Introduction
Recognizing British Women's Satire in the Long Eighteenth Century

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> Satire shoud, like a polish'd Razor keen,
>
> Wound with a Touch, that's scarcely felt or seen.
> Thine is an Oyster-Knife, that hacks and hews;
> The Rage, but not the Talent to Abuse;[1]
>
> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's bold attack on Pope's satire in "Verses Addressed to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace" (1733) positions her in a place of literary and cultural authority. Montagu critiques Pope's satire – "an Oyster-Knife, that hacks and hews" – on the grounds that his indiscriminate personal attacks violate the benevolent spirit of Horatian satire and fail to produce sufficient moral effects. Satire should aim judiciously at targets, she explains, and the satirist must always wield the pen with precision and self-restraint. Like a surgeon's knife, satire will cut and wound, but it is ultimately meant to heal and should never be used to bludgeon literary, political, or personal opponents.[2] Montagu intertwines personal attack with insightful commentary on satire theory, revealing a sophisticated understanding of the public role and moral responsibilities of the satirist. She rejects Pope's stated scattershot approach of using an "impartial glass . . . to expose myself, my foes, my friends,"[3] and fearlessly counters his barrage of personal and often misogynistic barbs with a pointed assault referencing his twisted back (111), his "weakness" (60), and his "wretched little carcase" (70), physical defects she links to a murderous spirit of vengeance and an unwillingness to spare even a "great and generous heart" from vicious ridicule (36).

Montagu's scathing attacks on Pope's deformed body tend to distract from the dominant purposes of her satire, which are to expose Pope's muddled appropriation of Horace's poetic verse and to forward her own theory of satire's social aims and moral duty. She delineates with precision the many ways in which Pope's satire misses the mark, both stylistically

and rhetorically. In reference to Pope's two-columned, side-by-side appropriation and translation of Horace's First Satire, Montagu states that Pope merely "pretends to imitate" the great classical satirist (9). Directly addressing her adversarius, she notes,

> Horace can laugh, is delicate, is clear,
> You, only coarsely rail, or darkly sneer;
> His Style is elegant, his Diction pure,
> Whilst none thy crabbed Number can endure;
> Hard as thy Heart, and as thy Birth obscure.
> (16–20)

Montagu embeds into her critique of Pope's poetic style and diction a thoughtful rhetorical analysis of satire as a powerful and efficacious genre aimed at the exposure of folly and vice; in doing so, she concurs with the common eighteenth-century belief that the satirist must be motivated by an underlying sense of benevolence and an altruistic desire to reform humanity, traits she finds missing in Pope's peevish attacks couched in heroic couplets.

Clearly, Montagu sees her literary dispute with Pope as an intellectual debate on the nature of satire and its social purposes. Anecdotes explaining Montagu's critique of Pope, however, tend to romanticize and personalize their relationship. Among the many conflicting accounts of the famous 1722 falling-out between Montagu and Pope, a dominant one was immortalized over a century later by William Frith in his 1852 painting "Pope Makes Love to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," as shown in Figure 0.1. Frith's painting humorously depicts an occasion when, according to Frith, Pope "made passionate love" to Montagu when she "least expected a declaration," and despite Montagu's "utmost endeavours to be angry and look grave," she burst into "an immediate fit of laughter, from which moment he became her implacable enemy."[4] Wounded and offended by her response, the story goes, Pope proceeded to attack Montagu viciously as "Sappho" in his satiric works, eventually prompting Montagu to respond in her satiric poem "Verses Addressed to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace," likely co-written with her literary collaborator Lord Hervey. This colorful personal portrait and its associated backstory neatly sidestep – and thus obscure – Montagu's satire and her serious challenges to Pope's ethics and his literary practices.[5] In many ways, Frith's depiction of the Montagu–Pope dispute as a lover's quarrel instantiates a pervasive tendency to misidentify, overlook, and dismiss women as authors and theorists of literary satire.

