

## 7. “Women Worthies” in Eighteenth-Century Historical Culture: Sarah Chapone and George Ballard’s *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752)

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As Daniel Woolf has shown, early modern English historical writing was a collaborative and gendered enterprise. Readers, publishers, printers, and booksellers joined named authors in producing formal historiography and shaping historical culture more broadly. Women contributed to the “communication circuit” that generated understandings of the past, even if few had their names appear on the title pages of historical works.<sup>1</sup> In a classic article on the gendering of history from the late seventeenth century into the eighteenth, Woolf elaborated on these points while tracing the sharpening distinction some commentators drew between the uses of history for women and for men. Writers came to see women as a distinct category of reader and crafted for them a “feminine past” suited to their presumed interests and needs. Different kinds of histories socialized boys and girls. Historical culture thus helped construct sexual difference, Woolf argued, even as gendered distinctions in the study of history grew.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D.R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). He adapts the “communication circuit” from Robert Darnton’s work.

<sup>2</sup> D.R. Woolf, “A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500–1800,” *American Historical Review* 102, no.3 (1997): 645–79.

This chapter revisits these insights and arguments by returning to George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), a particularly influential example of the long-lasting genre of "women worthies."<sup>3</sup> In her foundational study of *The English Woman in History* (1957), Doris Mary Stenton drew deeply from the *Memoirs* and observed that women of her own day ought to remember Ballard with gratitude for his work to preserve "the memory of their predecessors."<sup>4</sup> Two decades later, though, Natalie Zemon Davis invoked the *Memoirs* as an example of uses of the past that ought to be set aside in a programmatic call for a new mode of historical analysis. Davis traced the history and limitations of catalogues of "women worthies," surveying the genre from Plutarch to Christine de Pizan, through Ballard and then to her own day. She noted the focus on exceptional rather than ordinary women, typically taken out of context, generally with little attention to the dynamics of power and none to the variability of sex roles or gender identities over time. She urged historians to turn to the past not as the source of stories about inspiring women but as the source of the present. In a much-quoted phrase, Davis called upon feminist historians to move "from Women Worthies to a worthier craft."<sup>5</sup> Yet decades later, recuperative, biographical studies are resurgent – a fact some historians of women and gender eye wearily and warily, though recognizing the enduring appeal of such stories to

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<sup>3</sup> Printed at Oxford by W. Jackson, for the author; republished in London in 1775 for T. Evans as *Memoirs of British Ladies, Who Have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skills in the Learned Languages*.

<sup>4</sup> Doris Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 228.

<sup>5</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 83–103; see, too, her "Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers, 1400–1820," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: NYU Press, 1980), 153–82. For similar calls, see, for example, Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Joan Wallach Scott, "Women in History: The Modern Period," *Past and Present* 101, no.1 (1983): 141–57; and Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For a helpful overview, see Julie Des Jardins, "Women's and Gender History," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 5: *Historical Writing Since 1945*, ed. Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 136–58.

many audiences.<sup>6</sup> As such, even historians who echo the call to move away from restorative studies that celebrate the worth of individual women might wish to study more attentively the work done by such stories, in the past and present.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter re-examines the gendered work of Ballard's *Memoirs* by exploring the collaborations behind it. An iconic historical text written for and about women, it was also written *with* women: the contributions of the famous Anglo-Saxonist Elizabeth Elstob have received some scholarly notice, but the formative role of the assiduously anonymous Sarah Chapone warrants attention, too, as does the help of others of Chapone's friends. A chronological survey of women "who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts, and sciences," the *Memoirs* is at first glance a book squarely within the tradition of the "women worthies." But if we see the work in its own time and place, and as the product of a communication circuit, we see something more interesting than simply a celebration of women's worth. If we return to the *Memoirs* as the result of a rich and prolonged collaboration between Ballard and a circle of "women worthies" of his own day, we see an effort to ease women's entry into the nation's public life in pursuit of other, wide-ranging goals. A historical text shaped by the contributors' present and hopes for the future, the *Memoirs* used "learned" women of the past to argue for an expansive notion of women's capacity for public virtue, in ways that let us in turn see something of the normative and material restraints on women in eighteenth-century England.

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<sup>6</sup> Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5–6, 23–6; and Jean Marie Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism, and the Tyrannies of History," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 13–35.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Hicks has surveyed the genre's popularity throughout the eighteenth century, arguing for its role in sustaining feminist consciousness: "Women Worthies and Feminist Argument in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Women's History Review* 24, no. 2 (2015): 174–90. Ariane Chernock also offers a more positive assessment of the genre, and its role in writing women into national histories, in "Gender and the Politics of Exceptionalism in the Writing of British Women's History," in *Making Women's Histories*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Kate Haulman (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 115–36.

George Ballard himself tried very hard to acknowledge the contributions of a network of women to the *Memoirs*. Born c. 1706 in Chipping Camden, Gloucestershire, Ballard had to work for most of his life as a stay-maker and pursued his antiquarian interests on the side. Eventually he secured an annuity from a friend to allow him more time for his studies and finally a clerkship at Magdalen College, Oxford.<sup>8</sup> A lifelong bachelor, he nonetheless valued female friends. The gifts he made to the Bodleian Library at his death included a carefully curated volume of 140 original letters from eighteen women, consisting mostly of his correspondence with Chapone, Elstob, and others of their High Church circles.<sup>9</sup> Ruth Perry drew upon the letters for her 1985 edition of Ballard's *Memoirs*, but we might return to them now to read the *Memoirs* anew, with the benefit of intervening decades of scholarly work that has attributed to Chapone publications of her own and explored the collaborative aspects of authorship.<sup>10</sup> As Ballard tried to tell people all along, a central figure aided his efforts. The correspondence he left to the Bodleian makes this clear. His last will and testament also suggests as much: when he died in 1755, he gave his printed books written by "learned and ingenious women" and all his manuscripts relating to their lives to his "learned and ingenious" friend, Sarah Chapone.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On Ballard, see John Bloxam, *A Register of the Presidents, Fellows, . . . and Other Members of St Mary Magdalen College in the University of Oxford*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1857), 2:95–102. On antiquarianism's emergence in these years as a "social activity of considerable prominence," see Woolf, *Social Circulation* (quote at 182).

