The Women's Print History Project

Women & Philosophy Spotlight Series [Spotlight Introduction]

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Women & Philosophy Spotlight Series

Angela Wachowich

Figure 1. Angelica Kauffman. Woman Reading. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

In 2021, the *Journal of the History of Ideas* published 31 total articles, 18 of which named male thinkers in the titles and none of which named a single female philosopher (Dr. Megan Gallagher, tweet). The discipline of philosophy continues to have a lower percentage of female graduate students and faculty than any other humanities or social science, and it barely outranks notoriously inequitable fields like computer science and physics (Andrew Janiak, *Washington Post*). As a feminist project committed to uncovering eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's knowledge production, this Spring, in celebration of Women's History Month, *The Women's Print History Project* is delighted to join ongoing conversations about the history of philosophy with our Women & Philosophy Spotlight Series. Between March 4 and April 1, 2022, we will be highlighting five of the many inspiring female thinkers featured on our database. As a bibliographical database that seeks to capture as much as we can of women's contributions to print, the WPHP does not limit itself to a single genre or topic, and hence is ideally suited to capture the widest range of women's intellectual history during the period. This attention to women thinkers in print during the long eighteenth century will, we hope, contribute to this recovery work and to the ongoing efforts to broaden and change what counts as philosophical discourse.

Figure 2. William Blake. Etching from Mary Wollstonecraft's Original Stories from Real Life, 1801. *Wikimedia Commons*.

It helps to begin by asking, what role *could* women play in eighteenth-century philosophy when most were denied formal schooling and all were denied university educations? While female philosophers were constrained to private education, many "daughters of educated men," as Virginia Woolf describes educated women of the period (and we would hasten to add wives and sisters and mothers of educated men) undertook comprehensive study, circulating their ideas in manuscript and print. As Woolf's remark suggests, most female thinkers were born to upper-middle-class families with the resources to foster their daughters' intellectual curiosity, though this was not necessarily the case, as we see in our final spotlight in the series. Even with these usual limits, there is a breadth and depth of women's thinking that has yet to be addressed.

Unfettered by the formal limitations of academic discourse, women's philosophical writing took a variety of forms, including treatises and histories as well as novels and poems, and topically ranged across many subjects, from education, to political theory, to natural history, to early feminist thought. This month's *WPHP Monthly Mercury* episode will feature Lisa Shapiro and her *Bibliography of Works by Women Philosophers of the Past*, which is attempting to account for women's philosophical writing beyond philosophy's "Big Seven"; our Spotlights, similarly, deliberately

take up lesser- and even wholly un- known figures to diversify our understanding of the discipline and celebrate women who are never contemplated as part of the philosophical canon.

The Spotlight Series launches today, March 4, with "(Unidentified) Woman not Inferior to Man: 'Sophia,' Proto-Feminism, and the Anonymous Female Writer." In this Spotlight, Angela Wachowich considers the pseudonymous proto-feminism of "Sophia, a Person of Quality," and the implications of recovering unidentifiable female authors.

Figure 3. Margaret Cavendish by Abraham van Diepenbeeck. The frontispiece of *Natures Pictures*, 1671. British Library 8407.h.12.

On March 11, in "Reprinting Margaret Cavendish," Belle Eist considers how Margaret Cavendish, though now regarded as one of the more important scientific and proto-feminist thinkers of the seventeenth century, was mostly forgotten during the long eighteenth century. The very few selections of her writing that were reprinted were characterized by distortions and dismissals that reflect the long history of forgetting and censuring female thinkers.

On March 18, Isabelle Burrows takes us through Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* in her Spotlight, "A Great Conviction: Metaphysical Solutions for Practical Issues in Harriet Martineau's 'Illustrations of Political Economy,'" which explores the relationship between the material elements of her publications and the philosophical aims of the books. By examining Martineau's textual strategies for popularizing Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus's theories of political economy, Isabelle discusses how the dual function of each *Illustration* as periodical instalment and standalone publication allowed Martineau to intervene in contemporary political debates and address existential concerns brought on by the rapid pace of industrialization in nineteenth-century Britain.

Figure 4. Anna Letitia Barbauld (née Aikin) by Sir Emery Walker, after Henry Meyer. c. 1907. National Portrait Gallery D4456.

On April 1, Michelle Levy, Kate Moffatt, and Tamanna T. think about Anna Letitia Barbauld, aptly named by her biographer William McCarthy as the "Voice of the Enlightenment," in their Spotlight, "Anna Letitia Barbauld's Writing and the Problem of Genre." This spotlight focuses on the generic diversity of Barbauld's career, engaging with how we determine and analyze genre in the WPHP, as well as acknowledging how her philosophical interventions erupt everywhere in her writing—in her poems, her writing for children, her educational theory, her literary criticism, as well as her explicitly political essays. Even her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, a liturgy she wrote for boys at her school, is a philosophical text, engaging in theories of childhood development, cognition, theology, even cosmology.

Our Spotlight Series ends on April 8 with "Ann Williams: Postmistress, Poetess, and Sericulturist." This Spotlight returns us to the obscurity of so many women philosophers, focusing on Ann Williams and her 1773, self-published, *Original poems and Imitations*, by Michelle Levy. Only recently brought to the attention of the WPHP by a tweet from John Overholt, Curator of Early Books & Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University, and with the aid of research on the volume and Williams by the bookseller, Carpe Librum, this spotlight investigates this volume of poems by the unknown "A. Williams, Post-mistress of Gravesend," as she signed herself on the dedication page. If Williams was a postmistress by day, by night she was a scientist who engaged in astronomy, botany, chemistry, entomology—indeed she died during an experiment gone horribly wrong—and, somehow, she also found time to write verse. This final spotlight reflects on the myriad written forms within which women participated in the history of thought, and the varieties of experience they contemplated.

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The Women's Print History Project

(Unidentified) Woman not Inferior to Man: "Sophia," Proto-Feminism, and the Anonymous Female Writer [Spotlight]

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(Unidentified) Woman not Inferior to Man: "Sophia," Proto-Feminism, and the Anonymous Female Writer

Angela Wachowich

Figure 1. Carle van Loo. An Allegory of Comedy, 1752. *Wikimedia Commons*.

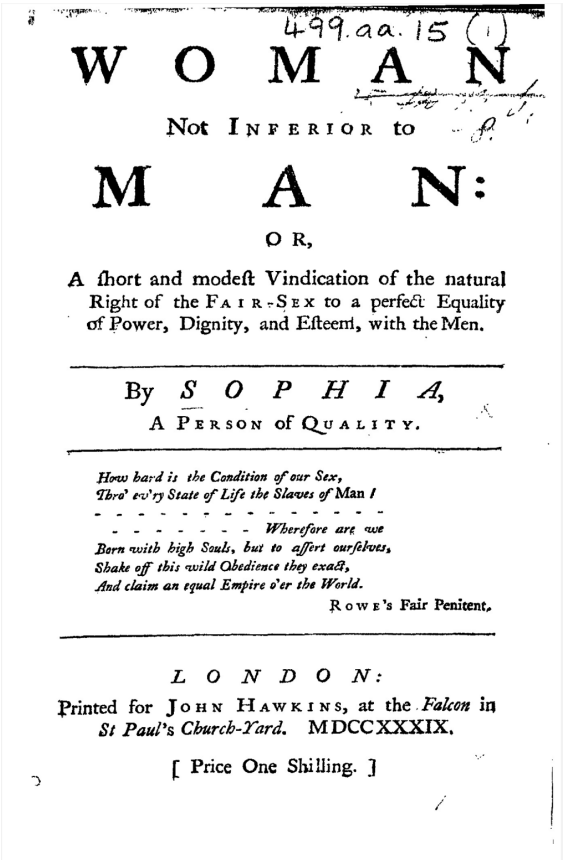
In 1739, in response to contemporary intellectual debate about the nature of women and women's rights, an anonymous woman, who identified herself as "Sophia, a Person of Quality," published a pamphlet called *Woman not Inferior to Man* in London. *Woman not Inferior* quickly drew the attention of leading intellectual women, such as Elizabeth Carter, who were left to speculate about the identity of the unidentified author (Carter 79). The year of the text's publication, an anonymous "Gentleman" delivered a rebuttal called *Man Superior to Woman* (1739), in which he antithetically asserted that Sophia and other women had no right to claim women were equal to men until they could prove women were superior to men (*Man Superior* 73–74). Sophia accepted the Gentleman's challenge and returned to the press with *Woman's Superior Excellence Over Man* (1740), writing:

> since the *Men* are so ungenerous, as to disallow us this modest pretension [equal right to dignity, power, and esteem], and the gentleman, my antagonist, is so weak as to dispute our equality with the *Men*, till we can shew a superiority over them; I think it but a justice due to my injured sex to accept of his challenge, and to prove, what is matter of fact, that *Woman-kind* are not only by nature equal, but far superior to the *Men*. (12)

Sophia critically supports her dual claims to women's equality and superiority by asserting that while born equal, eighteenth-century women developed moral superiorities to men as a result of social custom. This proto-feminist argument, influenced by Cartesian and Lockean philosophy and early modern texts such as Lucrezia Marinella's *La*

nobilità et l'eccellenza delle donne co'diffetti et mancamenti di gli uomini (1600), foreshadows our modern-day understanding of gender as a social construct (Broad, "From Nobility," 12, 8).

This Spotlight approaches Sophia's publications—*Man Superior to Woman* (1739, 1739, 1743) and *Woman's Superior Excellence Over Man* (1740, 1743)—from, first, a rhetorical and, then, a biographical perspective. In surveying the philosophical ideas that Sophia uses to support her defense of women's natural rights, this Spotlight highlights some of the rhetorical strategies employed by proto-feminist philosophers during the eighteenth-century; in examining the significance of Sophia's pseudonymous authorship, it surveys some of the ways the WPHP represents unidentified authors and considers the impact of female-gendered anonymous authorship on a work's reception.



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WOMAN

Not INFERIOR to

MAN:

OR,

A ſhort and modeſt Vindication of the natural Right of the FAIR-SEX to a perfect Equality of Power, Dignity, and Eſteem, with the Men.

By *SOPHIA*,
A PERSON of QUALITY.

How hard is the Condition of our Sex,
Thro' ev'ry State of Life the Slaves of Man!
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - *Wherefore are we*
Born with high Souls, but to aſſert ourſelves,
Shake off this wild Obedience they exact,
And claim an equal Empire o'er the World.
ROWE's Fair Penitent.

LONDON:
Printed for JOHN HAWKINS, at the *Falcon* in *St Paul's Church-Yard.* MDCCXXXIX.

[Price One Shilling.]

Figure 2. Sophia. Title page of *Woman Not Inferior to Man,* 1739. ECCO.

Proto-Feminist Rhetoric

Sophia's first work, *Woman not Inferior*, is not an entirely original work but a liberal translation of François Poulain de la Barre's *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (1673). That said, the extent to which Sophia adapted the text has often been underestimated. Since 1916, when C.A. Moore declared that Sophia was a plagiarist and an imposter (196), scholars such as Guyonne Leduc and Jacqueline Broad have stressed the importance of several salient differences between the two philosophers (Leduc qtd. in Broad, "From Nobility," 1). In addition to adding eighteenth-century quotations and

examples of accomplished women to Poulain's arguments (O'Brien, qtd. in Broad "From Nobility," 3), Sophia's diction and tone convey a more negative opinion of men than Poulain's original text. This section of the Spotlight surveys three particular philosophical arguments that Sophia uses in concert with and to embellish Poulain's original treatise, illustrating a few popular branches of eighteenth-century proto-feminist rhetoric.

Both Poulain and Sophia found their arguments upon Cartesian notions of equality, which assume a division between mind and body, allowing for each to exist independently of one another (Broad, "From Nobility," 4). Seventeenth-century feminists, such as Poulain, used Descartes' philosophy of mind "to assert their intellectual equality with men; for if, as Descartes argued, mind has no extension [in the body], then it also has no gender" (Gallagher, qtd. in Broad, "Early Modern Feminism," 72). Proto-feminists like Poulain and Sophia used Descartes' philosophy of mind to their own ends to argue that the differences between men and women's intellect must result from "outside causal factors, such as education, religion, and other environmental effects" (Broad, "Early Modern," 73, 76). Recognizing the importance of societal conditioning to women's perceived nature also allowed Poulain and Sophia to extoll the superior virtue and generosity manifest in eighteenth-century women as a social group, as exemplified by their caregiving skills (Broad, "From Nobility," 7). Attributing women's perceived strengths and weaknesses to conditioning rather than nature allowed Poulain and Sophia to illustrate the impossibility of definitively proving women's rational equality to men while they stood at an educational disadvantage (though women's virtues would suggest that their rights merited further consideration).

