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‘Collecting, Cataloguing and Losing Women Writers:
George Ballard’s *Memoirs of Several Ladies*’

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I know not how it hath happened that very many ingenious Women of this Nation, who were really possessed of a great share of learning, and have no doubt in their time been famous for it, are ~~but little known~~ ^{not only unknown} to the publick in general, and [^]but have [^]been passed by in silence, even by our ~~most~~ ^{indefatigable} Biographers themselves.¹

I know not how it has happened that very many ingenious women of this nation, who were really possessed of a great share of learning and have, no doubt, in their time been famous for it, are not only unknown to the public in general, but have been passed by in silence by our greatest biographers.²

Over fifteen years in the making, George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences* (1752) featured the lives of sixty-four British women from the fourteenth through to the early eighteenth century, making it the most expansive list of learned British women to date.³ However, as Ballard himself was fully aware, his collection was far from complete and he hoped that his 'imperfect attempt' might 'excite some more able Person to carry on and finish the work.'⁴ The incompleteness of scholarly projects is a familiar trope in the annals of literary history. Women's literary history in particular has, from its very beginnings, been constructed as a battle against a perceived set of fragmentary, incomplete, or unfinished accounts, if not excluded, forgotten, or erased ones.

Virginia Woolf inaugurated modern feminists' preoccupation with ideas about obscurity and historiography in her compelling account of the thwarted Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*.⁵ Margaret Ezell later corrected Woolf's (and many feminist scholars') perception of a dearth of female writing by drawing attention to the wealth of women's writing available in manuscript, rather than just print.⁶ More recently, Jennifer Summit has considered the ways in which, from the

¹ Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 74, f.3r

² George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 53. All subsequent references are to this edition.

³ George Ballard (1705/6-1755) was a ladies dressmaker from Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire. A keen numismatist and antiquary, he taught himself Old English and Latin in his youth and later became friends with many of the most prominent antiquaries of his day. For Ballard's biography, see Perry's introduction (1985) and 'Ballard, George (1705/6-1755)', David Vaisey in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1235> (accessed May 18, 2013).

⁴ MS Ballard 74, f.3r.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

⁶ Margaret J.M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 62. Then and now access to resources has been a significant issue for those doing research on manuscripts. Whilst online databases such as *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO) have enabled more

fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, descriptions of the ‘lost woman writer’ were not accurate, but were what Summit aptly describes as an ‘active construction.’ As she puts it, ‘The idea of loss has served as a powerful function that shaped the cultural place of the woman writer.’⁷

Ballard, as the quotations above illustrate, is one in a long line of writers and scholars who have perpetuated the myth of loss, and have turned the ‘but little known’ into the ‘unknown’ and ‘passed by in silence’. However, the existence of these two variants of his preface to the *Memoirs of Several Ladies* (there are four manuscript versions of his preface in total), alerts us, as Summit shows, to the fluid and contingent nature of such constructions. They also reveal that Ballard’s printed volume is not his only legacy in relation to women’s literary history: Ballard left a large manuscript collection to the Bodleian Library, including his working manuscript of the *Memoirs* and an annotated presentation copy of the published text, and there are further letters and manuscripts in the British Library, amongst which is a significantly longer working list of learned and writing women.

The Bodleian collection in particular comprises more than just the various source materials that went into *Memoirs of Several Ladies*: it features 73 additional volumes of manuscripts related to British literary history, including a number of documents of Anthony Wood (1632-1695), a predecessor in encyclopaedic biography; 44 volumes of letters addressed to Arthur Charlett (1655-1722), master of University College, Oxford; copious letters from Ballard’s male and female correspondents; and preliminary notes towards a history of learned women written in 1709 by Elizabeth Elstob (1683-1756), the Anglo-saxon scholar whom Ballard befriended and who provided the inspiration for his efforts.⁸ It is a collection about collections, collecting, textuality, scholarship, memorialisation, manuscript circulation, collaboration and the creation of textual lives. In Ballard’s letters and manuscripts, and reiterated throughout his biographies is the story of his textual reconstruction of these women’s lives. Moreover, his awareness of the differential values, problematic nature and potential veracity of all of his sources is constantly broached. He has much to tell us, therefore, about how eighteenth-century scholars conceptualized textuality, as well as about the research and writing of lives.

However, Ballard’s legacy has become increasingly problematic. Until the 1990s, his contribution was cited as one of the most valuable resources for scholars seeking information on early intellectual women. Nevertheless, despite Ruth Perry’s excellent critical edition in 1985 and Margaret Ezell’s critique, in *Writing Women’s Literary History* (1993), of its limited historical value very few explications of the exact nature and scope of his work has since been undertaken.⁹ Perry’s work

scholars to access published works, the difficulties involved in reproducing manuscript resources has continued to limit the range of material available outside the archive. There are exemplary online manuscript resources, such as the *Perdita Manuscripts: women writers 1500-1700*, but, like the print databases, it is too expensive for many university libraries. The team at the University of Warwick has produced free content, however, with their ‘Constructing Elizabeth Isham’ Project. A digital transcription of Isham’s ‘Booke of Remembrance’ (Princeton University Library, Robert Taylor Collection, MS RTC01 no. 62) is available at: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/isham/>.