<sup>9</sup> The Bodleian Library, Ballard MS 43. For Ballard's manuscripts, see Melanie Bigold, "'Bookmaking Out of the Remains of the Dead': George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies* (1752)," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 38, no. 2 (2014): 28–46.

<sup>10</sup> George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain*, ed. and intro. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985). See also Perry, "George Ballard's Biographies of Learned Ladies," in *Biography in the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. J.D. Browning (London: Garland Publishing, 1980), 85–111. Perry notes Chapone's contributions but not in the context of Chapone's own works, to be discussed here, as the attributions had not been made when she wrote. For studies of the collaborative aspects of early modern authorship, in addition to Woolf see, for example, Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Julie Crawford, *Mediatix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Margaret Ezell's works, esp. *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> The National Archives, Kew, PROB 11/817/374. What happened to Chapone's papers thereafter remains a mystery. The editor of Mary Delany's correspondence suggested, but without details, that they had been accidentally burnt: *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover, 1st series, 3 vols. (London, 1861), 1:264n.

Ballard and Chapone met in their native Gloucestershire, possibly through Ballard's dressmaking business or perhaps through his mother Elizabeth, a local midwife.<sup>12</sup> Chapone was the elder, born in 1699 to Damaris Kirkham and her husband Lionel, the rector of Stanton. In Sarah's youth, she developed what became an enduring friendship with Mary Granville (later Pendarves, finally Delany), daughter of a landed Tory family with court connections. Delany wrote of Sarah's "uncommon genius and intrepid spirit" (one her father initially thought "too free and masculine"), observing that she "would shine in an assembly composed of Tullys, Homers, and Miltons; at Gloucester she is like a diamond set in jet."<sup>13</sup> After Sarah's brother brought Charles and John Wesley home from university, they joined the small circle of intimates; they addressed one another with such classicized names as Cyrus, Araspes, and Aspasia, with Sarah variously Sappho or Varanes.<sup>14</sup> In 1725, however, she set aside a courtship with John Wesley to marry John Chapone, vicar of the nearby parish of Childswickham. Despite running a boarding school with her husband and having five children, and then relocating with her family to the parish of Badgeworth after financial difficulties, she managed to keep her literary interests alive.<sup>15</sup> At some point in these years, she also met and took a special interest in

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<sup>12</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 123: Chapone wrote of Mrs Ballard that "I shall never forget how much I owe to her physick and care."

<sup>13</sup> Delany, *Correspondence*, 1:15–16, 586.

<sup>14</sup> Possibly influenced by Madeleine de Scudéry's popular *Artamenes, or, The Grand Cyrus*, E.S. trans., 5 vols. (London, 1691). Might Varanes be the philosopher prince of Persia, the hero of *The Royal Convert: Or, The Force of Truth* (London, 1709), attr. Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicol? On the relationships, see V.H.H. Green, *The Young Mr Wesley* (London: E. Arnold, 1961), 205–10, 216, 221–6, 293–4.

<sup>15</sup> On Chapone, see Thomas Keymer, "Chapone [Capon; née Kirkham], Sarah (1699–1764), author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39723>; Susan Paterson Glover, "Further Reflections upon Marriage: Mary Astell and Sarah Chapone," in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell*, ed. Penny Weiss and Alice Sowall (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 93–110; Jacqueline Broad, "'A Great Championess for Her Sex': Sarah Chapone on Liberty as Nondomination and Self-Mastery," *The Monist* 98, no.1 (2013): 77–88; and Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Sappho of Gloucestershire: Sarah Chapone and Christian Feminism," in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, ed. Deborah Heller (London: Routledge, 2015), 91–110.

Elizabeth Elstob, then a poor dame school teacher living under an assumed name just a few miles away in Evesham.

In her earlier years, Elstob had been a celebrated Anglo-Saxonist.<sup>16</sup> Born in Newcastle in 1683 and orphaned young, she later reported that she was left with an uncle who thought “one tongue is enough for a woman.” She struggled to retain the Latin she had learned from her mother until her brother William acquired a church living in London and could take her in. Then, she shone. In 1708 she published anonymously a translation of *Discours de la Gloire*, a prize-winning work by the great French *précieuse*, Madeleine de Scudéry. Thereafter she turned her attentions more fully to Old English and “the northern languages.” Along with her contributions to others’ works, Elstob published under her own name *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St Gregory* (1709), a translation of a sermon used to convert the pagan English to Christianity, and *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715), the first such grammar in English rather than Latin. But her brother’s untimely death in 1715 aborted her anticipated edition of Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies*, along with much else. Thereafter, she wrote, she was “unhappily hindered by a necessity of getting her bread, which with much difficulty, labour, and ill-health she had endeavoured to do for many years with very indifferent success.”<sup>17</sup>

In her brief few years in London before the retreat to quiet penury in Evesham, though, Elstob had come to know the Tory feminist Mary Astell and her circle of learned ladies,

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<sup>16</sup> On Elstob, see John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 6 vols. (London, 1812), 4:112–40; and Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England, 1650–1760* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 169–85. For recent scholarship, see especially Jacqueline Way, “‘Our Mother-Tongue’: The Politics of Elizabeth Elstob’s Antiquarian Scholarship,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2015): 417–40; Norma Clarke, “Elizabeth Elstob (1674–1752): England’s First Professional Woman Historian?,” *Gender and History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 210–20; and Dawn Hollis, “‘On the Margins of Scholarship’: The Letters of Elizabeth Elstob to George Ballard, 1735–1753,” *Lias: Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources* 42, no. 2 (2015): 167–268. On her relationship with Astell, see Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 106–11, 269.

