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Females and Footnotes: Excavating the Genre of Eighteenth-Century Women's Scholarly Verse

Abstract

Throughout the eighteenth century, the genre of women's poetry heavily annotated with editorializing commentary (a genre I term "scholarly verse") became increasingly prevalent. Such poetry presents an ironic reversal of conventions of gender and authority by incorporating the literal margins of the page: the female voice commands the majority of the page, while the masculine voice of empiricism, authority, and scholarly reason is pushed to the margins. This essay offers a distant reading of the range of annotations women poets provided, in order to begin new conversations about the ways women's poetry served as a site of and structure for intellectual exploration in the eighteenth century.

Keywords

scholarly verse, women poets, poetry, distant reading, gender, authority

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Eighteenth-century women's poetry is steadily being recovered and re-assessed through critical projects including Paula Backscheider's landmark *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (2005), Anne Mellor's "The Female Poet and the Poetess: Two Traditions of British Women's Poetry, 1780-1830" (1997), Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blair's *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon* (1999), and Gillian Wright's *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600–1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (2013). However, one aspect of women's poetry has been continually eschewed in these works: the prevalence of footnotes in their poetry and these women's engagement with intellectual exploration and scholarly discourse by way of these footnotes.

It is, perhaps, all too simple to dismiss footnotes in poetry as pedantic ornamentation or as merely the hallmarks of an esoteric genre—one censured for “introducing . . . rather too much of an affectation of science” (“Rev. of *Beachy Head*” 41) and for perpetuating the “modern fashion of encumbering a [text] with a body of notes, swelled by quotations, which nobody reads, and everybody must pay for” (“Rev. of *Roderick*” 306). Yet, for many women writers, the act of including an extensive “body of notes” was not an engagement with a “modern fashion” but an act of exercising authority in the gendered sphere of literary genres. As such, for these writers, the incorporation of footnotes within literary works is more than a marker of historiography, in the tradition of Edward Gibbon, or of satire, in the poetic tradition of Alexander Pope. Moreover, the use of the footnote to contain, critique, and classify the information in the central poetic texts showcases these women's engagement with typically masculine intellectual discourses of history, ecology, and politics, and so forth.

In this essay, I argue that women's poetry with annotation (footnotes and endnotes) constructs a small but important canon of women's intellectual and imaginative literature of the long eighteenth century. Indeed, the prevalence of this genre implores us to consider more carefully the ways that women writers engaged in historical, political, and ecological discourse in a literary mode that was safe or acceptable for female authorship: poetry. In poetry, women could subvert these gendered restrictions by including their own scholarly contributions, but to couch those contributions in the margins. Such poetry presents an ironic reversal of conventions of gendered authority by incorporating the literal margins of the page: the voice coded as female commands the majority of the page, while the voice of empiricism, authority, and scholarly reason—coded as male—is pushed to the margins. The result, I suggest, is the heavily annotated genre of poetry that I term “scholarly verse” (fig. 1). Due to its prevalence throughout the long eighteenth century—particularly among women writers—this genre deserves our critical attention.

Such poems and their marginal paratexts represent an important canon of women's intellectual and imaginative literature. The genre of eighteenth-century scholarly verse, as I suggest, flourished as a haven for women writers to advance historical, ecological, and political thought in literary arenas that were not reserved for men. Understanding these intersections can allow us to better understand the complexities of female authorship and authority throughout the eighteenth century.

(3)

In ages past, when learning's feeble ray
 First shone prophetic of a brighter day,
 The female bosom caught the sacred flame,
 And on her eagle-pinion soar'd to fame. 30
 Emerging from the gloom of mental night,
 Illustrious PARR* first rose divinely bright,

* *Catherine Parr*, daughter of Sir *Thomas Parr* of *Kendall*, and the sixth and last wife to King *Henry VIII*. She enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education, and was a woman of great sense, singular prudence, and a most strenuous friend to the reformation; which she studied to promote to the extent of her power. She frequently argued with the King on the subject of Religion, and urged him, as he had already separated from the *See of Rome*, to accomplish the glorious work he had begun; and thoroughly to refine the *Church* from the remains of superstition that still contaminated it. Impatient as *Henry* was of controul, such was his opinion of her worth, and such the affection he bore to her person, that he seldom betrayed the least indications of disgust at her freedom. She was very assiduous in studying the *Sacred Writings*, and books of Divinity, and occasionally had Sermons preached to herself, and such of the ladies of her bed-chamber as chose to be present, by several eminent Protestant divines, whom she retained in the character of Chaplains: for she dared to be the patroness of truth at a time when its professors were exposed to the utmost danger: After her death a discourse of her's, found amongst her papers, was published, intitled, *Queen Catherine Parr's Lamentations of a Sinner, bewailing the Ignorance of her blind Life*.

B 2

An

(4)

An instrument in Heav'n's o'er-ruling hand,
 To succour truth, and bless a guilty land,
 The rage of superstition to controul, 35
 And chase the mists of error from the soul.

Next beauteous DUDLEY* rose to grace the stage,
 The pride and wonder of her sex and age!
 Low bending at the radiant shrine of truth,
 Her soul renounc'd the idle toys of youth: 40
 Impell'd by nobler fires, she boldly soar'd,
 And every science, every art explor'd:
 Religion in its purest form array'd,
 Her tongue, her manners, and her pen † display'd.

* *Lady Jane Grey*, wife to Lord *Guildford Dudley*. Her virtues, learning, and sufferings, are so well known, that it would be impertinent to particularize them.

