



A COMPANION TO

AMERICAN POETRY

EDITED BY
MARY MCALEER BALKUN
JEFFREY GRAY
AND PAUL JAUSSEN

WILEY Blackwell

A Companion to American Poetry

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Introduction

Mary McAleer Balkun, Jeffrey Gray, and Paul Jaussen

In his 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot observed that the creation of a new work of art necessarily changes those that preceded it: “The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them” (1920, para. 4). In the case of poetry, new work changes the way we look at Emily Dickinson’s fascicles or modernist images, for example, or indeed what we decide to call “American” poetry.

Like works of art, critical paradigms can refine methods, broaden contexts, and reorganize the field of poetics, transforming what scholars value or understand about poems. The New Criticism, for instance, raised the profile of the lyric poem in the early twentieth century, an elevation that was later challenged, first, in the late twentieth century by the New Historicism, which restored the elements of identity and context and privileged narrative over lyric, and more recently by the “new lyric studies,” which questions the critical stance toward this genre over the past century, one that has often ignored the diversity of poetry and its historical dimension. The twenty-first century has seen a growing interest in documentary and archival poetry, a further remove from New Critical impersonality. As a result of changes in both poetic practice and critical paradigms, often in a reciprocal relation with one another, the study of poetry has evolved at a rapid rate.

This volume was conceived and written during a period of accelerating global instability, with the re-emergence of authoritarian political regimes, the increasingly obvious effects of climate change, and, in the final years of writing and editing, the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges highlight the dynamism between present concerns and the ways in which the past helps us understand those concerns. In the development of the *Companion to American Poetry*, we have tried to broaden our critical map so as to address the fact that our American pasts often entertained very different ideas of the poet and of poetry’s place and purpose. We solicited essays that both took those historical concepts on their own terms but also, crucially,

reconceptualized the past in dialogue with the present. Not only is the past unstable, but it changes according to the questions we ask of it. In this volume, we sought to pose new questions that respect long-standing concerns of American poetry and criticism as well as recast those questions according to our present lights. How, for instance, has the inescapable experience of death and dying been transformed through the decades by the poetic imagination? How has American poetry staged the struggles over language and nation in the wake of US settler colonialism? How have queer and trans voices used poetry to articulate identities that have been otherwise repressed in the United States? Where do we see poetry engaging “nature” as a transcendent concept and the anthropocene as a material activity of planetary destruction? How does the very term “American poetry” become redefined when read through the forces of globalization? Questions such as these express critical and poetic continuities—traditionally at the heart of a volume such as this one—but also demonstrate important *discontinuities*. These include poetry’s relationship to other genres and other fields, the way conceptions of the poem itself have changed, and the way poetry responds to contemporary events and trends.

The challenge for such a project is not only its scale but also the demands of portraying American poetry as a whole. Instead of offering a singular narrative, as we developed this *Companion to American Poetry* we committed to two principles: first, to highlight new approaches, unexplored research areas, and emerging practices within American poetry and poetics writ large; and, second, to prompt a wide-ranging discussion about the expanding edges of poetry scholarship. The *Companion* brings together a group of scholars and scholar-poets, from those in the early stages of their careers to more established voices, and with expertise in a cross-section of historical periods and forms: from the time before there was an “American” poetry to the present day, and from the traditional to the experimental. These essays reflect a poetry that is broadly conceived and that acknowledges the porousness of boundaries, whether cultural, temporal, or generic.

While each chapter presents an individual argument, we have organized the volume according to clusters of concerns. Each section title gestures toward earlier paradigms in American poetry criticism while also attempting to widen our definitions of those conceptual frameworks. We begin with “Poetry before ‘American Poetry,’” calling attention to the problematic definition of “America” through chapters on pre-colonial writings, indigenous politics, and the role that poetry played in forming the early national imaginary. We follow this with “Poetry and the Transcendent,” considering the flourishing of nineteenth-century poetry in dialogue with transcendentalist philosophy while also exploring the ongoing role of experiences of the sacred and epiphanic in contemporary writing. Acknowledging that the “experimental/traditional” divide is both operative and problematic in many accounts of American poetry, our third section stresses “experimentalisms,” whether in modernist and contemporary poetry or in experimental critical practices, such as philosophical readings or digital fabrications. Sections four and five examine the related topics of identity and nation, with essays that take up queer, transgender, and transnational concerns. Section six expands the field of poetry’s relationship to other arts and media, with reconsiderations of ekphrastic and cinematic poetics, along with chapters on bio art and rap music. Section seven exemplifies our commitment to moving between past, present, and future through readings of the various ways that ecology, nature, and the anthropocene have shaped our vision of planetary existence. In our final section, we gather a diverse collection of essays on poetry that engages with public struggles: over borders, war, capitalism, or racial inequality.

Some scholars claim that shifts in literary critical practice, notably the rise of New Historicism and various reactions to it, have led to the sidelining of poetry in favor of narrative. However, as we can see from the intellectual diversity and depth of this volume, the death of poetry has been greatly exaggerated. The 37 essays in *A Companion to American Poetry* demonstrate the continued relevance of poetry and poetics for broader fields that animate literary scholarship today, including indigenous studies, queer and transgender studies, diasporic and Black studies, maker methodologies, science and technology studies, and visual cultural studies, among others. We hope these essays not only offer new understandings and perspectives but also speak to the ongoing vitality of American poetry, as well as its important, always timely, contributions to American and world culture.

