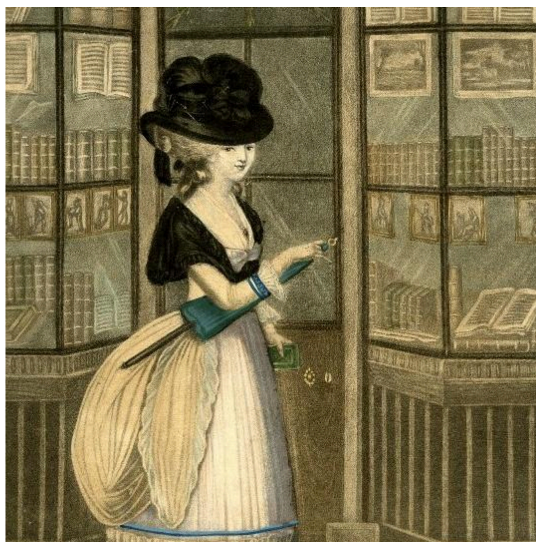

The Women's Print History Project

Cataloguing Catharine Macaulay [Spotlight]

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Cataloguing Catharine Macaulay

Kate Moffatt

This post is part of our Women & History Spotlight Series, which will run through March 2021. Spotlights in this series focus on women's contributions to history in the database.

Figure 1. From the third volume of Macaulay's History (ECCO).

ADVERTISEMENT.

> The author, having heard that long notes were tedious and disagreeable to the reader, has altered the method which she pursued in the five first volumes of this history, and at a much larger expence of labour has wove into the text every part of the composition which could be done without breaking into the thread of the history.
> — From volume 6 of Catharine Macaulay's *The History of England* (1781)

"Animated with the love of liberty, and an enthusiastic regard to English patriotism, I ventured to take the pen in hand . . ." (vii). So writes Catharine Macaulay partway through the preface of the sixth volume of her *The History of England, from the accession of James I to that of the Brunswick line*, after a scathing critique of some of the male historians who had published before her — of Paul Rapin de Thoyras, for example, she declares, "[his popularity] was more from the circumstance of his having no competitor than from the intrinsic merit of his work" (vi). Of David Hume, she opines that although he is "blessed with that genius and profound sagacity necessary to form a complete historian," his historical work, "whilst [serving] as an elegant pastime for the hours of leisure or idleness, leaves the reader perfectly ignorant as to characters, motives, and often facts" (vi). And facts were Macaulay's bread and butter, contributing to her distaste for Hume and his work, with whom and about which she fundamentally disagreed; besides being a staunch royalist to Macaulay's republican, Daniel Woolf describes Hume as also being "among those

eighteenth-century historians for whom the narrative was all, and though it must be 'true', that truth lay in reason, common sense, and rhetoric, rather than research" and that, "with few exceptions, he avoided primary sources" (694).

In contrast, Macaulay's eight-volume *History* made use of printed sources, manuscripts, letters, and at least five thousand tracts and sermons over the more than twenty years that she researched and wrote it (Hill and Hill 274). The first five volumes contain extensive footnotes, listing many of her sources as well as offering further commentary; these footnotes, however, disappear after the fifth volume because of a disgruntled readership who claimed "long notes [were] tedious and disagreeable," quoted above. This feedback resulted in Macaulay including as much of the historical material into the body of the work itself as she could "without," she writes "breaking into the thread of history" (vii). While this may have ultimately made for a less disruptive reading experience, it also makes it much more difficult to trace her sources. In large part, our ability to estimate the five thousand sermons and tracts used for this enormous project originates from the existence of her *Catalogue of Tracts* (1790), a printed catalog of the contents of her library (Hill and Hil 277–81). Only a few copies of the Catalogue survive, one of which is held by the British Library.

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Ann. 1649. and Dundalk were immediately quitted by the royalifts. There did not remain with Ormond, who was now fallen into great difgrace, above fifteen hundred foot and feven hundred horfe, nor would any of the principal port-towns admit his foldiers, or receive garrifons from his authority. This wayward difpofition in the Irifh greatly accelerated the conquefts of Cromwell, who, well acquainted with their inteftine divifions, though in a late feafon of the year, marched his army to Wexford; and had hardly fat down before it when Stafford, the governor, gave up the caftle on conditions, and thus procured him an entrance into the town *. Roffe, and other places of ftrength, were no fooner attacked than won; and, to compleat the fuccefs of the conquerors, all the towns in Munfter, garrifoned by the Englifh foldiers under Lord Inchiquin †, revolted, and thus fecured to them a fafe retreat, free paffage, neceffary provifions, and harbor for their fhips. Waterford was next attempted; but as this town was prepared for a vigorous defence, and the feafon was far advanced, Cromwell, whofe army had been in continual action from their firft arrival in the country, raifed the fiege, and retired into winter-quarters.