Figure. 3. William Hogarth. *Assembly at Wanstead House*. 1728-1731, The John Howard McFadden Collection, M1928-1-13. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The suggestion that women's rights ought to be reconsidered relied upon Descartes' method of doubt, which encouraged early modern feminists to question and test men's assumed superiority to and authority over women before accepting its truth (Perry qtd. in Broad, "Early Modern," 72). To this end, as Leduc's analyses of Sophia's 'translation' has demonstrated, Sophia diverged from Poulain in applying the diction of popular anti-tyranny discourse to her treatise (Broad, "From Nobility," 11). For example, Sophia replaced Poulain's moderate qualifications of women as "subject" to men's authority with assertions that women were "enslaved" to men's "tyranny" as a result of "lawless usurpation" (Leduc qtd. in Broad, "Nobility" 3), highlighting the "unnatural violence" and "grosser barbarities" used to maintain men's authority (Sophia, *Woman not Inferior*, 10). Sophia argued that women were better qualified for political leadership by virtue of women's caregiving skills and men's historically violent leadership. In doing so, Sophia exploited widespread acceptance of Locke's assertion that a human being cannot voluntarily consent to tyranny (Broad, "From Nobility," 11–12) and ties her proto-feminism to a larger political conversation about subjugation.

Woman not Inferior and *Woman's Superior Excellence* also make use of another popular rhetorical tactic employed by pro-women writers as early as the Renaissance—the citation of exceptional examples of women from history, or, 'women worthies.' 'Women worthies' are women who were seen as testaments to the power or intelligence of the female sex (Hicks 175), such as the Amazons, Sappho, Queen Anne, and Joan of Arc. As the century progressed, particularly in the 1770s, contemporary women like Elizabeth Carter and Hannah More were increasingly drawn into this tradition, as can be seen in Richard Samuel's *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (figure 4). The second of Sophia's works foreshadows the coming inclusion of contemporary women in the 'women worthies' tradition by adding eighteenth-century 'women worthies' such as Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Anne Finch to Poulain's examples of women with a superior aptitude for intellectual, political, and military power (Hicks 178).

That said, Sophia's rhetorical reliance upon 'women worthies' may also have contributed to her texts' short lives; by the end of the eighteenth-century, the citation of 'women worthies' had fallen out of favour in proto-feminist rhetoric. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, famously rejected the tradition, writing, "I shall not lay any great stress on the example of a few women who, from having a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 224). Wollstonecraft's political ideals represent a larger philosophical shift towards ideals of radical equality (typified by the French Revolution), in light of which, the citation of a few exceptional women no longer seemed the best way to represent the rights of the whole sex. Therefore, while the tradition of 'women worthies' persisted in historical writing, such as Mary Hays's *Female Biography*, Sophia's argumentative reliance on 'women worthies' significantly limited her treatises' afterlives.

Figure 4. Richard Samuel. *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo.* 1778, National Portrait Gallery. Left to right: Elizabeth Carter, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Angelica Kauffman, Elizabeth Linley Sheridan, Elizabeth Griffith, Charlotte Lennox, Elizabeth Montagu, Catharine Macaulay, and Hannah More.

Unidentified Woman Writer

Since their publication, Sophia's treatises *Woman not Inferior* and *Woman's Superior Excellence* have been plagued by questions of attribution. Scholars have alternately taken the author at her word in describing herself as "a Woman" (*Women's Superior* 75) of noble birth and speculated that "she" was actually a man (Daniel). Others have asserted that the author of *Women's Superior Excellence* was different than the author of *Woman not Inferior* and *Man Superior to Woman* (Daniel). Since the eighteenth-century, others have speculated that Sophia was a pseudonym used by a more well-known woman, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) or Lady Sophia Fermor (1721–1745); however, no compelling evidence supports either claim.

In seeking to capture women's contributions to print during the long eighteenth-century, the WPHP has opted to include anonymous titles putatively authored by women whose identities are unknown. For example, titles attributed to "a Lady" are assigned to "Unknown, [Woman]". More information about these authors can sometimes be found in the Signed Author field, where "a Lady" might specify she is "A Young Lady" or "A woman of fashion." Titles published under pseudonyms, like Sophia, are given their own Person Records. This means that many of the WPHP's Person Records are limited to a first name, such as Elizabeth, Sabina, and Susanna. We include unidentified anonymous and pseudonymous authors in the database although some of these authors may have misrepresented their

genders because we believe it is ultimately more important to account for the women who concealed their identities than to exclude a limited number of male authors who may have misrepresented themselves.

Though the popularity of and reasons for anonymous publication evolved over the course of the century, it is important to remember that, as Jennie Batchelor summarizes, "anonymity was the norm for eighteenth-century [novel] publication, not a deviation from it" (*Hidden Histories*). Eighty-percent of new (first edition) novels published between 1750 and 1790 were published anonymously (Raven). If an individual were to peel through the Signed Author fields of some of the eighteenth-century's most well-known texts, they would discover that even beloved authors—such as Frances Burney, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen—published anonymously at some point in their careers. Unlike these texts, however, most titles "by a Lady" will never be connected to an author.

The question then becomes—What do we gain by considering works by female-gendered anonymous and pseudonymous authors, like Sophia, women-authored texts? The author of *Woman not Inferior* and *Women's Superior Excellence* presented their treaties before the public as a woman's work. This accordingly shaped the texts' readership. By specifying that she was "a Person of Quality," Sophia's work recommended itself to educated women of a certain status. The assigned gender and class also positioned the author in relation to a growing social movement—proto-feminism—led by white women of the upper-middle classes. The adaptations Sophia made to Poulain are consequently read in relation to the ideas of other British proto-feminist women writers, like Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft. In this sense, the assigned gender and class determined the context by which both contemporary and modern readers read and study Sophia's texts. Unlike Astell and Wollstonecraft, however, Sophia's work cannot be understood in relation to their creator's life. Anonymous and pseudonymous texts like *Woman not Inferior* challenge feminist literary scholars to extend the work of identifying and recovering texts by subversive women writers to the work of recovering and appreciating the gendered history of texts with unidentified authors.

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Sophia (person, author)
Woman not Inferior to Man (title, first edition)
Carter, Elizabeth (person, author)
Woman's Superior Excellence over Man (title, first edition)
More, Hannah (person, author)
Rowe, Elizabeth Singer (person, author)
Finch, Anne (person, author)
Wollstonecraft, Mary (person, author)
A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (title)
Hays, Mary (person, author)
Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries. Alphabetically Arranged (title)

Barbauld, Anna Laetitia (person, author)
Griffith, Elizabeth (person, author)
Lennox, Charlotte (person, author)
Montagu, Elizabeth (person, author)
Macaulay, Catharine (person, author)
Montagu, Mary Wortley (person, author)
Unknown, [Woman] (person, author)
Elizabeth (person, author)
Sabina (person, author)
Susanna (person, author)
Burney, Frances (person, author)
Shelley, Mary (person, author)
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Sophia, Person of Quality. *Woman not inferior to man*. John Hawkins, 1739.

Sophia, Person of Quality. *Woman's superior excellence over man*. John Hawkins, 1740.

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The Women's Print History Project

Reprinting Margaret Cavendish [Spotlight]

Authored by Isabella (Belle) Eist
Edited by Michelle Levy and Kandice Sharren

Project Director: Michelle Levy (Simon Fraser University)

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Reprinting Margaret Cavendish

Isabella (Belle) Eist

Figure 1. Pieter van Schuppen after Diepenbeeck. Portrait of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. 1800, *Wikimedia Commons.*

As a woman writer who repudiated the gendered expectation for authorial anonymity, Margaret Cavendish [née Lucas], Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673), faced criticism and social sanction for publishing without a pseudonym and for writing on natural philosophy, politics, and society, topics considered improper for women to address during and after her lifetime. In response to "malicious" allegations that Cavendish—as a woman who received a gendered and informal education—could not have theorized philosophy, medicine, and astronomy as deftly as she had in her early publications, her husband William Cavendish announced: "here's the crime, a Lady writes them, and to intrench so much upon the male prerogative, is not to be forgiven" (*The philosophical and physical opinions written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle* iii). Cavendish spent her adult life crafting an impressive corpus and archival legacy centered around the literary "male prerogative." Her disregard for the mores of a patriarchal society and print industry that chiefly amplified the voices of privileged men likely influenced the neglect and censorship her important contributions to scientific and proto-feminist discourse received after her death. Despite her husband's defence, the negative perception of Cavendish carried from her coeval critics into the twentieth century, leading Virginia Woolf to describe her as a "giant cucumber [that] had spread itself over all the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death," because the "crazy Duchess became a bogey to frighten clever girls with" (*A Room*

of One's Own 73). During the entire period the WPHP covers, the long eighteenth century (1700–1836), the posthumous publication of Cavendish's writing is limited to only six titles that feature her excerpts. Cavendish's first two publications, *Poems, and Fancies written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle and Philosophicall Fancies. Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Newcastle*, were privately printed in 1653. Both of these works reveal the depth of Cavendish's interest in natural philosophy and lay the groundwork for her later works, such as *The Blazing World* (1666), which is now regarded as one of the earliest examples of the proto-science fiction novel. These texts are primarily philosophical and moral, as she considers the nature of atoms and matter, the ethos of people and animals, and the intersection of reason, fate, and religion. Over the next twenty years of her life, Cavendish published eleven additional original works, which she continually revised in heavily altered subsequent editions. Despite the exile and financial instability she experienced after her marriage to William Cavendish, a fellow Royalist and general of Charles I, her precarious position did not free her from the social expectation for the lives and productions of upper-class women to remain private and rooted in the domestic sphere ("Margaret Cavendish" 1). Cavendish was known for being "naturally bashful" and quiet during her time in Queen Henrietta Maria's court, but her shy nature did not extend to her literary ambitions (*A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish* 21). She remained undiscouraged by the censure of others and continued to write on topics that had been long hegemonized by male writers and patriarchal convention. Cavendish's decision to publish under her name was particularly scandalous; in "Print and Perception," Tamara Tubb situates Cavendish's desire to promulgate her privately-published works as an indecent "act of physical exposure," unbecoming to her status as an aristocratic woman. Though Cavendish was critiqued for her unconventional writing style, supposed vanity, and focus on philosophy, Tubb notes that she can be viewed as "one of the first literary celebrities" in England. Because eccentricity is a quality commonly associated with Cavendish's literary persona, her short-lived popularity was likely built around the unusual role she occupied, rather than for her talents.

Though Cavendish published a variety of works across different genres and forms, and inevitably grew into her talents as an author over two decades of writing, it is from her first work, *Poems, and Fancies*, that the majority of her republished excerpts were taken during the long eighteenth century. *Poems, and Fancies*, and Cavendish herself, garnered a mixture of reproach and admiration from her exclusively male republishers. Ongoing criticism can be witnessed in the equivocal commentary of her early nineteenth-century editor, Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges, who compiled and edited two publications of her works as an "early and brief exhibition" of the private press he partnered with and reluctantly funded (*Select Poems* i). Recognizing that all the publications of Cavendish's writing in the WPHP feature a selection based upon the whims of the compiler, modern readers are reminded that republishing only a small portion of an author's work can distort its meaning and challenge an author's agency over their writing. Tubb highlights that Cavendish manipulated the prefatory and paratextual material in her publications (such as her specifically commissioned frontispieces) to define herself as a new type of author and "locat[e] her personal authority within her texts." Tubb argues that Cavendish's prefaces were crafted to reassert her authorial agency and power over her writing, and went beyond simply introducing herself and her work. Following her death, the fragmentary publication of Cavendish's writing in short excerpts, without these paratextual materials, undercut her influence over

her work and hindered her efforts to destigmatize female authorship. Indeed, it is only now that a complete, critical edition of Cavendish's writing is in preparation (*The Complete Works of Margaret Cavendish*).

Republishing and Refashioning Cavendish

We now recognize Cavendish as an illustrious literary and philosophical figure, but it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that her writing began to receive scholarly attention and unabridged republication. Four of Cavendish's six titles in the WPHP (including three editions of one anthology) contain short excerpts of Cavendish's work, included among the works of other authors, while the remaining two publications feature Cavendish alone, and subject to the commentary of a belittling editor.

Role	Title	Date
Author	Poems by Eminent Ladies; Particularly Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Behn, Miss Carter, Lady Chudleigh, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Killigrew, Mrs. Leapor, Mrs. Madan, Mrs. Masters, Lady M.W. Montague, Mrs. Monk, Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs. C. Philips, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Rowe, Lady Winchelsea.	1755
Author	Poems on Several Subjects, Both Comical and Serious. In Two Parts. By Alexander Nicol, Schoolmaster. To Which Are Added, The Experienced Gentleman, and The She Anchoret; Written in Cromwell's Time, by the then Duchess of Newcastle.	1766
Author	Poems by the most eminent ladies of Great-Britain and Ireland. Particularly, Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Behn, Miss Carter, Lady Chudleigh, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Killigrew, Mrs. Leapor, Mrs. Madan, Mrs. Masters, Lady M. W. Montague, Mrs. Monk, Dutchess of Newcastle, Mrs. K. Philips, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Rowe, Lady Winchelsea. Selected, with an account of the writers, by G. Colman and B. Thornton, Esqrs. A new edition.	1773
Author	Poems by Eminent Ladies; Particularly Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Behn, Miss Carter, Lady Chudleigh, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Killigrew, Mrs. Leapor, Mrs. Madan, Mrs. Masters, Lady M.W. Montague, Mrs. Monk, Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs. C. Philips, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Rowe, Lady Winchelsea.	1780
Author	Select Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Edited by Sir Egerton Brydges, K.J.	1813
Author	A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Written by Herself. With a Critical Preface, &c. By Sir Egerton Brydges, M.P.	1814

Figure 2. A table of Margaret Cavendish's six titles in the WPHP.

