written for her friends, a translation of Corneille's *Pompey* and a partial translation of *Horace*, letters to her friend Sir Charles Cotterell, and four letters to an anonymous noblewoman. An edition of her poems was printed in 1664 without her consent, but she had it withdrawn as soon as she could.

²¹ While eighteenth-century life-writers made Philips into a heterosexual domestic ideal, twentieth-century life-writers have made her into a woman-centered protofeminist whose reputation should be based on her homoerotic verse (Andreadis). Still more recently, Philips has been made into an aggressive female literary entrepreneur whose "career" was "distinguished by its astute management" and "networking," and whose female friendship poems should be seen as "adolescent bagatelle" (Mulvihill 73, 100).

²² In his biographical sketch of Barrett Browning in *The Female Poets of Great Britain*, Rowton observes that "learned poetesses, however great their genius, have rarely been so effective and popular as less cultivated writers, possessed of even smaller natural powers [sic]." He then goes on—in his life of *Barrett Browning*—to offer an alternative model of female authorial self-representation: Katherine Philips (501). Similarly editor George Bethune finds Elizabeth Barrett Browning's intellectual abilities unappealing. "We like her less as a scholar than as a woman," he explains (452).

²³ Sir Charles Cotterell, Preface to his 1667 edition of Philips's *Poems*.

assume that Philips was logically foregrounded as a counter-model to more outspokenly polemical female authors; set up as a conservative alternative to politically and sexually explicit authors such as Aphra Behn (1640?-1689). Closer study of Philips's overall literary output and aesthetic choices, however, suggests that in fact she was only *selectively* foregrounded—that in fact she too was intimately (and personally) concerned with the public political crises of her time. While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies, with few exceptions, represent Philips as an apolitical writer, Philips's 1667 *Poems* reveals her to be a vocally *political* poet. The polemic opening her 1667 folio volume is her scathing "On the double murder of K. Charles, in answer to a libelous rime made by V[avasor] P[owell]," while the next ten poems are explicitly political. (As her recent editor insightfully points out, however, careful readers will recognize of Philips that even her friendship poems are political [Thomas 12].) By the mid-eighteenth century, however, this outspoken polemical author had disappeared—replaced by the modest female poet of friendship and domestic concerns.

Philips was born into a Puritan family, and was married into one as well. Her husband James Philips was a supporter of Cromwell, and served as an M. P. during the Interregnum. The Restoration eventually put an end to James Philips's political career, and for a time "his liberty, perhaps even his life" were at stake (Thomas 5).²⁴ It is surely doubly significant, then, that "despite the long adherence of both sides of her family to the Puritan cause, all the relationships [Katherine Philips] came to choose for herself either favoured the royalists or displayed no obvious political partisanship at all" (Thomas 1-2). Philips's political allegiances, in fact, may be said to have been her most radical act of individual expression. They also threatened to be her most costly, for her membership in a circle of known Royalists during the Interregnum in fact caused her husband serious trouble on one occasion.²⁵ In 1651, Philips had participated in the publication of a volume by the Anglican divine William Cartwright—a gesture which would have been recognized by her contemporaries as an encoded statement of her political allegiances. (Cartwright's volume, which did not pass the censors

²⁴ James Philips was suspended from the House of Commons in 1661, and his election as M.P. for Cardigan, Wales was later declared void. (For details, see Thomas.)

²⁵ As Philips records in her poem "To Antenor [James Philips], on a paper of mine w^{ch} J[enkin] Jones threatens to publish to his prejudice," Jenkin Jones, Vavasor Powell and other radical opponents of Cromwell tried to use *her* royalist verses as evidence against her husband, who was "among the more moderate of the Welsh Cromwellians" (Thomas 348, 5).

unscathed, was “intended to have a political as well as a literary impact”; the list of contributors in fact reads like “a roll-call of royalist sympathisers” [Thomas 6]). Philips’s commonly acknowledged *préciosité*, too, should similarly be recognized as a statement of her political allegiances. By enacting rituals of courtly friendship introduced to the court by Henrietta Maria, royalist women demonstrated their “loyalty to a temporarily discredited system of values” (Thomas 8). Philips’s much-anthologized female friendship poems, then, had a crucial political dimension commonly overlooked today. The Restoration marked her debut as a *royalist* poet.²⁶

By the mid-eighteenth century, single-sex literary histories were increasingly published alongside single-sex literary miscellanies. One important mid-century miscellany was George Colman and Bonnell Thornton’s *Poems by the Most Eminent Ladies of Great Britain* (1755). Colman and Thornton included eleven of Philips’s poems, and their choices would eventually become standard selections. These two men’s selections, then, would become the Philips “canon.” Philips’s anthologists, rather than her works, would determine her dominant concerns. The Colman and Thornton anthology may be said to have signaled the onset of Philips’s full-scale literary historical “depoliticization.”

Above all by the 1750s Philips had become not the politicized *précieuse* of her *Letters* and *Poems*, but the devoted sixteen year-old wife of her fifty-four year-old husband. Katherine Fowler’s marriage in her teens to a man old enough to have been her grandfather was probably arranged by her mother. Despite the couple’s thirty-eight year age difference, however, she does not appear to have been consistently unhappy. Eighteenth-century biographers could not romanticize her relationship with her husband, of course, for not surprisingly, she typically referred to him in terms of her “duty.” The contrast is everywhere apparent in her letters and poetry, between her passionate expressions of affection for her female friends, and polite sentiments of concern for her spouse. Indeed life-writers appear to have compensated for this female literary biographical “shortcoming” by making James Philips seem more and more hopelessly incompetent (in order to make his young wife seem more exemplary). As one editor put it, “It nowhere appears that the husband of Mrs. Philips was a man of any abilities, and if

²⁶ Philips’s friendship with Sir Charles Cotterell—her primary correspondent, and the editor of her posthumous *Poems* (1667)—was substantially politically based. Like Philips, Cotterell was a staunch royalist, who served as Master of Ceremonies to Charles I, and then followed Charles II into exile.

he met with any respect in this world, it was probably reflected from his wife” (Cibber 2: 149-50).