<sup>17</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 60.

precursors of the later Bluestockings, and became in her own turn an impassioned proponent of language learning for women. Each of Elstob's publications praised women's education, the second most extensively setting out its utility to faith and nation. She referred readers to Anna Maria van Schurman's Latin-language riposte to critics of women's learning in general and argued for the value of women's learning in Old English in particular.<sup>18</sup> She studied Saxon to prove the antique purity of the reformed Church of England, she wrote. Moreover, history showed that women as much as men could serve the faith: she cited Bertha, the first Christian queen of England, along with a long list of others who had helped bring Christianity to the English.<sup>19</sup> Patrimony might be thought the preserve of men but skills in their "MOTHER-TONGUE" could help women in her own day serve their church and country. She addressed the preface of her *Grammar* to the nonjuring Bishop George Hickes, noting her satisfaction with his Saxon thesaurus and observing that as "others of my own sex might be capable of the same satisfaction, I resolved to give them the rudiments of that language in an English dress."<sup>20</sup> She presented her effort to correct, improve, and teach the nation's early language as a patriotic act, "much to the honour of our country." Her writings responded to the political and religious controversies of her day. As Jacqueline Way has so well demonstrated, Elstob's antiquarianism had a sharp political edge: "her pointed endeavor to attract women to the study of Anglo-Saxon antiquities is not simply a matter of extending female education . . . but also of investing women with the authority to participate in public debates on the political ordering of the nation."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Anna Maria van Schurman, *Dissertatio, de Ingenii Muliebris ad Doctrinam & Meliores Litteras Aptitudine* (1641).

<sup>19</sup> Ælfric, *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birth-Day of St Gregory . . . Translated into Modern English, with Notes, &c.*, by Eliz. Elstob (London, 1709), ii–vi, xiv, lviii–lix.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Elstob, *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, First Given in English: With an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities* (London, 1715), title page and ii.

<sup>21</sup> Way, "Our Mother Tongue," 440.

After Chapone discovered this once celebrated scholar living in nearby Evesham she set about to find Elstob an income and to reintroduce her to learned society. With the help of Mary Delany, a circular letter Chapone crafted caught the eye of Queen Caroline, a woman to whom Elstob had long before dedicated one of her works. In 1730 the queen promised Elstob a pension; sadly, though, it ended with Caroline's death in 1737.<sup>22</sup> Chapone tried again, telling Elstob in a letter that "if it please God to make me the happy instrument of doing good to a person of your merit and abilities, I shall esteem it a great blessing to myself."<sup>23</sup> A year later, Chapone and Delany secured Elstob an appointment as tutor in the household of the wealthy naturalist and supporter of women's learning, Margaret Bentinck, duchess of Portland. In the meantime, in 1735, Chapone also introduced Elstob and Ballard, who delightedly shared copies of Saxon texts, monumental inscriptions, and other antiquarian finds.<sup>24</sup> Class and material circumstance variously enabled and constrained Ballard, Elstob, and Chapone, all on the slippery edges of middling status and means; patriarchy imposed additional restraints, especially on Chapone, a married woman with many responsibilities, and on Elstob, an unmarried woman with few resources after her brother's death. But the three soon set about the collaboration that would produce the *Memoirs*.

Chapone can easily fall into the background in this story, partly because of her own insistence on anonymity, but she was not just the helpful vicar's wife she sometimes seems in the passing references to her in accounts of Ballard's project.<sup>25</sup> Elstob may have provided the immediate inspiration for the *Memoirs*: the plans she had to abandon upon her brother's death

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<sup>22</sup> For the pension, see Delany, *Correspondence*, 1:263–4.

<sup>23</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Pace* accounts which say that Ballard introduced Chapone to Elstob: Delany's correspondence shows that Chapone knew Elstob at least by 1730, when she began soliciting for her support, and as Ballard MS 43 indicates (fos. 3–5), Elstob and Ballard began corresponding in 1735 and only met in person later that year.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Clarke, "Elizabeth Elstob"; and Hollis, "On the Margins."



included a rough sketch for a biographical dictionary of learned women throughout the ages.<sup>26</sup> Or Ballard may have been the instigator. He had an “ingenious,” historically minded older sister and a lifelong fascination with John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments of the English Church*, a compendium of martyrologies in which women were prominent among the heroes of the Protestant nation.<sup>27</sup> Either fact might have prompted his interest in the project that became the *Memoirs*. But as we now know, Chapone herself was already the author of a work advancing the interests of women, attuned to politics of the sort once embraced by Astell and Elstob, and may also have been quick to see the value of such a historical endeavour.

In 1735, Chapone had published, anonymously, an excoriating work titled *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives*.<sup>28</sup> One of the first systematic analyses and critiques of the legal position of wives under English common law, and the first written by a woman, the *Hardships* compared coverture to slavery. Chapone argued that the peculiar set of disabilities English law imposed upon women at marriage went far beyond what the biblical curse of wifely subjection mandated. In denying married women control of property it also left them susceptible to harm in ways not seen in the laws of other nations. Chapone was responding in part to recent

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<sup>26</sup> Her rough notes for the project, now in Ballard MS 64, date to 1709. Clarke and Perry attribute the inspiration for the *Memoirs* to Elstob; Hollis notes that Ballard only acquired Elstob’s manuscript in 1747, bought from a bookseller from among the materials Elstob lost on her flight from London. Hollis allows, though, that the subject might have come up in conversations between the two earlier.

<sup>27</sup> Bloxam, *Register*, 2:99–100.