† See her letter to Mr. *Harding*, her Father's Chaplain, after his renunciation of the Protestant faith; and letters to her father and sister, in the 3d vol. of *Fox's Ecclesiastical History*.

Figure 1 Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate* (1774), pp. 3-4.

Females, Footnotes, and Scholarly Verse

On looking into the works catalogued in Paula R. Backscheider's extensive bibliography in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry*, we can observe the trends in published volumes of poetry with notes by women over the course of the long eighteenth century (Figure 2): the genre began slowly in the early decades, with annotated mytho-historical works, such as Elizabeth Tollett's "Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle" (1724) and Jane Brereton's *Merlin* (1735) as well as loco-descriptive verse, including Mary Chandler's *A Description of Bath* (1733). Scholarly verse waned slightly in the mid century before burgeoning in the 1780s and 90s with the heavily annotated poetry of politically engaged and prolific poets like Anna Seward, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, and Ann Yearsley.

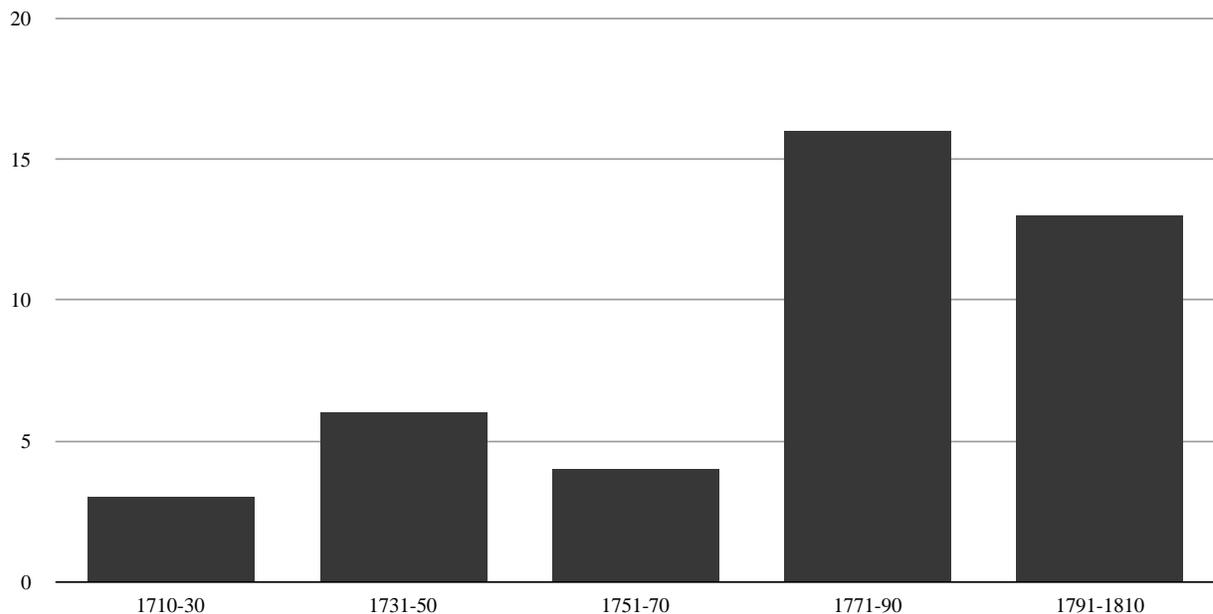


Figure 2 Volumes of women's poetry with footnotes, 1710-1810.

Data set from Paula R. Backscheider's *Eighteenth Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (2005).¹

We might interpret this prevalence as a material or textual reaction to the intellectual and political climate shaped by the American and French Revolutions, indicating what Mellor has determined as the “explicitly political” position of the female poet and the inherently didactic nature of her poetry (82, 85) and supporting Backscheider’s assessment that “the women poets of the 1790s had inherited and brought to maturity the potential for power in the public sphere” (*Eighteenth-Century* 8). Indeed, as Evelyn B. Tribble has suggested, the shape of the page often becomes “more than usually visible” at periods when “paradigms for receiving the past are under stress” (229) such as during the age of Revolution when narratives of history, nation, and belonging were continually challenged. We might also read these numbers as indicative of what Clifford Siskin and William Warner have described as the “turn toward more specialized and localized knowledges and practices” (26) within an increasingly empirical eighteenth century.

Of the forty-three poets surveyed in Backscheider’s critical volume, twenty-four of them produce forty-two volumes of poetry that incorporate annotations. Within the forty-two volumes of annotated verse by these twenty-four women, a desire for objectivity and empiricism shapes the content of many of the annotations, with women asserting their roles as poets and as natural historians, literary critics, and political activists. The topics discussed in their annotations can be classified into nine broad categories:

1. Natural history, as found throughout Charlotte Smith’s poetic corpus, including *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) and *Beachy Head* (1807).
2. Literary quotations (most often from Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible), as seen throughout Anne Bannerman’s *Poems* (1800).

3. Biographical information, as seen in Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate* (1774), which devotes its annotations to writing intricate networks of women's intellectual, literary, and political history.
4. Literary criticism, as seen throughout Anna Seward's *Original Sonnets* (1799).
5. Anthropology/Ethnography, as seen in Helen Maria Williams' *Peru* (1784).
6. Classical allusions, as annotated in Elizabeth Carter's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762).
7. Political history, as found in Elizabeth Tollet's "Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle" (1724).
8. Topography, as in Mary Chandler's commentary on the landscapes serving as the backdrop to *A Description of Bath* (1733).
9. Social criticism, as in Hannah More's *Slavery* (1788), where the annotations complement the pathos in Smith's verse.