If Katherine Philips was not easily represented as an affectionate companion to her husband, however, she was nevertheless readily representable as his business manager, and in this way too all of her extended travels out of Wales *away* from him could be attributed to a desire to serve his interests (even when she accompanied a female friend to Dublin on her friend’s honeymoon, and stayed away from her own husband for over a year). While Philips was in Ireland, one of her dramatic translations was performed, and she became known to the Earls of Orrery and Roscommon. Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, biographers invariably take this opportunity to suggest that she stayed in Ireland only at the “pressing importunity of the above mentioned noblemen”—implicitly suggesting that she naturally longed to return to her husband and rural retirement (Cibber 2: 151).²⁷

According to Ballard, when Philips finally returned to Cardigan, she “spent the remaining part of that and the beginning of the next year in a sort of melancholy retirement” (272). This period is passed off by the usually scholarly Ballard as “occasioned (*perhaps*) by the bad success of her husband’s affairs” (my emphasis). The “perhaps” in this passage is a rare instance of speculation on Ballard’s part. Why did he feel the need to speculate here? Perhaps because (as I think Ballard himself recognized) Philips’s melancholy in fact had little to do with her husband; rather, as always, she could not bear to be separated from her female friends, and spent much of her time in Wales begging her acquaintances in London to obtain a post there for “Antenor” so she could be with them. Even Ballard recognized that it was “the conversation of her female friends,” not her husband, that Philips needed “to relieve her spirits” (272).

Philips finally managed to convince “Antenor” that it would be in his best interests if she went to London without him. The one statement from her letters which is invariably quoted in anthologies after the 1750s is her remark to an older male friend about her husband, “I hope God will enable me to answer his [James Philips’s] expectations, by making me an instrument of doing him some

²⁷ The way Philips referred to confinement with her husband in Wales in her personal letters to her friends in fact suggests that at times she found it trying indeed. To Sir Charles Cotterell, for instance, she confessed that “I could never, without the Relief your Letters bring me, have been able to reconcile myself to a place which deprives me of so desirable a Conversation as yours” (5 April 1662, *Letters* p. 24).

handsome service; which is the only Ambition I have in the world, and which I would purchase with the hazard of my life." An adoring wife indeed, were it not that the statement is both incomplete and taken grossly out of context. Philips was in fact writing to her friend from Wales, during her period of "melancholy retirement" there with her husband. The statement quoted is actually taken from a passage in which she works to *justify* her actions in leaving her husband behind—a passage which also suggests that it took considerable work on her part to convince him that this journey away from him was in his best interests. Not coincidentally, Ballard paraphrases everything but the last sentence of this passage, which reads as follows:

Let me assure you, that *the next Satisfaction I propose to my self after the Hopes of doing something for ANTENOR's Service, is to enjoy the excellent Company of some very few Friends, among whom POLIARCHUS may be assur'd he holds the chiefest Rank. Nor could I have thus long deny'd my self the Happiness of his excellent Conversation, would I have listened to the Dictates of my own Desires, that continually prompted me to purchase it by a Forgetfulness of my Duty to ANTENOR.* But had I done this, I had not only lost my own inward Content, but forfeited that Friendship I should indeed very little deserve, if I could have hop'd for it on such unworthy Terms. *But ANTENOR is now* so satisfy'd that my going may be for his Advantage, that he hastens me away as fast as he can, and I hope God will enable me to answer his Expectations, by making me an Instrument of doing him some handsome Service, which is the only Ambition I have in the World, and which I would purchase with the hazard of my Life.*²⁸

If life-writers invariably quoted the same statement from Philips's letters, they also quoted the same four or five of her poems, and (mis)read them to the same purposes. While only *three* of Katherine Philips's more than one hundred and thirty poems are addressed to her husband, her cool "To my Antenor" was routinely included in later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies as a substantiating example of her conjugal duty. Editor Fredric Rowton, for instance, concluded from this short poem that she "was as exemplary in the discharge of her domestic duties as she was celebrated for her poetical abilities" (*Female Poets of Great Britain* [1848] 72).²⁹ Along similar lines, one of the two or three expressions of maternal feeling in *all* of Philips's writings was foregrounded as if motherhood were a dominant theme of her work. Her short lyric on the

²⁸ Letter to Sir Charles Cotterell, 12 March 1664, *Letters* pp. 242-3, my emphasis.

²⁹ "To My Antenor, March 16. 1661/2" was written shortly after James Philips underwent examination by the House of Commons for allegedly having sentenced a prominent royalist to death while serving on the High Court of Justice during the Interregnum (Thomas 383). Ironically, it is one of Philips's most exasperated-sounding poems ("My dear *Antenor*, now give o're,/For my sake talk of graves no more" [1-2]).

death of her son would become one of her most frequently reprinted poems—despite the fact that "her son is mentioned only twice in her writings . . . [while] her daughter, who survived her, is never mentioned at all" (Andreadis 44).³⁰ Philips's "Ode Against Pleasure," too, was read by critics as evidence of her high moral sense. From it Frederic Rowton concluded that "it is from passages like this that we gain a true idea of the power and mission of the female mind" (68). Other poems used to demonstrate Philips's satisfaction of what was by now virtually a requirement of the woman writer—her focus on the next world—include her poems beginning "'Tis true our life is but a long disease" and "Happy are they to whom God gives a grave."