⁷ Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

⁸ Elstob’s notebook is MS Ballard 64.

⁹ Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Perry’s bibliography in the *Memoirs* provides a useful register of the state of scholarship on each of Ballard’s women at the time her edition went to press. In many cases, it confirms why Ballard was still such an important resource given the paucity of critical material available.

concentrates on Ballard as the male equivalent of his female protagonists: all ‘amateurs in the groves of academe,’ (13) and valorises his objective, scholarly industry in documenting these women’s lives. Ezell, on the other hand, takes issue with Perry’s celebration of the work as a repository of facts and reminds us that historical narratives embody ideology as well as data, and that Ballard’s text is of limited use precisely because of its didactic exemplification of women’s intellectual endeavours.¹⁰ Since Ezell’s timely critique, few twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have been complimentary about Ballard or his methods; he is not vilified but, like other male editors who appear to act as restrictive gatekeepers in our quest for women’s ordinary literary texts and lives, he is made to be an obstacle or worse an obsolete resource.

Elizabeth Eger, echoing Ezell, describes the ‘incredibly uncritical acceptance of Ballard’s researches’ and adds that ‘[w]hile pioneering at the time, Ballard’s work contains subtle emphases and omissions, neglecting important aspects of the women’s arts—their lives forming the focus of his enquiry.’¹¹ Emily Bowles-Smith reiterates this position when she questions his ‘strategic elisions and reinterpretations of the works, words, and worlds of the women he describes.’¹² She also argues that despite his antiquarian interest in piecing together an objective picture of the textual remains of learned women, Ballard’s lives inculcate, in eighteenth-century conduct-book and novelistic fashion, ‘lessons of domestic obedience, textual deference, and nationalistic pride.’¹³ Emma Clery is the most generous regarding Ballard’s project: she credits him with the aim of improving the ‘climate for learned women... by publicizing the literary achievements of women in the past, and showing the compatibility of intellectual pursuits and strict virtue in a series of exemplary lives.’¹⁴

What many of the accounts fail to tease out, but what Clery hints at when she notes Ballard’s polemical aims, are the manifold issues surrounding life-writing and encyclopaedic biography in a period of, what Summit calls, ‘changing ideas about writing, gender and the nature of the literary tradition.’¹⁵ As recent scholarship has acknowledged, life-writing, rather than biography, offers a more appropriate and capacious term for the broad range of forms that the genres embraces—everything from diaries and letters, to archaeological data and oral histories.¹⁶ In particular, women’s life-writing ‘has in recent years become increasingly understood as generically fluid’ and ‘as producing [...] fragmentary subjectivities.’¹⁷ Ballard himself

¹⁰ See Chapter 3, ‘The Tedious Chase: Writing Women’s Literary History in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,’ in *Writing Women’s Literary History*, 66-103.

¹¹ Elizabeth Eger, ‘Fashioning a Female Canon: Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and the Politics of the Anthology,’ in *Women’s Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of the Canon, 1730-1820*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999): 201-15, 210.

¹² Emily Bowles-Smith, ‘Perfect Patterns of Conjugal Love and Duty: George Ballard’s Domestic Ideologies in his Lives of Elizabeth Egerton and Margaret Cavendish,’ *The Age of Johnson, A Scholarly Annual* 19 (2009): 167-85, 169.

¹³ Bowles-Smith, ‘Perfect Patterns,’ 170.

¹⁴ Emma J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 163.

¹⁵ Summit, *Lost Property*, 2.

¹⁶ For some working definitions of life-writing see Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-6 and the introduction to *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*, ed. Thomas F. Mayer and D.F. Woolf (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995): 1-37.

¹⁷ Sarah C.E. Ross, “‘Like Penelope, always employed’”: Reading, Life-Writing, and the Early Modern Female Self in Katherine Austen’s *Book M*,’ *Literature Compass* 9/4 (2012): 306-316, 307.

used multiple terms for the lives he compiled: he titled them memoirs, elsewhere referred to the set as a catalogue or collection, and consistently contrasted his efforts with those of English biographers. Once we consider the unique methodological and ideological nature of antiquarian projects in the latter half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, we can read Ballard's text as much more than a series of biographies of exemplary female writers. The *Memoirs*' unique evocation of the very process of creating a textual life is a compelling memorial to the transitory nature of both texts and lives. Likewise, Ballard's reiterated concern with the extratextual (that is, social and material) dimensions of these women's lives, in addition to their high culture 'arts', significantly predates our own modern preoccupation with identifying the diverse cultural practices of early women writers.¹⁸ George Eliot's publisher once referred to biography as 'bookmaking out of the remains of the dead', and Ballard's text and archive present an opportunity to explore the ways in which textuality and materiality contributed to life-writing in the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁹

Encyclopedic Biography

Isabel Rivers has discussed the importance of biographical dictionaries in the eighteenth century and notes that, 'Modern readers sometimes turn to individual dictionaries for information about specific individuals that is of value to them now, but they rarely ask what their editors hoped to achieve or what their original readers might have found in them at the time.'²⁰ She emphasizes the considerable differences in the biographical tradition, from Pierre Bayle's inclusive historical-critical method, Jeremy Collier's less substantial offerings devoid of 'quotations or notes or source material,' to Anthony Wood's chronological, rather than alphabetical, approach in *Athenae Oxonienses* (1691–92).²¹ Trying to place Ballard in these various contexts immediately differentiates his collection, but it also raises problems. For instance, he assembled his anthology using 'rigorous' (in eighteenth-century terms) methods of bibliographical research, which suggests that he meant the *Memoirs* to contribute to the great critical tradition of biography exemplified by Pierre Bayle. However, the eventual work was subsumed into the popular anthology genre which catalogued but did not pass critical judgment on the works of the featured authors. He also arranged his subjects chronologically, an important nod to antiquarians like Wood and John Leland, but which weakens the arrangement's usefulness as a reference text for looking up individual women—precisely the way Ballard is used by most modern critics. Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* is, of course, arranged alphabetically and so is Elizabeth Elstob's preliminary outline in which she cites both Wood and Bayle as sources on the women she features. Elstob's booklet also contains an international assortment of notable women, as opposed to Ballard's strictly British selection.²²

Most collections of female worthies produced before Ballard were international in scope and often featured classical as well as biblical heroines. When a

¹⁸ See the introduction to vol. 2 of *The History of British Women's Writing, 1500-1610*, ed. Caroline Bicks and Jennifer Summit (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-14, 1.

¹⁹ George Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood, describing Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Bronte*. Quoted in Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

²⁰ Isabel Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries and their uses from Bayle to Chalmers,' in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London: Continuum, 2001), 137.

²¹ Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries,' 141.

²² Half of Elstob's 40 entries are British. Elstob's international list contains rough notes towards a series of lives, and Ballard's work, as Perry has argued, owes much to her example.

friend directed Ballard to Thomas Heywood's *Gynaikeion: or, Nine bookes of various history. Concerninge women inscribed by ye names of ye nine Muses* (1624), he was quick to reply that 'Heywoods Worthy Women is altogether foreign to to [sic] my Design'; foreign, that is, both in terms of the countries of origin of the women but also with respect to the variety of women featured.²³ Heywood was interested in 'the generalitie of Women, such as have either beene illustrated for their Vertues, and Noble Actions, or contrarily branded for their Vices, and baser Conditions'.²⁴ In section eight, for example, you can find his list of learned women and poetesses, but also various witches. And Heywood makes very little concession to life narrative.

In contrast, John Wilford, Ballard's immediate predecessor in national biography, framed his work as an establishment account of the great and the good of England. Wilford was a bookseller and his serial publication, *Memorials and Characters* (1739-41), was a commercial venture that relied mostly on previously published lives. Compiled by John Jones, the work has a strong Anglican bias: it is addressed and dedicated to 'The Most Reverend the Archbishops, the Right Reverend Bishops, and All Others of the Reverend Clergy of the Church of England: likewise to the Nobility and Gentry of both Sexes', and was meant to 'preserve the Memories, and record the Virtues, of their [the clergy's and the aristocracy's] most worthy Ancestors'.²⁵ Covering the period 1600-1740, the work gives a prominent place to female aristocrats and gentlewomen (they make up 78 of the 230 entries), amongst whom are a number of literary and learned women. The tone of the compilation is strongly influenced by its reliance on funeral sermons, and Wilford concedes that the eulogistic nature of these accounts somewhat lessens their reliability.²⁶ Nevertheless, Ballard found the volume useful and cites Wilford/Jones as a source for his entry on Anne, Countess of Pembroke, and likewise in the notes for a manuscript one on Lady Mary Armyne.²⁷ Like Wilford, Ballard also relies on a similar fund of textual remains for his own accounts, particularly funeral sermons. Where Ballard differs is in his approach to the sources and in his efforts to contribute new information. For Wilford, the sources are free content that handily perpetuate a virtuous message; for Ballard, the virtuous message is important, but so too is a larger antiquarian project.

Lost Women Writers

Ballard is preoccupied both with the lives of women and with ideas about obscurity and historiography. For Ballard, women's literary history is constructed out of a set of false aporias which he tries to dismiss by emphasizing the number of scholarly references he can find to support his points. Nonetheless, it is this very notion that there is a gap in the knowledge about women writers that prompts his repetitive reclamation project.²⁸

²³ British Library, MS Stowe 753, George Ballard to Charles Lyttelton, 4 January 1745/6, f.62v.

²⁴ Thomas Heywood, 'To the Reader,' *Gynaikeion: or, Nine bookes of various history. Concerninge women inscribed by ye names of ye nine Muses* (London: Adam Islip, 1624), A4v.

²⁵ John Wilford, dedication to *Memorials and Characters together with the Lives of Divers Eminent and Worthy Persons...*, 4 vols. (London: John Wilford, 1739-41).

²⁶ Wilford, ii.