<sup>28</sup> [Sarah Chapone], *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (London, 1735), printed by William Bowyer, with Rev. Thomas Seward as an intermediary. [See the publication details in the *English Short Title Catalogue*, <http://estc.bl.uk>, derived from Bowyer’s registers. Seward later published a defence of “The Female Right to Literature,” in a poem marshalling “historick truth” and Britons’ equal claims to “birth-right liberty,” in *A Collection of Poems in Several Hands*, ed. Robert Dodsley (London, 1748), 3 vols., 2:295–303. Later still, Chapone enlisted Seward to help find subscribers for the *Memoirs*, Ballard MS 43, fos. 155d, 171. Seward’s daughter Anna, b. 1742, later became a prominent writer.] The work was also published in Ireland in 1735 by George Faulkner and excerpts appeared in the May and June issues of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. A five-part republication appeared in the January 1788 issue of Philadelphia’s *Columbian Magazine*, although with pronouns switched to suggest a male author. A modern facsimile reprint of the *Hardships* is included in *Legal Treatises*, intro. Lynne A. Greenberg, 3 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), vol. 2. More recently, Susan Paterson Glover has produced a critical edition of *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives by Sarah Chapone* (London: Routledge, 2018).

debates that grounded the abstract liberties of the freeborn Englishman in his rights to property, drawing upon reports in the popular press of egregious abuses suffered by very real women under English law. Framed as a petition to king and parliament, and insisting upon women's right to petition, the *Hardships* called for legislative change. Chapone described her own marriage as happy and allowed that most husbands did not abuse the power that law gave them over their wives, but insisted that such power must not even be permitted: "A good husband would not desire the power of horse-whipping, confining, half-starving his wife, or squandering her estate; a bad husband should not be allowed it."<sup>29</sup>

A remarkable text that now receives serious attention from scholars interested in feminist political philosophy, in its own day *The Hardships* provoked a few mocking ripostes. Modern scholarship only firmly attributed the work to Chapone at the turn of the millennium.<sup>30</sup> Upon its publication in 1735, critics rounded on an unnamed woman author. One writer contested her unflattering comparison of English law with that of the Romans, suggesting that women of the ancient Roman world had been more deserving: "When the English history supplies us with an instance of the sacrifice of one female vanity to the public good," he wrote, "we will then acknowledge the justice and politeness of the Romans to exceed and shame ours, as much as our female virtue, at present, falls short of theirs."<sup>31</sup> Another critic suggested drawing upon histories of the "virtues and exploits of women" of every age to determine where sovereignty ought to lie

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<sup>29</sup> Chapone, *Hardships*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> See Greenberg, *Legal Treatises*, 2:xli and Glover, *Hardships*, 11, 13, for the evidence of Chapone's authorship (a key piece of which is in Ballard MS 43, fo. 106). The first printed attribution seems to have appeared in a review Perry published in 2000, of a 1998 book that still treated the *Hardships*' author as unknown; Perry later thanked Janice Thaddeus for the tip. [See Barbara J. Todd, "'To Be Somebody': Married Women and *The Hardships of the English Laws*," in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 343–62; and Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199n17]

<sup>31</sup> *Weekly Miscellany*, no. 300 (23 October 1736), reprinted in Glover, ed., *Hardships*, 91–2.

between the sexes. Until then, the laws would remain as they were.<sup>32</sup> Such responses might well have disposed Chapone to see the merits of a project like the *Memoirs*.

Whoever provided the first nudge, the *Memoirs* drew upon Chapone's contributions at all stages of its production. Ballard's correspondence records him exchanging texts with both Elstob and Chapone. Chapone wrote to her acquaintances to get copies of writings by or about great women authors and to secure Ballard some of the sources he needed.<sup>33</sup> She tried but failed to have the Princess of Wales patronize the project.<sup>34</sup> She expressed "invincible objections" to Ballard's request to dedicate the work to her, refusing to have her "name drawn from its proper obscurity," but advised on who else to approach and helped him write the inscription to her friend, Mary Delany (though Delany herself accepted only grudgingly, also preferring the "shade and shelter" of anonymity).<sup>35</sup> Chapone read drafts and advised on the text. She assisted Ballard in securing a copyeditor, printer, and publisher. At one point she offered to put him in contact with the printer and novelist Samuel Richardson, another of her correspondents. (She counselled Richardson on his fictional heroines' legal situations after reading *Clarissa*.)<sup>36</sup> When Ballard decided to finance the publication via subscription, she advised on the process, urging him to print proposals in contradiction to another friend's counsel. Thereafter she worked to find subscribers of good number and name to support the work.<sup>37</sup> Some of the same could be said of others of Ballard's network: his correspondence shows him getting transcriptions of sources from

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<sup>32</sup> *Weekly Miscellany*, no. 303 (13 November 1736), reprinted in Glover, ed., *Hardships*, 96–7.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Ballard MS 43, fos. 134, 136.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 165d.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 137, 168, 169d. Delany "dislike[d] extremely" the plan to dedicate part of the work to her but agreed upon her husband's warning that "it will mortify the man if I refuse." Thereafter she felt it vain to solicit for subscribers to the work. Delany, *Correspondence*, 2:590, 595, 608; 3:92, 171.

<sup>36</sup> Ballard MS 43, fos. 155, 159. Sarah's daughter worked in Richardson's household for a time, and he introduced Sarah's son John to Hester Mulso, his future wife and a prominent Bluestocking. Samuel Richardson, *Correspondence of Richardson's Final Years (1755–61)*, ed. Shelley King and John E. Pierce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 22n8.

