

**SAA 2021, Seminar 09: Editing Early-Modern Women's Writing: Approaches, Challenges, and Responsibilities (led by Elaine Hobby, e.a.hobby@lboro.ac.uk, and Claire Bowditch, c.bowditch@lboro.ac.uk).**

### **The Challenges of Editing Alice Thornton's 'Bookes'** **Cordelia Beattie and Suzanne Trill**

Cordelia's rediscovery of two 'missing' Alice Thornton manuscripts (the *Booke of Remembrances* and 'my first Booke of my Widdowed Condition') makes it possible now both to 'un-edit' Charles C. Jackson's nineteenth-century edition of her life (*The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton*) and produce an entirely new edition that will allow scholars to reassess the significance of her writing. While exciting, planning such a project presents many challenges, not the least of which being how to refer to the different manuscripts now known to exist. Although Raymond Anselment had good reason to title his edition *My First Booke of My Life* (2014), all four 'Bookes' intersect in significant ways. The contents of the four volumes suggest that Thornton continually rewrote, revised, and reappraised key events in her life. We have applied for AHRC funding with the primary aim of producing a Digital Scholarly Edition that will allow all four of Thornton's 'Bookes' to be read continuously as separate volumes while also facilitating easy comparison of variant accounts of the same event as they appear across the volumes. From a pilot project in which we were only able to document one event (the birth of her third child), we are aware this presents both editorial and technical challenges. Thornton's 'Bookes' manifestly resist the chronological organisation imposed on them by Jackson; however, one of our challenges will be how to enable our readers to navigate their way through a labyrinth of possibilities. Your comments on this paper will play an important part in that process.

### **Editing Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*** **Alison Findlay**

This paper explores the privilege, pleasures and problems of editing an early modern woman's play from manuscript for publication within a series designed for early printed drama. My access to the only complete manuscript copy of Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* (1617-1621), the Penshurst Manuscript, has been a matter of time and great good fortune but this privilege has also come with responsibilities which I believe are shared by other feminist editors. My paper examines these through an account of key moments in editing the play. It considers how Wroth's writing (and women's writing more generally) challenges traditional bibliographic terms such as 'copy text'; how the importance of diacritical markings demands different editorial models; how the need to a construct stage history - both speculative and material - is an editorial duty in the case of early women's drama. Finally, the paper reflects on the importance of feminist scholarship, past and present, in supporting and illuminating one's editorial choices to bring out the particular registers of the female voice by using examples from Wroth's script.

### **Editing as Time Travel** **Karen Gevirtz**

When L. P. Hartley famously wrote in *The Go-Between*, 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,' he might as well have been thinking of editing. Editing a text like Aphra Behn's *The History of the Nun* is like being a tourist in Hartley's sense: one is

very aware -- one is *supposed* to be very aware -- of being an alien, because that alienation reveals what needs explaining to an audience. Editing is being simultaneously immersed in the world of the text and being absolutely different from it. Baedeker might consider someone who does that a tourist. In textual terms, Gérard Genette might argue that an editor's position is like a piece of discourse in the middle of a narrative, or as he so elegantly puts it, a 'cyst.'

In that sense, the editor is a time traveller, going into the past in order to render the text more comprehensible or accessible to an audience of a very different time. Hartley's point that 'they do things differently there' doesn't just refer to the 'big things' like allusions to important people or events. It also means understanding the small things, the daily life involved in 'doing things.' Editing is time traveling, then, in the sense of understanding not just what happened but also what it was to live in the time while it happened. To raise another literary allusion of my own, editing is understanding Auden's 'dogs getting on with their doggy lives' while Icarus falls into the sea.

Editing also requires a simultaneous journey into the future, in the sense that editors must anticipate what readers of the text will need and want, and how readers will approach the text and the editing apparatus like glosses and headnotes. This journey was far easier to undertake decades ago, when at least some audiences, like university professors, were fairly homogenous and stable. In the third decade of the twenty-first century, however, the questions come fast and furious: Who will read this -- general readers, undergraduates, graduate students, scholars? American readers? British readers? Native speakers of a different language? What experience and knowledge will they bring to the reading? What will the audience know and how can the text support less-informed readers without irritating the knowledgeable? How will readers use or want to use the edited text? When will they read it -- a year from now, five years from now, twenty years from now?

That question of 'when' complicates the editor's journey into the future, because there isn't one spot that is 'the future' any more than one spot that is 'the past.' The past is a foreign country and a big one at that, but at least its limits are discernible and it can be divided (however spuriously) into sections for convenience's sake. To carry the metaphor to a perhaps outrageous extent, the future is an even vaster country and its only limit is the one the editor is sitting on already. But the editor still has to prepare the text to be useful to the future's inhabitants.

I have learned all this, of course, by the very ordinary chronological journey everyone makes, and sometimes the road most certainly did not rise up to meet me, as the Irish toast goes. My earlier method, providing information for an imagined generic reader in order to guide them to an understanding of *The History of the Nun*, is too problematic to serve. Fortunately, the smooth and rough bits of the road have yielded some ideas to proffer to other editors. The word 'nuptial', for instance, forced me to gloss the text with the difference between British and American students very much in mind. Behn's punctuation also proved the boundary between Millennials and Gen Xers, requiring me to rethink how I handled the delicious, breathless balancing act that is the Behnian sentence. The consistency of students' questions about why Isabella felt compelled to murder Henault sent me on research expeditions into murder, matrimony, and the military for the headnote.

I look forward to exploring examples like these, and the larger questions they provoke, in our seminar.