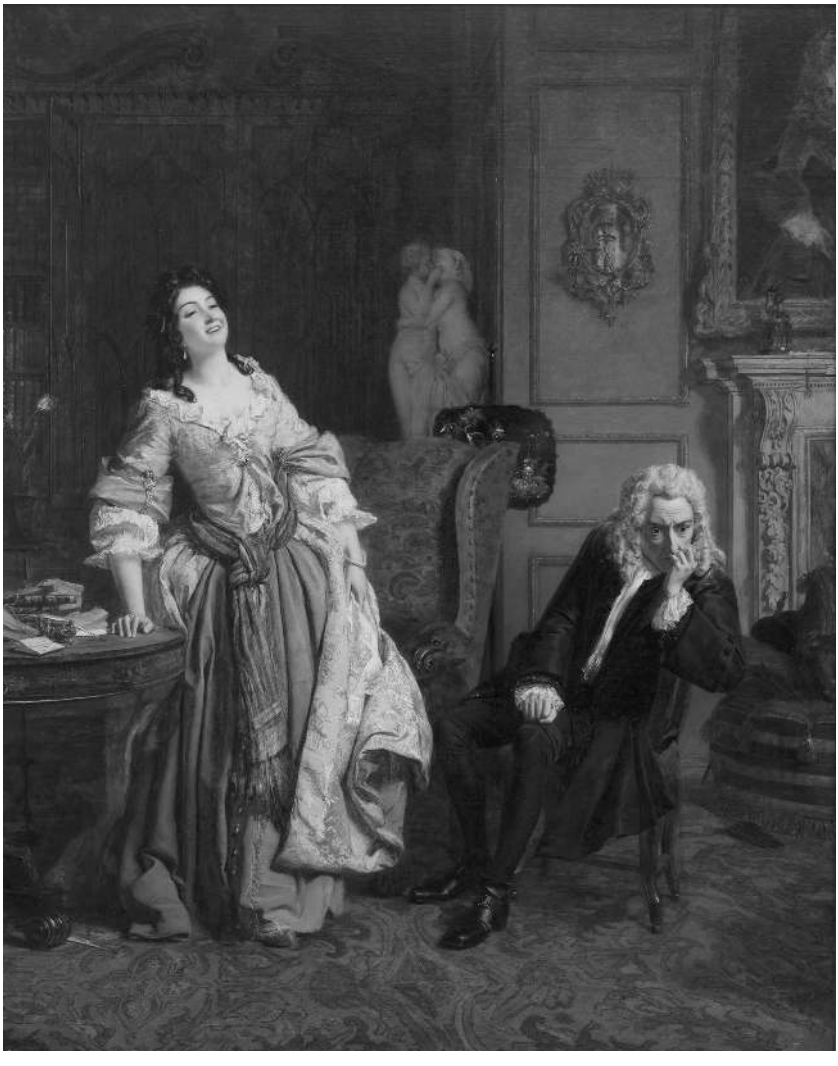

Figure 0.1 William Frith, "Pope Makes Love to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" (1852). Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki.

By satire, we do not just mean formal verse satire inherited from the classical tradition – although eighteenth-century women poets certainly composed verses integrating both polite Horatian-styled raillery and biting Juvenalian invective. More inclusively, we define satire as any written

performance of imaginative, witty, and pointed social critique purposely delivered from an exaggerated, absurd, and (often) ironic stance. Historically, satire has been described by a number of rather loose characteristics, including (1) a clearly identified, but usually generalized, target of censure or ridicule; (2) the use of irony, humor, or wit; (3) the exposure of hypocrisy; (4) a literary, rather than purely polemical, style; and (5) the aim of reform through the censure of folly or vice.[6] As a literary form of social critique, satire binds to specific cultural configurations, relies on its readers' understandings of historical context, and typically integrates rhetorical devices such as parody, dialogue, genre-mixing, allegory, and imitation. One of the most consistent traits offered by scholars of satire is its stubborn resistance to precise categorization.[7] In our view, the fluidity and ambiguity of satire's defining characteristics justify rethinking traditional definitions that scholars have employed in the study of satire, including its customary alignment with masculinity.

We contend that the prevalent critical association between satire and aggressive masculinity has produced a critical blind spot that obscures the presence of a vital, diverse group of women satirists and ignores the kairos of the British Enlightenment as an historical era in which the identities of satirist and woman could naturally converge in their roles as social critics and moral exemplars.[8] The alignment of femininity with politeness gave women a new level of rhetorical authority, and women writers recognized satire as a powerful tool for pursuing social critique and reform. Through its conventions of exaggeration, wit, humor, irony, and other devices of indirection, satire afforded women writers a palatable, flexible, and intellectually potent vehicle for voicing opinions that would otherwise be deemed too indecorous for a lady. During the long eighteenth century, from the Restoration era to the Regency period, well-known authors, such as Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen, as well as lesser-known women writers, such as Mary Evelyn, Jane Collier, and Anne Hamilton, employed literary satire within a broad range of genres to forward feminine critiques on a variety of cultural practices, institutions, and assumptions. This collection attends to women's contributions to the British tradition of satire throughout the long eighteenth century – as a body of literature in its own right, but also as deeply integrated into the established masculine canon of satire.