To avoid that general deftruction which the fuccefs of the Englifh arms threatened, an union of forces was at length effected between the two bodies of old and

* The military were treated in the fame manner as had been thofe at Drogheda.

† The horfe under lord Inchiquin had been prevented in a defign they had projected, to march in a body to Leinfter, to join with Jones, the governor of Dublin. *Carte's Life of Ormond*, vol. II. p. 45.

new

Figure 2. Example of Macaulay including sources in her footnotes, from the fifth volume of her *History* (ECCO).

While current scholars may bemoan the loss of Macaulay's footnotes in those last three volumes, it is not surprising that her readership loudly decried them—they were, to say the least, extensive. In examining the first twenty pages of the fifth volume, four pages contain only a single sentence of the main body of work while the remainder of the page is dedicated to footnotes, and only one page of the twenty contains no footnotes at all. One would almost be reading

another work entirely alongside the first if reading every note. But there is a common question that arises when considering eighteenth-century works of history: what did they use as sources? Historians of the eighteenth century were not always forthcoming, but Macaulay's footnotes begin to answer this question, at least for the first five volumes of the *History*, and her printed *Catalogue* speaks to much of the rest. As Hill and Hill write, the *Catalogue* is a valuable contribution to scholarship, given that "it provides not only knowledge of at least some of the seventeenth-century sources at her disposal, but also enables us to re-evaluate her scholarship in light of those sources and how she used them" (269).

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An. 1649

at their proceedings *. A conduct ſo ill ſuited to the independant ſpirit of the Levellers, provoked them to

* One Lockier ſuffered death; and for a petition in which the party had demanded reformation in point of lawful toleration, in point of religion, the equal adminiſtration of law to perſons of all conditions, the aboliſhment of tythes, and other articles of the ſame nature, the petitioners (being troopers) were tried by a court-martial, and on ſeveral of them was inflicted the puniſhment of riding the wooden horſe. This ſeverity was ſo far from intimidating the party, that a petition, in which they complained of the arbitrary influence of three or four military grandees over the ſupreme authority of the nation; and in which they demanded that the government ſhould ceaſe an illegal proſecution they had commenced againſt Lilbourn and three other leaders of the party, for a pamphlet they had publiſhed, called England's Second Chains, was ſigned by ten thouſand perſons, and ſeconded by a female petition of the ſame tendency. Theſe movements of the party not having the effect to intimidate the government into milder or juſter meaſures, Lilbourn and his three aſſociates, though under confinement, had the courage to print a narrative of all that paſſed between them and the council of ſtate, with a new model of government, entitled, An Agreement of the free People of England. It was a better model than any which had been yet offered to the public; and as it directs the reformation of all the grievances which the people of England then labored under, and which to this very day they do with equal weight ſuſtain, I ſhall give abſtracts of the moſt important articles. Parliaments were to be annual, inſtead of biennial, and the members not capable of reelection till after the intervention of one repreſentative. The executive powers of government, during the adjournments of Parliament, were to be exerciſed by committees of Parliament, inſtead of a council of ſtate. The exerciſe of the ſupreme power, with the limitations eſtabliſhed by the Petition of Right, was to be bound in all religious matters, touching the rights of conſcience. They were not empowered to impreſs or conſtrain any perſon to military ſervice, either by ſea or land; " Every man's conſcience, ſays the Agreement, being to be ſatisfied in the juſtneſs of that cauſe wherein he hazards his own life, or may deſtroy another's." They were not empowered to give judgment on perſon or eſtate, in any caſe where the

Figure 3. From the fifth volume of Macaulay's *History* (ECCO).

And looking at Macaulay's *A Catalogue of Tracts* could very well explain her profuseness in footnotes: if the *Catalogue* is any indication, she was remarkably well-read on the subjects about which she wrote. Bridget Hill and Christopher Hill's "Catharine Macaulay's *History* and her *Catalogue of Tracts*" looks closely at one of the only surviving physical copies, held by the British Library, and in looking at Macaulay's work and *Catalogue* they argue that "many of today's respected seventeenth-century historians are less well briefed" (275). Alongside its many sermons and tracts, *A Catalogue of Tracts* also lists letters, manuscripts, speeches, petitions, pamphlets, and literature. Hill and Hill write that