²⁷ Perry, 287note.h and 415n.61. There are a couple of biographies of learned women that exist only in MS 74, including the painter, Ann Carlisle and Lady Mary Armyne. Perry records the omissions in her edition (414 note 57 and 415 note 61). Ballard also admits omitting Elizabeth Carew by accident (54).

²⁸ Alison Booth draws attention to the popularity of this idea: 'Catalogs of notable women have flourished in plain view for centuries, while generation after generation laments the absence of women of the past.' *How to Make it as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

Summit has convincingly shown how the Protestant biases of early editors of women's writing contributed to the lie of the lost woman writer in England, specifically demonstrating that they alienated her from ecclesiastical literacy and from the classical canon in the fourteenth century, which enabled her 'recovery' in the sixteenth century as a figure of national identity who was disassociated from the Roman Catholic Church.²⁹ In particular she details how editors such as John Bale began to develop 'nascent English literary history' in 'opposition to the Catholic medieval church', and utilized 'the religious woman writer as a figure for the conflict-ridden relationship between English writing and the literary past.'³⁰ Bale is one of Ballard's chief sources, along with John Leland (through Bishop Tanner's edition of the *Bibliotheca*), and part of Ballard's rhetorical strategy depends on both the scholarly authority and the critical bias of his Renaissance predecessors. Ballard wanted to demonstrate and celebrate the longstanding tradition of learned women in England, but, like Bale, he 'sought to *rewrite* England's national, cultural heritage through its books'.³¹

A 'compleat Catalogue': Ballard's Lost List of Ladies

Why, however, did Ballard, the diligent, principled defender of learned women leave so many women out of his *Memoirs*? There are, of course, many possible reasons, but the evidence of a much longer list of learned women reveals Ballard's more inclusive ambitions. To my knowledge, no one has yet identified a list of 108 women in Thomas Birch's archive as Ballard's working list.³² However, the hand, for anyone familiar with Ballard's neat and legible script, is unmistakable, and earlier pages in the manuscript contain a number of Birch folios entitled, 'Memoranda relating to Women eminent for their Writings, or Skill in the learned Languages, to be communicated to Mr. Geo. Ballard.'³³ The separate list is titled, 'A Catalogue of Ladies famous for their Writings, or skill in the Learned Languages,' a very close match to Ballard's eventual title: *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and science*. Also, a series of letters between Ballard and his friend and mentor Charles Lyttelton conclusively link the list to Ballard.³⁴

The working list is remarkable because it features so many writers who are now prominent in women's literary history, but who are absent from the *Memoirs*: Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Susanna Centlivre, Mary Pix, Penelope Aubin, Laetitia Pilkington, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Mary Leapor, and even Ballard's friend Elizabeth Elstob. This list reveals a version of the *Memoirs* that could have set a standard for learned women's collective biography not equaled until Myra Reynold's work in the 1920s.³⁵ Why, then, was it whittled down to just 64 women? The most likely reasons were practical constraints and financial costs. Ballard relied on patronage and the kindness of fellow antiquaries to pursue his projects. In February 1749, when Ballard was thinking of publishing proposals for an edition of King Ælfred's translation of Orosius, two antiquarian friends dissuaded him and suggested

²⁹ Summit, *Lost Property*, 16.

³⁰ Summit, *Lost Property*, 15.

³¹ Summit, *Lost Property*, 140 (emphasis mine).

³² British Library, Additional MS 4244, f.23.

³³ Add. MS 4244, ff. 21-4.

³⁴ Stowe 753, ff. 102-7.

³⁵ Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920).

he turn his attention back to a volume of learned ladies—a project he had begun over a decade earlier and which they thought would be both popular and profitable. Ballard relayed their conversation to Lyttelton, informing him that ‘I am therefore, now busily employ’d among the Learned and Virtuous of the fair Sex, in collecting scattered notices and remains in order to draw up about Thirty Lives, which for want of proper Materials have lain long unfinished.’³⁶ Ballard was incredibly deferential and accepting of advice from those he considered his intellectual and cultural superiors and it was likely that his two friends suggested just thirty lives. That Ballard knew of far more women is evident because, less than ten days later, he refers to his longer list of 108 women, and a month later sends the ‘compleat Catalogue’ of them to both Lyttelton and Thomas Birch.³⁷

Ballard was first put in touch with Birch through Lyttelton, after he queried the source of some original Lady Jane Grey letters. In response to what Ballard described as Birch’s ‘generous intentions of communicating some Anecdotes relating to several learned English Ladies’, and his volume of Lady Jane letters, Ballard then sent him his working list of learned women.³⁸ Unfortunately it took Birch over three months to communicate his information and, according to Ballard, ‘there was but three observations which were new to me’.³⁹ Birch’s ‘Memoranda’ reveal that he sent information on a number of women that appear in the final text, but also on at least five who do not: Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Susannah Newcombe (or Newcome), Delarivier Manley, and Mary Chandler.⁴⁰ At this point at least (May 1749), Ballard had not yet decided which writers to include in the *Memoirs*.