Philips's single most frequently reprinted poem was probably "A Countrey [*sic*] life," and the way this poem is used in later anthologies may serve to support my contention that the early literary history of women contributed to the "depoliticization" of women writers' works. Despite the prominence of contemporary religio-political concerns as a theme of early women's writing, explicitly political writing almost never appears in later anthologies—except in snippets, as negative examples of "female partisanship."³¹ More subtly political poems, or poems on diverse themes which nevertheless take on much of their meaning from their political contexts, are sometimes included. But they are removed from their historical and sociopolitical contexts, and so "emptied" of their political concerns.

Philips's "A Countrey life" is held up by Alexander Dyce, Frederic Rowton, George Bethune and others as an example of her feminine rejection of the public political world—not as what the poem would have been recognized as in Philips's *own* time, a devoted royalist's subtle commentary on contemporary political affairs. Upon first glance, "A Countrey life" appears to be conventional pastoral (though knowledge of Philips's recent marriage, and departure from

³⁰ The difference of opinion among two female Philips scholars today concerning this poem may be instructive. While Harriette Andreadis (who celebrates Philips as a feminist and a lesbian) goes out of her way to declare "On Little Hector Philips" to be one of Philips's "dull[est]" works, (44) Maureen Mulvihill (who represents Philips as an astute manipulator of the "old-boy's network") goes out of her way to declare it "Katherine's most affecting lyric" (81).

³¹ Of course, literary history is itself interpellated by political concerns, and early literary histories of women are no exception. Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century royalist women writers such as Katherine Philips fare poorly with progressivist literary historians of the early nineteenth century, while early women writers who declared themselves Whigs come into new appreciation. For an example of unrestrained political bias in early nineteenth-century progressivist literary historiography by and about women, see Louisa Stuart Costello, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen* (1844).

London to the relative exile of remote Wales, does give the speaker's renunciation of London special poignancy). The speaker of this poem insists that his or her renunciation of public life is "wholly by . . . choice" (l. 88). "Secure in these *unenvy'd walls*," the speaker insists, "I think not on the state" (ll. 45-6, my emphasis).

But it is surely not irrelevant to our understanding of "A Country life" that this poem is dated 1650—the year Cromwell was victorious over Charles II at the Battle of Dunbar, and one year after the execution of Charles I. It seems likely that Philips's politically astute coterie audience would have interpreted her critique of men governed by "thoughts of ruling and of gaine" in this poem as a reference to Cromwell and his forces, and her reference to kings with unfortunate fates as an allusion to King Charles (ll. 15, 39). (As if to drive home her allusion to Charles I here, in fact, Philips later repeated an entire line of this poem in her verses "Upon the double murth' of K. Charles.") What are the "tumult," "discontent," "feares" and "warre" Philips alludes to in "A Country life" (ll. 3-4, 86), and who is the king with the unfortunate fate? (Fascinatingly, Charles II's illegitimate son and would-be-successor the Duke of Monmouth later incorporated these very lines on unfortunate kings [ll. 37-40] into one of his own manuscript poems—suggesting that he, at least, decoded them as an allusion to his family's situation [Thomas 363-4].)

Philips's biographers do not tell us any of this; rather, they erase history and difference, emptying the poem of its particular historical content, and transforming one woman writer's *particular* political intervention into a general statement that transcends time and space (and most importantly, works to uphold contemporary gender categories). Writing as political intervention becomes writing as saleable commodity. A "gesture charged with risks" becomes "a possession caught in a circuit of property values" (Foucault, "Author" 124).

Philips is but one example of the way select women writers' lives and concerns were written and rewritten according to a set of approved "destinies"; tailored to suit changing ideological needs and market demands. What were some of the more general *aesthetic* consequences for literary history, of this process of "typing" I have identified? Over the course of the eighteenth century, models for the representation of women writers crystallized; some critics would argue that they were also delimited. Janet Todd, for instance, has argued that while seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women writers were relatively free to invent themselves, by mid-century "the characters that could profitably be chosen were

few" (Todd, "Marketing" 96). As with female *autobiography*, so with female literary *biography*, I would suggest, profitable paradigms were delimited. Women writers were divided up into a series of recognizable types, and their lives rewritten according to a set of *gendered* demands.

The construction of generalized female models necessitated the erasure of particular differences—a process which may be illustrated graphically by comparing the successive illustrations to Katherine Philips's poems. In the posthumous 1667 edition, Philips's poems were accompanied by a likeness of her, based on a contemporary portrait bust. While the portrait is certainly stylized (it is executed in the fashionable "heroic" manner, with all the fleshy loveliness of Lely's beauties) it can nevertheless easily be situated in history as a product of Philips's own era. When Philips's poems were reprinted in Bethune's anthology two hundred years later, however, they were accompanied not by this known likeness, but rather by an engraving of a generic Victorian gentlewoman labeled "True Felicity"—an illustration of Everywoman, which could have accompanied the works of any other female poet in the volume. Katherine Philips's own historical particularity had been deemed irrelevant—and so had been erased.