A mere 2% of all annotations by women do not readily fall into any specific category. These sorts of notes might consist of a simple vocabulary gloss of an Italian or French phrase, a concise definition of a term, identification of a person or place, and the like.

These categories are hardly exhaustive and hardly mutually exclusive amongst themselves—many notes can fall into multiple categories (a literary quotation might offer social criticism, for instance), and many volumes include a range of topics within the notes. Yet, identifying trends and themes across the range of annotations and use of marginal spaces offers a useful starting point for continued excavations of this oft-overlooked but prevalent genre. Within a single poem, the poet takes readers through multiple genres and multiple textual spaces (central page and margin—even into other books). Not unlike women writers using the form of the novel to engage with historical, political, and scientific discourse (Kasmer 4-7), these writers utilized page space to impart their own critical authority in a literary form that would have been more acceptable for women conducting scholarship, veiling it as verse. Annotations, I argue here, offer the writer with a greater range of authorizing maneuvers. They can establish authority for the poet's voice via that of an editor, setting a tone for interpretation—even telling the reader how to read specific passages by pointing out allusions or references to other texts or cultural events. By seeking to manage the reading experience, the poet can work to educate her readers, filling in the gaps left within the verse by providing records of names, dates, and lists of events alluded to in the poetry. Such uses of annotation indicate women writers' engagement with forms of intellectual discourse typically reserved for men. In sum, the margins provided women writers with a space to engage in contemporary (often gendered) critical conversations and to raise their voices across the page and beyond poetic genres.²

Natural history. Annotations addressing aspects of natural history—botany, geology, astronomy, etc.—comprise 24% percent of the annotations within the data set sampled here (see note 1). Many of these annotations are found in the works of Charlotte Smith. Of the 266 notes across Smith's seventy-six annotated poems, only sixty-five notes (24.4%) do not include botanical commentary. Within Smith's "Beachy Head" (1807) alone, she offers seventy-six notes, including three footnotes subjoined to the notes. Of these notes, fifty-nine (77.6%) address aspects of natural history: eleven notes offer empirical descriptions of England's landscape and vistas; six notes discuss England's geologic history; forty-two notes offer explanations of botanical information, juxtaposing the empiricism of the Linnaean classification system with the

lyricism of the verse. For example, Smith incorporates the following lyric rhapsody into the poem's blank verse:

Retiring May to lovely June
Her latest garland now resigns;
The banks with cuckoo-flowers are strewn,*
The woodwalks blue with columbines,**
And with its reeds, the wandering stream
Reflects the flag-flower's*** golden gleam (597-602)

Smith directs the readers across the page, away from poetry and reflection and into the specifics of botanical study with the following glosses on flower types:

**Lychnis dioica*.
***Aquilegia vulgaris*. Shakespeare describes the Cuckoo buds as being yellow. He probably meant the numerous *Ranunculi*, or March marigolds (*Caltha palustris*), which so gild the meadows in spring; but poets have never been botanists. The Cuckoo flower is the *Lychnis floscuculi*.
****Iris pseudacorus*. (242n)

Complementing the poetic reflections, these annotations showcase how Smith was able to manipulate the seemingly static place of the page in order to present her autonomy as poet-scholar—despite her dismissal that “poets have never been botanists” (242n), and this dismissal despite her reliance upon John Aikin’s 1789 essay, “On the Application of Natural History to the Purposes of Poetry” for justification of her fixation on botanical references. Thus, between the poem’s text and paratext, Smith creates a gendered interface between reflection and objective documentation. While the poem reflects upon the many layers of British history, the notes present a catalogue of scientific terminology, classifying the various geographical, geological, and botanical references of the poem.

Literary quotations. Annotations offering direct quotations comprise 15% of the notes within the sample; these quotations are drawn most often from the Bible, from Shakespeare, and from Milton. Distinct from Classical Allusions, which I have categorized separately, literary quotations provide an intertextual framework for scholarly verse, as Anne Bannerman’s *Poems* (1800) illustrates. Several of Bannerman’s poems offer modern reinventions of ancient lore within the eighteenth-century Gothic tradition; others offer original sonnets inspired by passages from Petrarch and Goethe. In addition to these, Bannerman provides annotations of quotation to her lyric poetry, including “Verses on an Illumination for a Naval Victory.” This poem, which Catherine Ingrassia has identified as being likely about the 1794 defeat of the French fleet under the command of General Howe (111), juxtaposes evocative depictions of private pain with public celebration, victory with defeat, savagery with civilization. And, within the materiality of the poem, Bannerman juxtaposes poetry with prose, text with paratext; the reader is simultaneously immersed within the poem while routinely disrupted from this immersion—a material response for the reader, perhaps, that coincides with Bannerman’s own “conflicted response” (Craciun 179) to war.