Apart from cost restrictions, there are a number of other possible reasons for the reduced selection: a number of the women were still alive in 1749 (Cockburn, Elstob, Haywood, Pilkington, and Newcombe), a few were inadvertently forgotten (Carew and Armyne), and for some, Ballard lacked sufficient evidence. However, a letter from Sarah Chapone suggests that she may have convinced Ballard to exclude the likes of Manley and Behn. In February 1749, around the time he was circulating his list of learned women, she wrote:

the other Sex, have a most inveterate, and I may add, illiberal dislike to intellectual improvements of any kind, in ours, but to obviate all objects and Soften that dislike (if possible) I believe you may assert in your Preface, that it would be a difficult matter to find one Single instance, when a woman of real Learning and Knowledge has misapplid [sic] those Talents [...]. Some few women of gay imaginations, and who Carried more Sail than Ballast, have indeed fallen in with the enemy, and join’d the impious Squadron, making Ship-wreck of their Faith, and modesty in the Service, as the author of the Atalantis, and famous M^{rs}. Bhen[sic], are two late instances of very unhappy turn’d minds, But they, nor none of that Slight Sisterhood, were ever thought women of Learning, or had any pretence to be call’d women of Knowledge.⁴¹

Ballard did not have to take this advice—indeed, contrary to her wishes, he cut a polemical defense of women from his preface—but it likely was a significant factor.

³⁶ Stowe 753, Ballard to Lyttelton, 10 February 1748/9, f. 99r.

³⁷ Stowe 753, Ballard to Lyttelton, 20 February 1748/9, f. 102.

³⁸ Stowe 753, Ballard to Lyttelton, 20 February 1748-9, f. 102.

³⁹ Stowe 753, Ballard to Lyttelton, 14 June 1749, f. 107.

⁴⁰ Add. MS 4244, 22 May 1749, ff. 21-4.

⁴¹ MS Ballard 43, Chapone to Ballard, 29 February 1749, f.151.

As Sarah C. E. Ross explains, the centrality of virtue and piety to the image of the learned women was largely ‘determined by the specifics of their education (primarily religious, as opposed to men’s grammar school education)’ and Ballard’s acceptance of the ‘cultural capital’ of such attributes is everywhere evident in his lives.⁴² Perhaps too Ballard’s interest in the obscure and arcane led him to exclude authors who were readily known and whose works were still in circulation. For example, in the entry for Lady Jane Grey he excludes an English version of one of her letters, ‘as it has been already so frequently printed by others in our own language’ (137). Nevertheless, his manuscript list informed the finished text and provides evidence of the collections he was making towards his history of learned women in England.

Collecting Lives and Antiquarian Methods

Ballard’s manuscript archive also reveals the extent to which his antiquarian pursuits shaped the content and style of his lives. His initial interest in Elstob, for example, stemmed not only from her gender but from her prestige in septentrional studies. Though nominally a ladies’ dressmaker, Ballard, from a young age was fascinated with history and early on in his career he developed an antiquary’s passion for and, latterly, expertise in numismatics, philology, Anglo-Saxon studies, book history, and life-writing. While our current view of the antiquary needs to get beyond what Rosemary Sweet describes as ‘the image of... a chaotic study, crammed full of objects of dubious authenticity, festooned with cobwebs,’⁴³ Graham Parry reminds us that ‘antiquarianism in the seventeenth century had a heroic quality to it, and its achievements aroused powerful emotions.’⁴⁴ Ballard’s letters repeatedly venerate the previous generation’s achievements, and, though he is primarily known today for his work on learned women, he was a typical antiquary in his accumulation of multiple collections, projects, curiosities, and ephemera. Parry notes that

The triumphal way to the printing press was littered with the remains of enterprises that had failed or been abandoned. For every antiquarian work that was published, there were a dozen that remained in manuscript, for the subject required not only industry and skill, but organizational power. The usual working method of the antiquary was to make what were called ‘collections’: extracts from works bearing on his subject, copies of documents, lists of inscriptions, miscellaneous jottings, records of conversations, observations, etc. Very often a project foundered amongst these compilations.⁴⁵

Given his self-taught expertise and lack of financial resources, Ballard was unusual in being valued as a judicious and conscientious compiler, transcriber, and ‘editor’ of others’ miscellaneous papers. Long before he produced anything in print, wealthy collectors and antiquaries enlisted Ballard’s help with their own projects. James West—a politician, antiquary, and, later, president of the Royal Society—entrusted his Burghley collection to Ballard, writing to him, ‘I pray you to digest & Catalogue & I will bind them in order of time.’⁴⁶ Richard Rawlinson, Ralph Thoresby, Joseph Ames, and Charles Lyttelton, among others, solicited and sometimes paid Ballard to

⁴² Ross, ‘Like Penelope,’ 307.

⁴³ Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Study of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), xiii.

⁴⁴ Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; 2007), 1.

⁴⁵ Parry, *Trophies of Time*, 16.

⁴⁶ MS Ballard 40, West to Ballard, 12 August 1747, f. 13.

carry out research, transcriptions, or collating on their behalf. Likewise, the reason Ballard's archive is so extensive is because antiquaries like Thomas Rawlins (Arthur Charlett's nephew) entrusted their unfinished 'collections' and letters to Ballard.

