

The Laughing Tortoise: Speculations on Manuscript Sources and Women's Book History

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MARGARET J. M. EZELL

*The Laughing Tortoise: Speculations
on Manuscript Sources and Women's Book History*

If one starts from the a priori position that women are invariably silenced by social constraints, then it is easy to be inattentive to the women's voices that do survive.¹

In 1982, Germaine Greer stated that as a field, women's studies was not yet ready to make generalizations about women's writing, and warned that the urge to theorize was in danger of overwhelming the limited archival research available to support it.² Some twenty years later, scholars are clearly in a much better position concerning the availability at least of seventeenth-century English women's texts. Compared to 1988, when Greer and her associates' anthology of seventeenth-century women's verse *Kissing the Rod* appeared, those interested in reading texts by early modern women writers have many more examples from many more genres to use in answering questions about early modern women's literary activities and in constructing paradigms.³ Elaine Beilin, Elaine Hobby, Sarah Heller Mendelson, Barbara Lewalski, Margaret Hannay, and Margaret Fergusson's early critical studies were the starting point for

I am indebted to the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds for permission to quote from Pulter's manuscript. I am particularly indebted to Alice Eardsley and Oliver Pickering for generously sharing their knowledge about the author and the textual history of the volume with me and to Elizabeth Clarke for introducing me to the manuscript.

1. Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, & Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2005), p. 410.

2. Germaine Greer, "The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature: What We are Doing and Why We are Doing It," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1 (1982), 5–26 (5).

3. There have been several important and sizeable anthologies featuring early modern and seventeenth-century women's writing published since Germaine Greer et al.'s still influential *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century British Women's Verse* (London, 1988); see, for

many in establishing interest in seventeenth-century women's literary texts which has grown into a sizeable body of scholarship.⁴ In spite of this gratifying recovery of and interest in early modern women's writings, questions remain, however, about seventeenth-century women's participation in literary and intellectual culture, and some of these questions continue to be raised by the physical nature of the recovered materials, in particular in the tensions between studying manuscript and print cultures.

Scholars in the last decade working on these recovered materials have often raised the issue of how the texts' entrances into academic discourse have affected the ways in which they have been studied. For example, a collection of essays in 2000 on early modern "gendered writing" begins, "there are ways in which the very methodologies which restored this material to us stand in the way of interpretation. This is a crucial difficulty, because the feminist frame which led to the discovery of these writers is the very same frame that has led us to misread them: we are all working within a bizarre form of 'double-think,' where what the material tells us is fundamentally at odds with what drew us towards them in the

example, *Major Women Writers of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. James Fitzmaurice et al. (Ann Arbor, 1997); *Lay By Your Needles, Ladies*, ed. Suzanne Trill, Melanie Osborne, and Kate Chedgoy (London, 1998); *Women Poets of the Renaissance*, ed. Marion Wynne-Davies (London, 1999); *Early Modern Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson (Oxford, 2001); *Women's Writing of the Early Modern Period, 1588–1688*, ed. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (New York, 2002); and *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry*, ed. Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright (Manchester, 2005), hereafter cited as *EMWMP*, all exemplary for their display of the range of genre and authorship practices employed by early modern women. Editions of a wide range of early modern women's texts have been published as part of Ashgate Press's two series, "Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works," ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Anne Lake Prescott, and "The Early Modern Englishwoman 1500–1700: Contemporary Editions," ed. Travitsky, Prescott, and Patrick Cullen. Susanne Woods and Elizabeth Hageman oversaw the "Oxford Women Writers in English 1350–1850" series. There are also electronic "anthologies" of early modern women writers' texts on-line from the Brown Women Writers' Project and Renaissance Women On-line project and notable new scholarly editions of individual early modern women's texts.

4. Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, 1987); Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88* (London, 1988); Sarah Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Brighton, 1987); Barbara Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Margaret P. Hannay, *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio, 1986); see also influential essay collections from this period, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers (Chicago, 1986), and *Women, Writing, History 1640–1740* ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (Athens, Ga., 1992).

first place.”⁵ For Danielle Clarke, “inevitably, the excavation of ‘forgotten’ texts and traces by women was based upon the unproblematic inscription of an ontologically stable female subject, defined primarily in terms of sex, and only secondarily by class, religion or political allegiance” (p. 9). Such binary models, she argues, do little to assist in understanding the complicated nature of early modern women’s participation in activities and roles believed to be either exclusively female or exclusively male.

The recovery of manuscript texts by early modern women by itself is an important part of recovering artifacts of literary history, in increasing the amount of material on which we base our conclusions, but one could argue that such texts offer more than simply evidence of literary production (i.e., evidence that women did indeed write). Even though increasing scholarly attention has been paid since the 1980s to the world of handwritten culture, it still remains valuable to ask what the specific nature of handwritten texts, as distinct from printed ones, encourages one to think about in terms of the dynamics of women’s participation in certain types of intellectual endeavors, and whether existing paradigms (as well as our desire to read them as being unproblematic, transparent documents) might continue to mask our perception of the nature of literary practices even after the “recovery” process has established their numerical existence.

It seems timely to revisit the nature of the significance of manuscript studies for those working with early modern women writers in the context of the expansion of a new literary historical field, the history of the book, and, for the purposes of this essay to concentrate on that interesting period in the seventeenth century when the “print revolution” was visibly making an impact on social participation in politics. Handwritten documents, whether marginalia, commonplace books, or “domestic papers,” frequently offer intriguing glimpses into what seventeenth-century women and men were reading and to which they wrote in response.⁶ Bound manuscript volumes whose white space is shared by multiple authors and collections of loose papers, both in their contents and their behavior, while having many conventions with

5. Danielle Clarke, “Introduction,” *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (London, 2000), pp. 1–15 (9).

6. See, for example, Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 2000); *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven M. Zwicker (Cambridge, Eng., 2003); Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005).

printed texts, nevertheless have their own forms, formulas, and functions. Nor does it seem that the recovery phase has been completed: given the recent emergence of manuscript materials by canonical male authors that were previously held privately, such as the Hooke folio once in private hands and now in those of the Royal Society, or the massive collection of John Evelyn's papers transferred to the British Library from Christ Church, Oxford still in the cataloguing stage, it seems clear that the possibility exists that there are still many manuscript texts, encompassing a variety of genres, by both men and seventeenth-century women that await discovery.⁷