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SECTION 1

Poetry before “American Poetry”

Worldmaking and Ambition in History Poems by Early American Women: The Examples of Anne Bradstreet and Sarah Wentworth Morton

Tamara Harvey

George Mason University

Arme, arme, Soldado's arme, Horse, Horse, speed to your Horses,
Gentle-women, make head, they vent their plot in Verses;
They write of Monarchies, a most seditious word,
It signifies Oppression, Tyranny, and Sword:
March amain to *London*, they'l rise, for there they flock,
But stay a while, they seldome rise till ten a clock.

R.Q. (Bradstreet, 1650, n.p.)

The humor in R.Q.'s prefatory poem to Anne Bradstreet's *The Tenth Muse* (1650) is neither original nor subtle, which may explain why it was the only prefatory poem to be dropped from *Several Poems* (1678).¹ And yet its representation of both monarchy and literary gentle-women epitomizes the broad trends in scholarship on the poem R.Q. would seem to have in mind, Bradstreet's "The Four Monarchies." Bradstreet renders Sir Walter Raleigh's² five volume *The Historie of the World* in over 3500 lines of iambic pentameter couplets. According to Gillian Wright, Bradstreet's poem is a "politic history," a subgenre of early modern verse history that uses condensation and an epigrammatic style to render its subject (p. 85). At times this yields pithy epitomes of long, scholarly discourse, though just as frequently the effort to turn Raleigh's prose into poetry leads to confusing inversions and other infelicities. Modern readers, it is fair to say, don't love this poem. To make sense of it, scholars have read it as a reflection of extratextual concerns that

resonate more readily with modern interests, situating Bradstreet politically within transatlantic Puritan concerns during the English Civil War and literarily as a woman writer who must work against broad characterizations of women's abilities and nature. How the poem fails and how it treats failure is a frequent focus of these approaches. Bradstreet herself attributed faults in the poem to her gender and personal circumstances: "To fill the world with terrour and with woe,/ My tyred brain leavs to some better pen,/This task befits not women like to men" (1678, p. 185).³ In this poem, written during the English Civil War and published in the year following the beheading of Charles I, Bradstreet also repeatedly demonstrates that "Royalty no good conditions brings" (1678, p. 172), but falters in concluding the poem in ways that may be attributed to her unwillingness to imagine political solutions that fully reject monarchy.⁴

In this chapter, I argue that attention to the concept of worldmaking *and* its attendant failures provides useful grounds for comparing women writers across time. I expand on recent readings of Bradstreet's longest and most neglected poem, "The Four Monarchies," and then consider *The Virtues of Society* (1799), one of three long history poems written by Sarah Wentworth Morton during the early US republic. My goal is to suggest that understanding the ways these poets engage the intellectual project of imagining and theorizing the world at moments of significant global transformation provides insights into their work individually as well as providing a framework for examining the work of other early women writers. In each case I focus on the poet's representation of a heroic woman situated in world-historical space, Semiramis and Lady Harriet Ackland, respectively, in order to explore their engagement with historical genres, learned debates, and depictions of exceptional women.

Though both personal and political approaches to literature are relevant and revelatory, they often sidestep the manifest purpose of a poem such as Bradstreet's—to tell the history of the world. Recent attention to worldmaking and a rapidly changing global imaginary during the early modern period provides a more robust framework for reading Bradstreet's ambitious attempt at a universal history. Ayesha Ramachandran describes early modern "worldmaking" as "the methods by which early modern thinkers sought to imagine, shape, revise, control, and articulate the dimensions of the world," synthesizing fragments into a comprehensive whole (pp. 6–7). Understanding Bradstreet's poem as a form of worldmaking helps us better appreciate her literary ambition. It also helps us account for her evident failures in this poem without attributing them solely to her gender and personal circumstances or the responses of New England Puritans to the English Civil War. "[T]he great secret of the early modern system-makers," Ramachandran explains, is that "worldmaking is possible, even necessary, because of the insurmountable gap between our fragmentary apprehension of the phenomenal world and our desire for complete knowledge of it" (p. 10). Early modern worldmaking frequently drew on metaphors of the body to imagine the world (Ramachandran 2015, p. 23 ff.). Bradstreet's apology that "my Monarchies their legs do lack" (1678, p. 191) is as much a gesture toward the worldmaking design of the poem as it is a confession that it, like all such projects, fell short of that design.

While shared marginalization, female embodiment, and the experience of being writers whose authority is automatically doubted are understandable grounds for comparing women across time, history poems are seldom subjects for this kind of comparison. Perhaps this is because they seem too impersonal for comparisons of embodied experience while also emerging from specific historical contexts that get in the way of comparative analysis based on genre and political engagement. By attending to the worldmaking design of these poems, I build on scholarship on women's engagement of politics in poetry and their self-consciously ambitious attempts to represent global space and world history. Wright observes with regard to Bradstreet's

“Monarchies,” “What matters in the ‘I’ of politic history is not the biographical baggage which he or she (overtly at least) brings to the task, but rather the qualities of discrimination, political judgement and apt expression which are manifest in the narrative” (p. 88). Insofar as it is possible, I focus here on qualities of discrimination and design rather than on their personal circumstances to compare these writers. One challenge, of course, is that their approaches to history differ in important ways. Bradstreet’s worldmaking is a form of universal history that was a generation old when she was writing the poems that make up *The Tenth Muse*, while Morton’s neoclassicism draws on the epic and her more complete knowledge of the globe, centering America and, eventually, the United States, geopolitically in ways that Bradstreet and her peers could not yet have imagined. Still, we gain some important insights that allow us to deal more substantially with the content of these poems by attending to the poets’ own ambitious representation of world history, the scholarly gestures of these works that are important components of their literary and intellectual ambition, and how exactly these poets imagined the globe. Acknowledging and appreciating the grand design in women’s history poems as well as the inevitable flaws in those designs can help us move away from attributing faults and expressions of failure to the rhetorical exigencies placed on women writers as well as their insecurities and limited educational opportunities.