Poems by Eminent Ladies (1755, 1773, and 1780), an anthology of women poets from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, features seven of Cavendish's poems from *Poems, and Fancies*. In comparison to other included authors, such as Aphra Behn, Mary Leapor, and Laetitia Pilkington, Cavendish's section of featured poetry is minimal. Within this anthology, the titles of some of Cavendish's included poems have been changed (for example, Cavendish's "A Dialogue Between Melancholy and Mirth" becomes "Mirth and Melancholy") and in the case of the poem "Wit," the editors appended part of a different poem to the last stanza of Cavendish's originally titled "The Mine of Wit," without separation or note. By shortening "The Mine of Wit," the editors omit Cavendish's discussion of the qualities of metals, continuing the posthumous exclusion of her philosophical writing. In their preface, the editors of the 1773 edition, G. Colman and B. Thornton, defend their selection, stating, "it was...thought better to omit those pieces, which too plainly betrayed the want of learning, than to insert them merely to disgrace [the author's other poetry]," but do not admit to altering the works of their compiled writers (iv). Though the editors include Cavendish in their list of "Eminent Ladies," the nominal focus on her work, their description of her verse as "uncommon" and in need of

cultivation, and their concealed modification of her poetry suggest they were not fully exempt from the critical eighteenth century view of Cavendish (198).

Samuel Egerton Brydges was the editor of the only two publications of Cavendish's work that focus solely on her: *Select Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Edited by Sir Egerton Brydges, K.J. (1813) and A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Written by Herself. With a Critical Preface, &c. By Sir Egerton Brydges, M.P.* (1814). In the prefatory material to *Select Poems*, Brydges admits these titles were published "partly by accident" and critiques Cavendish's poetic diction, style, and overall intelligence (i). *Select Poems*—which Brydges calls "an early and brief exhibition of the productions of a private press [The Press of Lee Priory], which may hereafter, I trust, bring forth far more *important works*" (emphasis added)—is a compilation of Cavendish's poetry taken primarily from *Poems, and Fancies*, with small selections pulled from *Poems, or, Several fancies in verse with the Animal parliament in prose* (1668), and from "The Convent of Pleasure" [published in *Plays, Never Before Printed* (1668)] (i). In particular, Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies* and her play, "The Convent of Pleasure," highlight her philosophical and proto-feminist perspectives; however, Brydges's compilation excludes Cavendish's overtly philosophical poetry and features her less emblematic poems on emotion and nature, presenting her as a more romantic, and less radical, author.

Liza Blake's digital critical edition of Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies* (which compiles the 1653, 1664, and 1668 editions into a free and accessible resource) confronts the historic misrepresentation of Cavendish's first publication. Blake echoes Tamara Tubb's focus on the importance of context to reading Cavendish's work. She notes that *Poems, and Fancies* possesses an interconnected structure, featuring multiple "Clasp" sections meant to guide the reader to and between sections, and that Cavendish "did not write individual poems to be read in isolation" ["Reading Poems (and Fancies)"]. The long eighteenth century publications of Cavendish's poetry as fragments, unmoored from their surrounding text, suppressed her writing on subjects dominated by male authors, such as natural and moral philosophy. *Poems by Eminent Ladies* and Brydges's *Select Poems* misrepresent Cavendish as they assert that their small, disordered selections from *Poems, and Fancies* act as a sufficient blueprint of Cavendish's poetic corpus.

Samuel Egerton Brydges and the Press of Lee Priory

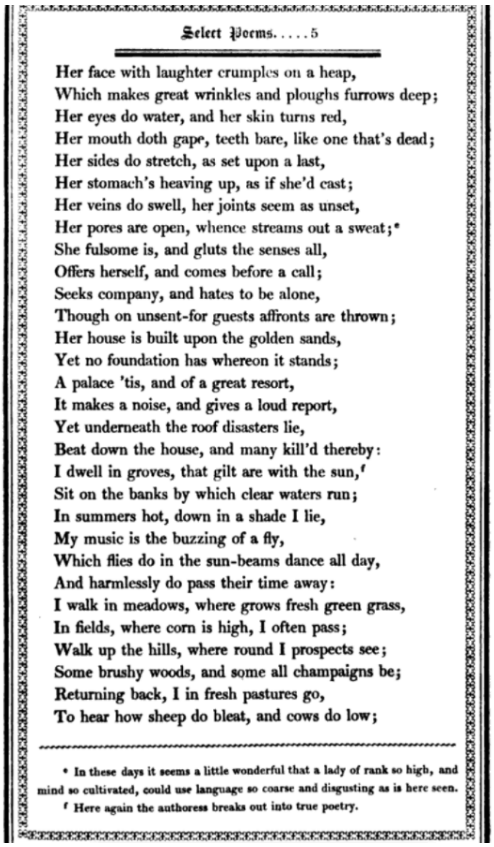
As the only contributor and firm to publish a volume of Cavendish's work (without any other included authors) between 1700 and 1836, Samuel Egerton Brydges and the Private Press of Lee Priory merit further investigation. Brydges, an author and editor who lived at the Lee Priory estate with his son, is an interesting historical and literary figure (Goodsall, "Lee Priory and the Brydges Circle"). In the "Advertisement" for *Select Poems*, Brydges claims to be a descendant of William Cavendish and his first wife, Elizabeth Basset (ii). Brydges writes, "The Editor of these Poems is proud to record his descent" from the great-granddaughter of the Duke of Cavendish, Lady Elizabeth Egerton (ii). Brydges provides no clear motive for adopting Cavendish's poetry as the first and third publications of the Press of Lee Priory; his supposed genealogical connection to the Duke may be the most plausible reason. However, Brydges does not supplement his claim of relation with any proof. Robert H. Goodsall, author of "Lee Priory and the Brydges

Circle," writes of a controversial case brought to the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords by Brydges in 1789, which makes his claim to the Newcastle line appear increasingly questionable. Brydges declared himself a descendent of John Brydges, the Baron of Chandos, but had little proof to reinforce his claim to the House of Lords (Goodsall 6). In 1803, after fourteen years of petitioning for the right to the Chandos barony, it was ruled that Brydges was "descended from an obscure yeoman family of Harbledown, near Canterbury, of the name of Bridges," and had no relation to the late Baron (Goodsall 6). It was also proposed that Brydges falsified documents presented in the case, but he faced no charges for this offense. The historical context of Brydges's potential forgery and unsubstantiated claims to the Chandos barony divests credibility from his purported connection to William Cavendish, though there is not enough evidence against his claim to disprove it entirely.

Figure 3. John Dixon. Lee Priory, Kent. 1785, *Wikimedia Commons.*

The Private Press of Lee Priory operated out of the Brydges family estate between 1813 and 1822 (Goodsall 3). Run by John Johnson and John Warwick, "a compositor and a press man" respectively, the firm was plagued by ongoing deficits and financial issues (Goodsall 3). As their primary financier and editor, Brydges was intimately involved with each stage of the firm's productions. In his 1834 autobiography, Brydges describes the early publications of the Press of Lee Priory, including *Select Poems* and *A True Relation*, as "rare tracts" he believed to be "of some use to our old English Literature" (*The Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges* 192). The motive behind Brydges's choice to edit and twice republish Cavendish remains otherwise unspecified in his biography, but as a fellow author who privately printed his work for purposes beyond profit, connections can be drawn between Brydges and Cavendish.

The "Noble Critic" and the "[Un]true" Poet



Select Poems. 5

Her face with laughter crumples on a heap,
Which makes great wrinkles and ploughs furrows deep;
Her eyes do water, and her skin turns red,
Her mouth doth gape, teeth bare, like one that's dead;
Her sides do stretch, as set upon a last,
Her stomach's heaving up, as if she'd cast;
Her veins do swell, her joints seem as unset,
Her pores are open, whence streams out a sweat;*
She fulsome is, and gluts the senses all,
Offers herself, and comes before a call;
Seeks company, and hates to be alone,
Though on unsent-for guests affronts are thrown;
Her house is built upon the golden sands,
Yet no foundation has whereon it stands;
A palace 'tis, and of a great resort,
It makes a noise, and gives a loud report,
Yet underneath the roof disasters lie,
Beat down the house, and many kill'd thereby:
I dwell in groves, that gilt are with the sun,†
Sit on the banks by which clear waters run;
In summers hot, down in a shade I lie,
My music is the buzzing of a fly,
Which flies do in the sun-beams dance all day,
And harmlessly do pass their time away:
I walk in meadows, where grows fresh green grass,
In fields, where corn is high, I often pass;
Walk up the hills, where round I prospects see;
Some brushy woods, and some all champaigns be;
Returning back, I in fresh pastures go,
To hear how sheep do bleat, and cows do low;

* In these days it seems a little wonderful that a lady of rank so high, and mind so cultivated, could use language so coarse and disgusting as is here seen.
† Here again the authoress breaks out into true poetry.

Figure 4. An example of Brydges critical footnotes in "A Dialogue Between Melancholy and Mirth." Margaret Cavendish, edited by Egerton Brydges. 1813, *Google Books*, p. 5.

Brydges's critique of Cavendish's writing is ubiquitous and often contradictory throughout the paratexts of his publications, as found in the advertisements, prefaces, and footnotes of *Select Poems* and *A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish*. In figure 4, Brydges takes issue with Cavendish's "disgusting" language in and around the line, "Her pores are open, whence streams out a sweat" (*Select Poems* 5). His distaste for her verses on perspiration contrasts with his enjoyment of her lines on nature, a more conventional poetic subject that Brydges appeared to consider feminine and appropriate for Cavendish. Other complaints, such as "[Cavendish's] taste appears to have been not only uncultivated, but perhaps originally defective," and his admission that he was "frequently shocked by expressions and images of extraordinary coarseness; and more extraordinary as flowing from a female of high rank," suggest Brydges's conception of good writing lay in an author's ability to conform to the demand for "fine words," something that Cavendish vehemently decries in "Wherein Poetry Chiefly Consists" (ii, 13). As Brydges disparages her use of "prosaic and inelegant" language and suggests that only a minority of her work can be given the title of "true poetry," he fails to recognize that Cavendish sought to disrupt the assumed connection between "fine" language and true wit: for as she writes, "Words are but shadows, substance they have none" and it is "Fancy the form is, flesh [and] blood" (2, 5, "Wherein Poetry Chiefly Consists" 13). In both publications of her work, Brydges does not sincerely compliment Cavendish for her skills as a writer without offering a related complaint. Conversely, he is quick to praise Cavendish for the gendered role she fulfilled as "the faithful and endearing companion of all that virtuous nobleman's [William Cavendish's] subsequent troubles and exile," and acknowledges the feminine domestic "charm" of her biographical writing (*Select Poems* i; *A True Relation* 3).

Brydges viewed himself as a "noble critic," and advised his readers that "we must not compare [Cavendish's] compositions with the more refined exactness of later times" (*A True Relation* 1, 9). By including his negative assessments in his analysis of Cavendish's style, and republishing only a small and early selection of her formidable body of work, Brydges destabilized his own attempts at editorial nobility. Cavendish's legacy in the long eighteenth century is represented by her six instances of excerpt-based republication, all of which omit her focus on philosophy, her subversion of gender norms, and her authorial persona, which she crafted for her readers in her prefaces and "Clasps." As contemporary scholarship continues to reclaim Margaret Cavendish and honor her contributions to early modern science and literature, current scholars take Brydges's advice, advice that he unevenly applied to himself: that Cavendish's work must be understood in its historical and social contexts, and not judged by the supposedly "refined" standards of later centuries.

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Thornton, Bonnell (person, editor)
Behn, Aphra (person, author)
Leapor, Mary (person, author)
Pilkington, Laetitia (person, author)
Select Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Edited by Sir Egerton Brydges, K.J. (title)
A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Written by Herself. With a Critical Preface, &c. By Sir Egerton Brydges, M.P. (title)
Poems by Eminent Ladies; Particularly Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Behn, Miss Carter, Lady Chudleigh, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Killigrew, Mrs. Leapor, Mrs. Madan, Mrs. Masters, Lady M.W. Montague, Mrs. Monk, Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs. C. Philips, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Rowe, Lady Winchelsea. (title, 1755 edition)
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Poems by Eminent Ladies; Particularly Mrs. Barber, Mrs. Behn, Miss Carter, Lady Chudleigh, Mrs. Cockburn, Mrs. Grierson, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Killigrew, Mrs. Leapor, Mrs. Madan, Mrs. Masters, Lady M.W. Montague, Mrs. Monk, Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs. C. Philips, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Rowe, Lady Winchelsea. (title, 1780 edition)

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The Women's Print History Project

A Great Conviction: Harriet Martineau's Metaphysical Solutions for Practical Issues [Spotlight]

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Edited by Michelle Levy and Kandice Sharren

Project Director: Michelle Levy (Simon Fraser University)

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A Great Conviction: Harriet Martineau's Metaphysical Solutions for Practical Issues

Isabelle Burrows

This post is part of our Women & Philosophy Spotlight Series, which will run through March 2022. Spotlights in this series focus on women philosophers in the database.