Even when the original documents are not materially available, one finds numerous anecdotal traces of handwritten texts by women when reading contemporary and later printed sources. For example, in 1640 in a small pamphlet published in London, the minister John Ley informed his readers in his life of Jane Ratcliffe, widow and citizen of Chester, that the evidence of her exemplary nature was preserved in her own words, in her own hand: "I have it under her owne hand writing among many other of her private papers (which with a little deske wherein they were contained she desired before shee went to LONDON, to bee delivered unto mee in case she should die, as she did from home)."⁸ Writing over three hundred years after John Ley, Elizabeth Clarke noted in her introduction to a piece on Hester Pulter and the *Perdita* Project that "Victoria Burke and myself, who started the Project, were motivated to do so by the belief . . . that many more Englishwomen from the early modern period wrote in manuscript than had their work published. Those who did not publish, however, have often been invisible to the scholarly community, and in a real sense, *perdita*, lost."⁹ By 2005, there were "over 500 manuscripts of various kinds in the prototype *Perdita* on-line catalogue." Based on one's own serendipitous experiences, one suspects

7. For works focused on the circulation of handwritten texts and "scribal publication," see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1993); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995); H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558–1640* (Oxford, 1996); Peter Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998); Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore, 1999); *Manuscripts and their Makers in the English Renaissance*, ed. Peter Beal and Grace Ioppolo (London, 2003).

8. John Ley, *A Pattern of Piety, or the Religious Life and Death of that Grave and Gracious Matron, Mrs. Jane Ratcliffe Widow and Citizen of Chester* (1640), p. 45.

9. Elizabeth Clarke, "Introducing Hester Pulter and the *Perdita* Project," *Literature Compass* 2.1 (2005), 1–3 <DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00159.x>.

that there are many more, in writing desks, boxes, and bound collections on library shelves, private and public, waiting to have the lid removed, the cover opened, and the dust blown away.

Here speculation truly begins: as we continue to recover more and more handwritten texts, when does a person, a practice, or a text cease to be deemed “extraordinary” or “anomalous” and instead invite a restructuring, revision, or the creation of a new framework of understanding? I will argue that manuscript evidence strongly encourages us to revisit simple yet central questions, questions as valid today as twenty years ago—not only *what* do we know about early modern women, their lives, their reading and writing practices, but also *how* do we know what it is that we “know”?

II

Book history as currently practiced in the United States, with the exception of its discussion of medieval texts, is still mostly about the history of print and how manuscripts become and are circulated as printed objects.¹⁰ Has this focus in book history on the “revolution of print” and its technology of reproduction and distribution had the same unintentional effect of taking the majority of seventeenth-century women writers out of the field, of recreating the same problem which those working on early modern women writers confronted decades ago in the field of literary history in general? There are several excellent monograph studies of women’s participation in the print trade and their responses to print such as those by Wall, Bell, McDowell, and Maruca.¹¹ The journals in the field, however, as well as introductory textbooks and special issues of *PMLA* rarely if ever include any references to manuscript volumes after the medieval period except as they exist in the context of print, and they

10. See Ezell, “Invisible Books,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Book: New Perspectives on Writing and Publishing, 1650–1825*, ed. Pat Rogers and Laura Runge (forthcoming).

11. Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, 1993); Maureen Bell, “Introduction: The Material Text,” *Reconstructing the Book: Literary Texts in Transmission*, ed. Bell, Shirley Chow, Simon Eliot, et al. (Aldershot, 1991), pp. 1–8; Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730* (London, 1998); Lisa Maruca, *The Work of Print: Authorship and the English Text Trades, 1660–1760* (Seattle, 2007).

silently signal that perhaps manuscript volumes aren't really "books."¹² As a side-effect, it is easy to see how the study of seventeenth-century women's participation in manuscript culture during this very important period in book history has been essentially relegated to belonging in another category, leaving book history again almost by default to be defined by examples from male writers seeking print.

One feels that this is a pity. Bound handwritten volumes, women's and men's, push us to think seriously about matters of gender, culture, and the technologies used to produce and sustain them, the concept of authorship and the role of the reader. The numerous seventeenth-century authors who declare boldly (and usually repeatedly) in their own hand on the flyleaves and title-pages that this handwritten text is "their Book" might be surprised indeed to know that, once again, they have been overlooked by literary scholars and not included in the critical questions being debated. Likewise, collections of loose sheets by the same hand or from the same family figure uneasily, if at all, in book history accounts, reinforcing the sense that during the seventeenth century and later, books as objects are recognizable and classifiable by their material, printed natures.

One area which handwritten texts urge us to question is the ways in which "participation" in a literary or intellectual movement is defined and measured. This used to be so much easier to answer in the case of seventeenth-century women: there was a long-standing "fact" which was repeatedly used by social and literary historians alike to construct models of authorship and also of social participation, that the overwhelming majority of seventeenth-century women, from every social class, were "illiterate," effectively barring them from participation in public life. Even as recently as work published in 2000, critics begin their analyses of women's participation in "civilized culture" and of readers of romances based on the premise that 90% of English women were illiterate throughout the seventeenth century, with marked gains not until nearly 1700.¹³

12. *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London, 2002); Finkelstein and McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (London, 2005). Matthew P. Brown, "The Thick Style: Steady Sellers, Textual Aesthetics, and Early Modern Devotional Reading" is the solitary exception in this special issue as he does include examples of handwritten texts as he tracks "steady sellers" and the move from manuscript to print: "The History of the Book and the Idea of Literature," ed. Seth Lehrer and Leah Price, *PMLA* 121 (2006), 67–86.

13. Sarah Heller Mendelson, "The Civility of Women in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, ed. Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (Oxford, 2000), pp. 111–25; Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance*

Significant studies of the history of reading by Margaret Spufford, Adam Fox, Nigel Wheale, Steven Zwicker, Kevin Sharpe, and Heidi Hackel have given us different ways to approach the issue of early modern literacy and significantly challenged the statistics based on signature alone.¹⁴ This newer understanding of literacy is surely supported by the existence and the nature of handwritten volumes and collections of loose papers from women's hands. Not only does the amount of manuscript material in women's handwriting already recovered by the Perdita Project combined with women's printed texts challenge such figures, but also what these women employed their hands to write, ask us to consider the very definition of "literacy" at its various levels as well as how it has been assessed.

Many surviving manuscript volumes clearly show that they performed a variety of functions in the household. This may prove particularly revealing when one looks at manuscript texts by women who otherwise led unremarkable lives—in other words, not members of a well-known literary family such as the Sidneys, and not members of what are typically considered to be the aristocratic elite, but instead, comfortably at home in the world of "domestic papers," such as the writings of the widow Ratcliffe applauded by her minister for her care in recording her thoughts.