Susan Stewart suggests that the collection is "a mode of control and containment insofar as it is a mode of generation and series" (159). A second aesthetic consequence of the process of typing was the generation of literary historiographical series and subsets (such as the ahistorical "Behn, Manley, Haywood" series that still plagues us today). The first taxonomies of writing women generated series of female literary worthies and unworthies, and played these series off one another, to articulate boundaries. The literary history of early modern women is a sharply polarized structure: a spectrum of virtue and vice. Even today, Katherine Philips is almost never mentioned by literary scholars without a simultaneous reference to Aphra Behn, for by 1700 these two writers were part of an ideological "set." While in the seventeenth century Behn and Philips were *both* positive exemplars, by the mid-eighteenth century Behn had become an anti-model for the new "genteel" woman writer, who would not "urge [her] pen to prostitution" (Inchbald 2). Behn and Philips are only the best-known example of this binary opposition pattern in female literary history; the Reverend Richard Polwhele subsequently made use of the same structuring dichotomy in *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), when he contrasted Hannah More with Mary Wollstonecraft. Polwhele simply had to state that "Miss . . . More may be justly esteemed . . . in all points, diametrically opposite to Miss Wollstonecraft" (35n),

and his readers all understood what sort of person More was. She was the not-Wollstonecraft.

Ironically, however, because an antithesis necessarily contains its opposite, the Mary Wollstonecraft that a Hannah More was not, or the Behn/Manley/Haywood series that a Philips was not, accompanied the virtuous woman writer whenever a biographer tried to constitute her (or whenever she tried to constitute herself). More than one hundred and fifty years after Katherine Philips's death, John Keats complained in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds of "a set of Devils" who had "made a very uncomfortable impression on me" (women writers who lacked "real feminine Modesty")—and then went on to comfort himself with "one beautiful Mrs. Philips" (yes, Katherine Philips). Keats wrote:

The world, and especially our England, has within the last thirty years been vexed and teased by a set of Devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an acherontic promotion to a Torturer, purposely for their accommodation; These Devils are a set of Women, who having taken a snack or Luncheon of Literary scraps, set themselves up for Towers of Babel in Languages, Sapphos in poetry—Euclids in Geometry—and everything in nothing. . . . The thing has made a very uncomfortable impression on me. I had longed for some *real feminine Modesty* in these things, and was therefore gladdened in the extreme on opening the other day. . . . a Book of Poetry written by *one beautiful Mrs. Philips* . . . and called "the Matchless Orinda"—You must have heard of her, and most likely read her Poetry—I wish you have not, that I may have the pleasure of treating you with a few stanzas [copies out poem].³²

The two poles of female literary value—"Devils" and "beauties"—are inextricably linked, for each pole is defined by its relationship to the other. In a simple binary opposition, meaning does not exist at either pole, but in the relationship between them (as the title of Mary Pilkington's *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters . . . in which the Virtuous and Vicious are Painted* [1804] itself suggests). One considerable problem for early women's literary history, then, was that the opposing poles of these spectrums could never be far enough apart. (Hence the continued "underground" existence of female literary "unworthies" in literary history—the references, however damning, to politically and sexually explicit writers such as Behn, or the more subversive traces of older catalogues and traditions.) Even when nineteenth-century editors omitted female "Devils" from their collections entirely, they were still implicitly present. Louisa Stuart Costello, for instance, omitted Aphra Behn from her *Memoirs of Eminent*

Englishwomen (1844), yet raised Behn's ghost once more when she pointedly referred to Behn's successor Susanna Centlivre as "the first female English writer who *deserves* the name of a dramatist" (3: 380, my emphasis).

iv

In turning now to some observations on literary history as a form of collecting, and in particular on the power relations inherent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collections of writing women's lives, one may as well begin with the opening sentences of Eric Robertson's *English Poetesses* (1883), which begins with Katherine Philips. Robertson's anthology, significantly, is no longer a collection of women writers' *works* with prefatory lives, but women writers' *lives*, with "illustrative extracts" from their works. Robertson begins his "Series of Critical Biographies" by recreating for the reader his own most memorable scene of antiquarian discovery: the day he happened upon a folio edition of Katherine Philips. Robertson recalls having unearthed Philips (that is, her *Poems*) in the "dusty recesses of an Edinburgh bookshop," among a "rarely visited accumulation of old folios" (1, my emphasis). Representing himself as would-be chivalric rescuer, Robertson reminds us that it is in his editorial power to save this abandoned lady from obscurity.

As Robertson's antiquarian forays suggest, early literary history was a mode of "collecting," and collections of lives of literary ladies themselves a form of accumulation and display. The lives in Robertson's anthology are like artifacts in a cabinet: exhibited as possessions that are also *signs* of possession. Eighteenth-century English men and women's fascination with rare and "exotic" objects may be seen in the origins of the first public museums,³³ and as the title of Alexander Dyce's *Specimens of the English Poetesses* (1825, my emphasis) suggests, the woman writer herself was seen as something of a curiosity or rarity. George Ballard, the most scholarly and "feminist" of the century's literary "collectors," actually collected rare coins before he collected literary ladies; his patron had a collection of women's portraits.³⁴ Thomas Amory's eccentric *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1755) purports to be a record of British women

³³ On the origins of England's first public museums, see Boesky.

³⁴ On Ballard's and his patrons' collecting, see Ruth Perry's introduction (17-24). As Perry points out, the *Memoirs* themselves are "strongly flavored with an antiquarian's delight in relics" (24).

³² Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 21 September 1817, *Letters* 1: 163, my emphasis.

