Digital Editions of Early Modern Women's Writing

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A review of *Mary Wroth's Poetry: An Electronic Edition* (http://wroth.latrobe.edu.au/index.html); *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* (http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/); and *Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition* (http://library2.utm.utoronto.ca/poemsandfancies/).

The past decade has seen the publication of exciting new editions of early modern English women's writing. The Other Voice series continues to be strong in the field, publishing a wide range of collections and editions, while the first two of four volumes of *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson* have been published by Oxford University Press, and collected editions of Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips are forthcoming. The recent textbook publication of *Women Poets of the English Civil War* (2018), edited by Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, has made the work of key women writers available to the undergraduate and graduate classroom.[1] A particularly important development for both scholarship and teaching is the publication of three groundbreaking digital editions of women's writing, supplementing the long-standing collections of women's writing found in the *Emory Women Writers Resource Project*, *Perdita Manuscripts, 1500–1700*, *Women Writers Online*, and *Orlando*.[2] Mary Wroth, Hester Pulter, and Margaret Cavendish are now well represented in digital form on separate websites: *Mary Wroth's Poetry*, edited by Paul Salzman; *Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies*, edited by Liza Blake with her students; and *The Pulter Project*, edited by a team headed by Leah Knight and Wendy Wall.[3] These digital editions represent important innovations in the

presentation and editing of early modern women's writing, offering valuable role models for the creation of digital editions of early modern texts more generally.

Editing early modern women's writing poses specific challenges and is, as shown by the 2016 collection of essays edited by Sarah Ross and Paul Salzman and entitled *Editing Early Modern Women*, the subject of continued debate.[4] Given the danger of reductive readings based on limited sets of facts, how much should editions foreground women writers' biographies? How should the mixed and fluid genres in which women wrote be presented? Should women's writing receive the same treatment as writing by men? How should we deal with recent arguments for "unediting" the early modern text when texts by many women have not been edited in the first place? Finally, how should we represent the textual transmission and history of women's works, given that "the 'production' of the seventeenth-century woman poet occurred through multiple mediations of editorial collaboration and intervention, and in overlapping practices of manuscript and print publication"?[5]

Digital editions are particularly well situated to resolve some of these thorny questions. For instance, they can make a writer's biography available without positioning it before the text itself to avoid privileging it as an interpretive key to the work. They can provide literary, cultural, and political contexts by including additional texts and hyperlinks to relevant material. Above all, they can highlight textual complexities and uncertainties while also offering accessible, modernized texts, empowering readers to make their own editorial choices. All three editions discussed in this review essay highlight the editing of their texts by giving us a look behind what the editors of the Pulter Project call "the editorial curtain" in order to "reveal to readers the often invisible decisions underwriting the making of poetry and poets." These digital editions give us the traditional edited text but also enable us, if we wish, to encounter the instability of women's works.

Mary Wroth

Wroth's sonnets exist in two contemporary forms: the manuscript version held by the Folger Library (a fair copy by Wroth herself) and the printed version, included in the first volume of Wroth's romance *Urania* (1621). Between these two, there are differences in ordering, word choices, and punctuation. On Salzman's website, each poem appears in five different iterations—facsimile image, transcription, and modernized version of the poem

in the manuscript as well as transcription and modernized version of the print edition—and the reader can choose which ones to see on the screen at the same time. In a welcome addition, Salzman also includes the "hermaphrodite poems"—the angry poetic response to the *Urania* by Edward Denny calling Wroth "Hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster" and Wroth's clever rebuttal.

The ability to display one or more different editions means that we can appreciate the extent to which, as Salzman puts it, "the poetry remained in a state of flux." To give an example, when displayed side by side, sonnet F26 (23 in most editions), "When every one to pleasing pastimes hies," shows a small number of intriguing variants. The sonnet features a series of contrasts between the female speaker and "others," defined as a leisured, courtly group that engages in elite pastimes of various kinds. While these others "play," the speaker sits alone with her thoughts, but it becomes clear that her private contemplation, seemingly a sign of deprivation and retreat, may be considered superior. The manuscript image shows that the phrase "I my thoughts doe farr aboue thes prise" originally read "I my thoughts did farr aboue thes prise," possibly a decision to keep the poem in the present tense to make its emotional appeal more immediate. The sonnet ends with

a question that reads in the modernized manuscript version, "O God, say I, can these fond pleasures move? / Or music be but in dear thoughts of love?" In print, "dear" becomes "sweet," removing the possible pun on costly in the manuscript and highlighting the physical pleasure found in thoughts instead. In addition, the manuscript contrasts the speaker who "with my spirit talk, and cry" with others for whom "music is their greatest grace." In print, the others are described as those who "music choose as greatest grace." The shift from "is" to "choose," particularly in combination with the religious term "grace," can lead us to reflect on issues of predestination and free will: the finality and fixity of music as the "greatest grace" for others in the manuscript version contrasts with their deliberate decision in favor of music in the print version. Neither version is clearly preferable, but they create alternative readings of the difference between the speaker and others articulated in the poem. The juxtaposition of manuscript and print gives both equal weight and opens the poem up to complex interpretation.