After first setting the scene for the brutality of warfare in the first stanza, Bannerman describes the warrior:

Th' uncultur'd savage spurns the arts of peace;
 Impell'd by hatred, and revenge his guide,
 He leaves* his native mountain's shelt'ring side,
 Thro' trackless deserts holds his bloody way,
 With toil unwearied, thro' the tedious day (22-24)

To underscore the immense savagery of the warrior described here, Bannerman directs the reader to the margin with a quotation from William Robertson's *History of America* (1777): “*‘A single warrior, prompted by caprice or revenge, will take the field alone, and march several hundred miles to surprise and cut off a straggling enemy.’ Rob. Hist. Amer. Vol. II.” (28n). Setting aside the distinction between General Howe’s defeat of the French fleet in the Atlantic off the coast of northwest France and Robertson’s problematic description of Native Americans, what Bannerman achieves in this annotation is an emphasis on the immediacy and brutality of warfare that also distances the brutality: savagery is something central to the text yet also relegated to the margins. A few stanzas later, after the poem has oscillated between scenes of martial engagement and scenes of tranquil nature, the poem’s speaker, “the lone Enthusiast” (81), longs for harmony:

O! for a lodge*, where Peace might love to dwell,
 In some sequester'd solitary dell!
 Some fairy isle, beyond the Southern wave,
 Where War ne'er led his victims to the grave (75-79)

Remarking on the lodge “where Peace might love to dwell,” Bannerman calls out the poetic allusion to lines from Book II of William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785): “*‘O! for a lodge in some vast wilderness, / Some boundless contiguity of shade.’ Cowper’s Task” (31n). The reader is again taken away from the intensity of the poem, across the page, to a fanciful respite within the footnote. Backscheider focuses on this moment in the poem as a break from the “catalogue of horrors” (*Elizabeth Singer Rowe* 118) that mark the majority of poem, beckoning the reader to join her in the fairy realm and escape from the scenes the writer wrestles with in the verse. Bannerman does indeed step back from the horrors of war in these four lines by drawing upon the more ethereal diction associated with the fictional realm of fairies versus the somber tone of reality and warfare. But she further emphasizes this break by manipulating the materiality of the page and the attention of the reader; she harnesses the tool of the footnote to further direct the reader away from the violence in the central text and towards the imagined, liminal fairy lands alluded to in the liminal space on the page.

Biographical information. Brief sketches of biographical information constitute another 15% of the annotations studied here. Mary Scott’s proto-feminist account of British literary history, *The Female Advocate* (1774), offers a rich example of biographical accounts appended to verse. The annotations provide detailed narratives of women writers whom Scott attempts to canonize: Catherine Parr, Lady Jane Grey, Constantia Grierson, Ann Killigrew, Mary Barber, Mary Chandler, Mary Masters, Sarah Fielding, Elizabeth Tollett, Charlotte Lennox, Phillis Wheatley, Catherine McCaulay, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, among others. The biographical sketches range from single-sentence summaries of women’s lives to 400-word arguments advocating the

literary merits of Scott's female canon. On the poem's multifaceted approach to biography and canonization, Moira Ferguson writes:

In *The Female Advocate* Scott publicized a female literary tradition and attempted to establish a canon in an England that closed almost every professional avenue of advance to women. Scott chose a tripartite method of attack: a polemical preface, an adulatory text, and copiously detailed footnotes—hence a polemic, a poem, and a history interweave in one text. (366)

The generic blending Ferguson describes—the “tripartite method” to “[t]ell what bright daughters Britain could boast (Scott 25)—harnesses the margins in a method akin to scholarly documentation blended with authorial reflection. Scott's footnotes objectively describe the birth, station, and literary productions of the writers she meticulously catalogues; many also include gestures of literary criticism, suggesting the unacknowledged merits of the writers in Scott's canon. The relationship between the text and paratext—the poem and footnotes—is relatively straightforward. Scott names, either literally or figuratively, an eminent woman writer in the text of the poem:

Mores, Seymours, Cokes,* a bright assemblage shone,
And shar'd the palm man fondly thought his own.
See, bending o'er Newcastle's** sacred urn,
The Muses sigh, and drooping Fancy mourn!
[. . .]
In thee, illustrious Killebrew,*** we find
The Poet's and the Painter's arts combin'd
[. . .]
By thee our fair Orinda**** too expir'd,
Lov'd by the Muses, by the world admir'd! (83-86, 93-94, 101-102)

Scott then glosses the names and allusions:

*Three daughters of Sir *Thomas More*, *Margaret*, *Elizabeth* and *Cicely*; all women of great talents and learning . . . (7n)

**Margaret Dutchess of *Newcastle* was the youngest daughter of Sir *Charles Lucas*, and born in the reign of King *James I* . . . (8n)

***Mrs. *Ann Killigrew*, daughter of *Henry Killigrew* (one of the Prebendaries of *Westminster*) was born a short time before the restoration of King *Charles II*. Her naturally fine genius being improved by a polite education, she made a great proficiency in the kindred-arts of Poetry and Painting . . . (9n)

****The celebrated Mrs. *Catharine Philips*, who also died of the small-pox. (10n)

The thirty-eight notes to this 522-line poem are all presented in this manner, offering relatively straightforward scholarly commentary, opposed to the editorial remarks and authorial reflections offered by many other kinds of notes by other women writers. Scott uses every aspect that the medium of published poetry has to offer. The paratextuality of this poem is part of the poem's very argument. Indeed, the notes are integral to Scott's project; without them, the poem would fall short of its aim of advocacy. She uses the margins to focus her argument, reversing the

common structure of the scholarly and literary page—the central text is now secondary to the marginal.