(Cambridge, Eng., 2000); David Cressy, "Literacy in Context: Meaning and Measure in Early Modern England," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porters (London, 1993), p. 305; see also the citations of studies utilizing signatures in Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (London, 2000).

14. On its own, the signature test as a marker for literacy has been contested since the late 1970s: Margaret Spufford, "The First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers," *Social History* 4 (1979), 407–35; Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Bauman (Oxford, 1986), pp. 97–131; Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain, 1590–1660* (London, 1999); Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Margaret W. Fergusson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago, 2003); Sharpe and Zwicker, *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*; Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*. See also David George Mullan's introduction to *Women's Life Writing in Early Modern Scotland: Writing the Evangelical Self, c. 1670–1730* (Aldershot, 2003), where he observes that slightly more lay Scottish women than men wrote spiritual memoirs in the seventeenth century.

III

In the same way that earlier literacy models established in the 1960s and 1970s sustained a paradigm which situated early modern women as silent, submissive, and supportive (or perhaps silently seething, to keep alliteration), those interested in seventeenth-century women's experiences and texts still deal with issues arising from the "queen/victim" school of history, or women represented as either unique and all-powerful or without individual agency and powerless. Of course, this simplified image of the early modern woman as a cultural cipher or a muted ineffectual player in systems outside the domestic walls is unquestionably reinforced for us by contemporary documents, printed and handwritten. Representations of both the exemplary woman who stayed at home except to go to church and studied how best to kiss either the rod or the patriarch, and of those who transgressed the boundaries even in minor ways, speak to the power of a prescriptive society.

Representations of early modern women's activities both exemplary and transgressive, written and published by men for the horror and delectation of their readers, male and female, are valuable cultural documents. These types of narratives have helped to shape how we understand early modern women's participation in practices or discourses which define a society. Indeed, traditionally seventeenth-century women's participation in activities were framed in terms of what they could *not* do—the areas from which they were excluded, such as, for example, intellectual institutions, the acquisition of classical languages (Stevenson points to Walter Ong's seminal article, "Latin Language Study as the Renaissance Puberty Rite," where the argument defines "women and Latin [as belonging] in mutually oppositional worlds"¹⁵), participation in the new science of experiments, and, of course, direct, public political participation. For women to participate in those social and cultural spheres, it has been argued, they essentially were forced to give up their sex, to become "unnatural" or to be viewed as "mannish," and thus it would be the rare, isolated, and anomalous woman who dared to do so, perhaps emboldened by her aristocratic status.¹⁶

In such paradigms, there is always room for an example of the anomalous aristocratic exception, such as "Mad Madge" who figures

15. Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, p. 409.

16. See Stevenson's discussion on Ong and subsequent theories about learned women: "Conclusion," *Women Latin Poets*.

dramatically in several categories of anomalous and eccentric female behavior. Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, who wrote on experimental philosophy and once attended the Royal Society, is presently a focus for debate over the nature and authenticity of her participation—was she a “real” scientific thinker or a crazed eccentric? Are her publications critiquing the new science merely pathetic posturing or a critique of masculinist modes of inquiry foreshadowing Donna Haraway’s relative knowledge? But what has not so clearly been brought into question in these debates is whether she was indeed a rare exception in her interest in and study of scientific methodologies, one containable within the paradigm as an abnormal, aristocratic eccentric.

Notwithstanding Hunter and Hutton’s drawing our attention to the mothers and sisters of the Royal Society almost a decade ago, one generally “knows” from the contemporary scorn aimed at those such as Cavendish that experimental science was not the realm in which seventeenth-century women participated.¹⁷ As with the model of literacy based on signatures, however, there is a move away from this model. Patricia Fara’s 2004 book *Pandora’s Breeches: Women, Science and Power in the Enlightenment* opens with the now classic reference to Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* to wonder, “suppose Newton or Descartes or Darwin had a clever sister?” It goes on, however, to reject the model of the half-crazed witch woman scientist, and instead explores the question through the ways in which “intelligent women could find ways to accommodate their intellectual interests within conventional lives.”¹⁸

Here again, handwritten texts by seventeenth-century women offer the chance to critique and to reconfigure systems of power which escape, ignore, or manipulate the victim/queen dichotomy of female actions, as well as preserving in a variety of genres women’s written responses to contemporary attitudes and anxieties about women’s natures and social status. It is not only an increase in sheer numbers of documents we have available; recent archival recoveries highlight the importance of this type of documents in rethinking fundamental assumptions on which paradigms are based. As cited before, Jane Stevenson’s recovery of a

17. Barbara T. Gates and Ann B. Shteir point to Aphra Behn’s 1688 translation of Fontenelle’s *Discovery of New Worlds* as the beginning of the popularization of science for women readers, but prior to that, they point out, “women have been assumed to have inhabited only the distant borderlands of science”: *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science* (Madison, Wisc., 1997), p. 5.

18. Patricia Fara, *Pandora’s Breeches: Women, Science and Power in the Enlightenment* (London, 2004), p. 9.

body of Latin texts by English and Continental women outside the elite atmosphere of princely courts asks fundamental questions about how we have organized what we know about “learned women.” Work by Lynette Hunter, Sarah Pennell, Jayne Archer, and others on women’s manuscript “recipe” books and household books explore the possibility of reconceptualizing the whole sphere of “domestic science” in the context of the evolution of scientific record-keeping and connections between medicine and chemistry.¹⁹

In this same fashion, the notion of participation in a “public sphere” as applied to early modern women has become much more complex and sophisticated over the last twenty years. Again, looking past the printed document has brought to light what Georgiana Ziegler has called the “hand-ma[i]de book,” calligraphic manuscript books by women, highlighting the connections between authorship and embroidery work and how the artistic handmade object might function as a mode of political engagement.²⁰ Davidson and Stevenson’s anthology offers numerous examples of women’s responses to war and political events.²¹ Elizabeth Clarke has analyzed the ways in which women’s manuscript texts which “appear” to be “texts of private devotion” could be copied and used for timely political ends.²²

IV

Women’s manuscript texts offer a different way of measuring not only the numbers of women engaged in different types of activities—linguistic,

19. Lynette Hunter, “Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570–1620,” in *Women, Science, and Medicine 1500–1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society*, ed. Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Thurp, 1997), pp. 89–107; Sara Pennell, “Perfecting Practice? Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England,” in *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers From the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, ed. Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 237–58; Jayne Archer, “Women and Alchemy in Early Modern England” (Phd diss. University of Cambridge, 1999); Stanton J. Linden, “Mrs. Mary Trye, Medicatrix: Chemistry and Controversy in Restoration England,” *Women’s Writing* 1 (1994), 341–53.