The essays in this collection explore women's satire in poetic forms, as well as in novels, drama, fables, and ephemeral genres, including periodicals and letters. The overriding goals of the collection are to dismantle the operative assumption within eighteenth-century literary studies that

women writers rarely engaged in the practice of satire and to theorize the many ways eighteenth-century British women contributed to satire's development as a literary genre. This introduction sets the stage, first, by briefly reviewing traditional satire theory as the study of an ancient, discursive, and masculine mode of public critique that rose as a popular outlet of a political and sociable punditry in the eighteenth century; then, by summarizing some of the more recent and general trends in feminist literary criticism on eighteenth-century British women writers; and finally, by articulating a new feminist methodology for studying women's satire and highlighting how the collected essays attend to British eighteenth-century women writers as practitioners and theorists of satire. As Melinda Rabb astutely notes, "satire's 'great age' in England coincides with a so-called crisis of authority when . . . the game-changing events of the Civil Wars, Commonwealth, Restoration, and Succession Settlement" resulted in unsettled "models of compromised masculinity" and efforts to "define gender roles with greater clarity."[9] Eighteenth-century women writers understood the linguistic weaponry afforded by satire, a genre through which they could anatomize the sociable practices and ideological constraints that dictated feminine experience. Across the British long eighteenth century, women satirists comprised a diverse group who shared in the achievement of creating texts of startling wit and critical insight. Whether directly confrontational, as with Montagu's critique of Pope, or in more subtle forms, the works featured in this collection confront a variety of satiric targets through transactional sociable and political argument, literary debate, public censure, and, in some cases, proposals for reform. In the remainder of this introduction, we first explain how and why women's satire has been thus far undervalued, and then we offer a new methodology for exploring eighteenth-century women satirists in specific cultural and historical contexts and in relation to the broader satiric tradition.

The Critical Legacy of Satire Theory versus Women's Writing Studies

Within the last few decades, two trends have emerged simultaneously in eighteenth-century literary studies. On the one hand, literary scholars have challenged many premises underlying the "grand narrative" of eighteenth-century satire, acknowledging the complexity of eighteenth-century satiric texts, conceding the lack of consensus on what constitutes satire among both eighteenth-century satirists and current theorists, and examining the

broad scope of non-canonical and minor satiric texts from the period.[10] On the other hand, literary scholars applying feminist critical frameworks have recovered previously neglected works by women writers in a wide range of genres, thus enhancing our understanding of the development of the literary marketplace and the practices of writing and reading across the British long eighteenth century.[11] As Catherine Ingrassia notes, using "sophisticated theoretical, bibliographic, and biographical tools," scholars have been able to "write women into literary history across the full range of genres."[12] This commitment to greater inclusivity and breadth of scope has motivated scholars to revise traditional narratives of literary history that neglect the role of women writers and to produce hundreds of biographies, anthologies, articles, and critical analyses focused on eighteenth-century women writers and their texts.[13] However, despite these two areas of critical revision and attention, with the exception of a handful of critical studies that address the satiric novels of Burney, Haywood, Lennox, or Austen, eighteenth-century female satirists seem to remain largely invisible to many literary scholars, who fail to identify their works as satires even when they clearly function satirically or share the traits, characteristics, and purposes of satire. Satire appears to be one literary genre that eighteenth-century women writers have not yet been fully "written into."