<sup>37</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 151.

contacts at the universities and elsewhere, asking Joseph Ames to stop by Chelsea church to look for the monument to Mary Astell, for example.<sup>38</sup> Rev. William Talbot secured the annuity that gave Ballard some leisure to write; he and his wife Sarah offered advice, found subscribers, and earned places in one of the two dedications.<sup>39</sup> Two other women in their Gloucestershire circle – Anna Hopkins and Anne Dewes, sister of Mary Delany – also procured sources and proved avid subscription-hunters, then distributors of the finished books. But when Ballard became so ill in 1745 that he feared he would not complete his work, the person to whom he turned for a promise to finish it was Chapone.<sup>40</sup>

She agreed, though Ballard recovered and she could continue as an adviser. Of course, Ballard did not always take her counsel. They disagreed on the preface. Before publication, she urged him to address in blunt terms the “inveterate and, I may add, illiberal dislike” men had for women’s intellectual improvements. She further advised that “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 misapplied those talents in defence of evil principles.” True, some few women “who carry more sail than ballast” may have made “shipwrecks of their faith,” but Ballard’s book focused on women of *learning*, and “none of that Slight Sisterhood was ever thought women of learning or had any pretence to be called women of knowledge.” (She singled out Aphra Behn here, perhaps recalling Behn’s mocking treatment of “Lady Knowall.”<sup>41</sup>) Chapone later complained that the published preface pulled the punches thrown in the draft she had read.<sup>42</sup> She also disliked the printed inscription to Mary Delany. Ballard had acted on her earlier advice

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<sup>38</sup> John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London, 1817–58), 4:223, 224, 225.

<sup>39</sup> See references to the Talbots in Ballard MS 43, fos. 197–204, and in Ballard’s will. The bequest of antique coins to Sarah Talbot suggests shared antiquarian interests.

<sup>40</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 127.

<sup>41</sup> In *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), referenced in Woolf, “Feminine Past,” 660n63.

<sup>42</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 182.

to remove reference to Delany's husband: she "is so eminently known that it will be looked upon as superfluous and indecorous to attempt to distinguish her by saying whose wife she is."<sup>43</sup> But he had changed what seemed to Chapone a key phrase in her version of the inscription, to a woman who exemplified the "virtues and accomplishments which are the true dignity and real ornaments of *human nature*." Instead, he had referenced accomplishments that "adorn her sex." Chapone objected, for "all the cardinal virtues are neither masculine nor feminine but common to both sexes."<sup>44</sup> On balance, though, she seemed satisfied with a work, "which will do so much honour to our sex, and to the worthy author of it."<sup>45</sup>

The book that emerged from this collaboration located honour in learning and went beyond showing women's capacity for learning (their "ingenuity," in the parlance of the day) to demonstrate their ability to put that learning to use in service of the nation. An innate or natural disposition of the body and soul, ingenuity needed cultivation to achieve its ends.<sup>46</sup> In his preface, Ballard described his focus as "ingenious women of this nation who were really possessed of a great share of learning" – and about whom he could collect enough information.<sup>47</sup> Ballard covered well-known women and some who had been recognized in their own day but forgotten since. He drew upon the catalogues and martyrologies of John Bale and John Foxe as well as the chronicles and histories of writers such as Raphael Holinshed, William Camden, and John Strype. Making the work stand out from others of its kind, he added to the material gleaned from such books the results of his own and his collaborators' research in parish registers, monumental inscriptions in churches scattered about the isles, and manuscript collections at

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., fo. 168.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., fos. 169d, 171d. Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., fo. 145.

<sup>46</sup> Particularly useful in understanding the semantic significance of early modern *ingenium*: Rhodri Lewis, "Francis Bacon and Ingenuity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2014): 113–63.

<sup>47</sup> Ballard, *Memoirs*, 53, 54. All citations to the *Memoirs* are to Perry's edition.

widely dispersed libraries. Even so, for some women he had but names and few details. He ventured no further back than the fourteenth century, beginning with Juliana of Norwich (1343–c.1416) and referring readers to Thomas Tanner’s *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica* to learn of other, earlier women writers. The first part of the *Memoirs* focused on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with entries on thirty-two women and scattered references to a few others. The second part described thirty-two women who worked mostly in the seventeenth century, ending with Constantia Grierson. There Ballard stopped, noting that he omitted “very many other learned and ingenious women since the year 1700.”<sup>48</sup> Though he expressed a special pride in the English having produced more famous learned women than other nations, he included Welsh, Irish, and Scottish writers in a biographical and bibliographical survey that drew exemplars from Great Britain as a whole. Ballard described his focus as women who were “learned, ingenious, and virtuous.”

By “learned” he usually meant skilled in the scholarly languages. Ballard included a few women who did not fit this definition or for whom other achievements were paramount: Anne, Lady Halkett, for example, warranted a place not just for her writings in divinity but also for her proficiency in physic. Whether Esther Inglis composed or simply copied texts, Ballard thought her calligraphy sufficiently impressive to include her. He noted some women who produced important work despite their lack of language training, citing Catherine Bovey’s achievements, for example, “notwithstanding the disadvantages of her education in not being instructed in the learned languages.”<sup>49</sup> More common, though, were encomia such as that of Jane, countess of Westmorland (c.1533–1593): “this ingenious lady made such a surprising progress in the Latin

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 378.

and Greek tongues . . . that her skill in those languages was such that she might well stand in competition with the greatest men of that age.”<sup>50</sup>

The *Memoirs* insisted upon women’s inherent “ingenuity,” taking pains to counter the doubts about women’s ability to acquire the learned languages that led some critics to deny women’s claims to authorship. In noting that some had questioned the attribution of elegant translations of Hebrew verse to Mary Sydney, countess of Pembroke, Ballard continued with some exasperation: “that the female sex are as capable of learning this as any other language appears so plain from many undeniable instances of it as to render any further disproof of that assertion unnecessary.”<sup>51</sup> He described with some awe not just Dudleya North’s learning in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew but also her “competent share of knowledge in the whole circle of Oriental learning.”<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Bury’s genius “led her to the study of almost everything”: philology, philosophy, history, music, mathematics, and languages. She learned French to aid in her work with French refugees but, of special note, she also excelled in Hebrew.<sup>53</sup>