20. Georgiana Ziegler, “Hand-Ma[i]de Books: The Manuscripts of Ester Inglis, Early-Modern Precursors of the Artists’ Book,” *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 9 (2000), 73–87 (84). See also Susan Frye, “Materializing Authorship in Esther Inglis’s Books,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3 (2002), 469–91.

21. Stevenson and Davidson, *Early Modern Women Poets*, p. xxxi.

22. Elizabeth Clarke, “Beyond Microhistory: the Use of Women’s Manuscripts in a Widening Political Arena,” *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 211–27.

scientific, or political—but also of reassessing the ways in which even the most conventional patriarch’s wife, or daughter, could indeed use her voice in a variety of handwritten media. I will conclude with a case study, which until recently was one of the Perdita Project’s lost manuscripts. In 1996, as part of the process for creating the University of Leeds Brotherton Library verse database project, Mark Robson discovered a miscatalogued manuscript volume.²³ Hester Pulter’s substantial folio manuscript volume, “Poems Breathed forth by the Noble Hadassas,” whose contents were created apparently between the 1640s and the early 1660s, somehow had not been given its own shelf-mark; in the decade since its recovery, it has been the focus of keen if fairly limited scholarly attention.²⁴

In terms of its contents, the life of its author, and also the physical nature of the book itself this single text has much to offer. Sarah Ross has argued that the majority of the poems in the 160 folio pages are done by a scribe in a fair hand, while the few corrections and titles themselves appear to be in Pulter’s hand, while still a third hand copied in from loose sheets of a rough working draft (in Pulter’s hand) the unfinished second part of the romance.²⁵ In addition to the main group of poems, there is another section of verse with its own title-page, “The sighes of a sad soule Emblematically breath’d forth by the noble Hadassah—Emblemes,” and an unfinished, two-part romance, also with a separate title-page, “The Unfortunate Florinda,” which was written from the “end” of the reversed volume in two different hands, with only a single blank page between it and the verse portion.²⁶ On the volume’s flyleaves are recorded the

23. Now catalogued as Hester Pulter, “Poems Breathed forth by The Noble Hadassas,” Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection MS Lt q 32. The volume was purchased from Christie’s in 1975 from the sale of Sir Gilbert Inglefield’s library; I am grateful for this information from Oliver Pickering and Alice Eardsley.

24. Mark Robson, “Reading Hester Pulter Reading,” *Literature Compass* 2.1 (2005), 1–12 <DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00162.x>; Sarah C. Ross, “Tears, Bezoars, and Blazing Comets: Gender and Politics in Hester Pulter’s Civil War Lyrics,” *Literature Compass* 2.1 (2005), 1–14 <DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00161.x>; Jayne Archer, “A ‘Perfect Circle’? Alchemy in the Poetry of Hester Pulter,” *Literature Compass* 2.1 (2005), 1–14 <DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00160.x>; Alice Eardsley, “A Scholarly Edition of Lady Hester Pulter’s book of ‘Emblemes’ ” (PhD diss. University of Warwick, 2008).

25. Sarah C. Ross, “Women and Religious Verse in English Manuscript Culture, c. 1600–1688: Lady Anne Southwell, Lady Hester Pulter, and Katherine Austen” (PhD diss. Oxford University, 2000), pp. 251–53.

26. Selections from Pulter’s poetry have been published in two anthologies, Stevenson and Davidson’s *Early Modern Women Poets* and Millman and Wright’s *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Poetry*; at the time of this essay being written, her unfinished romance, “The Unfortunate Florinda,” remains in manuscript.

wages of various women servants, from the cook maid to her grandson's wet nurse, but atypically, the volume was not used for miscellaneous purposes by later generations, and thus remains primarily a record of Pulter's interests.

The contents of Pulter's manuscript book, comprising the two sections of poetry as well as a romance, appear to have been composed when she was in her early forties through her fifties. By this time, she had given birth to most of her fifteen children (eight daughters, of whom four married, and seven sons, of whom four lived past childhood but none of whom had families), thirteen of whom are believed to have died before her.²⁷ Both as a child herself with seven sisters and as a mother, Hester Pulter's domestic situations seem to have been in households with a strong female presence. Many of the poems in the volume are addressed to her daughters by name. One could speculate that the volume itself was initially passed down through a female line, going first to her daughter Margaret, one of the two surviving children, whose only child, James Forster, was the heir of his grandparents. James Forster at that time was married to Martha Chauncy, who fortuitously was a member of a family of famous and publishing antiquaries. Her father was Sir Henry Chauncy, who wrote the most extensive account of the Pulter genealogy in 1700; this connection suggests one possible path the handsome folio might have followed after Hester Pulter's death and offers an explanation for its pristine condition as an acquisition for that family's antiquarian library.²⁸

What strikes one about Pulter's own birth falling in the first decade of the seventeenth century is that it makes her roughly the contemporary of Bathsua Makin, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Alice Sutcliffe, and Anne Bradstreet, but a full generation older than Lucy Hutchinson, Margaret Cavendish, and Katherine Phillips, the women writers who might first come to mind for the 1640s–1660s period. She had, therefore, a different perspective on the events of the Civil War and the Commonwealth. Like Hutchinson and Cavendish, she was born into a well-placed family. Her father was James Ley, the first Earl of Marlborough, who was the Lord Chief Justice presiding at Francis Bacon's trial and for a short time

27. For information on Ley, see Wilfred Prest, "Ley, James, first earl of Marlborough (1550–1629)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16619>. "Hester Pulter," in *EMWMP*, p. 112; University of Leeds, Brotherton Library MS Lt q 32, loose sheet iii.