“She for Her Potency Must Go Alone”: Anne Bradstreet’s Semiramis

Since the start of the twenty-first century there has been a small surge in scholarship on Bradstreet’s “The Four Monarchies” that better accounts for the context and aims of this long poem by either exploring her vision of the world or situating her poem among other political works by English women writers during the seventeenth century. Jim Egan and Samuel Fallon have developed readings of Bradstreet’s worldmaking that find in her elegies a fulfillment and refinement of ideas explored in the “Monarchies.” Egan uses Bradstreet’s comparison of Alexander the Great and Sir Phillip Sidney in her elegy on Sidney to make the case that her extensive treatment of Alexander in both works was meant to connect New England to the East. Fallon distinguishes between space and time in Bradstreet’s worldmaking, and his reading of the “Monarchies” identifies a tension between the totalizing project of the history and the present time of poetic address evident in her apologies (pp. 107–108). As he explains, “Worldmaking in such moments is not a matter of charting global space, but something more modest: the careful tending of a fragile intimacy” (Fallon, p. 103). For Egan and Fallon, the elegies fulfill what is only begun in the “Monarchies” through the comparisons and identifications that this lyric genre invites. But in stressing the subtlety of Bradstreet’s “rhetorical sleight of hand” (Egan 2011, p. 23) and her modest “tending of fragile intimacy” (Fallon 2018, p. 103), both critics redirect our attention away from the naked ambition of Bradstreet’s longest poem. Scholars who focus on Bradstreet’s poem as an instance of political writing, including Susan Wiseman (2006), Mihoko Suzuki (2009), and Gillian Wright (2013), pay more attention to Bradstreet’s literary ambitions in “The Four Monarchies” as well as her complicated representation of monarchy.

Anne Bradstreet’s treatment of Semiramis in two works, “The Four Monarchies” and the elegy “In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory,” provides an opportunity for thinking about politics, worldbuilding, and genre.⁵ This notorious queen was known both as an empire builder and as a licentious manipulator. She is rumored to have had her husband Ninus killed in order to gain the throne and then to have had an incestuous relationship

with her son, Ninias, or to have dressed as him in order to rule in his place. In the elegy, Bradstreet uses these qualities to raise Queen Elizabeth in comparison:

But time would fail me, so my tongue would to,
To tell of half she did, or she could doe.
Semiramis to her, is but obscure,
More infamy then fame, she did procure.
She built her glory but on *Babels* walls,
Worlds wonder for a while, but yet it falls.

(Bradstreet 1678, p. 212)

Bradstreet's use of the inexpressibility topos in this passage builds on Semiramis' accomplishments as the known quantity, which serves to elevate Elizabeth's greatness while also striking a warning note about the decline of past empires.

Bradstreet's treatment of Semiramis in "Monarchies" illuminates the ways in which the aims of her longest poem differ fundamentally from those of her lyric elegies. Following Raleigh, in this poem Bradstreet focuses on the extent and grandeur of her building projects, not their fall, and foregrounds mythmaking and competing interpretations through repeated references to "reports," "aspersions," and what "poets feigned." As a poem, it is both less nationalist and less feminist than the Queen Elizabeth elegy. While in the elegy Bradstreet seeks to underscore both Semiramis's personal infamy and the inevitable fall of Babylon in the service of demonstrating that Elizabeth I is more virtuous and more powerful, in the "Monarchies" she is far more interested in praising what Semiramis accomplished and more conflicted in treating her rumored licentiousness. For example, while in the elegy Bradstreet sets infamy and fame in opposition in order to draw a distinction between Semiramis and Elizabeth, in the "Monarchies" she frames this kind of opposition as a contradiction that at times is attributed to Semiramis's character ("She like a brave *Virago* playd the *Rex*/And was both shame and glory of her Sex") and at other times is attributed to the bias of historians ("That undeserv'd, they blur'd her name and fame/By their aspersions, cast upon the same") (1678, pp. 71–72).

Both Bradstreet and Raleigh refute the charge of Semiramis's licentiousness, but while Raleigh's observations about the risks taken by conquerors underscore both his own acumen in judging others and his "labour and hazard" in the service of the crown, Bradstreet dwells more on sexed dichotomies that "blurred [Semiramis's] name and fame." For Raleigh, Semiramis's success stands as evidence that calumnies against her are the work of "envious and lying *Grecians*" (Raleigh 1652, pp. 183):

For delicacy and ease doe more often accompany licentiousnesse in men and women, than labour and hazard doe. And if the one halfe be true which is reported of this Lady, then there never lived any Prince or Princesse more worthy of fame than *Semiramis* was, both for the works she did at *Babylon* and elsewhere, and for the wars she made with glorious successe....