“to be forever admired for their literary accomplishments” (xxiii), but is in fact an account of “female curiosities” he encountered on his “perambulations throughout Great Britain” (vii). Exhibiting his literary ladies like a showman at a fair (“Beauties . . . with the heads of philosophers,” he calls them) Amory borrows his advertising strategies from popular fiction, claiming “extraordinary adventures,” “surprising accounts,” and “true histories of amour, distress, and relief” (xxiv).

If collections are signs of possession, they are also a “paradise of consumption” (in Susan Stewart’s felicitous phrase), and it is here that the sexualized nature of literary collecting most clearly comes into play. The relationship of the male critic to the woman writer in female literary lives is not so much analytical, as adoring. As Keats’s high praise for his “beautiful Mrs. Philips” may suggest, female virtue had a soothing and sometimes powerfully erotic appeal for the male critic, and where he found virtue, he created beauty. After her death, the virtuous woman writer becomes more and more attractive, until the same Katherine Philips Aubrey’s eye-witness described as “pretty fat, not tall, red pimpled face” becomes Keats’s “beauty.” Eric Robertson begins his *English Poetesses* with the solemn statement, “I remember to have conceived a humble affection for the ‘Matchless Orinda’ . . . at a very early age” (1).

Jean Baudrillard suggests that the desire and jouissance of collections stems not so much from the objects themselves, as from their systematic arrangement in the collection (the generation of series and binary oppositions I have alluded to, for instance).³⁵ With collections of literary lives, I suspect it also stems from the readers’ power to control the scene of judgment: to “sample” the contents; to “take’ the text as [s]he wills.”³⁶ The power relations Eric Robertson assumes, between himself as would-be “rescuer” of Philips, and Philips as feminized, fetishized object, anticipate the analogy Walter Benjamin employs to illustrate the psychosexual “conquest” of the collector:

One of the finest memories of a collector is the moment when he rescued a book to which he might never have given a thought. . . because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom—the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in *The Arabian Nights*. (64)

³⁵ Baudrillard, discussed in Schor (202). Walter Benjamin, similarly, attributes the pleasures of collecting to the “dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order” (60).

³⁶ Barbara M. Benedict uses this phrase in a different context in “Literary Miscellanies: The Cultural Mediation of Fragmented Feeling” (409).

Jean Baudrillard echoes these gendered scenarios of the power relations of collecting when he compares the collector to the master of a harem. “Master of a secret seraglio,” he observes, “man is never more so than when surrounded by his objects” (125, qtd. in Schor 201). Eighteenth-century collections of literary ladies reflect Europeans’ fascination with harems explicitly. In his protofeminist *Feminead*, for instance, John Duncombe asks the rhetorical question whether “the freeborn sons of Britain’s polished isle” should be like “eastern tyrants” with their “seraglios,” (ll. 44, 46) but then goes on to create his own “portable seraglio” of literary ladies. The very catalogue of “beauties” format Duncombe employs, I suggest, functions like his imagined harems: to line women writers up in a row, property of the reader/owner, and endlessly subject to his (or her) gaze.

The ultimate fantasy of the collector, of course, is to have the fetish-object permanently in his possession, and I am reminded of Eric Robertson’s return trip to the bookshop to admire Katherine Philips. “It was then I indulged myself with another peep at the ‘matchless Orinda,’” Robertson confides in us, “still longing to “Possess and love *what so many reverent hands had fondled*” (my emphasis). (In a similarly eroticized fashion, Walter Benjamin confides that “the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as *the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them*” [60, my emphasis].) Like the Baron in *The Rape of the Lock*, “trumpeting his triumph, waving the lock about,” the successful collector has his “fetish object,” “his totemic insinuation of his power” over the woman writer. “Her fame, her power, are now magically transferred to him.”³⁷

In considering the power relations in literary historical “collecting,” finally, it is worth noting that in Robertson’s account Katherine Philips is the object of what we might call mediated literary critical desire. Her literary value is enhanced through homosocial exchange. Spying previous owners’ signatures inside the front cover of the folio *Poems*, Robertson begins to “*covet the volume*” (2, my emphasis). Scanning the encomium poems of Philips’s previous male critics, rather than Philips’s own works, he concludes that “there must be some-

³⁷ In making this analogy between Pope’s Baron and the eighteenth-century literary historical “collector,” I am indebted to Donna Landry’s discussion of *The Rape of the Lock* in Landry and Rajani Sudan, “What Is It Feminists Are Writing Histories of—Literature, Ideology, Sexuality, Misogyny?” Division on Restoration and Early-Eighteenth-Century English Literature, MLA Convention, San Francisco, 28 Dec. 1991. I am grateful to Professor Landry for sharing with me her portion of this unpublished paper.

thing very lovable in her.”³⁸ “Handed down from one *possessor* to another,” he pronounces, she is “a thing to be cherished and revered” (1-2).

v

What, then, were some of the long-term consequences of a literary history such as this for early women writers in English? Well, as the phrase I have used in quotation marks, “the ‘female’ literary tradition,” suggests, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the construction of a supposedly primary unity among women writers on the basis of sex. It saw the construction in anthologies and collections of a shared “female” authorial identity, erasing or blurring significant differences in politics, religion, sexuality, occupation, and rank. And it saw the carving-up of “volumes of poetry by a politically and socially diverse group of women into anthologies that foregrounded generalized ‘female’ experience” (Barash 415-16), highlighting private or personal issues, and excluding or marginalizing women’s oppositional religious and political expression.