28. Henry Chauncy, *The Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire* (London, 1700), pp. 67–70.

was Lord Treasurer for James I; his virtues were praised by John Milton in “Sonnet X” addressed to Hester Pulter’s sister, Margaret Ley, who lived in London and was a friend of Milton in the early 1640s. Milton’s early biographer Edward Phillips describes Margaret as “a Woman of great Wit and Ingenuity.” Hester’s mother, Mary Petty, gave birth to a large family, the majority of whom were daughters (as would be true with Hester’s own offspring); Mary Petty’s uncle George Pettie was noted for his early Elizabethan romance fiction *A Petite Pallace of Pettie His Pleasure* (1576 with at least six editions by 1613) and through this connection Hester Pulter was also a distant cousin of the Oxford anti-quary Anthony à Wood.²⁹

While Hester’s sisters who spent their time in London largely appear to have married into families sympathizing with Parliament, Hester’s life took a different course. Hester Pulter’s husband Arthur was a Justice of the Peace, Captain of the Militia, and acted as Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire. It is recorded on the outbreak of the Civil War that he “declin’d all publick employment, [and] liv’d a retir’d life.”³⁰ He may have retreated from public employment and turned to building the stately house Broadfield in the Hertfordshire countryside, a not unprecedented masculine royalist response, but what then immediately strikes one on reading her writings is that Hester Pulter was not silent, resigned, or detached about contemporary political events. Even without poems bearing titles such as “The complaint of Thames 1647 when the best of Kings was imprisoned by the worst of rebels at Holmbie,” and the two poems, “On the Horrid Murther of that incomparable Prince, King Charles the first,” “war” poems on which Robson and Ross have written convincingly, any reader familiar with the techniques of allegory or emblem would not have had the least doubt where her loyalties lay.³¹

Being a royalist woman writer in itself is hardly anomalous, but one is struck by the extent to which in her manuscript volume, Pulter uses poetical conventions and genres to express directly her anger, dismay and contempt about specific political groups. The text is also marked by her use of allegory and metaphor to illustrate indirectly her understanding

29. See also Mark Robson, “Pulter, Lady Hester (1595/6–1678),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68094>. I am indebted to Alice Eardsley for information concerning this connection to Anthony à Wood.

30. *EMWMP*, p. 113.

31. *EMWMP*, p. 188.

of contemporary events in a historical as well as literary context. Thus, the contents of the volume, in addition to recording her responses to her children's births and deaths, records, like the writings of so many male poets of the time, her perceptions of the health of the nation.³² Its contents are conventional, the sentiments hardly unique, but the fact that they are recorded not by an exiled Cavalier courtier but by a married woman living in Hertfordshire is a bit of a surprise under conventional existing paradigms. The contents thus raise the question of the extent to which Pulter was simply peculiar, a one-off, the neighborhood eccentric aristocrat—or it raises the consideration that there may be a continued need to rethink what defines “participation” or engagement with political events.

v

In addition to this interesting blend of domestic and political commentary (what Ross indeed argues as being a politicization of the domestic) in her occasional verse, another feature of the volume, seen especially in her emblem poems, is the extent to which her poetry is marked by an informed knowledge of contemporary science. Putler's emblems frequently meld the so-called “natural philosophy” as derived from classical sources such as Pliny with more conventional classical mythology and Scripture. Putler's engagement with classical sources on the classification of animals and plants is evident in almost every poem in the volume. Jane Stevenson's work makes one cautious about asserting that Putler must have been reading such texts in translations, but from the number of versions of Pliny in translation available in her lifetime, it would have been an available resource for her regardless of her knowledge of Latin (her contemporary Sir Thomas Browne noted in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* or *Vulgar Errors* [1646] that Pliny was a major source for English readers' mistaken beliefs about the world). Putler is not always as good as Pliny in identifying her sources, but there are some clear references in marginal glosses to Pliny and Plutarch, and she also resembles his disjointed, encyclopedic entry style in her use of natural history in her emblems. While it is not so surprising that an upper-class woman raised

32. See Peter Davidson's introduction to *Poetry and Revolution: An Anthology of British and Irish Verse 1625–1660* (Oxford, 1998), and James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (London, 1997).

in the first part of the seventeenth century should have been familiar with Medea as well as Aurora, and certainly not amazing that she appears to have known the name of every woman in the Bible, the extent to which Pulter weaves natural history and philosophy into her poems is striking.

Pulter refers to many different aspects of alchemy, natural philosophy, and classical allusion from the nature of animals to the effects of fire. There are poems on dancing atoms, on alchemist's circles, and on birds carrying their young on their backs, spiders that are compared to murderous Roman emperors, and basilisks who kill with a glance. Characters in the romance who fall in love are described as being "struck with an invisible arrow beyond the skill of an Elephant to draw forth" (f. 4v), frustrated males lament their chosen one's coldness by declaring that "I see if this sword were within a hairs breadth of that Cristall Tumour which incides this trembling heart of mine, you have not affection (nor pity inough for me) to pull it out" (f.24v), and the wronged heroine Florinda imagines scenarios of revenge which involve "a little Acconite between my lipps [to] kill him with a kiss," if not even better to "Calcine this Orbe to Cinders that he might frie in that conflagration" (f.34A), that is, not merely to call down destruction conventionally with fire from heaven, but indeed to annihilate the universe chemically.

Jayne Archer has argued convincingly that Pulter had more than a slight fancy for alchemy's images. Her argument is that Pulter appears to have been a practitioner of the applied as well as metaphorical or philosophical level, which might seem to place her firmly in the category of the anomalous woman, a position, however, that Archer rejects for her.³³ This again, however, raises the question of how we "see" evidence of participation. Other recent manuscript recoveries indeed seem to point to other women in the mid-seventeenth century as being practicing as well as "spiritual" or philosophical alchemists. Donald Dickson has published Thomas and Rebecca Vaughan's alchemical laboratory notebook composed during the 1650s, *Aqua Vitae*, which overlaps the period of Pulter's writing and offers an interesting contemporary parallel.³⁴ As

33. See Archer, "A 'Perfect Circle'?", and her extended discussion in "Women and Alchemy in Early Modern England."

34. *Thomas and Rebecca Vaughan's Aqua Vitae: No Vitis (British Library MS SLoane 1741)*, ed. Donald R. Dickson (Tempe, Az., 2001). This volume, inscribed in the manuscript as being transcriptions from "the Books of Thomas and Rebecca Vaughan," is an artifact of what Dickson, Archer, and others have called a "flourishing laboratory tradition" prior to the Royal Society.

Dickson notes, the alchemist and the emblem maker share much in common in their ways of understanding the physical world in term of their desire to interpret through allegory, but it is interesting to mark the extent to which we have not previously been aware of seventeenth-century women's experiments either with the emblem or in the laboratory until the recovery of such handwritten materials.