(Raleigh 1652, p. 183)

Bradstreet follows Raleigh in stressing Greek lies and Semiramis's power, though with subtle differences that speak to how she is exercising judgment and claiming authority:

She flourishing with *Ninus* long did reign,
Till her Ambition caus'd him to be slain.
That having no Compeer, she might rule all,

Or else she sought revenge for *Menon's* fall.
 Some think the Greeks this slander on her cast,
 As on her life Licentious, and unchast,
 That undeserv'd, they blur'd her name and fame
 By their aspersions, cast upon the same:
 But were her virtues more or less, or none,
 She for her potency must go alone.

(Bradstreet 1678, 72)

Unlike Raleigh, Bradstreet does not argue that voluptuaries are rarely as successful as Semiramis was; rather, she suggests that Semiramis' "potency" must speak for itself. This is a subtle difference and one that can be attributed in part to the epigrammatic style of Bradstreet's poem. But while Raleigh takes pains to demonstrate that he has the experience and judgment to evaluate the character of rulers, Bradstreet reports on and then questions several salacious rumors, never fully putting them aside but instead keeping the scholarly debates in play. We might read this as a reflection of her concern with what is said about authoritative women as well as her favorable opinion of female monarchs. However, in her elegy on Queen Elizabeth, Bradstreet takes a stronger, more feminist line: "Let such as say our Sex is void of Reason,/Know tis a Slander now, but once was Treason" (1678, p. 213). In "The Four Monarchies," she catalogs and evaluates interpretive disagreements without resolving them.

Raleigh demonstrates what he knows about the globe and military endeavors, and his praise of Semiramis leads to his positive evaluation of her military might. He devotes a full section of his work to her campaign in India, enumerating at great length the reported size of her army, including the numbers of footmen, horsemen, chariots, camels, raw hides, galleys, and soldiers. He concludes, "These incredible and impossible numbers, which no one place of the earth was able to nourish, (had every man and beast but fed upon grasse) are taken from the authority of *Ctesias* whom *Diodorus* followeth" (Raleigh 1652, p. 183). Bradstreet condenses this section significantly as the conclusion to her section on the Babylonian queen:

An expedition to the *East* she made
Staurobates, his Country to invade:
 Her Army of four millions did consist,
 Each may believe it as his fancy list.
 Her Camels, Chariots, Gallyes in such number,
 As puzzles best Historians to remember;
 But this is wonderful, of all those men,
 They say, but twenty e're came back agen.
 The river [*Indus*] swept them half away,
 The rest *Staurobates* in fight did slay;
 This was last progress of this mighty Queen,
 Who in her Country never more was seen.
 The Poets feign'd her turn'd into a Dove,
 Leaving the world to *Venus* soar'd above:
 Which made the *Assyrians* many a day,
 A Dove within their Ensigns to display:
 Forty two years she reign'd, and then she di'd
 But by what means we are not certifi'd.

(Bradstreet 1678, 73–74)

While Raleigh's prose demonstrates familiarity with the logistics of war befitting a wise counselor, Bradstreet instead amplifies that which is confusing and unknowable in referring to historical "puzzles" and insists that Semiramis died "by what means we are not certifi'd." She also elevates the "last progress of this mighty Queen" and Semiramis's final transformation into a dove, "Leaving the world to *Venus* soar'd above." Raleigh stresses learned citations and evaluates logistics according to his experiences in the field; Bradstreet navigates the problems of fame and infamy, foregrounding interpretive puzzles before elevating Semiramis as she soars out of the picture, ending with a summation of her reign as a monarch.⁶

I would argue that this poem is not only or even primarily a Puritan reflection on the failings of monarchs. Just as Raleigh wants to demonstrate his abilities as a judicious counselor with experience of the world, Bradstreet wants to demonstrate that she can compass the world imaginatively. The fact that she includes so many lines of poetry that repeat Raleigh's judgment of prior historians is telling (they could have easily been cut, to good effect). She's not just taking issue with monarchs; she is signaling her own authority and scholarly interest. And in condensing them, she draws our attention to myths and arguments. When in "The Prologue" she undermines her own contention that the muses stand as evidence of women's poetic abilities with the line "The Greeks did nought, but play the fools & lye" (Bradstreet 1678, p. 4), this is not just a retreat from classical exempla back into the orthodoxy of Puritanism. Judging "lying Greeks" is part of her project; the cultural distinctions she draws are as much about her scholarly judgment as they are about distinctions among nations and civilizations.

"The Four Monarchies" is an ambitious work recounting the successes and failures of ambitious people, and charting global space is certainly an important part of this undertaking. In mapping the globe, enumerating military forces, and weighing the merits of historical interpretations, Raleigh used his *Historie* to demonstrate his membership in "an early modern European community of learned counselors who deployed historical analysis to produce prophetic advice" (Popper 2012, p. 74). Though Bradstreet had no hope of serving the government, in "Monarchies" she limned the bounds of empire, recounted great architectural feats, and highlighted interpretive disagreements in order to assert her power as a poet and an interpreter of history. Bradstreet embraces both her own ambition and her judgment more fully in the "Monarchies" than she does in either "The Prologue" or her elegies.