Ballard showed particular concern – as did Chapone and others of their circle – to attribute to Dorothy, Lady Pakington a work widely considered one of the finest of the seventeenth century: *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658), a deeply influential devotional text that shaped the Anglican tradition. Ballard deemed it a work of “universal benefit to mankind.”<sup>54</sup> He believed it was Pakington’s, and thought that if he could prove as much, his case for women’s ability to learn and to put that learning to public use would be unassailable: “That vulgar prejudice of the supposed incapacity of the female sex is what these memoirs in general may

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 250; see also 293.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 290; for Chapone’s comments on this section, see Ballard MS 43, fos. 135, 181d; for Delany’s, *Correspondence*, 3:231. The work’s authorship remains uncertain but is now commonly assigned to Richard Allestree.

possibly remove.”<sup>55</sup> He quoted passages from the text that spoke of women’s abilities if and when educated, and its conclusion that “whatever vicious impotence women are under, it is acquired, not natural, nor derived from any illiberality of God’s, but from the ill management of His bounty.”<sup>56</sup> If his case for a woman’s ability to write the *Whole Duty* had not convinced the obdurate, Ballard continued, readers would at least have to acknowledge that one of the best authors of the age favoured the principles he espoused: “that women are capable of the highest attainments in literature and have given convincing proofs of it when they have been allowed proper advantages of education.”<sup>57</sup>

The *Memoirs* did not just defend women’s ability to learn and call for their education but also argued for the public utility of such learning. The entry on Anne Askew, the sixteenth-century martyr, invoked the “good use” she made of her education in furthering the evangelical cause.<sup>58</sup> Ballard celebrated Queen Catherine Parr’s learning and “the good uses she made of it in employing it to the best purposes through every stage of her life.” She sought not only to edify herself but also to “implant the seeds of piety and virtue in the minds of her people.” Like some others of the women in the *Memoirs*, Parr earned praise both for her own writings and for her commitment to sharing the results of learning with others: “Her great zeal for the Reformation and the earnest desire to have the Scriptures understood by the common people put her upon procuring several learned persons to translate Erasmus’s *Paraphrase on the New Testament* into the English tongue for the service of the public.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ballard, *Memoirs*, 293–4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 114, 120, 122.



While Parr put her learning to use both directly and indirectly, as a writer and as a patron, Ballard also praised other women for acts aside from individual authorship. Margaret Ascham, wife of Queen Elizabeth's tutor Roger Ascham, published her husband's *The Schoolmaster* (1570), along with a preface of her own composition. "Whether she did anything more towards the advancement of learning, I know not," he wrote, but this alone warranted a place for her "among the learned and ingenious of the fair sex."<sup>60</sup> Ballard valued mediators as well as authors. Blanche Parry, one of Queen Elizabeth's ladies of the chamber, received an entry even though Ballard acknowledged he could say little of her as a writer. But she was a "lover of antiquities" and an "encourager of that kind of learning in others," not least by securing publication of Edward Stradling's Welsh history.<sup>61</sup>

In his entry on Mildred Cecil, Lady Burghley, Ballard paused to examine William Wotton's contention in his *Reflections Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694) that no age had produced more learned women than the sixteenth century. Restraints on women could and did change over time, but why? Ballard thought the efflorescence might be "ascribed to the noble art of printing, which had just then awakened the minds of ingenious people and furnished them with a vast variety of books to improve their understanding." Perhaps, too, he suggested, the example of Sir Thomas More's commitment to educating his daughters in the languages, arts, and sciences had wielded a broad influence. Mildred's father, Sir Anthony Cooke, had followed More's example in providing his daughters an unusually rich and wide-ranging course of instruction. "Whatever were the motives to this kind of education," Ballard wrote, one fact was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 185.

certain: “the famous instances with which the histories of those times have furnished us must be allowed to deserve at least the praise, if not the imitation, of posterity.”<sup>62</sup>

He returned repeatedly to the utility of these women’s learning as something to be both praised and imitated. Mildred Cecil’s contributions came mainly through her prodigious yet exemplary charity – she built schools, endowed colleges, and donated works to the university libraries – though Ballard was also sure to mention that she accompanied her gift of a Hebrew Bible with a letter in Greek in her own hand. Her sister Anne, Lady Bacon similarly “employed her fine parts and learning very much to her own honour and to the advantage of the country,” not least by translating Bishop John Jewel’s *Apology for the Church of England* so that the “common people” might read and learn from it. Ballard transcribed for his readers Archbishop Parker’s praise for the quality and significance of Anne’s work, hoping it might “raise an emulation in them to apply themselves to the study of useful learning.”<sup>63</sup>

When burnished by learning, the inherent ingenuity of women could be put to a variety of virtuous public goods, strengthening both faith and nation. Unsurprisingly, Queen Elizabeth warranted lengthy notice for her knowledge of languages and philosophy, which she used not only for her own betterment but also for that of her people. She read works such as Livy’s *History*, the *Annals* of Tacitus, and Seneca’s *Works* to train herself to better order public affairs. Few women would have her education or her responsibilities, but Ballard implied throughout that women of a wide range of backgrounds might build upon the examples offered by these learned ladies to do good in the world. True, the virtuous conduct set down for imitation was sometimes of the “feminine” and private sort: among other praises of Margaret Cavendish, duchess of Newcastle, Ballard described her as “an excellent economist, very kind to her

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 188, 189.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 189–90, 196, 197.