There were several books printed in the 1630s and 1640s with the title "Emblems," but at first sight, Pulter's resembles none of them and the differences beg attention. The most frequently reprinted were by the staunch royalist writers Francis Quarles and George Wither, both of whose books appeared in 1635 bearing the same title as Pulter's, *Emblemes*.³⁵ These and other printed emblem books, by Thomas Jenner, Christopher Hervey, John Hall, Donald Lupton, and Henry Vaughan (brother of the alchemist), rely heavily on the presence of a picture to ground their poem.³⁶ Jenner notes in his epistle to the reader that "because men are more led by the eye, than ear, it may be, thou looking upon these little prints, mai'st conceive of that which many words would not make so plaine unto thee" (sig. A2v). Quarles explains "an Embleme is but a silent Parable. Let not the tender Eye check, to see the allusion to our blessed Saviour figure, in these Types" (*Emblemes*, sig. A3). Some of these pictures, like Jenner's and Wither's, show people in contemporary dress, while others, such as Hall's and Quarles's use iconic religious images and symbolic landscapes.

Pulter's emblems do not have any illustrations. Nor do they provide a quotation from Scripture at the beginning or end to anchor the emblem, although several do have Scriptural references in the margin. What Pulter uses instead of images or direct quotation are allusions to natural history, to the actions of animals and the natures of plants. Unlike Jenner, she relies on her audience to be readers and interpreters of textual allusion rather than visual. While Pulter no doubt would have agreed with Quarles' observation that "before the knowledge of letters, GOD was knowne by Hieroglyphicks; And, indeed, what are the Heavens, the

35. Elizabeth Clarke suggests that Pulter derived her title and pen name from Quarles' 1621 work *Hadassa: or The history of Queen Ester with meditations thereupon divine and moral* (*EMWMP*, p. 111).

36. Thomas Jenner, *The Soules Solace, of thirty and one spirituall emblems* (1626); Donald Lupton, *Emblems of rarities* (1636); Christopher Hervey, *Schola cordis, or, the soul of it selfe, gone away from God brought back againe to him & instructed by him in 47 emblems* (1647); and John Hall, *Emblems with elegant figures* (1648). Thomas Vaughan's brother Henry Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* would also be appropriate in this list.

Earth, nay every Creature, Hieroglyphicks and Emblemes of His Glory?" (*Emblemes*, sig. A3), when one is reading Pulter's emblems, what the reader sees most often in her descriptions of animals are allusions to contemporary events and more generally references to life lived during dangerous and unsettled times.

Her emblematic animals act in two ways. The first, and least used, are similar to the animals in Aesop's fables. An example of this is Emblem #13, the haughty male porcupine's dismissal of the laughing female tortoise's status in the world at large, or an emblem of pride versus humility: "The Porcupine went Russling in his Pride / Scorning the humble Tortois by his side / Spurning her oft and spurting many a Quill / The Tortoise pul'd her head in and lay still / Hee cald her patient fool & suff'ring Ass / Thus or' her Back insulting hee did Pass" (f. 99). However, when passing rustics laugh at the odd pair and the affronted porcupine shoots off his quills, his act results in the humans stoning him. Although the tortoise does get squished in the mud as the cart horse bolts from all this manly action, she simply pulls within her shell and is unhurt by quill or human; she "hardly could hold her Laughter" watching the humans chase off after the cart since "shee in spite of all their spite was well." She politely restrains this impulse to laugh on hearing the "Dolefull moan" of the battered male.³⁷

Much more common in the emblems than these animals, who take on human motives and emotions to create a universal moral story, are observers' reports of animals' characteristic behaviors, derived from texts such as Pliny's, which Pulter uses as a means of commenting on contemporary events. Emblem #12 highlights the ways in which Pulter uses emblem conventions to blend religion, science, and politics. "This vast Leviathan Whose Breathing blows / Huge floods and sholes of fishes through his nose" (f. 98v), does not seem like a promising start to making a universal moral point. It is followed, predictably, by a reference to Jonah, but then unpredictably by a reference to what whales eat which sustained Jonah, which the marginal gloss (perhaps intended as an insertion) describes as "A Diet as restorative as Rare." The point of the emblem, however, is not about Jonah or the whale, but about "nourishment," power, and reciprocal aid between unequals. Even Leviathans depend

37. My reading of this emblem differs considerably from Sarah Ross's, who sees this as an emblem of the tortoise being "humbled" by the porcupine: "Women and Religious Verse," pp. 123–24.

on little creatures for survival, for the “musculus doth swim before / Least hee in Shelves or Sands his Bulk should Moor” and in return, the tiny creatures feed on the whale’s leavings. The comparison then shifts from whales to crocodiles: “Soe may you see Nils Caymen gapeing Lye / Whilst in and out his Mouth the Wren doth flie,” which is glossed by two side references to Pliny (f. 98v). In Pulter’s version of natural history, the wren, in return for being permitted to dine safely—“the putrid flesh shee picks away / Between her teeth, this being all her pay”—acts as the crocodile’s warning system. Pliny’s account, in contrast, has a different version of animal interaction: the crocodile, being lulled asleep by the soothing scraping of its teeth by the wren, is vulnerable to his worst enemy, “the rat of India, or Ichneumon abovesaid, [who] spieth his vantage, and seeing him lie thus broad gaping, whippeth into his mouth, and shooteth himselfe downe his throat as quicke as an arrow, and then gnaweth his bowels, eateth an hole through his bellie, and so killeth him.”³⁸ Pulter, in addition to changing the sex of the animals involved, has the little wren actively warning the crocodile. She concludes by explaining the obligations of the monarch to care for the poorest laborers: “Then let those that are placed the rest above / Answer their Labour with their care and Love / And Pittie those which labor at the Plough / Tis God that made the difference and not thou.” In the margin is a reference to Ecclesiastes 5:9, but the weight of the emblem is clearly carried by Pulter’s manipulation of natural history to create a scenario that links the classical scientific past, the Biblical universal, and perhaps the political present.

There are also explicit references to political events and people of her own times as well as distant English history. In Emblem #39, the opening reference to the dolphin is as the spokesman for Neptune to woo Amphitrite and to wed her by proxy; this turns into “Like Maximillian who did Brittain wed / With putting one bare leg into her Bed,” which is glossed as coming from “My Lord Veru: [Francis Bacon] his history of Henry ye 7th, fol. 80” (f. 117). This comparison then changes into a reference to Charles, Holy Royal Emperor, and Pulter generalizes briefly on the necessity for loyalty to be constantly active in service. This emblem concludes grimly that under Draconian law, idleness was punishable by death and that if it were imposed on present-day England, it would “take away (I fear) more lives / Of cuntry Gentlemen

38. Pliny the Elder, *The History of the World*, tr. Philemon Holland (1601), Book XIII, p. 23.

and Citizens Wives / Then of the Natives Blood ye Spaniards spil'd / Or in these times our Seeking Saints have kil'd" (F. 117v). Pulter uses Pliny as the starting point for her reflection on service, loyalty, and finally "these times," and then works through myth, natural history, Bacon's history of Henry VII, and finally events of her own times in a way that none of the other 1640s and 1650s emblem writers attempts.