Literary criticism. Commentary on the merits of the aesthetic and moral merit of other literary works represent 9% of women poets' annotations. In *Original Sonnets* (1799), poet and literary critic Anna Seward pulls no punches in her marginal notes offering remarks on the Augustan Poets referenced in "Sonnet XXI." Seward (the poet) writes in the sonnet that "Proud of our lyric galaxy, I hear / Of faded Genius with supreme disdain" (1-2), and censures "those moody censors, who complain, / As Shaftesbury" had of poetry's demise. To Shaftesbury's name, Seward (the critic) appends the following: "Of the Poets, who were contemporary with Lord Shaftesbury, Dryden, Cowley, Pope, Prior, Congreve, Gay, Addison, &c, in the period which this age styles Augustan, his lordship speaks with sovereign scorn" (142n). She continues this critique, directing readers to consult the various publications falling under Shaftesbury's censure, before censuring Shaftesbury himself in closing her note:

Thus it is that the jealousy people of literary fame often feel of each other, produces the foolish and impolitic desire of decrying the general pretensions of the Age to Genius.— Their narrow selfishness leads them to betray the common cause which is their true interest to support. They persuade the credulous many, with whom envy of superior talents increases their willingness to despise, that imagination is become enervated. (143-44n)

Similarly, Seward's "Sonnet LXVII" (subtitled "On Doctor Johnson's Unjust Criticisms in his Lives of the Poets") offers a fourteen-line poetic prompt for a three-page treatise in the margins where she rails against the proverbial boy's club she sees as hindering Samuel Johnson's objectivity in his literary criticism; Seward there directs readers to consult the Hester Lynch Piozzi's editions of Johnson's letters. As Megan L. Peiser argues in "British Women Novelists and the Review Periodical, 1790-1820," paratextual spaces—margins, prefaces, etc.—easily offered women a threshold into literary criticism, allowing them to act as critics in their own right, distinct from the critics in review periodicals. Hence, for writers like Seward, the page itself becomes a dynamic tool for engaging not only the reader with the writer, but also with the reviewers, talking back to them, contradicting them, and creating a dialogue across texts.

Anthropology/Ethnography. Editorial commentary evoking travelogue-like descriptions of other peoples, places, and cultural practices constitute another 9% of the annotations in women's scholarly verse. Helen Maria Williams' *Peru* (1784) illustrates the juxtaposition of objective description with anthropological interpretation, transporting readers into an alter-Eden in the midst of losing its innocence: "There, lost Peruvia! bloom'd thy cultur'd scene, / The still wave, emblem of its bliss serene!" (3-4). In the poem, she places readers within the peaceful hills and plains covered with several varieties of trees, flowers, and fruits, and populated with various species of llamas. But, instead of allowing readers to become lost in this idyllic setting, she disrupts the poetic description with classifying and contextualizing annotations. For instance, in her descriptions of the charitable civility of the Peruvian natives, she comments on the line "While in the lap of age* she pour'd the spoils" (1.46), by stating that "*The people cheerfully assisted in reaping those fields, whose produce was given to old persons, past their labour" (60n). This charity is a far cry from the savagery depicted in several contemporary historiographies, such as the works of William Robertson and Abbé Raynal, which she cites in her anthropological

summaries of Peruvian religious practices. Her poetic text presents the religious landscape of Peru as “creative” and “majestic”:

She [Virtue] smiles in Mem'ry's lucid robes array'd,
O'er thy creative scene* majestic moves,
And wakes each mild delight thy Fancy loves (6.306-08)

The note accompanying this passage, however, casts a slight shadow over this tranquil scene of “mild delight” when she quotes directly from Raynal’s *History* to describe the rare but documented occurrences of Spanish colonists being slain during a festival commemorating the death of Atabalipa, sovereign emperor of the Inca Empire:

*The Peruvians have solemn days on which they assume their antient dress. Some among them represent a tragedy, the subject of which is the death of Atabalipa. The audience, who begin with shedding tears, are afterwards transported, into a kind of madness. It seldom happens in these festivals, but that some Spaniard is slain— *Abbe Raynal's History*. (92n)

Williams omits Raynal’s derisive tone towards the Incas (he characterizes them as having “profound stupidity” and “a listless and universal indifference”) and instead presents a poem sympathetic towards Peruvians’ noble savagery.

Classical allusions. Distinct from Biblical or Petrarchan quotation, Classical allusions can be found in 8% of the notes in my sample of women’s scholarly verse, such as annotated in Elizabeth Carter’s *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762). Several poems in Carter’s collection, similar to Mary Scott’s *The Female Advocate*, celebrates Britain’s literary women. But unlike Scott’s biographical documentation, Carter relies more heavily upon Classical allusion to write women like Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Katherine Philips into her canon. In writing a verse “Occasioned by an Ode written by Mrs. Phillips,” Carter relies heavily upon a markedly Classical diction, opening her poem with the exclamation “Narcissa!” (1). Carter eulogizes Philips as *Orinda*, placing her among the ancient muses:

In what blest Clime, beneath what fav'ring Skies,
Did thy fair Form, propitious Friendship rise?
With mystic Sense, the Poet's tuneful Tongue
*Urania's Birth in glitt'ring Fiction sung. (15-18)

Carter glosses this reference with the following explanation: “*There were two VENUSES among the Ancients; one called PANDEMUS, to whom they attributed the Love of wild disorderly Pleasures; the other nam'd URANIA, the Patroness and Inspirer of Friendship, Knowledge, and Virtue” (16n). Two stanzas later, Carter, sustaining the Classical imagery and allusions, remarks on the source of Philips’ poetic genius:

By Heavn's' enthusiastic Impulse taught
What shining Visions rose on *Plato's* Thought!
While by the Muses gently winding Flood*,
His searching Fancy trac'd the sov'reign Good! (41-44)

Carter contextualizes the image of the “gently winding Flood” of the Muses: “ILYSSUS, a River near ATHENS, dedicated to the Muses. On the Banks of this River, under a Plantane, PLATO lays the Scene of some of his Dialogues on Lover and Beauty” (17n). In this note glossing a particular location, she unites Greek mythology with history; she unites poetic lyricism with paratextual scholarship.