servants, and a perfect pattern of conjugal love and duty.”<sup>64</sup> But the *Memoirs* offered up for emulation an expansive definition of virtue. Toward the end of his compendium, for example, Ballard praised Damaris, Lady Masham, whose diligent studies of divinity and philosophy allowed her to write books “of the greatest and most general use of any and do most conduce to that which is the chief aim of Christianity: a good life.” Of her *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life* (1705) he wrote that its “principal design . . . was to improve religion and virtue, and, indeed, it is so full of excellent instruction that I am confidently persuaded if it was carefully perused by both sexes, it could not fail of obtaining much of its desired end.”<sup>65</sup>

The *Memoirs* asserted the possibility and uses of women’s learning not just by presenting historical examples of learned women but also by paraphrasing or quoting some of those women’s own arguments in favour of such education. Ballard quoted writings by Masham and Mary, Lady Chudleigh in support of women’s learning, at minimum to allow them “a right understanding of the principal grounds and foundation of their religion or to make themselves mistresses of so much learning as may enable them to instruct their own children.”<sup>66</sup> He referenced the prodigiously learned Elizabeth Bury’s critique of so many men’s unwillingness to aid in women’s education or to be kind to those who did acquire learning, “especially (as she often argued) since they would all so readily own that souls were not distinguished by sexes.”<sup>67</sup>

The penultimate entry in the *Memoirs* drives home many of these points. Ballard paraphrased and quoted liberally from Mary Astell’s urging of better education for women, “the want of which, as she justly observed, was the principal cause of their plunging themselves into

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 333, 334.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 334–6, 253–4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 366.

so many follies and inconveniences.” Of the second edition of her *Reflections upon Marriage* (1703) he wrote: “the book and the long preface prefixed to it are both written with a vast deal of wit and smartness and make perhaps the strongest defence that ever yet appeared in print of the rights and abilities of the fair sex.” But he depicted Astell as a “great ornament of her sex *and country*”: he enthused as much about the utility of her *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695) as about her writings on women specifically. The “good sense, sublime thoughts, and fine language” of her *Letters* should “perpetuate her memory to latest posterity.” In strong terms that echoed Elstob’s and Chapone’s assessments of Astell, Ballard commended her work across several publications for “courageously and successfully” attacking sectaries and defending both church and state. Of one of her ardently Anglican religious texts he noted: “I heartily wish this book was in every hand (especially the younger part of the world), being fully persuaded that it would have a considerable influence over the generality of mankind in checking and repressing the many reigning vices of this age.”<sup>68</sup> We misunderstand the *Memoirs* if we see it simply as a defence of women’s abilities for the sake of women alone or as a praise of purely private virtue: it was a call to action, to women and to men, to recognize the value and utility of women’s work for the public good.

The book itself bears witness to its collaborative production and offers direct evidence of the fruitfulness of women’s learning. It goes beyond describing women authors to quoting from their writings, compiling passages to bring into a new collective text. Ballard also identified the contributions of “the learned and ingenious Mrs Elstob,” who pointed him toward papers in the Harleian and Longleat libraries. Elsewhere he referenced sources as having come from women unnamed: in one passage, for example, he reproduced prayers composed by Lady Pakington,

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 382, 385, 383 (emphasis added), 385, 388.

“copied from a manuscript at Westwood, by a lady who does not give me leave to mention her name.”<sup>69</sup>

The most striking evidence of women’s (literal) investment in the text comes from the subscription list at its outset. Subscription can be seen as a form of “collective patronage,” a way to finance and advertise a book and a public sign of subscribers’ interests and commitments. Ballard’s book had four hundred subscribers, a tally well above the median number for eighteenth-century books and within the highest quartile of subscription counts.<sup>70</sup> Most strikingly, 142 of the *Memoirs*’ subscribers – more than one third – had female names or honorifics, a number and proportion seen in few other texts of the era.<sup>71</sup> The *Memoirs* thus offers strong support for Woolf’s observation that early modern historical texts were “the joint fabrication of several hands in an on-going process of collective creation (physical as well as intellectual),” a creative process that included women.<sup>72</sup> Residents of Gloucestershire and Ballard’s fellows at Oxford appear in significant number among the subscribers, as do people farther afield (including a surprising number of English merchants in Germany). Lords and ladies signed on, as did clergy. The list includes names of prominent scholars such as Sir William Blackstone. But it is the number of women’s names that stands out. A few even ordered multiple copies – Mary Delany purchased six and Anna Hopkins three, for example. The proposal for this book evidently resonated with an audience of mid-century women.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 241, 301.

<sup>70</sup> P.J. Wallis calculated a median of 245 based on a sample of nearly 800 lists: “Book Subscription Lists,” *The Library*, 5th ser., 29, no. 3 (1974): 260–1.

<sup>71</sup> Significantly, another subscription list with an exceptionally high number and proportion of women sustained Elstob’s *English-Saxon Homily*, which had 268 subscribers, of which 116 were women. See Clarke, “Elstob,” 214. For the utility of book subscription lists for historians of historical culture, and comparative numbers of women on other subscription lists, see Woolf, *Reading History*, ch. 6, esp. 306–7, and “Feminine Past,” 675.

<sup>72</sup> Woolf, *Reading History*, 318.