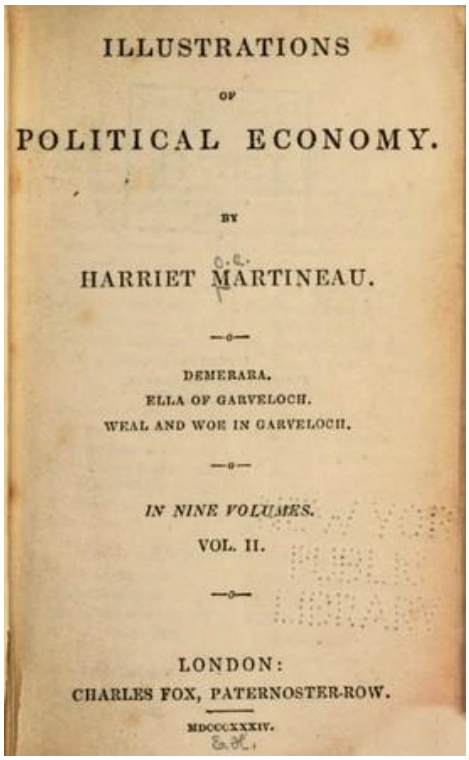

ILLUSTRATIONS
OF
POLITICAL ECONOMY.
BY
HARRIET MARTINEAU.
DEMERARA.
ELLA OF GARVELOCH.
WEAL AND WOE IN GARVELOCH.
IN NINE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.
LONDON:
CHARLES FOX, PATERNOSTER-ROW.
MDCCCXXXIV.

Figure 1. Title page of a nine-volume edition of Illustrations of Political Economy. *HathiTrust Digital Library.*

Of the ninety-four titles currently listed under Harriet Martineau's name in the WPHP, over fifty seem to be variations on the same title: *Illustrations of Political Economy*. When I first began creating metadata for Martineau's titles, I was confounded by the almost interminable list of *Illustrations*, which seemed to defy categorization by genre or print type. The WPHP data model is designed for stand-alone publications and for re-prints which are categorized as new editions, but we avoid periodicals, which tend to fall outside these parameters. Because of their monthly release, originally between 1832 and 1834, the *Illustrations* might be considered periodicals; however, each illustration is a self-contained fictional narrative, which makes them more like the discrete publications which our data model does include. Compounding the confusion were the multiple reprints of the *Illustrations*, which sometimes appeared in reissues alone and sometimes in nine-volume compilations composed of remaindered editions. This meant publications which might look like new editions were in fact collections of previously published material bound in a

new format. To explain the dual nature of the *Illustrations* as a hybrid of periodical and book, I will examine the dual purpose the *Illustrations* served as responses to current events in politics and economics, and as philosophical texts attempting to address wider and more lasting anxieties brought on by the rapid pace of industrialization in nineteenth-century Britain.

Martineau described the creation of the *Illustrations* as "The strongest act of will that I ever committed myself to" (*Autobiography* 138) and while the gruelling pace at which she produced them did require great endurance, she was no stranger to such labours. Even in childhood Martineau was obsessed by metaphysical quandaries, and highly motivated to develop precision in her intellectual practice, despite the fact that "it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously" (99). She studied languages and translation, the classics, and, most significantly for her later career, the treatises of Unitarian and Liberal theorists, which her brother James shared with her as he learned about them at college (105). Long before she made her 1823 print debut in the Unitarian periodical *The Monthly Repository*, Martineau's opinions were being informed by thinkers like the Unitarian pioneer Joseph Priestley. His theory of Necessity became for Martineau the "great conviction which henceforth gave to my life what is has had of steadiness, consistency, and progressiveness" (104).

Figure 2. Richard Evans, *Harriet Martineau*, 1834. © National Portrait Gallery.

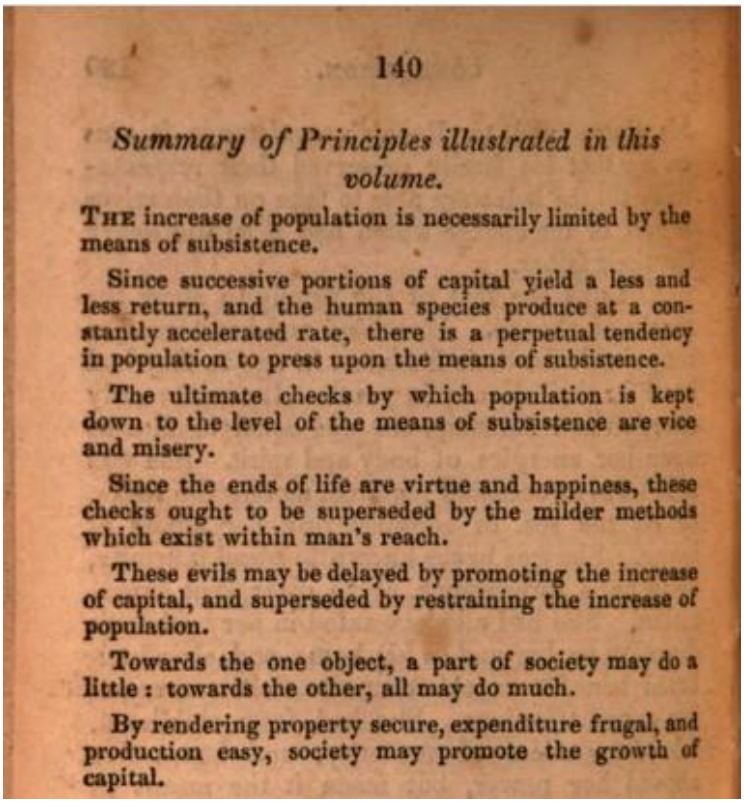
At its most basic, Necessarianism was a theory which identified God as the instigator of all action in the universe. According to Thomas Hobbes, a great influence on Priestley, "every desire, and inclination, proceedeth from some cause . . . in a continuall chaine . . . whose first link in the hand of God (*Leviathan* II: 148). Since all causes will have an effect, and since God is the original "cause" of creation, "no event could have been otherwise than it has been, is, or is to be...all things past present and to come, are precisely that the author of nature really intended them to be, and has made provision for" (Priestley 462). People have the liberty to think what they will, to choose to move their limbs, but

since all actions, and all volitions of the mind, originate from the same chain of cause and effect which God first put in motion, human beings are ultimately doing what God intended for them to do. Like many thinkers of the nineteenth century, both Priestley and his disciple sought to solve practical issues with their metaphysical theories. Martineau saw the tenets of Necessarianism as explanatory of the conditions in which the working class lived. She suggests that Necessarianism is a solution to problems besetting the working class because it will bring them the comforting assurance that, if they understand that "no action fails to produce effects, and no effort can be lost," workers can be assured of a product for their labours, and so "true Necessarians must be the most diligent and confident of all workers" (107). Free will, on the other hand, "leaves but scanty encouragement to exertion of any sort" (107). On a more practical level, Necessarianism was a gateway to a laissez-faire approach to the market and a hands-off strategy for aiding the working class: if God, when knocking down the first domino in the chain of a person's existence, set them crashing onto a course of penury and a lifetime of labour, then that was a perfectly acceptable, divinely-sanctioned outcome. The poor, like all other human beings, had the liberty to choose to take action and attempt to improve their situation, but if their actions did not effect a positive change, that indicated poverty was God's intended outcome for them. As Elaine Freedgood articulates it, Martineau's viewpoint positioned economic principles "as counterparts of the natural, immutable, and inevitable laws of the physical sciences, and...of God as their metaphysical author" (1).

Figure 3. William Hogarth. *Industry and Idleness:* "The Fellow 'Prentices at their Looms." 1794-1812, © The Trustees of the British Museum

The practical form which Martineau's metaphysical beliefs took was political economics, a set of theories which Martineau first encountered under that name in Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy*. Marcet's work explained the tenets of an economic theory based on works by the likes of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, who (to oversimplify a complex theory) were concerned with the finite nature of resources in Britain, and the limitations those finite resources placed on the capitalist's ability to finance labour and production. The political economists' solution to what they perceived as the inevitability of scarce resources, was to push the working classes into labour whenever possible, and to limit the working class's consumption of resources by controlling the numbers of their population. Marcet and Martineau presented these ideas in a pseudo-humanitarian guise, characterizing ideas which put the

burden of responsibility for their unfortunate situation on the poor themselves as charitable self-improvement solutions. Marcet presents her aim of pushing the working classes into productive labour as "excit[ing] greater attention in the lower classes to their future interests" (167), while limiting the reproduction of the working classes is a helpful measure to aid in "averting or at least alleviating the misery resulting from an excess of population" (161). Along with her socioeconomic opinions, Martineau also learned from Marcet the style of introducing the technical systems of political economy to a wider audience through simple literary forms. Marcet's example inspired Martineau to explain her principles "not by being smothered up in a story, but by being exhibited in their natural workings in selected passages of social life" (*Autobiography* 124).



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Summary of Principles illustrated in this volume.

THE increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence.

Since successive portions of capital yield a less and less return, and the human species produce at a constantly accelerated rate, there is a perpetual tendency in population to press upon the means of subsistence.

The ultimate checks by which population is kept down to the level of the means of subsistence are vice and misery.

Since the ends of life are virtue and happiness, these checks ought to be superseded by the milder methods which exist within man's reach.

These evils may be delayed by promoting the increase of capital, and superseded by restraining the increase of population.

Towards the one object, a part of society may do a little: towards the other, all may do much.

By rendering property secure, expenditure frugal, and production easy, society may promote the growth of capital.

Figure 4. The principles illustrated in *Weal and Woe in Garveloch*, illustration VI. *HathiTrust Digital Library*.

The years leading up to the publication of the *Illustrations* were plagued by turmoil, both in Martineau's career, and in England's social, political, and economic affairs. The need for guiding metaphysical philosophies like Necessarianism and practical theories like political economics became more and more clear to Martineau as she witnessed a raging cholera epidemic, "regarded with as much horror as a plague of the middle ages" (*Autobiography* 139), while the Reform Act and the Corn Laws wreaked havoc on individual lives and the traditional structures of English socioeconomic hierarchy. The news was fraught with accounts of protests for "annual Parliaments, universal suffrage, repeal of the corn laws, abolition of tithes, equitable adjustment of contracts," and apprehension among the upper classes that "this feeling [of discontentment] is rapidly spreading amongst the working people" (April 1827, *London Times* 2). Martineau, observing such widespread difficulties, was finally prompted by a bout of machine-breaking in

1827 to publicly address current events in her writing. The short stories *Principle and Practice* and *The Rioters* served as prototypes for both the narrative form and the timely discussion of contemporary affairs which would later become central to the Illustrations' eventual success. Although multiple publishers rejected her proposals for the printing of the *Illustrations*, Martineau eventually found her salvation in the forms of Charles Fox and William Johnson Fox, the publisher and editor, respectively, of the same monthly magazine in which Martineau had seen her print debut as a teenager. Despite the Foxes' resistance to the proposed format of the *Illustrations*, and their doubt as to the financial viability of the enterprise, Martineau's belief in her principles and in the necessity of the *Illustrations* didn't waver. She continued to insist that "the people want this book, and they shall have it" (144). Well, have it, the people did. Funded by the subscriptions the Foxes insisted on, along with some capital provided by her cousin David, Martineau at last got to distributing the prospectus of the *Illustrations* to its intended audience: "almost every member of both Houses of Parliament" (147). Her boldness in addressing such powerful men directly paid off, as did her conviction that the *Illustrations* would be a success. Upon the publication of the *Illustrations*,

> The entire periodical press, daily, weekly, and, as soon as possible, monthly, came out in my favour ...Members of Parliament sent down blue books through the post-office, to the astonishment of the postmaster...Half the hobbies of the House of Commons, and numberless notions of individuals, anonymous and others, were commended to me for treatment in my series. (150)

Martineau effectively addressed issues as they arose, spoke publicly about them when they were fresh in the minds of her audience, and joined the discussions in the periodical press, which was frequently weaponized by politicians seeking to promote, question, or condemn new bills of legislation. Her alliance with contemporary politicians during the initial stages of *Illustrations*' publication would only grow in strength. The demand for *Illustrations* grew with every new Act and controversy, as opponents and supporters of such events clamoured to have Martineau address their concerns in her work. Martineau became even more certain that her initial faith in her *Illustrations* was justified:

> My publisher wrote...that the London booksellers need not have been afraid of the Reform Bill, any more than the Cholera, for that during this crisis, he had sold more of my books than ever. Every thing indeed justified my determination not to defer a work which was the more wanted the more critical became the affairs of the nation." (174)

Her publisher was correct in his assessment. Addressing current events and issues was key to Martineau's success as an author and to her growing prominence as a public figure. *Sowers not Reapers* was the "Anti-Corn Law tale" (*Autobiography* 193), while *The Loom and the Lugger* was a discussion of free trade (192), but the instance which best documents the connections between public presence, political influence, and the unique publication scheme of the *Illustrations* is the commission and publication of *Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated*, a miniseries in the *Illustrations of Political Economy*. When Lord Brougham wanted to promote the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, he called on Martineau to write a short propaganda series in favour of the act. The Amendment's intent, to "produce rather negative than positive effects...to remove the debasing influences to which a large portion of the labouring population

is now subject" (*Reports from the Commissioners for the Poor Law*, 205) (that is, to remove obstacles to the poor helping themselves, rather than providing material assistance) was precisely in line with Martineau's own approach to solving the problems caused by poverty. Although The Poor Law Amendment Act, and Martineau's series about it, were badly received as heartless and brutal, the entire episode is proof of Martineau's success as a critic of contemporary affairs. Commissioned by a contemporary politician and inspiring controversy through her periodical writings, which then prompted response from politicians writing for other periodical works like the *Times*, the *Quarterly Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review*, Martineau had achieved her goal of making political economics known to the public, and of supporting real political change, whether that change was for good or ill.