"Or Round the Pictured Orb Instructive Trace": Sarah Wentworth Morton's Lady Harriet Ackland

Like Bradstreet, Sarah Wentworth Morton foregrounds scholarly citation and judgment in an ambitious engagement with world history and global space that we risk overlooking if we chiefly associate either her episodic approach to epic or the "various imperfections" for which she apologizes (1790, p. viii) with gendered marginalization. Morton published three long poems in the 1790s, *Ouâbi, or The Virtues of Nature* (1790), *Beacon Hill. A Local Poem* (1797), and *The Virtues of Society. A Tale Founded on Fact* (1799), which offer different glimpses of poetic ambition as expressed through poems that engage world history. All three are framed as "American" and situated with respect to both a European present and a classical past. As she entreats in her introduction to the first of these works, *Ouâbi, or The Virtues of Nature* (1790), "I am induced to hope, that the attempting a subject wholly American will in some respect entitle me to the partial eye of the patriot" (p. viii). In each of these poems, Morton recenters world history in the United States, generally

through the yoking of European cultural achievements with North American vitality. This vitality is figured through rugged and sublime natural prospects, racial heterogeneity, and the transportable ideals of post-revolutionary Liberty. It is also evident in a thoroughgoing Eurocentrism that in *Ouâbi*, for instance, fuels the Vanishing Indian motif that was so prevalent in later US literature. Here I focus on Morton's final long poem of the 1790s, *The Virtues of Society* (1799), which treats the heroism of Lady Harriet Ackland, who traveled with her husband to Canada and then to upstate New York, nursing him when he was struck down during the Battle of Saratoga.⁷

Morton makes frequent use of "prospects" in her long poems in passages that look both down on the landscape and into the future. This is, as Christopher N. Phillips explains, "a familiar gesture that could be used to make arguments about the meaning of landscape, the trajectory of the nation, or even the nature of knowledge" (2011, p. 17). *Beacon Hill* most obviously depends on this strategy, concluding, appropriately, with the United States figured as a beacon that shines out over the globe: "Till the full ray of EQUAL FREEDOM shine,/And like the sun this genial globe entwine" (Morton 1797, p. 52). But it is a key feature in her representation of American exceptionalism in other long poems as well. *The Virtues of Society* stresses westward movement both through the revivification of classical exempla in America and the movement of its heroine, Lady Harriet Ackland, from England to upstate New York. This movement from east to west is then rendered through a number of North American prospects that are explicitly set against the picturesque qualities "Of peaceful *Albion's* bliss-encircled isle" (Morton 1799, p. 9). Harriet's decision to follow her husband to "the thunder of the plains" leads to a sea voyage in which the waves create delusions of English landscape that are then swept away with wind and wave, such that, "To the fond view the painted prospects die,/And flowers, and flocks, and trees, in blotted ruin lie" (Morton 1799, p. 11). In "*Canadia*," Harriet finds instead a country of seasonal extremes that is nonetheless home to many peoples. Indeed, this portion of the poem depends both upon the oxymoron of a "brineless sea" and the warmth and glow of people who thrive in a location that is first represented as "sullen woods, that mock the solar ray," but are then recharacterized as warm and bright because "*there* the varying, mingling colors join" (Morton 1799, p. 12):

Yet on these shores a numerous race reside—
Here the red warrior towers in painted pride—
And *there* the blood of *Gallia's* captured race
Warms the brisk limbs, and tints the shaded face—
Here white-brow'd *Albion's* blooming offspring shine—
And *there* the varying, mingling colors join;—
Yet her own *Lawrence* rolls his fertile tide
Through villas, smiling on his pastoral side

(Morton 1799, p.12)

This introduction to the frigid north then gives way to the Hudson River as the site of the Battle of Saratoga:

The voice of death the shivering forest fills,
And *Hudson* echoes from his hundred hills.—
Hudson! The lord of many a fateful hour,
With wild, impetuous, desolating power,
To the loud battle joins his clamorous flood,
And feeds his myriads with immortal blood.

(Morton 1799, p. 16)

Morton uses this movement through successive prospects to teach Euro-centric readers to value both the sublime aspects of the North American wilds and the mixed community that emerges there.

Phillips locates Morton's "radical" rethinking of epic tradition in the prospects, proto-Romantic fragments, and intertextual connectedness working across her three long poems, all characteristics he identifies in other American epics of the period as well (2011, pp. 60–62). These characteristics help recenter the epic in local spaces and with respect to recent events while also drawing on and developing a greater use of fragments that "evokes and creates contexts if used deliberately" (Jung 2009, p. 16), in Morton's case the reach and significance of the United States through episodes in its history. Just as importantly, Morton marks the difference between the unreliable histories of classical bards and her accounts of the present "Founded on Fact," as the title page of *The Virtues of Society* proudly declares, by characterizing herself as a truth-telling "minstrel." This is another engagement of folk traditions that, Phillips argues, modernizes epic while anticipating the authorial self-fashioning of Romantic poets (2011, p. 60). He continues, "The modern solution to the problem of rendering contemporary events epic, according to Morton, is to frame the telling of those events as more virtuous than the Iliad because they are more truthful" (Phillips 2011, p. 60).