These established antiquarian activities clearly inform Ballard's approach to life-writing. Conventionally, 'Lives' were attached to the collected works, allowing the biographer to speak to a given corpus as well as comment on the anecdotal evidence. Ballard, however, prioritizes an eclectic mixture of fragmentary primary and secondary evidence—from unpublished verses, manuscript letters, to funeral sermons, epitaphs, and monuments—over the published work that had earned the women the right to be included in his *Memoirs* in the first place. Both his manuscript copy of the *Memoirs* and the 73 additional volumes of manuscripts are characterized by marginal notes and additions, revealing both the scholar and the dressmaker. Ballard's marginal notes provide missing names and biographical details, clarify oblique references, and direct readers to sources for transcribed texts. His pinned-in notes, using dressmaker's pins, however, also remind the reader of the temporal nature of his narrative process and the materiality of texts. In the life of Margaret Roper (1505-1544), Sir Thomas More's daughter, a pinned note appears to be information attained at a later stage of composition and expatiates on the whereabouts of More family portraits.⁴⁷ Similarly a scrap of paper containing an epitaph for Lady Arabella Seymour (née Stuart, 1575-1615) is clearly another late addition: his introduction to it supplants another sentence in the manuscript and then trails off into the margins.⁴⁸

This antiquarian approach owes much to Ballard's interest in 'artefacts of the written word'. Rosemary Sweet has described how early antiquaries examined the evidence of coins, manuscripts and inscriptions, in order to 'retrieve new material about the past which the narrative accounts did not supply.'⁴⁹ Ballard similarly retrieves forgotten women, as well as men, off the walls of churches, from obscure family deeds, and from rare or no longer extant texts. Daniel Woolf provides numerous examples of this process at work across a range of antiquarian endeavours—instances of local antiquaries using a combination of found objects, a growing body of textual scholarship, and some imaginative literary skills to fashion historical narratives of the national past.⁵⁰ He stresses, however, that the antiquarians' 'contribution lay less in the individual nuggets of information that they uncovered than in the "value added" in scholarly technique, combined with the capacity to keep what they received in circulation through their correspondence and printed works.'⁵¹ Ballard's *Memoirs* is a perfect synthesis of this antiquarian exercise: the use of 'artefacts of the written word', a reliance on 'the social circulation of the past' (he had a large network of male and female correspondents), and the 'value-added' labour of the scholar. Add to this that the typographical representation of the artefacts and the scholar's labour are textually marked out on the page and it becomes clear that Ballard's project is actually a piece by piece transcription of an already scripted history.

Much of the critical discussion concerning Ballard's *Memoirs* stresses his interest in exemplarity; however, virtue was not his main principle of selection: to be

⁴⁷ See MS Ballard 74, f.52. The note makes it into the final text as a footnote (95, n.o).

⁴⁸ MS Ballard 74, f.188r (for the marginal note) and f.189 for the epitaph. The pin is now lost.

⁴⁹ Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 1.

⁵⁰ Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, 154.

included, a woman had to be learned, but more importantly she, or someone else, had to produce something in print based upon her learning. Paramount throughout the *Memoirs* is a bibliographical concern for the survival, documentation, repetition, and dissemination of these women's texts. For Ballard, the 'noble art of printing' (188) was the medium that spread the fame of learned women, and because he appreciated print as the medium, the most important artefacts for him were books.

David McKitterick argues that the latter half of the eighteenth century paid increased attention to printing and the history of the book.⁵² Ballard himself engaged with such histories: he assisted Joseph Ames with material for one of these texts, *Typographical Antiquities* (1749), and later used Ames's work to promote his own original contributions to the history of the book. McKitterick shows us that, from the fifteenth through to the nineteenth century there was still an acceptance that print produced different copies and did not necessarily imply permanence.⁵³ Thus, throughout his biographies, Ballard treats the printed word as perishable and recognizes the true rarity of the individual printed artefact.

The first line of Ballard's *Memoirs* reveals his appreciation for the printed word: 'Juliana [of Norwich] distinguished herself by writing a book of revelations in the reign of K. Edw. III' (56). In his entry for Juliana Barnes (also Berners, fl. 1460), Ballard notes that her skilled treatises 'were so well esteemed that they were printed and published in the very infancy of the art of printing' (59). By emphasizing the book, Ballard foregrounds his interest in authorship, scholarship, and textual remains. We also sense his preoccupation with the importance of collecting, as well as his concern for material loss. He values Margaret Beaufort (1443-1509), the Countess of Richmond's love of learning, for example, in terms of her own accumulation of books:

Her affection for literature no doubt induced her mother-in-law, the Duchess of Buckingham, to give her the following legacy in her last will: 'To her daughter Richmond a book of English, being a legend of Saints; a book of French called Lucun; another book of French of the Epistles and Gospels; and a Primmer with clasps of silver gilt, covered with purple velvet.' This was a considerable legacy (of its kind) from a lady at that time, when few of her sex were taught to read, and when the most excellent art of printing was but just dawning upon the world. And it is not unlikely that this was that lady's whole stock of books. (66)