Yet even a cursory exploration of satire's literary history and cultural legacy reveals many plausible reasons for this oversight. Satire was frequently associated with both masculinity and verbal aggressiveness during the long eighteenth century, and both male and female satirists expended considerable effort defending their use of satiric strategies and assuring their readers that they did so for altruistic, benevolent purposes. John Dryden, in his authoritative *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), promoted the view that the satirist should recommend "Moral Virtue" and caution against "Vice or Folly," either through stinging critique or through "laughing a Folly out of countenance."[14] Eighteenth-century satirists routinely emphasized satire's benevolent purpose – to cultivate, in the words of Jonathan Swift in "A Vindication of Mr. Gay and *The Beggar's Opera*" (1728), "a public spirit, prompting men of genius and virtue, to mend the world as far as they are able."[15] More importantly, Dryden's *Discourse* solidified the operative seventeenth-century association between satire and masculinity in its overt privileging of Juvenal on the basis of his "vigorous and masculine wit."[16] Though in practice, eighteenth-century satirists often employed satire to taunt or mock personal, literary, or political rivals, they nonetheless defended satire as both a moral and a masculine

public genre, and women writers came to be seen largely "as the targets of satire, not the authors of it."[17]

In addition, women who wrote and published satire in the long eighteenth century confronted formidable obstacles stemming from deeply rooted presumptions about both gender roles and literary culture. For one, women writers risked facing "allegations of immorality" and were keenly aware of their culture's anxiety over "women's intellectual activity beyond regulated boundaries."[18] They also had to contend with eighteenth-century satire's close association "with Roman precursors, such as the satires of Horace and Juvenal,"[19] and with the fact that their own exclusion from classical learning limited their exposure to these influential models. In addition, both male and female writers had to mitigate the problematic perception of satire as mean-spirited attack or personal invective.[20] As a genre or literary practice, satire was often associated with libel, slander, and indiscriminate "flyting," or abusive name calling; and women satirists from the period had an arguably more difficult time aligning satire's aggressive qualities with cultural concepts of femininity that associated women with passivity or even silence.[21]

Even more problematic for eighteenth-century women writers was the satirist's public role as a cultural, literary, or political critic. Alvin Kernan, in *The Plot of Satire*, argues that "the satirist must first be a responsible critic of men and manners,"[22] a position dependent on broad public acceptance of the critic's authority to establish criteria for judgment. Eighteenth-century women, largely banned from positions of legal or political power, assumed as satirists a dangerous level of authority and public exposure, a risk keenly felt by Catherine Trotter, among others, who was lampooned in the 1696 satiric play *The Female Wits* as "Calista, a lady that pretends to the learned Languages and assumes to her self the Name of a Critick."[23] Kimberly Stern, in a thoughtful analysis of the female critic in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notes that "the female critic was a creature to be derided" and, later, to be "forgotten."[24] Female critics "sought to become gatekeepers in their own right," a deeply transgressive act that placed women "at the center of [critical] communities" and enabled them to "assume the role of critical judge."[25] By its very nature, satire is adversarial; it involves public critique and places the satirist in a position of cultural authority over both her readers and her designated targets. As an oppositional literary genre associated with public censure – one which, according to Michael Seidel, "produces its victims as much as it identifies them"[26] – satire was one of the most masculine-marked forms of writing during the period.

Adding to the gendered division on the permissibility of authoring satire, literary scholars from the early nineteenth century onward who acceded to what Ellen Pollack terms the "the myth of passive womanhood"[27] seemed to adopt the notion that women must not – and therefore could not – participate in the public practice of satire. The purposes, effects, and motivations of the satirist simply did not align with late eighteenth and nineteenth-century concepts of femininity and feminine thought and behavior, and critical studies of satire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have continued to reflect this legacy of omission and misunderstanding.[28] Clifford Siskin, in *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830*, calls this gendered contraction of focus within literary studies "The Great Forgetting." During the late eighteenth century, he argues, a "narrowing of the notion of literature in Britain" occurred that effectively "took writing out of the 'hands' of women," resulting in "an extraordinary act . . . of gendered exclusion and forgetting."[29] Factors such as the gradual shift in public taste toward sentiment, the cementing of associations between femininity and private spheres of action, and the rise of the powerful concept of the "Domestic Woman"[30] all made the concept of women's participation in satire more and more culturally unacceptable.