Morton's insistence that she recounts "living efforts...Beyond the storied page of fabling fame" (1799, p. 5) recalls Bradstreet's concern with lying Greeks; here too it signals a literary ambition that even a reader as astute as Phillips undervalues. While aligning Morton's experiments with broad trends in the early American epic, Phillips hypothesizes that the intertextual experimentation of Morton and Phillis Wheatley suggests that "conceiving of the epic in pieces may be a particularly useful entry into the tradition for marginalized writers" (2011, p. 59). There may be some truth in this familiar consideration of the material conditions shaping a marginalized writer's literary endeavors. It is a consideration invited by both Bradstreet and Morton themselves, as when Bradstreet adds to the end of her fourth monarchy, "No more I'll do sith I have suffer'd wrack,/Although my Monarchies their legs do lack" (Bradstreet 1678, p. 191), and Morton begs her readers to make allowances "from a consideration of my sex and situation" while hoping for "the partial eye of the patriot" (1790, p. viii). But too much emphasis on marginalization, particularly marginalization from formal education, may keep us from attending to the scholarly ambitions of these poems.

Just as Bradstreet follows Raleigh in stitching together a portrait of world history from the Assyrians to the Romans, Morton draws from similar works of history, as well as ethnography, art, and contemporary accounts of the American Revolution. Indeed, her early allusion in *The Virtues of Society* to Artemisia, "whom asian realms adored" (1799, p. 5), includes a footnote to *An Universal History, from the earliest account of time* (1747–1768), a massive, 65-volume attempt at totalizing history. Phillips attributes the use of "prospect" in early American epics not only to the influence of *Paradise Lost* but just as importantly to their frequent origins as commencement poems, which "tended to recycle the *translatio studii/translatio imperii* trope of George Berkeley's often reprinted 'Verses on the Prospect of Planting the Arts and Learning in America'" (2011, 42). That Morton's movement from Artemisia to Ackland in the opening section of this poem follows this pattern while stressing her own scholarly judgment suggests that she may have knowingly modeled her work on commencement forms, just as Bradstreet drew on Raleigh's use of citations. And just as we might see in Bradstreet's representation of Semiramis an attempt to encompass the world that resonates with the poet's own grand design, Morton signals her own intellectual accomplishments when she celebrates Ackland's education and scientific knowledge of the world:

While to her tutor'd rhetoric was given
 To point the stars, that gem the brow of heaven,
 The plant's quick growth, the mineral's slow decay,
 The electric torrent's undulating way,
 Or round the pictured orb instructive trace
 Each varying zone, that tints the changeful face;

(Morton 1799, pp. 6–7)

While Morton emphasizes that her poem is more factual than her classical models, here she praises Harriet's comprehension of the stars and earth as natural phenomena understood scientifically, not as embodiments of supernatural influence. This catalog of her education in astronomy, botany, mineralogy, and electricity culminates in a characterization of the globe in terms of "varying zone" that will then be more fully figured in Harriet's movement through various prospects as she travels from east to west.

Paying attention to ambition, to how the world is understood and how the project of literary worldmaking is undertaken by a given poet, provides insight into these often difficult poems as well as grounds for comparison among women poets undertaking such projects. In particular, such comparisons make visible intellectual and literary endeavors to achieve a totalizing vision that exceeds national and political interests as well as personal experiences. That such visions are necessarily imperfect is often acknowledged by the poets and gives us another way of understanding their efforts as those of fallible humans rather than marginalized women. Poems as varied as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz *Primero Sueño* (1997, pp. 77-129), Phillis Wheatley Peters' "To a LADY on her coming to North-America with her Son, for the Recovery of her Health" (2011, pp. 41-42) and Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson's "The Dream" (1768) explore the possibilities of goddess-eye points of view in ways that merit consideration as perspectives on the globe with reach beyond the personal and political occasions for those poems. Morton's poetic representation of science and the globe differs significantly from Bradstreet's early modern worldmaking. That said, both Morton and Bradstreet self-consciously engage in learned conjectures about the world in ways that resonate across time. Interestingly, both Semiramis and Harriet are represented as moving through imperial space, and the military endeavors with which they are associated ultimately fail—Semiramis at the Indus River and Harriet on the Hudson. Bradstreet and Morton may be similarly seen to fail, both in their understanding of the globe and world history and in the execution of long, ambitious poems. Bradstreet's "Monarchies" reflect an imperfect understanding of the world that has to be approximated through judicious readings of classical and contemporary sources as well as an impossible personal ambition, not unlike that of the monarchs whose efforts she recounts. This also allows Bradstreet, as she follows Raleigh, to amass and judge evidence—world history is complex not only for its breadth and variety, but because interpretations are at odds with one another. While her elegies often signal that Bradstreet is putting forward a particularly Puritan or English view of the world, her "Monarchies" make visible that she is weighing the incomplete and incongruous opinions of others, something that she does throughout her quaternions as well. Morton is more successful in navigating the globe, albeit through epic fragments that stand in for a larger and not yet fully realized whole. Travel by river and sea (briny or brineless) links prospects that, taken together, limn a world that is understood through perception and learning. In the works of both, fragments and citations are intentional and ambitious, if not fully satisfactory, attempts to "make" the world. It is useful to recognize that ambition and failure are inseparable in all such attempts and that women writers undertaking world-spanning projects are, perhaps like Semiramis and Harriet Ackland, inevitably going to falter on the banks of one river or another.