WPHP Records Referenced

Harriet Martineau (person, author)
Illustrations of Political Economy (title)
Joseph Priestley (person, author)
Jane Marcet (person, author)
Conversations on Political Economy (title)
Principle and Practice (title)
The Rioters (title)
Charles Fox (firm)
Sowers not Reapers (title)
The Loom and the Lugger Part I (title)
Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated: The Parish (title)

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The Women's Print History Project

Anna Laetitia Barbauld's Writing and the Problem of Genre [Spotlight]

Authored by Kate Moffatt, Michelle Levy, and Tamanna (Tammy) T.
Edited by Kandice Sharren

Project Director: Michelle Levy (Simon Fraser University)

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PDF Edited: 3 July 2023

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Anna Laetitia Barbauld's Writing and the Problem of Genre

Kate Moffatt, Michelle Levy, and Tamanna (Tammy) T.

Figure 1. Barbauld in Richard Samuel's "Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo" (top row, second from the left), oil on canvas, 1778. National Portrait Gallery.

Anna Letitia Aikin Barbauld's first publication, *Essays on Song-Writing*, co-authored with her brother John Aikin, appeared in 1772. Her last publication in the WPHP is the twenty-eighth edition of *Hymns in Prose*, published in 1836, eleven years after her death. Many of Barbauld's works continued to be reprinted throughout the nineteenth century, but we record title data only up until 1836. During the fifty-three lifetime years of her career in print, and the eleven posthumous years recorded in the WPHP, Barbauld's writing appeared in 44 first editions of titles, and we record an additional 123 in reprints, for a total of 167 separate title records (these figures include a few of her American titles, which we are in the process of adding). This spotlight surveys her career in print in the UK during 1772 to 1836 with a few aims in mind. We use this spotlight as an opportunity to discuss the generic breadth of Barbauld's writing, thus elucidating her position as an influential thinker in a wide variety of domains. We also use this spotlight as an opportunity to think through the genre categories in the WPHP, and in particular how it is one of the most interpretive and therefore trickiest of our data fields. By examining how we designate genre in our data model and the complications embedded in this process, we address the challenges of capturing, in data, the capaciousness and complexity of Barbauld's (and many other women's) careers. Further, we use this spotlight as an attempt to document the prevalence and significance of reprinting to her career and legacy. The interplay of genre and reprinting—that is,

what genres get reprinted the most, and why—is also a key question we seek to address. In asking these questions about Barbauld's career in print, we hope to elucidate the many kinds of writing within which philosophical thinking is found, from writing for children to poetry, from literary criticism to the more traditional essays in which we might expect to find philosophical discourse.

Barbauld's titles have 15 different WPHP genres attached to them, as follows:

1. Juvenile Literature
2. Religion/Biblical
3. Education
4. Poetry
5. Political Writing
6. Essays
7. Poetry Collection
8. Fiction
9. Music
10. Literary Criticism
11. Fiction Novel
12. Works
13. Memoirs
14. Annual Periodicals
15. Letters

We can see how these genres appear in a preview of a new timeline visualization feature that is coming soon to the WPHP. This timeline helps us to present the myriad data we have in our person and title records, connecting a person's birth and death dates with the year and genre of their publications.

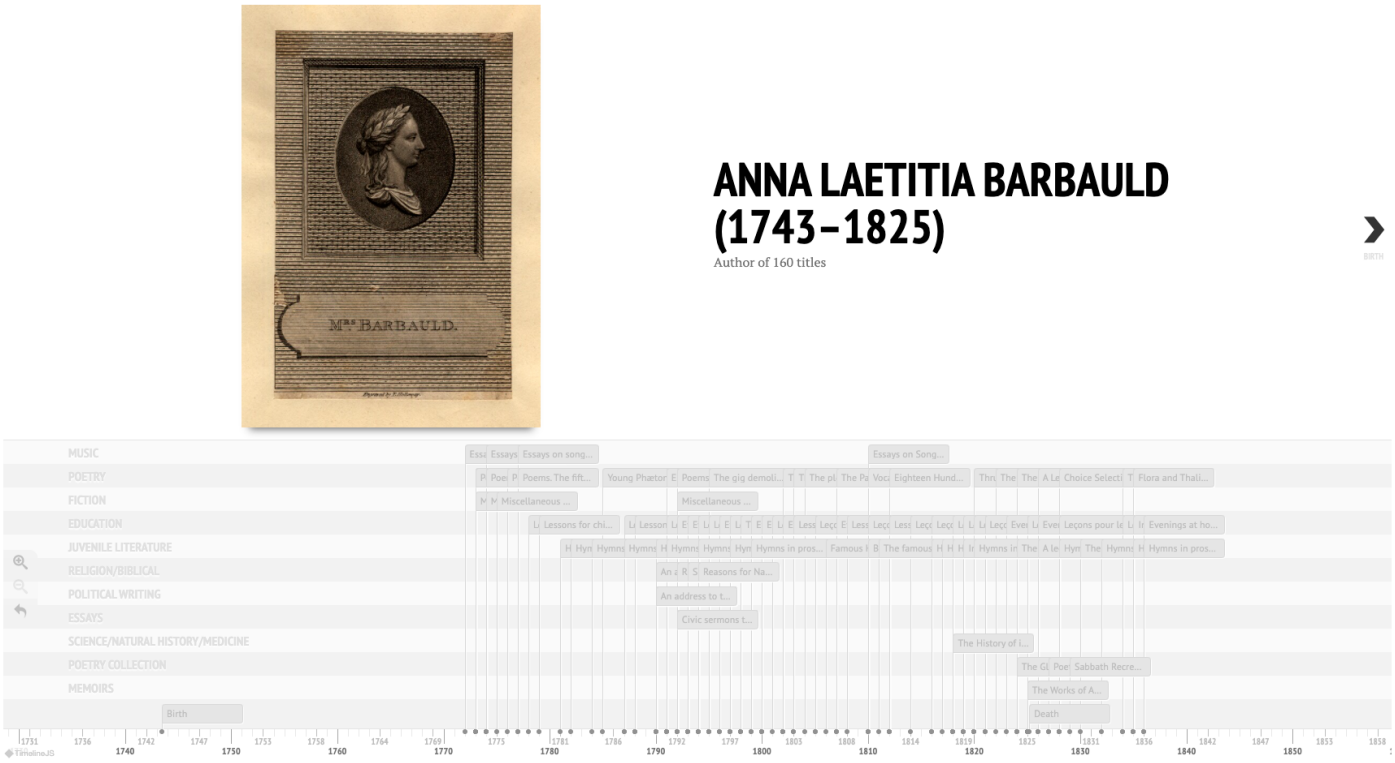


Figure 2. WPHP timeline prototype for Anna Letitia Barbauld, showing the entirety of her career, early March 2022.

This single genre categorization allows us to see the diversity of Barbauld's career. But it also reflects a simplification, arguably an oversimplification, as most of her titles are not easily confined to a single genre. Indeed, in a review of the WPHP, published in *SHARP News* last year, Leah Orr raised this issue for us directly:

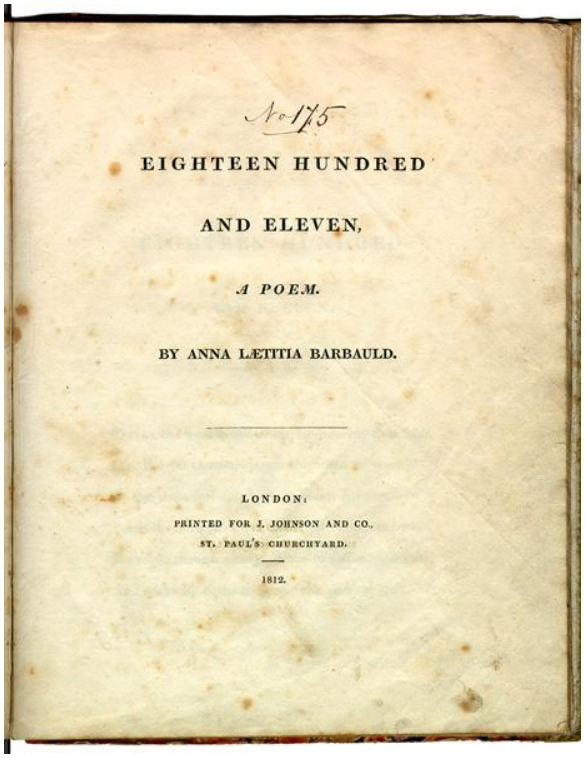
> The editors have attempted to indicate the variety of eighteenth-century genres by categorizing fiction and poetry into subcategories using terms from title pages (Fiction Romance or Fiction Tale, for instance), but these are sometimes unclear. Consider a work like Hannah More's *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly Intended for Young Persons: The Subjects Taken from the Bible. To Which is Added, Sensibility, a Poem* (1782). The Project categorizes this as Religion/Biblical, but it could also be relevant to scholars of children's literature, drama, or poetry. The editors evidently recognized this because the "second," "third," and "fourth" editions of this same work are categorized as Juvenile Literature (while an unnumbered 1784 edition is also Religion/Biblical). Adding more genre designations to each book might capture some of these complexities.

The inconsistency in genre categorization for *Sacred Dramas* that Orr recognizes is in part a function of the fact that our data model at the time allowed for us to assign only one genre per title, and the fact that we have many people working on our title records, who reached different conclusions about what single genre should be assigned.

Based on this feedback, we sought a change to our data model to include more than one genre, and have since used Barbauld as a test case to study its implementation. However, even with the flexibility to add multiple genres for each title, we face another set of problems. Barbauld's *Evenings at Home*, which had been categorized as Juvenile Literature, offers a challenging example similar to More's *Sacred Dramas*. In terms of literary genres, it collects poetry and prose. This kind of collection could also be called a miscellany, another one of our generic terms. It also illuminates, through its content, Barbauld's educational theory, as well as being deeply political in its insistence that children are political agents, capable of rational judgment and action, and that the domestic home is the necessary site of their political education and even activism. The pieces that make up *Evenings at Home* are also deeply invested in religion and science. So, how should *Evenings at Home* be generically categorized? As with *Sacred Dramas*, it is addressed to a youthful audience, but it adopts other literary and publication forms, and addresses more subject areas than the bare designation of Juvenile Literature would suggest.

But the problem is not limited to *Evenings at Home*. A similar question arises in relation to her 1773 *Poems*. It is Poetry, of course, but many of the poems included are politically-oriented: "The Mouse's Petition" condemns animal cruelty, "Summer Evening's Meditation" addresses the extent to which humankind, and perhaps especially women, should rein in thought, or be allowed "to stretch her powers / In flight so daring." But poems on similar themes are found in many if not most poetry volumes of the day, and, as a bibliographical database, we cannot read every volume of poems to make the determination as to whether they are also political, or scientific, and so on. So, with *Poems*, we have made the decision to stick with Poetry as the single genre category. But what about the 1792 edition of *Poems*, in which Barbauld includes "An Epistle to William Wilberforce," a poem castigating Parliament for rejecting the bill to abolish the slave trade? This is a poem that directly speaks to a Parliamentary vote; even if we had not classified the earlier edition of *Poems* as Political Writing, should the inclusion of this poem now render the volume worthy of this genre classification? And what about the stand-alone edition of the *Epistle*? And her later stand-alone publication, *Eighteen-Hundred and Eleven*, a searing indictment of the British government for its involvement in the war against France and its imperial project? Should these be categorized as Poetry and Political Writing, but not the previous volumes?