Now the construction of a supposedly primary unity among women on the basis of sex, and corresponding construction of a “female literary tradition,” has had certain kinds of feminist potential, and many would argue that mainstreaming and the domestication that came with it was for eighteenth-century women a condition for serious politics. But that supposed unity, I suggest—that generalized “female” experience—was nevertheless a construct which also had some very high stakes. Summary statements about “women’s nature,” from *whatever* position they are advanced, risk reducing significant differences among women “to the expression of an ahistorical ‘feminine voice,’ which easily becomes a tool of the dominant class” (Barash 419). The eighteenth-century emergence of “English literary history” significantly contributed to the ongoing economic and political exclusion of women.

Among the consequences of a “female literary tradition” for seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women’s literary history, paradoxically, were the *erasure of history* (the shaping social and political contexts of making) and the *erasure of labor* (material literary production, for instance, or the struggle for the

³⁸ “Cowley, Dryden, Sir John Denham, and others felt, regarding her . . . that to *love* her had been a liberal education” (*English Poetesses* 3, my emphasis).

right to write itself).³⁹ When a work like Katherine Philips’s “To My excellent Lucasia, on our friendship. 17th. July 1651” was taken out of its historical political contexts and made to serve as a “timeless” example of “universal” female friendship (as it supposedly still serves, in the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*), Philips’s powerful and stunningly original interweaving of personal and public political expression was lost. Philips’s “To My excellent Lucasia, on our friendship. 17th. July 1651” is the single “specimen” of her writings included in the *NALW*, and it is introduced there as a example of female friendship. The prefatory material says nothing about Philips’s political background, no historical footnotes are provided, and the editors truncate the title so as to lose Philips’s careful dating of her poem (“17th. July 1651”). The editors do tell us that *James Philips* was a Puritan—a detail that would shed a provocative light on this particular poem if only we were told that *Katherine Philips* did not share her husband’s political allegiances! Examine, for instance, the following lines, in which Philips declares her love for Anne Owen (“Lucasia”):

Nor Bridegroomes nor crown’d conqu’rour’s mirth
To mine compar’d can be:
They have but pieces of this Earth,
I’ve all the world in thee. (ll. 17-20)

When we learn that Katherine Philips was a lifelong royalist who turned sixteen in the year that Charles I was beheaded (1649), and that shortly before writing these lines (1651) she was married off to a fifty-four year-old Puritan by her mother (1648), the line “Nor Bridegroomes nor crown’d conqu’rour’s mirth” here takes on new connotations. Whether consciously or no, Philips appears to have linked her new husband (“Nor Bridegroom”) and his Puritan employer Oliver Cromwell (“nor crown’d conqu’rour”)—and then rejected them both for her beloved. Philips thus links private, sexual oppression with what she would see as public political oppression (the martyrdom of Charles I). As in the eighteenth century, however, so in the twentieth century editorial agendas transform “a gesture . . . charged with risks” into “a possession caught in a circuit of property values” (Foucault, “Author” 124). Ironically, when twentieth-century feminist editors remove Philips’s poems from their particular historical contexts to make them serve as “timeless” examples of “universal” female friendship,

³⁹ For an account of women’s entrance into the literary marketplace which seeks to restore history and labor on these terms, see my “The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1688-1730” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford U, 1991).

Philips's proto-"feminist" choices are actually made to seem *less* transgressive than they might otherwise appear.

Like their twentieth-century counterparts, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century proto-"feminist" literary life-writers and anthologists cannot be exempted from furthering the developments I have outlined in this essay; indeed at times these pioneering scholars may have furthered these developments more effectively than their nonfeminist contemporaries. The female worthies tradition, and subgenre of literary lives, was exploited by feminists and conservative moralists alike, and while the long-term motives of these two groups were radically different, their immediate goals were sometimes similar (improved education for women, for instance). Catalogues of learned and literary women were called up in feminist polemic as well as in conservative treatises, and because female learning was thought by many to undermine chastity, obedience, and other "feminine graces," early feminist polemic was often forced to be reactive (arguing, for instance, that women's education would not undermine but uphold these "ideals"). Feminist intellectuals, consequently, risked setting up chastity and domestic duty as women's highest goals. Early feminist polemic may have functioned as a form of conduct material, and early feminist literary history may have fulfilled conservative didactic functions (Ballard, for instance).

At the same time, too, literary history is a form of self-fashioning, and in writing the lives of their female literary predecessors, early female editors were necessarily constructing public images of themselves. Collections of literary ladies would inevitably be perceived as articulations of their editors' own identities, and in the eighteenth century a female editor's own virtue would be judged according to her editorial decisions. The harsh treatment accorded by Elizabeth Inchbald to fellow female dramatist Susanna Centlivre in her prefaces to Centlivre's plays in *The British Theatre* (1806-9) may be explained in part by the fact that as a woman writer herself, Inchbald's female *literary* biography would inevitably be read as *autobiography*.⁴⁰ Terry Eagleton suggests that "power reproduces itself by engendering in its victims a collusion which is the very condition of their survival" (82). Late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female

⁴⁰ In her preface to Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, for example, Inchbald writes that "Mrs. Centlivre, as a woman, falls more particularly under censure than her cotemporary writers . . . the authoress of this comedy should have laid down her pen, and taken, in exchange, the meanest implement of labour, rather than have imitated the licentious example given her by the renowned poets of those days" (12: 4). In her biographical sketch of Centlivre, too, Inchbald takes care to refer to "the *masculine* enterprise of an author" (11: 4; my emphasis).

editors' violent repudiation of earlier women writers for transgressing the gender boundaries of their *own* historical periods was a necessary strategy; a way of forestalling male criticism by repudiating the female "other." Concerned to separate women's writing from what had become the damaging legacy of politically and sexually explicit authors such as Aphra Behn, early feminist literary historians were forced to construct a "pure" past (substituting a part of the "female literary tradition" for the whole). Eighteenth-century feminist literary historians needed to construct a pure past. What kind of past do we need to construct now?