One way of making sense of Carter’s transcendence of page space and generic blending is to recognize that by the eighteenth century, the Classics had long a cornerstone in Britain’s literary culture. Therefore, drawing an explicit association between a woman writer’s work (especially that which celebrates fellow women writers) allows for an implicit connection to an already established canon.

Political history. Commentary on political history comprise 7% of annotations. Of these 7% one of the most interesting examples is found in Elizabeth Tollet’s “Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle” (1724). Tollet writes that the prompt for the poem “was taken from the last Letter of this unfortunate Princess to King Henry, still preserved in the Cotton Library, and printed in one of the Spectators; in which we have a lasting Monument of the Quickness of her Understanding, and the Greatness of her Spirit” (82n). Tollet concludes her commentary on the poem’s inception by remarking on her inclusion of the 19 notes glossing political history: “as I have given this Letter entirely a poetical Cast, it may not be improper to explain some Parts of the History alluded to in it” (82n). The poem certainly demonstrates a material self-awareness that I would argue is characteristic of women’s scholarly verse—particularly in the context of women rewriting history to include deep and meaningful accounts of women’s roles. The 370-line sentimental poem focuses on Anne Boleyn’s emotional state as she awaited her execution. In Tollet’s account, Boleyn depicts herself as a martyr, who dies as a witness of woman’s “wounded honour” (157); in her martyrdom, she beseeches Heaven to be merciful even to those who will end her life:

Ye Angel Guardians!* who the Throne defend,
 And hov’ring Light in Air, unseen attend;
 If heav’nly Minds can hear a Mortal’s Pray’r,
 From threat’ning Danger guard your sacred Care;
 From foreign Wars, and from seditious Strife,
 From dark Conspiracy preserve his [King Henry VIII’s] Life. (273-78)

But, Tollet alerts readers to the fact that this poetical plea falls short of the original epistolary record: “*Anne Boleyn ends her Letter with a Recommendation of the King to Heaven, too solemn to be introduc’d into this sort of Poetry” (83n). This juxtaposition of romance and realism provides the reader with periodic moments of respite from the pathos of Boleyn’s plea for remembrance and for mercy. Tollet maintains this rhythm of romance interrupted by reality throughout the poem. For instance, when Tollet poetically describes Boleyn’s internment—“Such* fun’ral Rites alone must I receive / As Enmity confers, or Chance can give” (357-68)—she explains the funereal rites at length and in greater detail, as would become a prose historiographical account rather than poetical account: “Historians have inform’d us that this unfortunate Lady was interr’d without even the Regards of common Decency. They tell us that not so much as a Coffin was provided for her, in want of which her Body was put into an Arrow-Chest, and bury’d in the Tower-Chapel before the high Altar . . .” (83n). Tollet explains this

burial with the detail of an antiquarian, romanticizing the past while also fixating on the material reality of the artifacts. The level of detail in the notes complements the “poetical Cast” given to the historical allusions of the verse, lending Tollet’s account a sense of authority underscoring the romance of the verse epistle. The hybridization of romance and history, poetry and prose, authorial narration and editorial gloss anticipates later eighteenth-century generic developments of the Gothic and the Historical Novel.

Topography. Descriptions of geography comprise 6% of annotations; unearthing the commentary in these notes provides a unique counterpoint to many critical narratives about the implicit gendering of geographical information within poetry. Claudia Kairoff writes that “Locodescriptive, topographic, and peripatetic poems . . . Such poems often endowed the landscape with political affinities similar to those of their owners” (4), and Jacqueline Labbe reads the genre as evoking a masculine gaze *over* a landscape, whereas women writers would often “situate themselves *within* the landscape, a part of it, interactive” (*Romantic* xiii). Mary Chandler’s popular *Description of Bath* (1733) offers a rich example of annotation that pairs editorial argumentation with topographical description. The text joined with the paratext allows the poem to present what David Shuttleton has read as a “feminocentric civic mapping” (447), with the footnotes functioning “as the poem’s barely latent commercial unconscious” (456). Chandler takes readers on a textual tour of the spa town, narrating its history from the Romans through her present eighteenth century context and its contemporary vogue as a destination for urban and rural pleasures alike. At periodical points in the tour, Chandler stops her narrative to interject a pithy tidbit on local features of the urban landscape:

Pallas he chose Protectress of the Streams,
Pallac the City* her Protectress claims.
Thus He, who of Man’s Fall divinely sings,
Tells from old Records, wrote of Gothic Kings.
The Romans well this ancient Story knew,
Minerva’s Statues their Devotion drew,
Of curious Art her noble *Bust*** appears,
Safe from the Ruin of a thousand Years. (23-30)

To these call-outs, she appends the following remarks: “*The city of BATH is call’d in the British Language, Caër Palludar, or the City of Pallas” and “**There is now an antique Bust in the Town Hall of BATH, supposed to belong to a Roman Statue of Pallas” (5n). The landscape of the page is as intricate as the landscape Chandler describes; by traversing from the page’s center to its margins, readers are thus able to follow along Chandler’s tour in their armchair travels, as Kairoff suggests, while interacting in the landscape, as Labbe offers—interacting with the page. Thus, when we allow ourselves to delve into the margins of the page we can notice the nuances of arguments by poets like Chandler whose *Description of Bath* and its topographical annotations do more than merely describe a landscape but imbue it with political agency.