## **Editing Laetitia Pilkington's *Memoirs*** **Catherine Ingrassia**

Poet and memoirist Laetitia Pilkington (c. 1709-1749) published the first two volumes of her *Memoirs* in 1748 (Dublin and London); the third, completed by her son, appeared posthumously in 1754 (London). The University of Georgia Press published a two-volume edition (edited by A.C. Elias) in 1997, but priced at \$96, numbering 792 pages (well more than half in Elias's apparatus), and owned by only 227 libraries worldwide, that edition arguably constricts rather than expands availability to this important text. In editing the *Memoirs* for Broadview Press, I'm trying to produce an affordable scholarly edition with a useful apparatus and appendices that situate the work within Pilkington's particular cultural moment— newly making the text accessible in every sense of that word. This approach, which I used when editing Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (Broadview), necessarily eschews a focus on textual variants but brings other editorial challenges and responsibilities upon which my paper seeks to reflect. Using the Pilkington project as the example (while remaining mindful of how the questions pertain beyond her work alone), I want to consider the implications for the status of early modern women's writing when texts like Pilkington's appear in a teachable paperback edition rather than what Laura Mandell terms "monumentalizing editions." A commitment to the preservation and circulation of women's writing and a scholarly activism grounded in a feminist editorial practice extends to the classroom and the creation of such affordable editions (or digital editions). Does that form perpetuate some of the associations that persist in the valuing of non-elite women writers? Does it change the nature of the contribution to the infrastructure of scholarship, if so how? Pilkington, who associated with and was championed by some of the most prominent literary figures of the period, proves an resonant test case for these questions.

## **"He words me": Editing Male-Authored Narratives with Female Narrators** **Catherine Loomis**

I am editing a collection of about two hundred poems and short prose works published between 1585 and 1610 in which male writers use a female narrative voice. Unlike published works by early modern women, which, with a few notable exceptions, usually deal with theology, these male-authored texts include many details of ordinary life: daily task lists, a description of the pain of breastfeeding an infant, bitter stories of unhappy marriages, an account of learning to read, explanations of the practicalities of sex work. While such details can, thanks to recent research, be found in women's letters, diaries, and commonplace books, the presence of these female voices in published and sometimes popular texts makes those experiences more widely accessible to early modern readers. But these narratives raise a set of troubling editorial questions. Is their source a poet's observation? Could these be female-authored narratives that were published under a male name so that they could appear in print? Are they, as at least one of them claims to be, "as told to" narratives? Do they bear any relationship to female characters who speak out on the early modern stage? Can we as readers trust that their accounts of women's lives are accurate? What use can such narratives be in the classroom, and how ought they to be introduced to readers? Any answers to these questions remain tentative, but the narratives themselves offer powerful and memorable female protagonists who deserve serious attention.

## **When a Corpus is like an Edition: Preparing Behn's Digital Oeuvre**

**Laura Runge**

Much of the work in cultural analytics or “distant reading” relies on massive data sets to extract statistically relevant facts from extensive fields of information, generally texts from large-scale digitization projects such as the Hathi Trust, Google Books, or EEBO-TCP. Unlike for textual criticism and the literary criticism that relies on it, the condition of a text in massive algorithmic criticism is not very important because individual textual discrepancies are statistically irrelevant in large corpora. Newer methods applying mid-range reading techniques on specific texts are beginning to influence literary criticism, but there has been little discussion regarding the preparation of texts used in these digitally analyzed corpora. This paper details the methods of carefully preparing the corpus of Aphra Behn's entire literary oeuvre for digital analysis: delineating the list of texts and digital surrogates, obtaining the plain text versions, and cleaning, proofing, and testing the corpora. Considerations include, what texts should be included and what excluded? What needs to be “corrected” and what retained? Like editors past and present, I applied principles of editing to make reasonable, consistent decisions, and like previous editors, I've relied heavily on bibliographic scholarship preceding me. Unlike editors of print editions, my research relies on the digitization of texts mediated over time in different forms. Consequently, the challenges involve removing much that has been added to Behn's texts (e.g. metadata, coding) and restoring the printed words that have been obscured. This corpus is built upon the desire to recreate a plain-text version of one set of the words known-to-be written by Behn and circulated in print during her lifetime. The purpose is to characterize Behn's contributions in literature of the late seventeenth century and to measure her uniqueness. To measure uniqueness, I have also constructed a late-seventeenth-century general language reference of 100 texts segmented into 5000 words each. This paper also describes how it was constructed and general observations on editing that set of texts.

## **Sleuth and pragmatist: the challenges of editing the seventeenth-century Boyle women's letters**

**Ann-Maria Walsh**

The seventeenth-century Boyle women were members of a hugely successful, noble Protestant family with vast landed interests as well as powerful socio-political ties stretching across Ireland and Britain. An unusually large amount of the Boyles' surviving papers relate to the women. Writing was a routine part of daily living for these elite women both as the means by which they ran their large households but also as a way of staying in touch with other family members who had to travel far from home for schooling, to transact business, and for marriage. The women's portion of the archive is incredibly rich and diverse and consists of letters, a diary, an autobiography, a memorandum book, a prose treatise, medical receipt and accounts books, and pious meditations. The letters are particularly significant because they cover an extensive time period from 1605 to 1691, while also offering a tantalizing glimpse into the lives and the immediate concerns of this family of women. Three hundred and sixty of the women's outgoing letters have been identified and of that number, there are twenty-six different female correspondents spanning three generations, starting as early as seven years of age and extending up to seventy-five-years old. The preparation and editing of those letters for publication must achieve a balance between capturing each writer's individual epistolary style, reflecting those elements which are common to the other female correspondents, while at the same

time necessarily having to be pragmatic about standardizing less important aspects. As the first editor of the Boyle women's letters, the occasion of this seminar thus presents a great opportunity for me to highlight and share some of the challenges which I have encountered, particularly around questions of gender, family, and place, and how they impact and shape the various processes of retrieval, transcription, annotation, and interpretation.