NOTES

1. *The Tenth Muse* includes twelve pages of prefatory material, including a letter by John Woodbridge, Bradstreet's brother-in-law who oversaw the publication of this volume, and several poems and anagrams by men who praised and tweaked her by turn. The identity of R.Q. is unknown. For a fuller discussion of this prefatory material, see Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (1990) and Gillian Wright (2013, pp. 66–73). Jane D. Eberwein suggests that R.Q.'s commendatory poem was omitted from *Several Poems* because it suggested that Bradstreet's representation of monarchies might be read as seditious (1991, p. 139), while Wright suggests that the misogynist humor of the poem undermines the general tone of studied, unthreatened praise found in the other prefatory material (2013, p. 67).
2. I use "Ralegh" as the preferred spelling since it is common across recent scholarship.
3. Apart from R.Q.'s poem, which was cut from *Several Poems*, I have used Bradstreet's later edition of her poems because in it we find subtle differences that, at least in the sections I treat, put greater emphasis on women's efforts ("plac'd" becomes "built" in her description of Semiramis in "In honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen ELIZABETH, of most happy memory") and on slurs on powerful women (in "The Four Monarchies," again regarding Semiramis, "And that her worth, deserved no such blame" becomes "That undeserv'd, they blur'd her name and fame"). These changes suggest that Bradstreet's ideas about historical interpretation and representations of women may have been becoming more bold and specific even as she moderated her positions on monarchy.
4. As Jane D. Eberwein argues, "if Anne Bradstreet failed as a historian, she did so in part because, in events then being played out in the courts and battlefields of Britain, history itself failed her" (1991, p. 123). Wright suggests that the confusion of the ending may also be attributed to the editorial interference of John Woodbridge, who was arranging its publication after the beheading of the King (2013, pp. 94–96).
5. The figure of the Assyrian Queen Semiramis found in Ralegh's *Historie* and Bradstreet's poetry is rooted in Greek histories of Persia by Diodorus, Herodotus, Plutarch, and others. To a large extent she is an historical fiction, perhaps a composite of two historical queens from the eighth century BCE but with a legend that was thoroughly shaped by Greek perspectives (Stronk 2017, pp. 526–527). She is represented as a great leader who built the walls of Babylon and successfully ruled and expanded the Assyrian empire after the death of her husband Ninus. Some accounts assert that she had her husband killed so she could rule in his stead. Others suggest that she pretended to be her son or had an incestuous relationship with him in order to rule after Ninus' death. The unreliability of Greek accounts is an important feature in Ralegh's *Historie*. Two centuries earlier, Christine de Pizan stresses the gendered valences of historical misrepresentations when she includes Semiramis as the cornerstone of her City of Ladies (1982, pp. 38–40).
6. Suzuki argues that "Bradstreet establishes an opposition between monarchism and republicanism, which intersects with another opposition between the genders", suggesting that her positive treatment of counselors and of female monarchs both privilege an expanded polity (2009, p. 936). In the process, Bradstreet stakes her claim as an epic poet. I highlight instead her emphasis on the process of evaluating interpretations rather than the conclusions she reaches.
7. Lady Harriet Acland (1750–1815) was widely known for this act of heroism and devotion. Texts and images drawing on General Burgoyne's account include an engraving by Robert Pollard of Harriet Acland on the Hudson River. A couple of years before Wentworth published *The Virtues of Society*, Acland's story was included in Noah Webster's *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking* (1797, pp. 50–53).

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Before Poetry: Revival Verse and Sermonic Address in Eighteenth-Century America

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Verse abounded in eighteenth-century British North America. From almanacs to newspapers, from school notebooks to commonplace books, from letters to literary salons, from hymnbooks to broadsides, from sermons to plays, from religious revivals to taverns, from funerals to executions to barn dances, early American culture was saturated with poetry. Some poetry spread news, some entertained with fantastic and sensational accounts of travel or crime, some tantalized with local gossip, some urged moral reflection. Other poetry memorialized neighbors, loved ones, and events, or served as literary games to solidify friendships, romances, or social status. Some poetry activated and sustained new religious forms and communities; some measured intellectual capacity and served as litmus tests for civilizations. The forms, occasions, and uses of eighteenth-century poetry felt right to the people who lived with and through these vibrant verse practices, and they often had a very different sense of what made poetry good, or even what made poetry poetry than later generations of poets and scholars.

The notion of poetry itself as a distinct genre, as well as the proper way to read it, has been an open question for scholars of historic poetics. Virginia Jackson argues that the “lyricization of poetry” occurred unevenly over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and effectively subsumed a whole field of verse genres into what we now recognize as lyric poetry—or simply poetry (2005). Reading lyrically rather than historically, she argues, eclipses the diverse verse forms that came before. Attending to the various forms, media, and communities in their specificity has helped early American scholars recuperate forgotten ways of reading and engaging with verse.

The many people who wrote, printed, declaimed, sang, and exchanged verse did so in a context in which poetry was widely considered crucial to politics and society. Much of eighteenth-century British North American poetry aimed to do things in the world not to earn the respect of posterity as a participant in a great literary tradition. Max Cavitch traces one of the most enduring occasional verse forms, the elegy, and reveals how mourning verse practices were essential to nation building (2007). Colin Wells shows how a vigorous political poetry, now largely forgotten, actively shaped political opinions and institutions during the American Revolution and early United States (2018). David Shields's groundbreaking work on the centrality of manuscript poetry to early American culture argues that eighteenth-century poetry has been largely missing from accounts of American poetry because one of the primary verse forms of the period—belles-lettres poetry in manuscript—was deeply occasional and eschewed the goal of permanence (1997). It was an elite poetry that aspired to sociability and experiments in civility in a variety of private spaces such as taverns, coffee houses, salons, clubs, and fraternities.