Of course late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary biographical efforts to prescribe the "mission of the female mind" (Rowton 68) were never wholly successful, and in tracing the early historiography of women's writing one would also have to trace the various *resistances* to these developments I have sketched. There has always been an "alternative Amazonian traffic," as Donna Landry has reminded us in a recent critique of the current "fetishization of the domestic woman" in eighteenth-century studies ("Traffic" 181), and even at what we must now recognize as this early stage in the reconstruction of British women's literary history, we can begin to identify at least three different avenues of resistance to dominant literary historical agendas. I will outline these avenues of resistance briefly now.

First, following Jane Gallop's theoretical model in *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Criticism* (1992), there are resistances within each and every literary historical collection to the unity or other principle of organization imposed by its editor. In *Around 1981*, Gallop reads twelve historically important anthologies of feminist criticism, identifying the voice which would impose a pattern upon the collection (usually that of the editor). She then exposes the resistances within each volume to this imposed unity. Similar attempts by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary biographers, to impose specific patterns of interpretation upon their literary historical subjects, may similarly be undermined by the contents of the collections themselves. In *The British Female Poets*, for instance, editor George Bethune illustrates Anne Irwin's outspoken feminist rejoinder to Alexander Pope with a wildly inappropriate engraving of a knight carrying a shipwrecked woman to shore. The engraving, captioned "Manhood," presumably works to counter the more threatening feminist implications of Irwin's poem (by depicting a semiconscious female victim gratefully surrendering to

male protection).⁴¹ Despite Bethune's attempt to delimit reader interpretation, however, Irwin's poem itself undermines the ideology of passive femininity the engraving upholds. Bethune's attempt to delimit the meanings of Irwin's text actually overexposes his own ideological agenda—and so indirectly encourages oppositional readings.

Second, following Chaucer's Wife of Bath, another important form of resistance to dominant literary historical agendas takes place at the site of reception. We need to know more about how eighteenth-century women *read* these catalogues of female literary worthies and unworthies, for as I have suggested above, unconventional or "transgressive" women may actually have found crucial "confirmation and company"⁴² in the very female lives they were supposed to reject. Eighteenth-century editors may have included a woman like Lady Jane Gray as a model of Protestant martyrdom and feminine submission, but women readers of all backgrounds may nevertheless have identified with Gray as a martyr to masculine ambition and patriarchal folly (Ballard 130). Reading, too, is a mode of production, and "people have to make do with what they have" (De Certeau 18).⁴³

Finally, for now, there is a resistance to the entrenchment of dominant literary historical agendas inherent in the contingency of value—a contingency the seventeenth-century author Margaret Cavendish both recognized and found strength in, as when in donating her writings to Oxford and Cambridge she urged the academics of her own day not to destroy her works but rather to bury them respectfully in their libraries. In urging their "Wisdoms" not to destroy her writings, Cavendish concluded her address "To the Two Most Famous Universities of England" (1655) with a prophecy:

If your Wisdoms cannot give me the Bays, let your Charity strew me with
Cypresses; who knows, but, after my Honourable Burial, I may have a Glorious

⁴¹ As the appearance of an engraving captioned "Manhood" in *The British Female Poets* suggests, we cannot have "femininity" without "masculinity." Genders presuppose one another; they are relative. In tracing the development of literary historical constructs of "femininity," then, one would also have to trace the history of "masculinity"—a valuable project which is nevertheless beyond the scope of this article.

⁴² I have borrowed this phrase from Perry, who uses it in a different context (25).

⁴³ Michel de Certeau discusses reception as a mode of production in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This aphorism is from p. 18, where he addresses the "subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations."

Resurrection in Following Ages, since time brings Strange and Unusual things
to pass.⁴⁴

The fulfillment in our own time of Cavendish's prophecy of her works' "Glorious Resurrection in Following Ages" may remind even skeptics that even the most seemingly objective criteria for the evaluation of literary texts may be displaced. Rather than simply substituting a new canon of literary "female worthies" for the depoliticized version I have (admittedly) tried to begin displacing here, scholars of early women's writings must attend not only increasingly to history, but also to our own historicity. For our own needs and values, like those of the academics Cavendish plea bargained with more than three centuries ago, are subject to history, and "time brings Strange and Unusual things to pass."

⁴⁴ Margaret Cavendish, "To the Two Most Famous Universities of England," Preface to *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655). Cavendish's *The Description of a New World Called The Blazing-World and Other Writings* has recently been published in Great Britain and the United States, and a Penguin collection due to follow will make her writings widely available for the first time in nearly three hundred and fifty years.