Likewise, Margaret Ascham earns a place in the *Memoirs* for printing the educational treatise, *The Schoolmaster* (1570), written by her husband, Roger Ascham, which Ballard regards as important conservation work involving considerable editorial expertise. He notes that she preserved the text for posterity *and* she provided the paratextual apparatus of the dedicatory epistle; in other words, she not only found a patron for her husband's text—as Ballard knew, a difficult task in itself—but composed the epistle, proving her literary skill. He follows the bibliographical description of her edition with the information that a fellow of King's College, Cambridge has recently published a scholarly reprint with explanatory notes. Though he concludes her entry with the comment, 'Whether she did anything more towards the advancement of learning I know not', by treating Margaret's contribution as a

⁵² David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 183-6.

⁵³ McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order*, 110-111.

print intervention in the history of Ascham's text, he nevertheless recognises her mediation as an 'advancement of learning' (168).

By constantly focusing on the physical book and, in some cases, its disappearing afterlife, Ballard's text not only communicates the economic, aesthetic, and spiritual significance of a book in eighteenth-century England, but also writes the narrative of loss which has been so important to women's literary history. His short biography of Margery Kempe (b.circa 1373-d.circa 1438) is almost entirely concerned with the scarcity of her works: 'This person and her writings are so little known to the learned world that she has escaped the knowledge even of the indefatigable compiler of the *Typographical Antiquities*, who seems an entire stranger to her book, which is now become so extremely scarce that I can hear of no more than two copies extant' (62). At the same time he cites two scholarly works with references to Kempe: Bishop Thomas Tanner's *Bibliotheca* (1748) and John Weever's *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631).⁵⁴ Their evidence keeps her in circulation despite the rarity of her works.⁵⁵ Documenting the bibliographical history of Margaret Beaufort's 'exceeding scarce book', *The mirroure of golde for the synfull soule* (1506), Ballard's footnote explains,

I was favoured with the loan of it by that great preserver and restorer of antiquities, the Honourable James West, Esq. Bishop Tanner mentions two more editions of this book.... Both these editions are so scarce that the former was unknown to the author of the *Typographical Antiquities*, and none of them to be met with in the Oxford libraries. (68)

The sense of rarity is not confined to products from the early years of printing: entries for Eleanor Davies (1590-1652), Anne Killigrew (1660-1685), and Grace, Lady Gethin (1676-1697), among others, also mention the scarcity of their books.

Ballard similarly manifests this antiquarian approach to life-writing in his appreciation of works still in manuscript. On the subject of manuscript letters from Queen Katherine (née Parr, 1512-1548) Ballard details a 'chasm' in the documentary record and seeks to counteract future aporias by publishing the remaining letter in the *Memoirs*. In a footnote, he records that a volume of manuscript letters in Elias Ashmole's study is supposed to contain two letters from the Queen to her third husband, Thomas Seymour: 'but upon the most careful search, I could find but one, and yet by the chasm in the paging, it is very evident that it was once to be found there' (124). Following the example of his scholarly forebears who print inconsequential letters as well as notable ones, he therefore adds, 'I gladly follow their example in preserving this epistle, fearing lest it should share the same fate with the other' (124).

Ballard's consistent appreciation for print and manuscript further extends to an aesthetic appreciation of the written word. Thus, he includes a biography of the calligrapher Esther Inglis (married name Kello, 1570/1-1624) because she 'did express whatever she wrote in most beautiful characters' (254), comparing her to men

⁵⁴ Tanner's enlarged edition of John Leland's *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica, sive, De scriptoribus* was published posthumously.

⁵⁵ Two excerpts from Kempe's writings were published by Wynkyn de Worde c.1501 and Henry Pepwell in 1521. Ballard references de Worde's edition. The manuscript of her work was not discovered until 1934. See 'Kempe, Margery (b. c.1373, d. in or after 1438),' Felicity Riddy in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15337> (accessed August 15, 2012).

known for their ‘talent this way,’ such as Wood in *Athenae Oxoniensis* (1691-92) and Thomas Hearne in his edition of William Camden’s *Annales rerum Anglicarum* (1717).⁵⁶ Another entry praises Elizabeth Lucar (1510-1537) for her skills in needlework, calligraphy, arithmetic, music, and languages, but confesses to know ‘nothing more concerning her than what her monumental inscription informs me’ (168). This inscription, copied from John Stowe’s *Survey of London* (1598—Ballard uses the 1633 edition), implicitly stands in for the lost evidence of her productions. The reference to Stowe—whose own life Ballard once considered writing—reinforces his argument that antiquaries have always championed learned women in England.