All of these early American verse practices lived and intervened in the social (Cohen 2015). The poetry that appears exclusively religious was no different; in fact, the majority of the poetry that early British North American colonists read and wrote was religious. As scholars of religion have long recognized, religion does not inhabit a special space apart from the social; it is, in Émile Durkheim's terms, the organization of the social. This essay turns to a prolific new verse culture that arose within the eighteenth century, which was explicitly religious and as such deeply enmeshed in arranging the social—revival poetics (Roberts 2020). Revival poetry encompassed a variety of verse forms and straddled later conceptions of hymn and poetry and piety and sociability that tend to be viewed as distinct. Protestant Christianity deeply influenced American poetry in a variety of ways; in this essay, I return to early evangelicalism to show how revival verse participated in the construction of what would become modern lyric's address.

Evangelicalism and New Constellations of the Sermon and Verse

There were various forms of Protestant sermons and verse; they were not static categories but changing cultural forms that attached in new ways in the eighteenth century, particularly as German Pietism and its verse culture helped produce varied but widespread changes in transatlantic Protestant Christianity. These changes were in conjunction with new ideas regarding the sublime, poetry, and publics developing in relation to various media. One place to see this is in the revival activity that began to take on new meanings in the British North American colonies during the 1730s and 1740s traditionally called the Great Awakening. As Doug Winiarski argues, this period was a time, not of "resurgent puritan piety," but of "insurgent religious radicalism" led by lay people whose newly formed religious idioms led them to separate from their congregations and begin new churches and communities (2017, pp. 8). Poetry played a vital role in this changing landscape of religious experience, language, and church institutions, often considered the beginning of evangelicalism in America.

Evangelicalism is a notoriously difficult term to define and can often obscure more than it reveals when applied to the eighteenth century. Evangelical historians have often approached the term from a doctrinal perspective to trace a consistent and identifiable Protestant tradition from the present moment back to the eighteenth century. Yet, the doctrinal emphases used to ground this tradition—usually Biblicism, crucicentrism, activism, and conversionism—ebb and flow in the history of Christianity and can be difficult to isolate convincingly (Bebbington 1989, pp. 2–3).

The most helpful historical treatment of the term comes from Linford Fisher who recognizes not only its historical change over time from the fifteenth century to today, but also its flexibility as a category even within the same period of time. Perhaps most important to understand is that “to be ‘evangelical’ was at once a critique and a practice; it was a pursuit of experiential purity, but that purity was incessantly relative to the other modes of Christianity that were out there” (2016, pp. 186). Fisher shows that to be evangelical denoted one’s way of doing Christianity as more authentic than others—and a surprising smorgasbord of Protestant groups, many who would not be considered evangelical today, wielded the term in this way.

Michael Warner’s recent work on evangelicalism likewise moves scholars away from doctrinal definitions. Warner revises the once-presumed rational, secular public sphere à la early Habermas, through attention to early evangelicalism, which Warner places at the center of his analysis of the initial formulation of print publics. He emphasizes a seismic shift from the general expectation that sermons addressed a specific congregation to the idea, dominant by the beginning of the nineteenth century, that effective preaching addressed a limitless number of strangers. Warner highlights this new and controversial practice to offer a crucial defining feature of evangelicalism: “the conversionistic address to the stranger.” According to Warner, this new address—more than changes in theology and pietism—is what made evangelicalism distinct, and it reveals the entanglements of the religious and the secular in early America as new media and their publics emerged (2010, pp. 382). Evangelicalism, he argues, helped produce the structure of secular publics through its creation of the address to the stranger.

Another way to examine the emergence of evangelicalism that takes into account both Fisher’s and Warner’s important insights is through verse cultures. Because poetry was thought to induce the passions, activate feelings of the religious sublime, and partake in the language of heaven, it was one of the primary tools through which a broad variety of Christians came to feel more authentically Christian than others—that is evangelical. Revival verse, like the kind of conversion experience it promoted and facilitated, created felt religious authenticity. The development of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century occurs along with the proliferation of verse and its fusion with the itinerant minister and revival sermon. The turn to a common aesthetic experience, what the famous minister Jonathan Edwards called God’s “sweetness,” that grounded experiential religion for a growing number of Christians over the eighteenth century is central to what religious scholars and religious adherents have come to label early evangelicalism (1733, pp. 415). This religio-aesthetic experience was often spurred by a new kind of sermonic address—the conversionistic address to the stranger—but this was not unique to the genre of the revival sermon. Or, rather, a strict separation between what now appear to be discrete genres were more fluid for revivalists in their lived contexts.

For Isaac Watts, often considered the father of English hymnody, and Charles Wesley, the prolific Methodist hymn writer, and a whole host of revivalists they influenced, revitalizing religion could not happen apart from revitalizing poetry. Watts wrote that poetry was superior to the sermon because it bypassed reason by addressing the lower faculties first and then drawing the mind to piety (1706, pp. xvii). It was the proper tool of God for the enlivening of all Christians and the project of Christian missions. This was why he wrote hymns for what he called the “plainest capacity” (1706, pp. xvi). In an emerging revival culture, hymns moved toward a homiletic function while sermons moved toward a poetic function—which means they began to overlap in their purpose. Over the eighteenth century, the revival poet-minister and the poem as a type of itinerant minister became attached to what was understood to be an awakening of God that heralded the imminent reign of Christ.