Margaret Cavendish

Blake's edition of Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* shows that early modern printed texts could be just as varied as manuscript versions of

poems, particularly in the case of Cavendish, who made what Blake calls "post-print interventions": her corrections, alterations, rearrangements, and selections of prefatory materials create different reading experiences for the three editions of the collection that came out during her lifetime (1653, 1664, and 1668) and even for individual copies of each edition. Blake's introductions explain the textual history of the book and offer teaching suggestions, thematic clusters, and a table of the rearrangements of poems, since these have the potential to alter the meaning of individual poems significantly. Notably absent from the website is a biography of Cavendish; the assumption is that the reader who turns to this site is familiar with the basics and is interested in a complex, advanced encounter with her writing. The experience of using Blake's edition is different from Salzman's: all poems and prose texts are modernized, and rather than juxtaposing versions, Blake and her team decided to use "best text" editing: for each variant, the editorial team has chosen the option they prefer, producing their own unique version of the text. The reader can access other variants by having the cursor hover over footnotes or clicking on them.

While this procedure has affinities to older editorial practices that have been rightly critiqued for producing texts that never existed in the first place, Blake's editorial policy is based on a different set of motivations and assumptions than those employed in the past, in spite of the fact that she claims the team "wanted to give Cavendish, as a woman writer, a chance to have the same *kind* of edition, namely a conflated edition, that her male contemporaries received in the centuries where her book sat largely ignored." In the past, conflated editions aimed at recovering authorial intentions, removing "corruptions" supposedly introduced in print, and creating a type of master text. By contrast, Blake's team assumes that there is no master text for Cavendish and accepts that her intentions were varied and are unrecoverable. Instead, the conflated edition models for the reader how one might engage with Cavendish's unstable texts: just as Cavendish herself reassembled her collection for different readerships (including different frontispieces, title pages, and poems), we might also put together a version of Cavendish's poems we find most interesting and meaningful. *Poems and Fancies* becomes, Blake's edition shows, an invitation to read and piece together the book we want to read. Blake and her students have created their preferred *Poems and Fancies* for us, but because the variants are readily available, we can engage with their choices, question them, and explore the implications.

For example, in the delightful poem "Of Fairies in the Brain," the edition lists 21 variants, some small (from 1653 "the" to 1664/8 "a") and others significant. A large number have to do with the regularizing of meter that took place in the revisions of the 1653 edition (possibly by someone other than Cavendish herself). But there are also substantive changes. The poem's opening shows several variants. The 1653 edition reads:

> Who knowes, but in the
>   *Braine* may dwel
> Little small *Fairies*; who can
>   tell?
> And by their severall
>   actions they may make
> Those *formes* and *figures*,
>   we for *fancy* take.[6]

The 1664 edition (largely retained in the 1668 edition) reads:

> Who knows, but that in
>   every Brain may dwell
> Those Creatures, we call
>   *Fairies*, who can tell?
> And by their several
>   Actions they may frame
> Those Forms and Figures,
>   which we Fancies name.[7]

Blake's edition combines the two:

> Who knows, but that in
>   every brain may dwell

> Those creatures we call
>   fairies—who can tell?
> And by their several actions
>   they may make
> Those forms and figures we
>   for fancy take.

The 1664 edition replaces "the" with "every" in the first line, moving from a more general consideration of "the *Braine*" to a sense of the pervasive presence of fairies in human brains.

It also highlights the theme of naming and language, present in the 1653 title but not in the poem itself, in the phrase "Those Creatures, we call *Fairies*" and "which we Fancies name." Both phrases suggest that reality and what we name it are not necessarily equivalent. By contrast, rather than highlighting linguistic uncertainty, the 1653 edition indicates fairies may be the ones to make what "we for *fancy* take," exposing a different form of uncertainty: are those forms and figures indeed fancy? Or are they what we think of as fancy? Additionally, the shift from "*fancy*" (1653) to "Fancies" (1664) has potential philosophical and poetic importance: the 1664 version may allude to the "Fancies" included in the book, rather than our "fancy" more generally. The conflated edition by Blake's team offers us both the linguistic uncertainty and the philosophical questioning, creating its very own version of what it is Cavendish is exploring. It is a

daring choice, and one that can certainly lead to much interesting discussion in the classroom.