VI

The final item in the volume is a romance. The experience of reading "The Unfortunate Florinda" is equally surprising, diverse, and admonishing to existing paradigms. Space does not permit a full account of the delights of this text, but only to foreground some of the issues it raises. Paul Salzman, in his essay on women and prose fiction, states that romance, while conventionally believed to be a favorite genre read by women, was not one that appealed to women writers. He notes that only two, Lady Mary Worth and Ann Weamys, "attempted" it and that both of their texts are inextricably tied to Sidney's *Arcadia* (one might also add that much of the critical discussion of these two texts involves their relationship with Sidney's text). He suggests that "unlike religious writing, prose fiction was not empowering for women, at least until the Restoration. Indeed, the example of Mary Wroth's *Urania* indicates that a venture into the male-dominated world of prose romance could lead to considerable scandal and opposition."³⁹

Thus the very existence of "Florinda" suggests that we ask how it is we "know" what genres, such as romances and emblems, were not "appealing" or empowering to women writers. Inevitably, what we know is based on the material we know—printed evidence and the seeming absence of manuscript texts. But are the manuscript texts "not there," i.e. do not exist, or are they instead simply "invisible"? That, in turn, raises the issue of what Jane Stevenson calls the "survivability factor" when she is discussing texts by women (pp. 1–32). If one assumes that other seventeenth-century women were already experimenting with the romance in their handwritten practices before Cavendish and Behn began publishing their versions after the War, why might handwritten romances have a lower survivability factor than a poem or a volume of meditations?

39. Paul Salzman, "Prose Fiction," in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford, 2002), p. 303.

Perhaps it is not so much that the genre as a whole was unappealing and unattempted by seventeenth-century women writers as the factors which have an impact on a manuscript being preserved and correctly catalogued. On the purely practical level, when one considers the sheer labor involved in transcribing a copy or copies of a romance—part I of Pulter’s romance fills 32 folio pages front and back, almost margin to margin—the likelihood of there being multiple copies declines and, obviously, also the survival rate. Likewise, the function of romance is perhaps to make political or social commentary, as critics have argued about Wroth’s, but it is primarily a genre for reading entertainment. As any one who has taught an early modern romance to undergraduates can attest, tastes in what is entertaining reading differ by generation. Texts viewed as trivial, frivolous, or merely old-fashioned, one could argue, would perhaps also have a lower survival rate than a poem on the death of a relative, a set of useful recipes, or a mother’s legacy.

The content as well as the very existence of “Florinda” is equally disruptive to expectations, even while it demonstrates a comfortable familiarity with all the appropriate conventions. Like Sidney and Wroth’s romances, “Florinda” ends mid-sentence and mid-gasp, Pulter’s with the kidnapping of a royal infant: “the sweet infant still sleeping very soundly, till . . .” (f. 36v). It also follows many of the plot and character conventions that Helen Hackett’s useful book on Renaissance romance and women readers identifies as being common with the popular Spanish romances, “adventures of elaborately named knights and ladies in exotic lands and/or in periods of distant mythologized history,” and which Steve Mentz’s study describes as characteristic features of Heliodoran prose fiction.⁴⁰ Pulter sets her story initially in Spain, but its characters also come from Italy, England, and Morocco; they are identified as Christians and Jews, but also Afric Vestal Virgins who receive oracular information while seated in Delphic manner from a “multitude of gods.” Likewise, there are episodes of cross-dressing characters, which Hackett considers in printed romances as typical of “patriarchal fiction”: in such romances, Hackett observes, cross-dressing often produces “semi-pornographic episodes,” where women cross-dress not to liberate themselves but in order to humble themselves as servants “in the service

40. Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance*, p. 1; Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 41–43.

of virility,” which motifs can “be regarded as catering to masculine reading pleasures” (pp. 68–70).

Interestingly, given Pulter’s outspoken condemnation of Puritans and Parliamentarians in her poetry, one does not find in her prose those hoards of particularly belligerent Amazonian women warriors, a convention discussed by Hackett as having an ambiguous impact for women readers. Pulter’s females manifest their personalities differently, but in general, they are pragmatic heroines, young women who find themselves in extraordinary situations not of their making, and who react in sometimes surprising ways.

Zabra is an “Afric” princess who, when a sudden violent storm drives her pleasure cruise to land on Spain’s shores, finds herself in the power of the lascivious usurper Prince Roderigo. He demands her hand in marriage along with her simultaneous conversion to Christianity, and she prudently decides to accept both demands. She has the smallest role in Part I and one wonders if greater things were in store for her in the unfinished Part II. Her presence, however, does provide the reason for the “luxurious” usurper’s court to have a bevy of virtuous and virginal ladies in waiting, one of whom is the title character Florinda, who is unfortunate, and the other equally virtuous Castabella, whose primary function is to pry secrets from other characters.

Perhaps the most interesting story is that of Fidelia, a countrywoman of Zabra who did not accompany her on her boat trip because she was, as a vestal virgin, attending her dying mother. Her story takes up most of Part I and is happily resolved by marriage to her beloved, a captive slave who turns out to be royal, in Part II. Fidelia arrives at the Spanish court to tell in a flashback narrative of what has happened in Zabra’s country after her loss and her own adventures. The disappearance of Zabra causes her nation’s religious structure, the whole institution of the prophetic virgins “formerly inspired with an infernall vapour through the Tripode” (f. 10v), to be called into question. Prophecy failing them, Fidelia reports, the priestess resorts to retiring to her closet and writing ambiguous verse. On hearing of Zabra’s fate—that she landed in Spain, married the King, and at the same time converted to Christianity—the King her father immediately dies from sadness. As in the Spanish situation, the throne is seized after a series of battles by a ruthless and opportunistic usurper who is not named, but who refers to his rule as a “Commonwealth” and never misses an occasion to act in an ignoble, non-chivalric and self-serving fashion. Fidelia, whose father and brother were formerly in favor at

court, prudently shifts ground and retires into private life and Fidelity is invited to share Spanish and Italian lessons with her brother, given by a noble captive slave. She, of course, excels at them. Amandus, the beautiful, noble slave, also infuses the language lessons with discussions of his religion, “persuading us that all those multiplicity of Gods, which wee adored, were no Gods” (f. 13).