Ballard also demonstrates an aesthetic appreciation of typography, as well as an understanding of its possible uses to convey extratextual messages. In his biography of Margaret Beaufort, for example, he includes the inscription from her husband’s tomb in the cathedral of St. Davids, Pembrokeshire, Wales. He cites as his source for this inscription William Dugdale’s *Baronage*. He departs from his source, however, in his choice of typography.⁵⁷ In Dugdale, the inscription appears in italics; in Ballard, it is in black letter, the font meant to represent old scribal letterforms that, as Paul C. Gutfahr and Megan Benton explain, could also be ‘associated with religious and especially Protestant texts’.⁵⁸ This is the only instance in the *Memoirs* when Ballard utilises black letter, but it is a striking example of the form mediating text and meaning.⁵⁹ Ballard’s text tries to embody both the artefact of the tomb, but also a sense of the past. In so doing he implicitly enhances the value of his text by giving his readers a visual sense of a memorial and a way of relating to the past through textual alterity. It is unlikely that Ballard saw the tomb—there is no record of him ever travelling to Wales—but evoking the artefact from the past, and relying on the concomitant implications of black letter, reveal that Ballard had a complex approach to life-writing.

As these select entries show, Ballard was keen to celebrate women’s contribution to learning, book history, and the preservation of the past. Sweet has noted that evidence for women’s involvement in antiquarian endeavours throughout the period is not well documented.⁶⁰ However, Ballard specifically draws attention to women who contributed in various ways: for example, they preserved or erected monuments, supported scholars, and most important, helped maintain accurate family genealogies.⁶¹ He is criticised for focusing on women’s lives rather than their ‘arts’, but his appreciation for their non-literary endeavours means that a number of his entries actually document the extent to which women helped to construct the past. In addition, Ballard’s antiquarian approach to the physical ‘fragment’ has, in fact, invested those fragments with an enduring metonymic value. Quite clearly the past

⁵⁶ Ballard revised Inglis’s entry a number of times. In his first attempt he is more apologetic about including her, but an appended note (MS Ballard 74, f.194) which makes the final edit asserts that her ‘beautiful characters’ deserve notice (254).

⁵⁷ William Dugdale, *The Baronage of England*, 2 vols (1675-6), 2.237. Ballard refers to volume three in his footnotes, which, though there is a separate title page, is actually part of the running pagination in volume 2 (1676). Ballard’s font is not reproduced in Perry’s edition, but can be found on p. 11 of the 1752 edition. I would like to thank Rebecca Lewis at St. Davids Cathedral for her help in confirming the use of blackletter on the tomb.

⁵⁸ Paul C. Gutfahr and Megan Benton, ed., *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 9-11.

⁵⁹ Gutfahr and Benton, *Illuminating Letters*, 4.

⁶⁰ Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 70-1.

⁶¹ See, for example, his entries for Blanch Parry and Anne, Countess of Pembroke.

that is attested to in these records is ‘no simple model disinterestedly reconstructed but is itself at the service of the historical determinants of that present in which it is “recovered”,’ as Kathryn Sutherland puts it.⁶² An awareness of the ideological and textual complexities of such recovery processes prompted Ezell’s initial critique of Ballard. However, Ezell was primarily concerned with the deployment of Ballard’s ‘facts’ in subsequent biographies. The far more interesting question, it seems to me, is how Ballard’s ‘evidence’ shaped the version of women’s literary history to which he subscribed.

Critics, such as Thomas F. Mayer and D. R. Woolf, observe that the complicated relational dynamic of text, life, memory, and historiography is one of the enduring problems and fascinations of life-writing.⁶³ Ballard’s archive and texts embody this dynamism in the most productive way. Indeed, the complex relations inherent in life-writing, of what Mayer and Woolf call ‘the fit between real (that is, extratextual) lives and their representation in texts of various kinds’, helps to explain Ballard’s mixed critical reception over the years.⁶⁴ Most of Ballard’s 64 lives do make a rather fragmentary impression and critics are right to question his rhetorical aims. However, this should not discredit Ballard as a crucial eighteenth-century historian of women’s lives, nor should it lead us to exclude him from a women’s literary history. Ballard’s manuscript collections, lists, and literary remains are invaluable records for that history. Likewise, his practice of using ‘artefacts of the written word,’ many of which came from sources commemorating the dead, is an integrative and imaginative form of life-writing, or ‘bookmaking out of the remains of the dead.’ However, unlike the fetishization of locks of hair, bones, or various other body parts which has informed many biographies and hagiographies past and present, the strictly textual exercise which Ballard embarked upon is quite different. For Ballard, ‘artefacts of the written word’ were a crucial tool, in fact the only credible tool, for reconceptualizing the national past and, regardless of the ideological factors which significantly influenced the finished product, his appeal to a history of texts and a history of scholarship based upon that body of texts, affirms his commitment to establishing a verifiable and therefore authoritative account of learned women in Britain.

⁶² Kathryn Sutherland, ‘Editing for a New Century: Elizabeth Elstob’s Anglo-Saxon Manifesto and Aelfric’s St. Gregory Homily,’ in *The Editing of Old English: Papers from the 1990 Manchester Conference*, ed. D.G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Cambridge and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer/Boydell and Brewer, 1994): 213-37, 214.

⁶³ Mayer and Woolf, *Rhetorics of Life-Writing*, 2.

⁶⁴ Mayer and Woolf, *Rhetorics of Life-Writing*, 2.

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