it "needs to be stressed that the collection is mainly of tracts—mere pamphlets not bound volumes—and not her whole library, whatever that may have consisted of" (282), and this note from Hill and Hill confirms that the *Catalogue* held many primary sources, most of which, if not all, Macaulay would have used in the research and writing of her *History*. This is an invaluable work in the face of the loss of Macaulay's footnotes in volumes six through eight, which obscures her sources. The *Catalogue* was published in 1790, and Hill and Hill, who examined the British Library copy, describe it as "roughly printed" (374). It is unknown why Macaulay had it published, or who published, printed, or sold the work, and it is only tentatively listed as having been printed in London by the ESTC. Although we have very little bibliographical information about the *Catalogue* and cannot verify the record without examining a digitized or physical copy, it is included in the WPHP as a work compiled by Macaulay, even if she was likely not doing the actual work of creating the catalog herself (Hill and Hill 283).

While we are able to include very little in our title record for the *Catalogue of Tracts*, the eight volumes of her *History* (aside from the fourth) have robust records, providing a detailed timeline of publication for the project. While we do not usually create records for individual volumes, we do make exceptions when volumes are published in different years with different publishers in order to more accurately and clearly collect the bibliographical information for each. The first volume of the *History* was published in 1763 by John Nourse, Robert and James Dodsley, and William Johnston. "Overnight," Bridget Hill points out, "[Macaulay] became 'the celebrated Mrs Macaulay'" (ODNB). The second, third, and fourth volumes were self-published—meaning Macaulay took on the financial risk, although scholars are uncertain why—shortly after, in 1765, 1767, and 1768, and the fifth was published by Edward and Charles Dilly in 1771. The sixth and seventh volumes were not published until 1781, a full ten years later, and the eighth two years after in 1783, bringing the span of publication for the entire project to a full twenty years.

Figure 4. "Catharine Macaulay (née Sawbridge)" by Robert Edge Pine (1775). National Portrait Gallery.

But Macaulay was not out of the public eye or mind during that decade between volumes five and six, nor during the entire twenty years of publication. She published *A modest plea for the property of copyright* in 1774, and *An address to the people of England, Scotland and Ireland, on the present important crisis of affairs* in 1775, which went into at least three editions that year, and Devoney Looser writes that "throughout the 1760s and 1770s, Macaulay's name appears regularly in newspapers, with reports on her health, where she had dined, and who has visited her. It was said that Macaulay's portrait was sold on every print seller's counter; her figure was made into porcelain; and she was ultimately represented in a life-sized coloured wax figure" (3). Alongside evidence of her celebrity, however, were critiques of the 'female historian,' as Macaulay terms herself in the introduction to the first volume of her *History* and as she later becomes known. Macaulay writes apologetically, "The inaccuracies of style which may be found in this composition, will, I hope, find favor from the candor of the public; and the defects of a female historian, in these points, not weighed in the balance of severe criticism" (xviii). Looser points out that "such apologies were customary in the context of the period's writing by women" with "many [prefacing] their works with requests seeking chivalrous treatment from critics" (8). And this preemptive apology indeed predicts the criticism Macaulay would receive about being a female historian: Bridget Hill writes that "after mild praise [for the *History*] the *Review* expressed the wish that 'the same degree of genius and application had been exerted in more suitable pursuits', for the writing of history was not recommended 'to the practice of our lovely countrywomen'" (ODNB, *Monthly Review*).

The gossip and criticism was inevitable, as it is for most celebrities, and especially for women who are pushing against—or stepping beyond—the bounds of propriety or tradition. Macaulay's position in the public eye was a result

of no one particular thing, but many: alongside the popularity of the *History*, she was an outspoken republican, a Bluestocking in spirit and art if not always in name, and a regular topic of gossip for her shocking relationships, one of which was marriage to the 21-year-old William Graham when she was forty-seven (ODNB). Her work was, however, largely well-received by her female contemporaries, who argued the criticism she received was a result of her position as a female historian. Mary Hays wrote about Macaulay in *Female Biography* (1803) that "a female historian, by its singularity, could not fail to excite attention: [Macaulay] seemed to have stepped out of the province of her sex; curiosity was sharpened, and malevolence provoked. The author was attacked by petty and personal scurrilities, to which it was believed her sex would render her vulnerable" (292). Hill and Hill point out that Mary Wollstonecraft described her as "an example of intellectual acquirements supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex," going on to say she wrote "with sober energy and argumentative closeness" (Hill and Hill 269; Wollstonecraft). Macaulay's influence on the genre and women's involvement in it, regardless of the loud and gendered criticism she received, was considerable: no longer was the term 'female historian' "used rarely, and when used, used mockingly," (Looser 7) as it was prior to the eighteenth century and the publication of Macaulay's impressive *History*.

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