Hester Pulter

Pulter's work was not printed in the seventeenth century and only gained scholarly attention in 1996. It survives in a single manuscript housed at the University of Leeds, containing 120 poems as well as an unfinished prose romance. Pulter's manuscript was written in different hands, mostly by a scribe, but it includes authorial emendations and revisions as well as a small number of poems probably in Pulter's own hand. The most aesthetically pleasing of the three editions reviewed here, *The Pulter Project* includes an introductory video, a biographical and textual introduction, and multiple editions of each poem. Readers can access a facsimile image of the manuscript, a transcription, an "elemental edition" (a lightly edited, modernized version with notes), and an "amplified edition" (a modernized version with more extensive commentary and interpretation). As is true of Salzman's website, the reader can choose to display one or more of these versions through simple clicks. Every version of each poem is accompanied by an Editorial Note (the same for all transcriptions and elemental editions but different for each amplified edition), and both

elemental and amplified editions include an introductory Headnote. Since elemental and amplified editions are by different scholars, readers can think about how editors frame individual poems and how such framing affects our interpretation. For instance, "The Complaint of Thames, 1647," a poem on the imprisonment of Charles I, is presented in more literary terms in the elemental edition's headnote by Knight and Wall, who end on a note of pathos, writing that in the poem's conclusion the river Thames "offers to immortalize the king with the only material she can offer: the watery tears of grief." The amplified edition by Lara Dodds, in contrast, emphasizes the political aspects of the poem as well as "both national and global contexts," noting that the poem ends with a speaker "who puts off sleep to weep with the rivers of the world."

In addition to the writings of Pulter, *The Pulter Project* also includes sections under the headings "Explorations" and "Curations." Both provide contexts for Pulter in the form of selected texts and visual materials, in the case of Explorations for multiple poems and in the case of Curations for single ones. For example, the Exploration entitled "Hester Pulter and the Blazon in Early Modern England," by Frances Dolan, introduces the concept of the blazon through definitions, critical excerpts, sixteenth-century models,

and contemporary examples. In her curation for the poem "Of Night and Morning," Tara Lyons has assembled materials ranging from individual reflection to official doctrine, including such diverse contexts as a visual representation of death, a sermon, the "Order for the Burial of the Dead" from the Book of Common Prayer, and poems on doomsday by George Herbert and John Donne. For "A Solitary Complaint," Elizabeth Kolkovich has collected a variety of complaint poems, poems about planets, and excerpts from works of astronomy. Such contextualizing not only presents the poems in all their rich cultural embeddedness but also encourages new readings by students and advanced scholars alike.

All three digital editions promise to enhance and deepen how we read early modern women's writing in- and outside of the classroom. *Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies* and *The Pulter Project* also model collaboration, involving students as well as advanced researchers in their production. Each of these websites can serve as inspiration for future editions of early modern writing more generally. Especially during a global pandemic, when many of us are teaching online, it is easy to see the advantages of online editions of women's writing. But these three editions will undoubtedly continue to enhance our teaching and research long after the pandemic is

over, showcasing the rich potential of digital publication to its fullest extent.

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NOTES

1. Recent publications by the Other Voice series include Mary Wroth, Jane Cavendish, and Elizabeth Brackley, *Women's Household Drama: Loves Victorie, A Pastorall, and The Concealed Fansyes*, ed. Marta Straznicky and Sara Mueller (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2018); *Witness, Warning, and Prophecy: Quaker Women's Writing, 1655–1700*, ed. Teresa Feroli and Margaret Olofson Thickstun (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2018); Lady Hester Pulter, *Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, ed. Alice Eardley (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2014); *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea; or, A Narrative of Her Journey from London into Cornwall*, ed. Hilary Hinds (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2016); Lady Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus in Manuscript and Print*, ed. Ilona Bell and Steven W. May (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2017); Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified and Other Pamphlets*, ed. Jane Donawerth and Rebecca M. Lush (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2018); Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Poems and Fancies with The Animal Parliament*, ed. Brandie R. Siegfried (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2018); and Anne Bradstreet, *Poems and Meditations*, ed. Margaret Olofson Thickstun (Tempe, AZ: Iter, 2019). See also Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, ed., *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Elizabeth Clarke, et al., ed., *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2018); and Sarah C. E. Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, ed., *Women Poets of the English Civil War* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2018).

2. The *Emory Women Writers Resource Project* includes an increasing number of texts by early modern women, some edited and others transcribed only. These are freely available at http://womenwriters.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/earlymodern/about.php. The other resources are subscription-based databases of primary texts and secondary materials. *Perdita Manuscripts, 1500–1700* is produced in association with the Perdita Project by the University of Warwick and Nottingham Trent University, found at https://www.amdigital.co.uk/primary-sources/perdita-manuscripts-1500-1700. The *Women Writers Project* includes the database *Women Writers Online* of early modern women's writing and is housed at Northeastern University: https://wwp.northeastern.edu/. *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* is housed by Cambridge University Press at http://orlando.cambridge.org/.

3. *Mary Wroth's Poetry: An Electronic Edition*, housed by Latrobe University, is at http://wroth.latrobe.edu.au/index.html; *Margaret Cavendish's Poems and Fancies: A Digital Critical Edition* is sponsored by the University of Toronto and at http://library2.utm.utoronto.ca/poemsandfancies/; and *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making* is housed by Northwestern University at http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/.

4. Sarah C. E. Ross and Paul Salzman, ed., *Editing Early Modern Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

5. Ross and Salzman, "Introduction," in *Editing Early Modern Women*, 6.

6. Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), 162; sig. Ddv.

7. Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Phancies* (London, 1664), 227; sig. Gg2r. Cf. Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, or, Several Fancies in Verse* (London, 1668), 269; sig. Mm3r.