Responses to the text varied, of course. Some writers dismissed Ballard and his efforts, deeming his status and his subject contemptible.<sup>73</sup> But rather than ventriloquizing the critics we might note that some of the book's female readers praised it. Mary Delany wrote to her sister that Ballard "does not pretend so much to be an author as a compiler and gives you very modestly (without assuming any merit to himself) his authorities for what he publishes." And she thought the book might "do a great deal of good," as "nothing animates more to virtuous actions than great examples."<sup>74</sup> Anna Hopkins wrote that she had read the *Memoirs* with "great pleasure" and would "read it again and again and hope to improve by it."<sup>75</sup> Dewes reported that the passages on Margaret Roper and Anne Askew brought her to tears. She noted, too, that Lady Coventry would need a second copy as she had given away the first and that they both wanted him to do another volume. She hoped his text would inspire a younger generation of women.<sup>76</sup>

Readers could evidently approach the *Memoirs* in the conventional exemplary, didactic mode of historical writing and reading, but they found in it depictions of virtue that went beyond the conventionally feminine, or that redefined the virtues to which women might aspire. And for some of its eighteenth-century readers, it was more than just a text to be read; it was the culmination of a collaborative process in which they played parts. We can only imagine the content and effects of the conversations that accompanied the sharing of subscription papers in women's networks and sociable engagements, akin perhaps to the "subscriptional politics" that accompanied the distribution of petitions. (One of Hopkins's three copies was for a woman who paid the subscription fee but did not want her name listed; this suggests that the desire to be

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<sup>73</sup> For example, Edward Gibbon, quoted in Susan Staves, "Church of England Clergy and Women Writers," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65 (2002): 84.

<sup>74</sup> Delany, *Correspondence*, 3:231.

<sup>75</sup> Ballard MS 43, fo. 118.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 242, 261–3.

named itself had import.<sup>77</sup>) But thanks to Ballard’s carefully saved correspondence, we can glean something more of the intents and contours of other women’s roles in shaping the book, even if some of them, too, resisted being named. For Chapone, at least, the key virtues had no sex, and one way to show this was by documenting the worth not of individual women but of a serial collective of women who had honed their native ingenuity with learning of a sort that served broader, public goods.

Seeing the *Memoirs* in its collaborative context lets us understand that its collection of exemplars might have seemed a useful complement or necessary supplement to other, wider-ranging projects for women such as Elstob and Chapone. It emerged from and served to sustain the avowedly rationalist and Anglican “Christian feminism” that they and others of their era promoted.<sup>78</sup> For Chapone, we see evidence of this Christian feminism not just in her earlier *Hardships of the English Laws* but also in another work she published anonymously while the *Memoirs* were being compiled, a response to the unrepentant *Apology* of the serial bigamist Constantia Phillips. When Phillips complained in print of the harsh censures she faced under a sexual double standard, Chapone acknowledged the inequality but urged higher standards for all: “The whole sex have a right to expostulate upon this unequal custom; but all who love virtue would not wish a remedy by taking the restraints off our sex; but would wish the same restraints laid upon theirs.”<sup>79</sup> To license rakish behaviour in men endangered men’s souls and the well-being of the women who married them. The “vagrant affections” of both men and women thus needed the restraints of reason and religion, and not the vague deism or natural religion espoused

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., fo. 109.

<sup>78</sup> Orr, “Sappho,” and Hilda Smith, “The Radical Nature of Mary Astell’s Christian Feminism,” in *Feminist History of Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O’Neill and Marcy P. Lascano (Cham: Springer, 2019), 301–17.

<sup>79</sup> [Sarah Chapone], *Remarks on Mrs. Muilman’s Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield* (1750), reprinted in Glover, *Hardships*, 60–83, quote at 70. On the Constantia Phillips scandal, see Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions and Broken Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 258–96.

by Phillips but the revealed truths of Christianity. Such dangerous examples as put forward in Phillips's publications needed to be countered for the sake of women as women and for the eternal good of all souls. Chapone was an early eighteenth-century feminist, not a modern one; for her, the genealogical legitimacy afforded by a long line of "learned and ingenious" women of the past might help license her own ventures into print and offer some hope for improved virtue – broadly defined – in her own present.

Margaret Ezell has described Ballard's *Memoirs* as an unusually influential text in women's literary history in that it served as a key source for later scholars, but critiques it for having "silently erased" the women writers it did not include. She suggests, too, that in privileging Ballard's book later literary historians "may have contributed to the silencing and marginalization of early women writers' voices." One might object that evaluating the *Memoirs* as a list of literary rather than "learned" women mistakes the text, but more to the point, we can heed Ezell's warning elsewhere that "because of the way we have defined authorship, audience, and literature, we have effectively silenced a large number of early women's voices in our very attempts to preserve and celebrate women's writings." She urges her readers to move beyond assumptions that authorship is an "individual act of creation" and to see it as more social and collaborative.<sup>80</sup> When we heed her advice in revisiting the *Memoirs*, we see a text – not just a source – that resulted from and contributed to a more contested and variable set of assumptions about women's nature and norms for gendered behaviour than we might at first expect. We also see signs of a struggle against silencing in its own time and place.

Recognizing the *Memoirs* as the product of collaboration should thus be more than simply restorative or recuperative in its turn. More than just clarifying the contributions of a few

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<sup>80</sup> Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, 28, 78, 81–2, 86–9.



new “women worthies” to early eighteenth-century historical culture, it invites us to revisit the functions and meanings of the genre more generally. As Chapone might have observed, such works can be useful complements to other projects that challenge norms and laws and familial structures that subordinate some to the will of others. But Chapone also, indirectly, makes us confront issues of anonymity and erasure – or, in Jean Allman’s words, the “agnotological fissures” that leave us complicit in “the reproduction of sanctioned ignorance,” a cycle of remembering, forgetting, and remembering anew.<sup>81</sup> Even as Chapone helped Ballard bring past women writers to light in service of present goals, she insisted on her own anonymity. We may have contributed by assuming that an eighteenth-century parson’s wife had neither the time nor the training to be much more than an encouraging acquaintance, but Chapone made it easy to be forgotten. In excavating her contributions from the evidence Ballard left, we can see that the very restraints on women’s participation in public life that Chapone (partly) heeded in keeping her name out of print were what made the cataloguing of past “women worthies” so desirable to her in her own day. The women behind the *Memoirs*, like those in its pages, *were* exceptional, but looking at them can help us see something more of the normative power of patriarchy and resistance to it in shaping the nature and uses of historical writing.

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<sup>81</sup> Allman, “Hannah Kudjoe,” 24.