Nearly every volume of poetry, and many novels, written during the period engage in political commentary, whether directly or implicitly, but categorizing all of them as such would render the category meaningless. Even if we were to give all of Barbauld's poetry titles the category of Political Writing, this designation would mostly be a function of our familiarity with her poetry. This same level of knowledge is unlikely to be applied with consistency across our dataset. The problem of inconsistency which Orr observes in relation to More's *Sacred Dramas* becomes more profound and potentially distorting as we seek to do more descriptive work which relies on background knowledge that we do not possess for all of our titles (a common theme in several of our podcast episodes: see "Women in the Imprints," "Oh! Those Fashionable Burney Novels!," "The Ecology of Databases").



No 175

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED

AND ELEVEN,

A POEM.

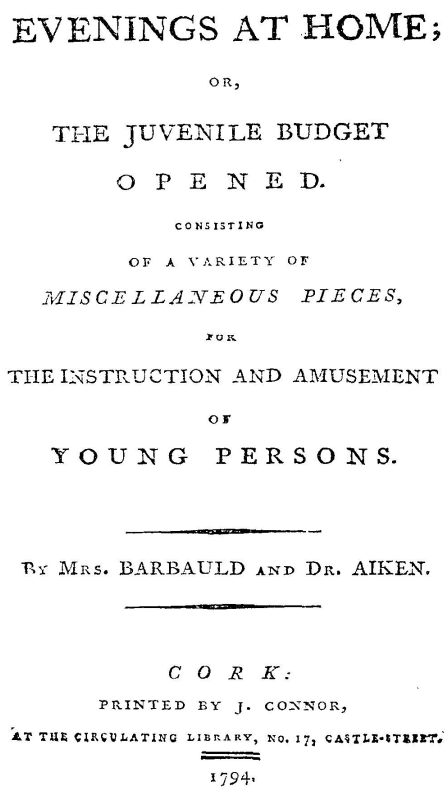
BY ANNA LÆTITIA BARBAULD.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON AND CO.
ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.
1812.

Figure 3. Title page of the first edition of *Eighteen-Hundred and Eleven* (1812), which falls into the Poetry and Political Writing genres in the WPHP. *Wikimedia Commons*.

But categorizing the titles at all first requires us to generate a list of genres that reflects the writing included in the WPHP. In looking at our genre list, we can see that many of our genres fall into what are broad literary categories: Biography, Drama, Essays, Fiction, Poetry, Juvenile Literature, Letters, Literary Criticism, Memoirs, Travel. Some of our genres, however, are more subject-based, as they delineate fields of inquiry beyond what the literary genres describe, for example: Domestic, Education, History, Legal, Political Writing, Religion, Science. Other genres describe more publication types, such as Catalogue, Poetry Collection, Miscellany, and Works. All of these categories help specify the content of a work, but using multiple genres also poses challenges. How helpful is it to describe *Evenings at Home* as five or six genres? Is *Poems* more political than domestic? Or is it both, plus science and religion?

One of the other consequences of being able to add multiple genre categories per title is that it complicates how we can analyze and visualize the data. For this spotlight, we are experimenting with attaching multiple genres to Barbauld's works in the interest of more accurately reflecting how her writing often engages in a range of subjects and forms simultaneously, and we are also thinking about how best to portray that data. Once combinations of genres are allowed, it is no longer as simple as counting how many titles are designated"Juvenile Literature and how many are Poetry, as we need to be able to account for the combinations of genres she published in, and determine what percentage of her titles fall into each genre individually to capture the generic scope of Barbauld's work for this spotlight. To that end, we have created multiple spreadsheets that display the genre breakdowns of Barbauld's titles in the WPHP.



EVENINGS AT HOME;

OR,

THE JUVENILE BUDGET

OPENED.

CONSISTING

OF A VARIETY OF

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES,

FOR

THE INSTRUCTION AND AMUSEMENT

OF

YOUNG PERSONS.

By Mrs. BARBAULD and Dr. AIKEN.

CORK:

PRINTED BY J. CONNOR,

AT THE CIRCULATING LIBRARY, No. 17, CASTLE-STREET.

1794.

Figure 4. Title page of the 1794 Cork edition of *Evenings at Home*, which falls into the Education, Juvenile Literature, Religion/Biblical, and Political Writing genres in the WPHP. NCCO.

We needed multiple spreadsheets to fully understand the genre data for Barbauld's titles. The first spreadsheet includes all of her titles and identifies each time a genre is used, whether it is the only genre added to a title or appears alongside other genres. This allows us to see how many titles of Barbauld's total are in any given genre. For example, *Evenings at Home* has four different genres attached—Education, Juvenile Literature, Religion/Biblical, and Political Writing—and so it is included in each of those genre columns in this spreadsheet. We can see that out of Barbauld's total 167 titles, Juvenile Literature is attached (including in combination with other genres and as the sole genre) to 98 titles, Poetry to 37, Religious/Biblical to 65, and so on. The second spreadsheet also accounts for all of her titles, but it counts the different combinations of genres that occur in them. For example, *Evenings at Home* falls under the Education; Juvenile Literature; Religion/Biblical; Political Writing combination; *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and *Epistle to William Wilberforce* fall under the Poetry; Political Writing combination. Other combinations include Juvenile Literature; Education, Political Writing; Religion/Biblical, and Poetry; Juvenile Literature; Essays, and so on. Accounting for the different genre combinations Barbauld published allows us to see which of her works fall into the same combinations, and identify common patterns or themes.

Because the WPHP accounts for both first editions and reprintings of an author's works, we have many title (and hence genre) entries for a frequently reprinted title like *Evenings at Home.* We include reprintings in the WPHP as important indicators of a title's continuing popularity and influence, including beyond an author's death; combining

all editions and reprintings when counting a genre tells us about the dominance of that genre over the period of time the WPHP covers. But we realized it was important to also capture data about genres for first editions alone, too, as counting only first editions tells us more about the diversity of genres that characterize Barbauld's written output. So we created a third spreadsheet that includes only the first editions attached to Barbauld in the WPHP to identify every time a genre is used for one of her 44 first editions, whether it is the only genre added or in combination with other genres: according to this spreadsheet, Juvenile Literature is attached to 21 titles, Poetry to 18, Religion Biblical to 15, and so on. Counting each time a genre is used in Barbauld's first editions shows us how many of her titles belong to each, and therefore also how much Barbauld published in a particular genre. A fourth spreadsheet counts the genre combinations that occur in her 44 first editions, and includes such combinations as Education; Juvenile Literature; Religion/Biblical; Political Writing and Literary Criticism/Critical Editions; Fiction Novel.

But how to discuss Barbauld's contributions to particular genres when *Evenings at Home*, for example, appears in four: Education, Juvenile Literature, Religion/Biblical, and Political Writing? For ease of considering her broader contributions to individual genres, we decided to return to our original data model for the genre field by identifying a single, main genre for each of her first editions in a fifth spreadsheet, from which we could then see her major contributions to each genre. In this fifth spreadsheet we have columns that list the following: the titles of her first editions; the year they were published; their current genre status in the WPHP (often a combination of two or more genres); and a final column containing a single genre for each title, chosen from the genres currently attached to them, that we consider to be their "main" genre. The discussion below adopts this approach by grouping her titles into one major genre and discussing these titles, by major genre, as a group.

First editions of Barbauld's works, by genre:

Juvenile Literature

1. *Lessons for children, from three to four years old.* (1778)
2. *Hymns in prose for children. By the author of Lessons for children.* (1781)
3. *Lessons for children, from two to three years old.* (1787)
4. *Lessons for children of three years old. Part I.* (1788)
5. *Lessons for children, of three years old. Part II.* (1788)
6. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. I.* (1792)
7. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. II.* (1793)
8. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. III.* (1793)
9. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. IV.* (1794)

10. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. V.* (1796)
11. *Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. VI.* (1796)
12. *The Female Speaker; or, Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse, Selected from the Best Writers, and Adapted to the Use of Young Women by Anna Lætitia Barbauld.* (1811)
13. *A Legacy for Young Ladies, Consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose and Verse by the late Mrs. Barbauld.* (1826)

Barbauld published more titles in this genre than any other, and when we add reprintings it was the genre she published in the most frequently. This is unsurprising, considering Barbauld's experience with teaching and her investment in education. She was considered a "surrogate mother" to the young boys studying in the school she and her husband ran in Palgrave, Suffolk (McCarthy ix), where she wrote *Hymns in Prose for Children*. In this work, "Barbauld seeks to effect an immersion in pleasurable sensory impressions, directing the child's whole being towards God" (McCarthy 60). The four-book series of *Lessons* that first appeared in 1778 is considered to be revolutionary in juvenile literature: written for children as young as two, Barbauld noticed that she knew of no books "adapted for the comprehension" of very young children ("Advertisement," *Lessons for Children, from two to three years old*). She also demanded the use of larger typography and white space to render print legible to children. In *Evenings at Home*, the miscellany she wrote with her brother, they treated children as educational and political subjects, capable of rational thought and the exercise of political agency. It was regularly reprinted across the Atlantic up to the twentieth century (McCarthy 324). By insisting that children had minds that should be cultivated but needed to be addressed on their own terms, Barbauld both theorized and implemented radically new understandings of child development and their cognitive and moral autonomy (Levy, "Radical Education").

Political Writing

1. *An address to the opposers of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.* (1790)
2. *Civic sermons to the people. Number I.* (1792)
3. *Civic sermons to the people. Number II. From mutual Wants springs mutual Happiness.* (1792)
4. *Sins of government, sins of the nation; or, a discourse for the fast, appointed on April 19, 1793. By a volunteer.* (1793)
5. *Reasons for National Penitence, recommended for the fast, Appointed February XXVIII. 1794.* (1794)

Between 1790 and 1794, Barbauld published several pamphlets with the aim of defending "ethical politics in an evil time" (McCarthy 309). In *An Address*, Barbauld protested religious intolerance and legalized discrimination against Dissenters. In *Sins of Government*, she protested Britain's entry into the war against France. Often in these political pamphlets, Barbauld sought to educate an adult audience about political literacy (McCarthy 323). Throughout her political writings, Barbauld urged her readers to question the government and its decisions, advocating for peace and

tolerance. Her insistence on these social values, and how they should structure our relations with one another and in our relation to the state, is reflected throughout her writing.

Poetry

1. *Poems*. (1773)
2. *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. On the rejection of the bill for abolishing the slave trade. By Anna Letitia Barbauld.* (1791)
3. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven: A Poem. By Anna Letitia Barbauld.* (1812)

Barbauld's reputation was made through her poetry, and her verse circulated in manuscript at Warrington and beyond in the 1760s and 1770s before her brother prevailed on her to collect and publish her verse. Her *Poems* was immediately successful, and reprinted 10 times. As discussed above, her poems touch upon many fields of thought and may be considered philosophical in their broad remit. She explores our relations to each other, to animals, and to God. She asks about the constraints placed on women, or what should constitute "a women's universe," in her poem "A Summer Evening's Meditation" and challenges Warrington patriarchy, voicing resistance to containing her "Epictetan self" (McCarthy 94–95). *Poems* also called attention to Barbauld's defiance of a conception of God as male, particularly in her poem "Meditation" (McCarthy 95). Her last published poem, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, was written to protest British government's policy regarding the war with France, and for this she suffered social abandonment by many of her friends (McCarthy xiv), as well as outrageously sexist and cruel attacks from reviewers.

Literary Criticism

1. *The Pleasures of Imagination. By Mark Akenside, M.D. to Which is Prefixed A Critical Essay on the Poem, by Mrs. Barbauld.* (1794)
2. *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson, Author of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison, Selected from the Original Manuscripts, Bequeathed by him, to his Family. To which are Prefixed a Biographical Account of that Author, and observations of his writings, by Anna Laetitia Barbauld.* (1804)
3. *Selections from the Spectator, Tatler, Guardian and Freeholder, with a Preliminary Essay, by Anna Letitia Barbauld.* (1804)
4. *The British Novelists; with an Essay; and Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, by Mrs. Barbauld.* (1810)

Throughout her literary career, Barbauld wrote many reviews in periodicals, which we do not include in the WPHP as we do not address periodical writing. She was also an editor, who published Akenside's poem and the correspondence of Samuel Richardson. Through her editing of these works and through her prefatory essays, she engaged in literary criticism, although her most famous effort is the fifty-volume anthology, *The British Novelists*, a monumental undertaking published in 1810 and reprinted in 1820. For each of the novels she included, she wrote a short prefatory essay, engaging in both biography and criticism and seeking to create a new canon of the eighteenth-century novel

(Claudia Johnson, "'Let me make the novels of a country': Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820"). Furthermore, in volume 1 of *The British Novelists*, Barbauld wrote an engaging and important essay, "On the Origins and Progress of Novel-Writing," that defended the novel, the subject of so many contemporary attacks, "condemned by the grave, and despised by the fastidious." As in Jane Austen's more famous defense of the novel in chapter 5 of *Northanger Abbey*, not published until 1818, in 1810 Barbauld notices that though the novel was easy to deride, "their leaves are seldom found unopened." Barbauld's case for the novel depends on the pleasure novels give readers, as the novel both reflects and influences the manners, sentiments, and sensibilities of its time.