APPENDIX: SOME COLLECTIONS OF LIVES INCLUDING OR DEVOTED
TO WOMEN, ANTHOLOGIES OF POETRY BY WOMEN WITH BRIEF
BIOGRAPHIES, AND RELATED WORKS

An equation with two variables: a history told by a subject in history.
—Jane Gallop, *Around 1981* (1992)

- 1st. c. A. D.: Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* (The Virtues of Women)
1361-1375: Giovanni Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus* (Concerning Famous Women)
1405: Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cite des dames* (The Book of the City of Ladies)
1443-7: Osbern Bokenham, *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*
1624: Thomas Heywood, *Gynaikeion: or, Nine Books of Various History concerning Women*
1640: *The exemplary lives and memorable acts of nine of the most worthy women of the world*
1642: [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Les Femmes illustres ou les Harangues heroiques*
1651: Charles Gerbier, *Elogium Heroinum: or, The Praise of Worthy Women*
1657: J. H. Gent [Thomas Heywood], *The Generall History of Women, Contain- ing the Lives of the Most Holy and Profane*
1662: Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England*, 2 vols.
1669-1696: John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (e.g. Katherine Philips)
1671: *A Catalogue of Virtuous Women*
1675: Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum, Or a Compleat Collection of the Poets, Especially the Most Eminent of All Ages*
1684: William Winstanley, *England's Worthies*
1686: [John Shirley], *The Illustrious History of Women*
1688: Richard Burton [Nathaniel Crouch], *Female Excellency, or the Ladies Glory*
1691: Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets*
1699: Charles Gildon, *Lives and Characters of the English Dramatic Poets*
1708: John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or an Historical View of the Stage*
1719: Giles Jacob, *The Poetical Register; or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets. With an Account of Their Writings*
1728: *The Female Dunciad*

- 1734-41: Thomas Birch et al., *A general dictionary, historical and critical . . . with several thousand lives never before published*, 10 vols.
1747-66: William Oldys, Joseph Towers, et al., *Biographia Britannica*, 6 vols.; revised Andrew Kippis et al. (1778-93)
1747: [John Mottley], "A Compleat list of all the English Dramatic Poets," appended to Thomas [and Martha] Whincop, *Scanderbeg*
1750: William Rufus Chetwood, *The British Theatre. Containing the lives of the English dramatic poets: with an account of all their plays*
1752: George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*
1753: Theophilus Cibber [Robert Shiels], *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Time of Dean Swift*, 5 vols. (Johnson's *Lives* was 1779-1781)
1754: John Duncombe, *The Femeinead. A Poem* (wr. 1751)
1755: Thomas Amory, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain. Interspersed with Literary Reflexions, and Accounts of Curious Things*
1755: George Colman and Bonnell Thornton, eds. *Poems by Eminent Ladies*, 2 vols.
1764: David Erskine Baker, *Biographia Dramatica: or, A Companion to the Playhouse*, 2 vols.; revised Isaac Reed (2 vols., 1782); revised Stephen Jones (4 vols., 1812)
1766: *Biographium Faemineum. The Female Worthies: or, Memoirs of the Most Illustrious Ladies, of all Ages and Nations*, 2 vols.
1769: James Granger, *A Biographical History of England*
1774: Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate; A Poem. Occasioned by Reading Mr. Duncombe's Femeinead*
1777: Thomas Gibbons, *Memoirs of Eminently Pious Women of Great Britain*
1798: Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem*
1803: Mary Hays, *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries*
1804: Matilda Betham, *A Biographical Dictionary of Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country*
1804: Mary Pilkington, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters . . . in which the Virtuous and the Vicious are Painted in Their True Colours. Embellished with Portraits*
1806-9: Elizabeth Inchbald, ed., *The British Theatre: or, A Collection of Plays*, 25 vols.

- 1822: Mary Belson Elliot, *Female biography or, virtue and talent exemplified in the characters of eminent British females*
- 1825: Alexander Dyce, *Specimens of British poetesses; selected and chronologically arranged*
- 1827: Anna Maria Lee, *Memoirs of Eminent Female Writers*
- 1843: Mrs. Elwood [Anne Katherine], *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England, from the Commencement of the Last Century*, 2 vols.
- 1844: Louisa Stuart Costello, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*, 4 vols.
- 1848: George Washington Bethune, *The British Female Poets: with Biographical and Critical Notices*
- 1848: Frederic Rowton, *The Female Poets of Great Britain, Chronologically Arranged: With Copious Selections and Critical Remarks*
- 1861: Jane Williams, *The Literary Women of England*
- 1862: Julia Kavanaugh, *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*, 2 vols.
- 1883: Eric S. Robertson, *English Poetesses: A Series of Critical Biographies with Illustrative Extracts*

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POWER IN THE DARKNESS: HETEROTOPIAS, LITERATURE AND GOTHIC LABYRINTHS

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Heterotopias

In an essay discussing the many other spaces that exist within and on the margins of society, Michel Foucault stresses their importance in the foundation of cultures. Taking various forms and functions depending on historical and cultural contexts, heterotopias are real places on the subordinated or excluded fringes of a particular social formation. Psychiatric hospitals, boarding schools, prisons, barracks, brothels, theatres, gardens, according to different historical and cultural contingencies, remain distinct from and yet adjacent to the privileged sites of social organization. Heterotopias are sites where subjects and behaviors that fit only partially within dominant norms can be both contained and excluded. Among these other spaces are sites that negotiate crisis states, such as adolescence or aging, or sites that relate to temporal disjunctions such as the cemetery or museum. Heterotopias are thus necessary in the constitution and maintenance of social formations: their otherness enables the differentiation, ordering and policing of the limits of their own space as well as the boundaries of society. Part of the social formation in respect of its constitution, heterotopias, by marking a line of differentiation, are also situated on the outside, penetrable but difficult of access and determined by other rules. Other spaces also exist as sites of reflection, inversion and contestation of the rules and relations of homogeneous social space. These heterotopias