Inevitably, the usurper spots Fidelity and demands her for his mistress or he will kill her father. Her father resigns himself to death, but Fidelity creates a plot involving her brother Ithocles and Amandus to outwit the King and restore the kingdom: Amandus is dressed in her nightgown and taken to the King by her brother and, as he opens his arms to embrace the veiled beauty, Amandus stabs him. Their plot falls apart at this point; instead of all meeting up and fleeing as a trio, Fidelity is forced to escape from a locked tower by climbing down a silk ladder, after flinging notes tied to tennis balls back and forth with Amandus. Once outside she then disguises herself as a boy while Amandus poses as an old Jewish woman carrying bones (stolen from under a gibbet) home to be buried.

Thus disguised as mother and son, the pair find a boat to take them to Europe, but on the way, they are captured by pirates and sold as slaves, Fidelity as a boy to an English merchant, and Amandus still as an old Jewish woman to be a slave in a seraglio. As a clever boy, Fidelity is valued by her English master who takes her to England with him where she works for him for a year before falling sick from the lamentable climate. When a foreign “barbaric” doctor is brought in, who should it be but her long-lost brother, Ithocles. Amandus’ story in the seraglio is too long to tell here, but suffice it to say that it does not fit Hackett’s description of the conventions surrounding males dressing as women in order to obtain access to women they love any more than Fidelity’s is done in service of masculine desires or any desire to humble herself, nor is either situation presented as eroticizing or tantalizing for the cross-dressed character.

In the genre, there is also typically a rape scene, which Hackett views as characteristic, although Mentz points out that while the threat of rape is common, the actual event is not (p. 43). In “Florinda,” again, while the danger to the female heroine is conventional, Pulten’s handling of it is not. To escape after the initial assault, Florinda pretends to agree with Roderigo that she will keep silent. Instead, however, of the heroine secluding herself, bemoaning, or committing suicide, she and her parents, plot a spectacular and bloody revenge. In the same way as Zabra and her countrywoman Fidelity foreground issues of conversion and faith

through juxtaposing Christianity with paganism, Florinda and Castabella debate the Christian and pagan responses to injury. Castabella urges resignation and acceptance since Florinda's virgin soul is untouched; Florinda points out "what have the Heathens their Nemuses, and Ramnusins their Adrustes to avenge their wronge and Christians must be putt of with Patience?" (f. 34A). The decision is clearly for female revenge.

Using the event of the rape, she and her parents together raise a rebellion by the nobles against the usurper. Rather than hiding her shame, in an extraordinary scene, her parents create a staged spectacle to which all the nobility has been invited. Florinda is presented seated in a black velvet chair with a vein in each arm slit, while her father and mother on either side press their fingers over them to delay the bleeding, forming a tableau of a crucifix; her parents announce her story to the world, the wounds indicating her willingness to die after being defiled and they voice their support of her decision. As her parents begin letting her blood pour into "golden bowls," the nobles are so affected by this sight that they swear revenge and rebellion, at which point her wounds are bound, "sparkling wine" is mixed in the golden bowls of fresh blood, and they all drink to vow vengeance (f. 36Av). Alas, the romance stops before we can enjoy her fully in action.

As one can tell from even this quick summary of the plot and characters, Pulter clearly had read and enjoyed romances, including more than simply *Arcadia*. The women are all beautiful and virtuous; the men either handsome, arrogant, and ruthless usurpers or handsome, virtuous princes in disguise or captivity. The action ranges throughout the Mediterranean and involves pirates, kidnapping, imprisonment and escape, and violent storms. However, Pulter's heroines are not perfect, suffering not only physical hardship but also from their own pride; they also are torn in confusion over conflicts in beliefs between a Christian moral code and a pagan lifestyle. They are also resourceful and physically active; they are literate, enjoy reading, some speak several languages, and they can dissemble for a year on end if necessary. To modern readers, they seem pragmatic young women rather than Amazonian warriors, living in countries where the men's main occupations seem to be stealing power, waging civil war, and attempting to debauch young women.

Considering the contents of the volume as a whole, Pulter's literary response to the events of the English Civil War and Interregnum takes one back to Pliny. Pliny's favorite precious stone, it appears, was the emerald because its soothing color refreshes the eyes: "after straining our

eyes by looking at another object, we can restore our vision to normal by gazing at an emerald.” Pliny’s accounts of natural history are frequently marked by his laments over the moral decay of his own time, its self-centeredness and self-destructiveness under the emperor Nero, who, he records, used emeralds through which better to watch the gladiators fight. Perhaps Hester Pulter, too, sought her emerald lenses, and in natural history and perhaps also in the genre of romance, she found them, a way of being able to look again at the relationship between classical times, Biblical ones, and her own, in particular, permitting her to gaze at the tragedy of her King’s downfall and its destructive aftermath.

VII

Speaking more generally, what do textual objects such as Hester Pulter’s manuscript volume offer that a printed text might not? Its multi-layered composition, the efforts of more than one writer visible, its survival and transmittal apparently initially through the women of the family, the ways in which its contents directly comment on contemporary political situations, its display of erudition in the natural sciences and philosophies, the ways in which it differs from contemporary printed models of the emblem and the romance, all these aspects suggest larger topics that invite further investigation. Finally, the volume raises the question of whether this textual object should be seen as an anomaly or as being just the tip of an iceberg now revealed by a type of critical climate shift.

The Perdita of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* only had to wait sixteen years before becoming the beloved of a handsome prince and being restored to her family, although her “loss” did involve her father’s madness, her mother’s early death, and her conveyance agent being eaten by a bear. The Perdita women in the manuscript database, as well as those still waiting to be noticed, lost under labels of “domestic papers” and “family correspondence,” or simply miscatalogued, have been in a type of intellectual exile for much, much longer. Unlike Shakespeare’s heroine, they are not, for the most part, aristocratic women in pastoral shepherdess disguises, but women who lived in a variety of places, worked in different families, and occupied a range of social stations. This volume’s survival suggests that the tortoise may have the last laugh: one hopes that spurred by further work still devoted to taking early modern women seriously and to the position that handwritten volumes are indeed just as much books as printed ones, albeit of an interesting and

intriguing nature, we will continue to find new materials to assist both literary and historical studies. Handwritten records will be read again across generations, drawing our attention to what is strange and foreign about this manuscript world, as well as what is still familiar and binding in human experience.

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