Barbauld's *The British Novelists* is another example of the challenges of using WPHP genre data alone to understand an author's involvement in particular genres. Fifty volumes long, and constituting thousands of pages, *The British Novelists* is one of the largest title records in the WPHP—but it counts as only a single work, which means it is captured by a single title entry in the WPHP, and therefore a single record in our genre counts for Literary Criticism/Critical Editions and Fiction Novel" To further complicate things, this title (and a few others) is included as Fiction Novel is in our genre data for Barbauld, despite Barbauld herself not having authored any of the novels.

Essays

1. *Essays on Song-Writing: with a collection of such english songs as are most eminent for Poetical Merit. To which are added, some original pieces.* (1772)
2. *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose, by J. and A. L. Aikin.* (1773)

Although we include only two works under the genre of Essays, the essay was a central form for Barbauld. Most of her political writing took the form of the essay, and many unpublished essays appeared in her *Works*, after her death. *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* contains many different forms of writing—the allegorical "The Hill of Science", the prose poem "Seláma, an Imitation of Ossian", the historical essay "On Monastic Institutions" and literary essays such as "An Enquiry into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations" (McCarthy 111).

Religion/Biblical

1. *Devotional Pieces, compiled from the Psalms and the Book of Job: to which are Prefixed, Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments.* (1775)
2. *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship.* (1792)

Barbauld was born and baptized into English Protestant Dissent, and her religion was an integral aspect of her life and permeates all of her writing, from her *Hymns in Prose* to her political sermons. *Devotional Pieces*, according to William McCarthy, was a culmination of important models of the Enlightenment—"philosophy enquiry" and "natural

history" and she explored the idea of devotional imagination through "taste" (148). In *Remarks*, she defends the practices of social worship.

Works

1. *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. With a memoir by Lucy Aikin. In two volumes.* (1825)

In 1825, Lucy Aikin published *The Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, including both published and unpublished writing by her aunt as well as a short memoir. This volume brought to light many unknown poems and essays.

One additional complication of our genre work is the fact that we account for titles in our data that include writing by Barbauld, but whose publication was not necessarily overseen by Barbauld herself. Because she was such a popular writer, we find that many of her poems and juvenile writing were reprinted in collections by other editors, compilers, and authors. For example, *The Promise. A Poetic Trifle* is a collection of poems that include one riddle by Barbauld; as such, it is included in the WPHP, and Barbauld is listed in its title record as an author. But this is an example of a title that may skew our understanding of Barbauld's contributions to particular genres if we do not account for its being a work overseen by someone else. As a result, in the discussion above, we do not consider the titles that include her writing but were not published by her. We have grouped them here by their main genre.

Genres of first editions containing Barbauld's writing but not overseen by Barbauld, by genre

Poetry

1. *Poems: By Francis Wrangham, M.A., Member of Trinity-College, Cambridge.* (1795)
2. *The Metrical Miscellany: Consisting Chiefly of Poems Hitherto Unpublished.* (1802)
3. *Poetic Gleanings, from Modern Writers; with Some Original Pieces. By a governess.* (1827)
4. *Choice Selections, and Original Effusions; or, Pen and Ink Well Employed. By a daughter of a clergyman.* (1828)
5. *The Promise, a Poetic Trifle. By a young lady.* (1834)
6. *Flora and Thalia; or Gems of Flowers and Poetry; being an Alphabetical Arrangement of Flowers, with Appropriate Poetical Illustrations, Embellished with Coloured Plates. By A Lady.* (1835)
7. *The Seraph: Or, Gems of Poetry, for the Serious and Contemplative Mind: And the Promotion of Genuine Religion.* (1835)

Juvenile Literature

1. *The Female Reader; or, Miscellaneous Pieces in prose and verse; selected from the best writers, and disposed under proper heads; for the improvement of young women. By Mr. Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution. To which is prefixed a preface, containing some hints on female education.* (1798)

2. *Hymns Selected from Various Authors, and Chiefly Intended for the Instruction of Young Persons.* (1818)
3. *The Force of Example: A Nursery Rhyme. From the Celebrated Lessons for Children by Mrs Barbauld.* (1822)
4. *The Gleaner, a Selection of Poems for Youth.* (1824)
5. *The three cakes; or, Harry, Peter, and Billy. A tale in verse. Illustrated with engravings. From the original in prose by Mrs. Barbauld.* (1824)
6. *An interlineary translation of Barbauld's 'Hymnes en prose.' Designed to assist young children in acquiring a vocabulary of the French language.* (1828)

Annual

1. *The Juvenile Forget Me Not. A Christmas and New Year's Gift, or Birthday Present, For the Year 1830. Edited by Mrs. S.C. Hall.* (1830)

Figure 5. William Holland, "Don Dismallo Running the Literary Gantlet [sic]," 1790. British Museum.

As we think this spotlight has amply demonstrated, any attempt to grapple with genre, even for a single (albeit prolific) writer, is fraught with complications. We note the many generic crossovers in her writing, and how difficult this makes the work of assigning genre categories, whether we limit ourselves to one or allow for many. It should be noted that Barbauld's career was marked by the highest praise for her writing and for her as an inspirational figure, as may be seen in the image we used to illustrate both the start of this Spotlight, and our Women and History Spotlight Series last year, in Richard Samuel's group portrait of 1778 where Barbauld appears as one of the nine muses (she is depicted second from the left, with her left hand outstretched). But her work on education and writing for children was also used against her: in a 1790 illustration (shown above) she is portrayed, third from the left, as a school mistress brandishing a cat o' nine tails to whip Edmund Burke for his offences against liberty (in his attack on the French Revolution), and later, in 1812, she was savagely treated by John Wilson Croker in his unsigned *Quarterly Review* of

Eighteen Hundred and Eleven for "exchanging the birchen for the satiric rod," viciously condemned for leaving off writing for children where she was considered useful and instead daring to address the state of the nation. Of course, Croker's attempt to pin Barbauld to her role as a writer for children grossly mischaracterizes her career, but it demonstrates the political force, and damage to women, that generic type-casting, as it were, could hold. How we choose to characterize our title records by genre will of course be much less controversial and potentially damaging, but, as this foray into the many complications and possibilities for the work of genre classification suggests, it remains a fraught endeavor.

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Hannah More (person, author)
Sacred Dramas: Chiefly Intended for Young Persons: The Subjects Taken from the Bible. To Which is Added, Sensibility, a Poem (title)
Evenings at home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a variety of miscellaneous pieces, for the instruction and amusement of young persons. Vol. I. (title, first edition)
Poems. (title)
Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. On the rejection of the bill for abolishing the slave trade. By Anna Letitia Barbauld. (title)
Eighteen Hundred and Eleven: A Poem. By Anna Letitia Barbauld. (title)
The Promise, a Poetic Trifle. By a young lady. (title)
The British Novelists; with an Essay; and Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, by Mrs. Barbauld (title)
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Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme (firm, publisher)
Thomas Cadell (firm, publisher, bookseller)
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The Women's Print History Project

Ann Williams: Postmistress, Poetess, Sericulturist [Spotlight]

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Ann Williams: Postmistress, Poetess, Sericulturist

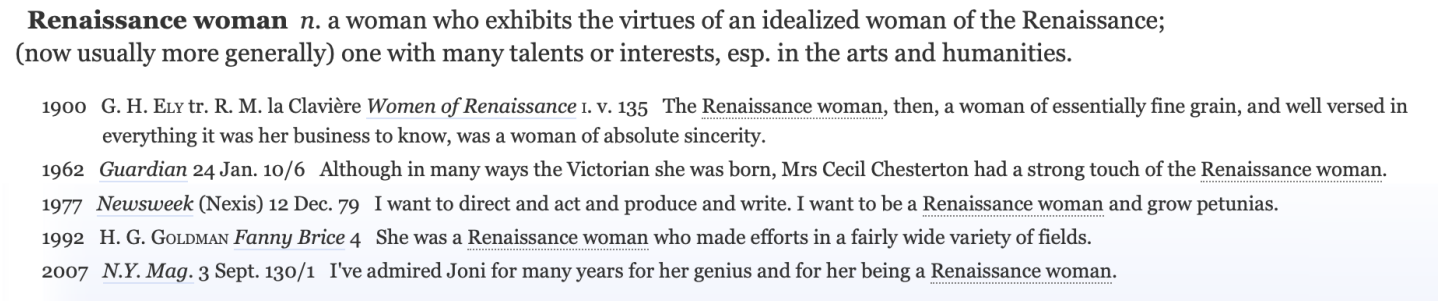
Michelle Levy

This post is part of our Women & Philosophy Spotlight Series which will run through March 2022. Spotlights in this series focus on women philosophers in the database.

Figure 1. Maria Sibylla Merian, "Maulbeerbaum samt Frucht," *Der Raupen* (*The Caterpillars*), 1679, Plate 1. It depicts the fruit and leaves of the mulberry tree and the eggs and larvae of the silkworm moth. *Wikipedia*.

There is no female or gender-neutral equivalent for the concept of "Renaissance man," a term that originates in the Italian phrase, Uomo Universale, or "Universal Man." According to the OED, it is "a man who exhibits the virtues of an idealized man of the Renaissance; (now usually more generally) one with many talents or interests, esp. in the arts and humanities." Although the term has been applied beyond the Renaissance, Wikipedia continues to provide only men as examples. The OED more helpfully includes an entry for "Renaissance woman," but the attestations it includes suggest some of the challenges involved in any straightforward translation of the term from men to women. The first and earliest quotation, from 1900, presents a more gendered understanding of what a "Renaissance woman" might be: she is a woman of "essentially fine grain," whatever that means; she is "well versed in everything it was her business to know," a statement that implies that there are limits on what she should know; and she is a woman "of absolute sincerity," a quality nowhere associated with the Renaissance man. The other attestations, beginning the

1960s, hew more closely to the traditional understanding, but even here the concept appears somewhat tempered: again, few so-called Renaissance men are tepidly described as having "made efforts in a fairly wide variety of fields."



Renaissance woman *n.* a woman who exhibits the virtues of an idealized woman of the Renaissance; (now usually more generally) one with many talents or interests, esp. in the arts and humanities.

1900 G. H. Ely tr. R. M. la Clavière *Women of Renaissance* I. v. 135 The Renaissance woman, then, a woman of essentially fine grain, and well versed in everything it was her business to know, was a woman of absolute sincerity.

1962 *Guardian* 24 Jan. 10/6 Although in many ways the Victorian she was born, Mrs Cecil Chesterton had a strong touch of the Renaissance woman.

1977 *Newsweek* (Nexis) 12 Dec. 79 I want to direct and act and produce and write. I want to be a Renaissance woman and grow petunias.

1992 H. G. Goldman *Fanny Brice* 4 She was a Renaissance woman who made efforts in a fairly wide variety of fields.

2007 *N.Y. Mag.* 3 Sept. 130/1 I've admired Joni for many years for her genius and for her being a Renaissance woman.

Figure 2. OED entry for "Renaissance woman."

It seems obvious that something critical has been lost in translation. This is not because no women fit the masculine definition; far from it. But as Lisa Shapiro discussed in our Women and Philosophy podcast episode (Season 2, Episode 10), we know so little about women who excelled in philosophical discourse, the "queen of the disciplines," let alone women with achievements in a range of intellectual fields and endeavors. Indeed it seems likely that in the period the WPHP covers, women, more so than men, would almost out of necessity develop knowledge in a variety of fields. Ann Williams, the subject of this person spotlight and a woman who is almost entirely unknown today, epitomized a "Donna Universale." Mary Wollstonecraft, in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, lamented that women were deliberately prevented from going into any *one* branch of knowledge too deeply:

... the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations on real life, than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them, in general, only a secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties, and clearness to the judgment. (1792, 40–41)

Anna Barbauld, the subject of the previous spotlight, felt this exclusion keenly. In an unpublished poem to addressed to her brother, "To Dr Aikin on his Complaining that she neglected him, October 20th 1768," she observes how "like two scions on one stem we grew, / And how from the same lips one precept drew," until she was forcibly separated from her brother, when he was allowed to leave to pursue medical studies, and she was forced to remain home. She laments that whereas once "the same studies saw us both pursue; / Our path divides." She questions this separation, saying that brother and sister were not "stampt with separate sentiments and taste." She then tells herself,

> But hush my heart! nor strive to soar too high,
> Nor for the tree of knowledge vainly sigh;

Check the fond love of science and of fame,
A bright, but ah! a too devouring flame.
Content remain within thy bounded sphere,
For fancy blooms, the virtues flourish there.

Of course, as the previous spotlight discusses, Barbauld did reach for "the tree of knowledge," though she was checked when she attempted to escape women's "bounded sphere." Indeed, Barbauld is a perfect example of the heights that a woman could ascend through the breadth and depth of her learning, but also of the dangers that a woman confronted in attempting to transcend what it was "her business to know."