Social criticism. Editorializing commentary offering pointed critiques of social systems represent 3% of the annotations in the data set. This commentary is perhaps unsurprisingly found in politically charged poems like Charlotte Smith’s *The Emigrants* (1793) and Hannah More’s *Slavery* (1788). In her abolitionist argument of *Slavery*, More’s notes allude to Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko: A Tragedy* (1695) and offer a quotation from James Ramsay’s *Essay on*

the Treatment of African Slaves (1784). In addition to this intertextuality, More also raises her own editorial voice, bolstering the pathos of the poetic text with further rhetoric of emotion in the margins—a location on the page often associated with scholarship and the logic, reason, and objectivity implied by a documentary footnote. In so doing, More subverts textual conventions of page space.

In condemning the merchandizing of human souls, More poetically describes the enslaved Africans and their inherent humanity: “Plead not, in reason’s palpable abuse, / Their sense of *feeling callous and obtuse” (148); she underscores their humanity with the poignant remark that “*Nothing is more frequent than this cruel and stupid argument that they do not feel the miseries inflicted on them as Europeans would do” (11n). In addition to the chastising commentary such as this, More also provides graphic descriptions of the violence exerted against those enslaved, describing the effects of toiling in the sun under conditions of starvation as well as physical and emotional torture, such as “When the sharp iron* wounds his inmost soul” (173). More couples this seemingly figurative image with the following note addressing the literal nature of the “sharp iron”: “*This is not said figuratively. The writer of these lines has seen a complete set of chains, fitted to every separate limb of these unhappy, innocent men; together with instruments for wrenching open the jaws, contrived with such ingenious cruelty as would shock the humanity of an inquisitor” (13n). With these notes of pointed social criticism, More’s voice commands the entire page, humanizing the scholarship, and telling “a distinctively modern, double story” (Grafton 23) that allows us to “hear the missteps of biases, and hear pathos, subtle decisions, scandal and anger” (Zerby 5), actuating the various tensions inherent in the ideology and presentation of a persuasive text.

Placing the Margins at the Center of Conversation

The margins of women’s writing are utilized in complex ways, as the examples above illustrate. The range of voices that these women are able to raise across the page evince the dynamism inherent in women’s intellectual history. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan write that “where women’s writing was once seen to occupy the margin of literary culture, it now takes centre stage” (4). I take Batchelor and Kaplan’s notion of marginal occupation literally, and I suggest that we read the margins of women’s writing in order to more fully understand their engagement with scholarly authority within verse forms. The textual, marginal framework of literary quotation, historical reference, political commentary, and so forth, illustrates Shari Benstock’s claim that “to read a footnote is to be reminded of the inherent multitextuality of all texts” (220n2); indeed, it is through the footnotes that readers, as Benstock observes, are “continually called to attention by the text and brought into collaboration with the author” (207). If the various degrees of multitextuality, collaboration, and editorializing commentary can be reduced to a single claim of intent or effect on women’s scholarly verse, I would argue that by annotating their poetry, women writers not only create a canon of women’s literature and literary history, but also implicitly position their poems within a larger canon with the various references, allusions, and scholarly citations throughout the long eighteenth century.

Although a few women writers continued working within this form into the nineteenth century (most notably Felicia Dorothea Hemans and Mary Russell Mitford), the scholarly lyric was coopted by male writers working more explicitly within a Romantic milieu, including Walter

Scott, Robert Southey, and Byron. Accordingly, most scholarship on footnotes at the turn of the eighteenth century treats annotated poetry as an esoteric and Romantic genre.³ Nevertheless, as the distant reading provided here demonstrates, women's scholarly verse has deep roots and wide acceptance in eighteenth-century women's writing. And there is much work yet to be done in accounting for the variety of authorities and approaches with which women writers engaged in the margins, through both distant and close readings.

None of this is to say that male writers were not incorporating annotation into their verses or that only women could write in this genre. James Grainger, for example, presents readers with extensive annotations in his poem, *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem in Four Books with Notes* (1764). These "intentionally didactic" annotations allow the work to serve as a horticultural primer complementary to the panegyrics of the verse, addressing Grainger's complaint that "so little has been published on the cultivation of the Sugar-Cane" (vi). The lengthy commentary and close focus on the botanical information certainly anticipates later eighteenth-century productions of Erasmus Darwin, Anna Seward, and Charlotte Smith. Likewise, Thomas Gray heavily annotated his early poetry in a quasi-Gothic mode anticipatory of the later Romantics—and doing so despite his disparaging remarks to Horace Walpole that "I do not love notes . . . They are signs of weakness and obscurity. If a thing cannot be understood without them, it had better be not understood at all" (15). Sharing this attitude towards annotation, Samuel Johnson remarked in his "Preface to Shakespeare" that "Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils" (299). Such contradicting claims and actions are not as present in women's literary history or commentary upon the textual aesthetic or political agendas underlying their works. Furthermore, given that Johnson is easily cast as the antagonist in Anna Seward's literary critical career, it may only be natural that she would seek to distance her own poetic authority, identity, and aesthetic from that of Johnson—and that she would voice her criticism of Johnson within the "necessary evil" of a note ("Sonnet LXVII").