By the twentieth century, the cultural association between satire and masculinity had coalesced into a critical blind spot.[31] In 1940, David Worcester, in *The Art of Satire*, confidently declared that "no woman has ever made a mark in satire,"[32] a proclamation not only accepted by scholars, but cemented into an enduring and seemingly unshakable paradigm about the literary period, the genre, and about women writers themselves. Since the mid twentieth century, in particular, the dominant narrative of "The Golden Age of Satire" has traced a smooth evolutionary development of the genre between the Restoration of Charles II (1660) and the deaths of Pope and Swift (1744; 1745), neatly concealing sharp differences between individual satiric texts, their purposes, their contexts, and their intended audiences.[33] Seminal twentieth-century scholarly texts on satire include close analyses of texts written by a small handful of exclusively male writers from the period,[34] reflecting the common belief that "satire gendered itself male" in the eighteenth century because the "Juvenalian tone" of satire "reproduced a masculine ethos" at odds with cultural concepts of femininity as nurturing.[35] Even recent efforts to broaden the scope of the study of eighteenth-century satire, such as Ashley Marshall's impressive survey of eighteenth-century satire, *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658–1770*, often promote the view that

the practice of satire in the eighteenth century was a largely masculine enterprise,[36] reflecting Melinda Rabb's observation that "the modern canon of criticism and theory about satire has almost always failed to question its own gendered assumptions."[37] Thus, while women writers have (rightly) received recognition for their innovations with the domestic novel – especially its amatory, sentimental, and Gothic subspecies – the continued omission of women's participation in the history and theory of satire within British literature reflects the ingrained gendering of public literary genres – especially those associated with censure – as essentially masculine.

Emerging Trends in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Women's Satire

Though we have outlined here a general pattern of oversight and omission regarding eighteenth-century women's satire, we have also noticed an emerging critical trend toward recognizing more women's contributions to the genre. In recent years, literary scholars have begun exploratory and promising examinations of female-authored satire, supporting Catherine Ingrassia's claim that "the field has moved far from early feminist work" focused on recovery to situate women writers and their work within specific cultural moments and explore their impact on the development of literary genres and print culture.[38] Among twenty-first-century studies of eighteenth-century British women writers, Susan Staves, in *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660–1789*, thoughtfully considers their satiric texts in the broader context of their total literary output during the era and concludes that the mid-century "dominance" of the satiric mode "encouraged women writers to develop their own critiques of masculine authority and emboldened them to ridicule forms of masculinity and individual men possessed of prestige and authority."[39] And recent scholarly essay collections, including *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire*, have included thoughtful analyses of eighteenth-century British women's satire,[40] suggesting growing acceptance of Melinda Rabb's argument that "satire written by women during the long eighteenth century claims a central position in the period's literary history" as "the locus of the most intense, and therefore, the most revealing literary struggle between cultural constructions of femininity and women's participation in textual production."[41]

This collection of essays builds upon these recent explorations of women's satire by offering focused examinations of women satirists in

the context of specific cultural and historical moments, situating their work within the canon of eighteenth-century satire and emphasizing their contributions to the development of the genre. These essays add to the growing body of scholarship showing that women did indeed write satires during the long eighteenth century, and they did so for many of the same reasons that men did. Though self-conscious and cautious about their intrusion into a literary mode often perceived as both masculine and aggressive, women writers understood satire's potency as a flexible, powerful, and destabilizing form of social critique and as a means for participating in important cultural debates germinating in the public sphere. In producing texts that they titled "Satires" or "Satyrs," modelling their work on classical styles of satire, and embedding satiric literary techniques into diverse genres, women participated in a distinctly conversational and sociable – yet oppositional – art form, even continuing to write in the satiric mode after public taste shifted away from satire toward sentiment in the later decades of the century.[42] As the essays in this collection show, women writers engaged in satire as imitators and innovators, collaborating, appropriating, modifying, amplifying, and enriching satiric literary discourse on a wide range of topics, including gender identities, courtship, marriage, politics, religion, literature, and education.

A Methodological Approach for Studying Female Satirists

As a prelude to our contributors' essays, we offer a framework for studying eighteenth-century women's satire that combines close reading with gendered transactional analysis. Our approach amends critical models of satire that privilege text over context and prescribe against interpreting authorial intent. Rather, we support the study of women satirists as purposeful, situated speakers who write to address specific target audiences and to criticize prevailing societal customs, norms, or practices. In this contextual approach, we embrace Robert Phiddian's claim that satire is inherently transactional, involving a satirist who seeks to influence and critique an audience.[43] To study women satirists effectively, we believe a method considering both text and context is necessary; the critic must look inside and outside the text in order both to identify the techniques and the circumstances that led women writers to work within and against established satiric models and to recognize how their texts function as historical, and often groundbreaking, transactions of gendered social critique.

In efforts to protest what they saw as societal injustices and flaws, eighteenth-century women writers crafted many forms of satire and drew