Ann Williams was a woman who did not "check the fond love of science" and arts and instead pursued multiple lines of intellectual and creative endeavour. The WPHP can provide only an incomplete view of her career, because most of her contributions were made in scientific journals. There is only one publication of hers included in WPHP, *Original Poems and Imitations*, which was printed for the author in 1773. This, moreover, is a recent addition to our title records, only recently brought to the attention of the WPHP by a tweet from John Overholt, Curator of Early Books & Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University, who cites research on the volume and Williams by the bookseller, Carpe Librum. This title was likely previously missed by us (and other sources) because on the title page the author is given as "A. Williams"; it is only on the dedication page that she is identified as "Post-mistress of Gravesend," that is, as a woman.

As may be seen on the second and third page of the Table of Contents, most of the poems are very short, taking the form of either imitations of classical and other verse, or "Impromptus," poems that claim to be composed in the moment. As a postmistress by day, Williams had limited time to write her poems; as we learn from the poems themselves, she had to compose in short bursts, such that many of her poems are occasional in nature or inspired by reading or experiences. Several of her poems hint at the challenges in being a postmistress by day, poet by night, such as one entitled, "Written when I was extremely sleepy, yet obliged to attend business" (91) and "Impromptu, to my Pen," which beings: "Adieu my pen, dull sleep has seiz'd my head / I now must leave thee, and must go to bed" (99). In "Impromptu, to a gentleman who asked me how I spent my evenings without playing cards," we seem to be presented with a description of how Williams found the time to write poems: "The bus'ness of the day being full o'er, / I fly from care to the poetic lore" (149).

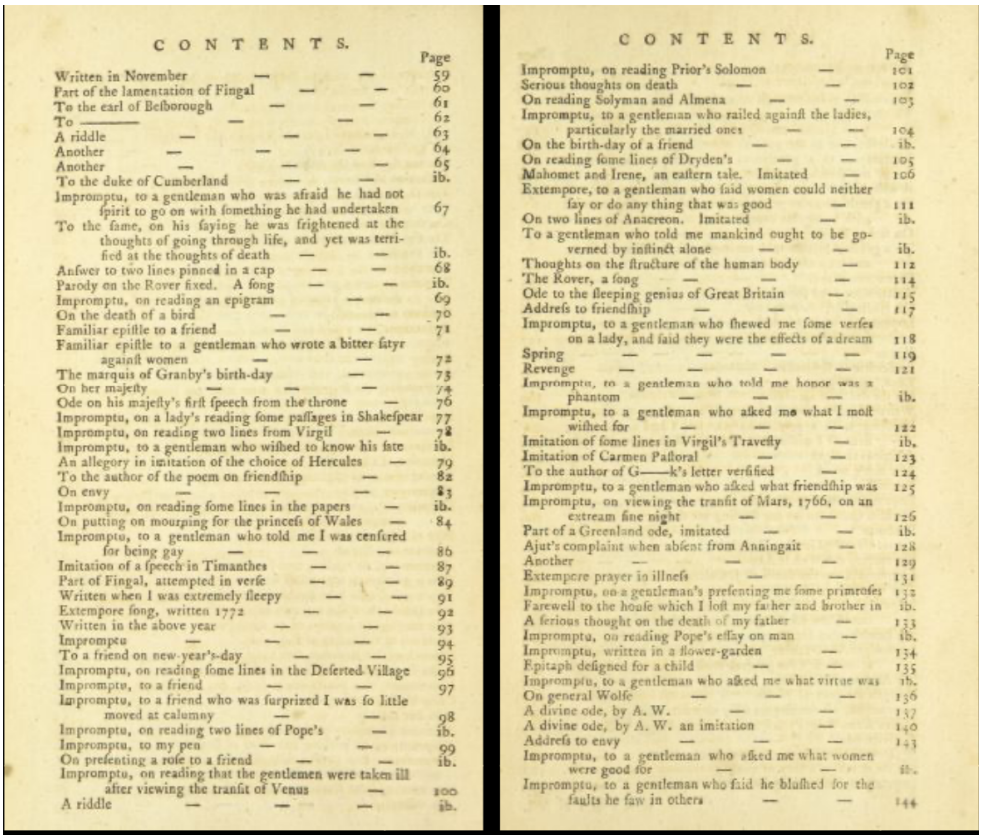


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Figure 3. Table of Contents, Ann Williams, *Original Poems and Imitations*. British Library.

Williams's poems address a range of commonplace topics, and many are entirely typical of the poetry of the day, addressing both personal and public topics, from the death of her father and brother to that of General Wolfe. Other poems speak more directly to her interest in scientific endeavors and her views on the position of the sexes. In the following excerpt from her poem, "On reading some lines in praise of Mrs Macauly," Williams attests to the influence of Catharine Macaulay, particularly in her claim that women look to history to better and improve themselves. In this poem, written to one "Brent," Williams combines her proto-feminism with her devotion to women's pursuit of "ev'ry art and science":

> Wou'd all the sex encourage us like you,
> More real merit in us soon you'd view;
> By you protected, females soon wou'd soar,
> And ev'ry art and science wou'd explore.
> This I with truth aver, the more we know,
> The greater happiness we can bestow;
> For in your search thro life, you'll surely find,
> No joy from an uncultivated mind. (58)

A more playful and satiric voice emerges in the short poem, "Extempore, to a Gentleman who said women could neither say or do any thing that was good":

> If nothing good we say,
> Or nothing good we do,
> How comes it then, I pray,
> We model such fine things as you?
> For this I will maintain,
> And hope it is no treason,
> You'd savages remain,
> Did we not teach you reason. (111)

A string of other poems establish Williams's rejection of patriarchy in a way that anticipates writers like Barbauld and Wollstonecraft. In the last poem in the volume, "Impromptu, On Reading Mrs Rowe's Poems" (190–91), she offers Elizabeth Singer Rowe as her true inspiration and dedicatee (the volume itself is formally dedicated to the first and second PostMaster General, H.F. Thynne and Francis, Baron Le Despencer). In "Address to the Ladies of England" (45), in terms strikingly similar to Wollstonecraft, she laments that

> Too long, alas! Too long, ye British fair,
> Has dress and nonsense been your only care;
> To reason deaf, and to conviction blind,
> You've lost the chain by which you led mankind.

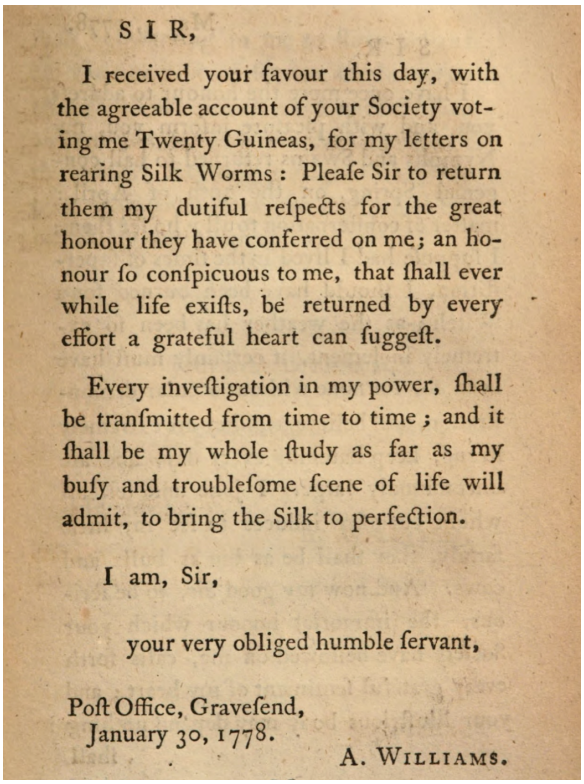
She laments the frivolity of women's lives—"Cards, routs, coteries, op'ras, balls and shews, / The only bus'ness of your lives compose"—and reminds them of the fleetingness of youth and beauty. She urges women:

> For shame: awake! The historic page explore,
> Recount those heroes Rome and Athens bore,
> With Greece and Sparta, and you there will find
> A glorious pattern for all womankind.

In "Impromptu, on reading an essay on education" (178-9), a poem seemingly responding to Samuel Johnson's *An Essay on Education* (1771), she lays bare the women's degradation as patriarchy, arguing that men are responsible for fettering women's "free-born minds."

Poetry was not Williams's only or even her main activity outside of her work as a postmistress. Several poems hint at her scientific pursuits: "Thoughts on the structure of the human body" (112), "Impromptu, on reading that all the gentlemen were taken ill the day after viewing the transit of venus" (100), and "Impromptu, on viewing the transit of

Mars, 1766, on an extream fine night" (126). These poems and others demonstrate her interest in astronomy, botany, chemistry, and entomology, and in 1784, eleven years after her poems were published, evidence of Williams's direct participation in scientific discourse appeared in print, when letters she had sent to the Society, Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, beginning in 1777, were published in the second volume of their *Transactions*; the following year, she was given twenty guineas for her researches. A letter published in *Transactions*, dated 30 January 1778, thanks the Society for this honour, and pledges that "it shall be my whole study as far as my busy and troublesome scene of life will admit, to bring the silk to Perfection."



SIR,

I received your favour this day, with the agreeable account of your Society voting me Twenty Guineas, for my letters on rearing Silk Worms: Pleaſe Sir to return them my dutiful reſpects for the great honour they have conferred on me; an honour ſo conſpicuous to me, that ſhall ever while life exiſts, be returned by every effort a grateful heart can ſuggeſt.

Every inveſtigation in my power, ſhall be tranſmitted from time to time; and it ſhall be my whole ſtudy as far as my buſy and troubleſome ſcene of life will admit, to bring the Silk to perfection.

I am, Sir,

your very obliged humble ſervant,

Poſt Office, Graveſend,
January 30, 1778.

A. WILLIAMS.

Figure 4. Royal Society of Arts, *Transactions of the Society*, vol. 2 (1784), 169. *HathiTrust Digital Library*.

The distribution of premiums to amateur scientists, celebrated in James Barry's engraving of 1792, was of enormous importance to a working woman like Williams. Indeed, as Leonie Hannan has explained, it was one of a series of new opportunities that emerged for women's participation in science in the eighteenth century:

> Whilst women remained excluded from roles within the learned societies and universities of eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, the century did offer other inroads to scientific enquiry and writing. Building on activity undertaken by largely aristocratic women of the 1600s in the fields of experimental science, medicine and technical writing, in the 1700s a more diverse range of women were engaging with science in public fora, whether that was through periodicals or poetry. (520)

Figure 5. James Barry, "The Distribution of Premiums in the Society of Arts," 1792. Tate.

In our spotlight on Margaret Cavendish, we encountered evidence of elite women dabbling in experimental science; with the arrival of the Society, founded in 1754, a way of supporting amateur activities, we find more middling women like Williams being supported in their pursuit of scientific knowledge. In 1775 and 1776, Williams had written to the Society before about the potential use of the common woodland plant, cuckoo pint, in dyeing (Hannan 527n46), but her most significant engagement with the London Society was with sericulture, or the cultivation of silkworms. Throughout these letters, Williams describes in detail the efforts she made to find the worms appropriate food and housing, to clean and nurture them. She frequently refers to silkworms as "my little family," seeks to comfort them and notes when they appear to be in pain or distress. Indeed, it is arguable that through her scientific investigations Williams practiced what feminist theorist Carol Gilligan subsequently termed an "ethics of care," characterized by attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. Hannan notes that Williams prioritizes learning about and attending to the needs of her silkworms over their silk production, and even compares her concern for them to Barbauld's "Mouse's Petition," though her poem "The Caterpillar" is perhaps a better expression of how attention to an individual creature creates the conditions for an ethics of care. In the poem, Barbauld reflects upon how even though she had "sworn perdition to thy race, / And recent from the slaughter am I come / Of tribes and embryo nations," when confronted with

> A single wretch, escaped the general doom,
> Making me feel and clearly recognise
> Thine individual existence, life,
> And fellowship of sense with all that breathes,--
> Present'st thyself before me, I relent,
> And cannot hurt thy weakness.

According to Robert Pocock, in his 1797 history of Gravesend, Williams died while conducting an experiment: "She unfortunately lost her life, by accident, whilst employed in a chymical Process, which set fire to her cloaths and burnt her past recovery" (16).

Pocock does not provide a date, but according to Carpe Librum, "the burial of an Ann Williams is recorded at St. Peter & St. Paul parish church, Milton-next-Gravesend on 14 January 1779, a date which roughly harmonizes with her last communication to the Society of Arts on 14 May 1778." This final spotlight celebrates Williams's life as a philosopher who engaged in a wide variety of activities and written forms. Williams embodies the idea of philosophy as the "queen of the disciplines," as Lisa Shapiro put it, as she engages in scientific observation and experimentation, reflection and thought about our place in the world both in her scientific discourse and in her poetry. As such, she joins the women we have discussed in this spotlight series, women who participated in the history of thought, and shaped that history through the varieties of experience they contemplated.

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