Lastly, it is worth noting that many of the women writers discussed here, in their engagement with scholarly verse, sought to compose complementary accounts of women's literary, political, and social history. And, when women specifically are not the primary focus of the poetry and annotations, other marginalized groups are, such as indigenous populations, slaves, and immigrants. We see this focus on the margins and marginalized in many of the examples above, from Charlotte Smith's own subjectivity in "Beachy Head" (1807), Mary Scott's reshaping of the British literary canon and celebration of women's achievements in *The Female Advocate* (1774), Anna Seward's revision of Samuel Johnson's male-centric canon in *Original Sonnets* (1799), Helen Maria Williams' extension of sympathy for oppressed populations, represented by the conquered Incas in *Peru* (1784), Elizabeth Tollet's celebration of Anne Boleyn's legacy in "Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle" (1724), and Hannah More's description of a female slave's struggles along with her overall abolitionist project in *Slavery* (1788). In adopting this focus on subjugated populations, and particularly their focus on women, these poets join the chorus of voices providing a "rallying cry" for women's historiography throughout the eighteenth century (Looser 1), with accounts of women's roles in domestic and political developments and accounts written by women. The narrative of women's literary history composed through the symbiosis of text and paratext presents a "history emphasizing the role of women or told from a woman's point of view; also, a piece of historical writing by or about

women” (“herstory”), termed “herstory.” Thus, in excavating the long-eighteenth-century genre of women’s scholarly verse, we discover an alternate “herstory” written in the margins.

This distant reading of women’s poetry that I offer lends a new angle for unpacking Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blair’s assertion that “women’s poetry reconfigures a customary epistemological binary, mind and body, revising eighteenth-century philosophical assumptions about mind and body, and probing the implications for a new understanding of social organization” (viii). Likewise, taking note of this paratextual trend offers a new way of thinking about Backscheider’s assessment that “the women poets of the 1790s had inherited and brought to maturity the potential for power in the public sphere” (*Eighteenth-Century* 8), as well as for recontextualizing Mellor’s argument for the “relentlessly didactic” and “explicitly political” (85) position of the female poet and the inherently didactic nature of her poetry. Yet, it is no new claim that women writers harnessed their political agency within poetry, and that in their poetry they raised issues of literary, historical, sociological, and political criticism. What is novel in this approach, however, is the attention I give to the material margins themselves in the writings of a marginalized community. Reading this prevalent yet overlooked form of women’s poetry more distantly, while also closely reading the annotations, promises to open up exciting and productive avenues of conversation about the unique ways poetry served as a site of and structure for intellectual exploration in the eighteenth century.

¹ The annotated volumes consist of Joanna Baillie’s *Poems* (1790) and *Fugitive Verses* (1840), Anne Bannerman’s *Poems* (1800) and *Tales of Superstition* (1802), Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s *Poems* (1773), Mary Barber’s *Apollo’s Edict* (1725), *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734), Jane Brereton’s *Merlin* (1735) and *Poems on Several Occasions* (1744), Elizabeth Carter’s *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762), Mary Chandler’s *A Description of Bath* (1733), Hester Chapone’s *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1775), Mary Whateley Darwall’s *Original Poems* (1764) and *Poems on Several Occasions* (1794), Sarah Dixon’s *Poems on Several Occasions* (1740), Anne Finch’s *Miscellanies in Verse* (1713), Mary Jones’s *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1750), Lady Catherine Rebecca Manners’ *Poems by Lady Manners* (1793) and *Review of Poetry* (1799), Mary Masters’ *Familiar Letters and Poems* (1755), Amelie Opie’s *Poems* (1803), Clara Reeve’s *Original Poems on Several Occasions* (1769), Mary Scott’s *The Female Advocate* (1774), Anna Seward’s *Elegy on Captain Cook* (1780), *Monody on Major Andre* (1781), *Louisa. A Poetical Novel* (1784), *Ode from General Elliott’s Return from Gibraltar* (1787), *Llangollen Vale* (1796), and *Original Sonnets* (1799), Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784), *The Emigrants* (1793), and *Beachy Head* (1807), Ann Thomas’s *Poems on Various Subjects* (1784), Elizabeth Tollet’s *Poems on Several Occasions* (1724), Eliza Dorothea Tuite’s *Poems by Lady Tuite* (1796), Helen Maria Williams’s *An Ode on the Peace* (1783), *Peru: A Poem* (1784), *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1786), and Ann Yearsley’s *Elegy on Marie Antoinette* (1796), *Stanzas of Woe* (1790), *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785), and *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787). Of course, we must acknowledge that some of the notes are likely the editorial interventions of spouses, editors, or hands other than the author—such as those whose poetry was collected posthumously or otherwise compiled and edited by others.

² It is worth noting that in modern anthologized editions of the poems, such notes are often stripped from their poems and relegated to appendices, intermingled with modern editorial commentary, or even removed altogether. Although it is far beyond the purview of this essay,

such neglect of women's textual manipulation is worth further discussion in the contexts of modern scholarly editing.

³ See the scholarship of Alex Watson, Jacqueline Labbe, Dahlia Porter, Theresa Kelley, Judith Pascoe, Noah Heringman, and David Simpson.

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