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Toward an Archaeology of Manuscripts

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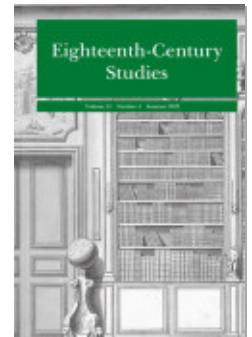
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REVIEW ESSAY

TOWARD AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF MANUSCRIPTS

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Hilary Havens, *Revising the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Authorship from Manuscript to Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019). Pp. 240; 2 b/w illus. \$99.99 cloth.

Kathryn James, *English Paleography and Manuscript Culture, 1500–1800* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2020). Pp. 288; 313 color illus. \$40.00 cloth.

Rachael Scarborough King, ed., *After Print: Eighteenth-Century Manuscript Cultures* (Charlottesville and London: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2020). Pp. 350. \$70.00 cloth; \$35.00 paper; \$35.00 ebook.

The title of Rachael Scarborough King's edited collection of essays, *After Print*, refers at once to Peter Stallybrass's insight that printing is a provocation of manuscript,² as well as to what the study of manuscripts looks like when we move away from stadial and supersessionist print culture paradigms of authorship and publication and instead embrace archival methods and interpretive approaches that center on concepts of media interrelation in early modern manuscript cultures, such as Margaret Ezell's concept of social authorship.³ The essays in King's collection, including an epilogue by Ezell herself, bear the fruits of such intermedial and transmedial approaches, bringing into relief what King terms "the multimedia eighteenth century." King argues that such methods and theories demonstrate the importance of what Siegfried Zielinski has called an "archeological" approach that focuses study on moments when, as Zielinski puts it, "things and situations were still in state of flux, where the options for development in various directions were still wide open, where the future was conceivable as holding multifarious possibilities of technical and cultural solutions for constructing media worlds."⁴

This review essay takes the historicist revisioning of the study of manuscripts as media archeology as an organizing principle for thinking about the complementarity of three new contributions to manuscript studies focusing on English and later British contexts from 1500–1800: the aforementioned *After Print*;

Hilary Havens's *Revising the Eighteenth-Century Novel*; and Kathryn James's *English Paleography and Manuscript Culture*. I consider how these contributions complement one another and equip scholars with the tools necessary for taking archeological approaches to manuscripts—approaches that do not presuppose a monolithic media environment in which such manuscripts are produced and circulated, nor an *a priori* historical outcome to which manuscript study should be subordinated (the creation of a print culture, the rise of the novel, etc.). I conclude by considering the archival scope of these studies. While taking care not to indict scholarship solely for the absence of particular figures, communities, and writings when the stated brief of each study is expertly fulfilled, it is nonetheless the case that where we choose to dig matters.

If the fundamental unit of archeology is the artifact—an historical object whose material form bears traces of how people used it to shape social relations and how past social practices and relations have in turn shaped its means and materialities—then as students of early modern English manuscript cultures we might want to start with an accounting of the range of textual artifacts written in English between 1500–1800. Kathryn James's introduction to such matter, *English Paleography and Manuscript Culture*, is a wonder. The book is organized across four major sections and a glossary that together serve as a robust, accessible curation of English handwriting. One finds the expected coverage in a book on paleography: a section on the range of scripts that one might encounter in the archive (“Hands,”) as well as a pedagogical section on how to read and transcribe English manuscripts according to both diplomatic and normalized standards (“Exercises”).

Other parts of the work, however, set James's book apart from most tomes on English paleography. In Part One, “Writing Materials and Writers,” James provides lavishly illustrated sections on the materials and technologies of writing and its attendant textual structures, ranging from what Bonnie Mak has called the “architectures of the page” to the bindings, storage, furniture, and spaces that facilitate writing.⁵ Part Three, “Case Studies,” expands this attention to materiality to encompass the media genres and material formats by which early modern English writing was deployed. Clocking in at over 300 color illustrations, this oversized hardback volume is an absolute steal at only forty dollars.

All of the first three sections' component parts are enhanced by partial transcriptions of the manuscripts illustrating the book and by short essays on the histories and sociopolitical contexts relating to these materials, technologies, identities, spaces, hands, genres, and formats. Consider how in Part One James attends to the range of social positions and identities inhabited by scribes and underscores embodied spaces for thinking about the range of meanings activated by contemporary writers. On pages 77–78, for example, she helpfully includes Louis Truchy's famous engraving of Samuel Richardson's eponymous character “Pamela . . . writing in her late Lady's dressing room” alongside particular hands and protocols of public and private, in order to dilate on how contemporaries read and related to women's manuscript production.

Similar attention to the context of these textual artifacts continues with Part Two's attention to hands and scripts. For instance, consider how James frames her section on the alphabet in terms of the alphabet's historical specificity. Some readers whose work focuses on eighteenth-century contexts may be surprised to

learn that “[t]he early modern alphabet had twenty-four rather than twenty-six letters . . . *I* and *J* were interchangeable, as were *U* and *V*.” In the same section, her turn of phrase “textual landscape” acknowledges that making and reading manuscripts requires knowledge of the representational conventions of visual art (90–91). “Landscape” is suggestive of how manuscript exemplars of alphabets must be read in terms of how early modern English writers understood alphabetic literacy as a socialized, ideologically loaded, disciplinary practice. James reminds us that the space of the page, too, is an artifact of social relation. Having already learned how margins could serve as barriers and as aesthetic devices that protect and frame handwriting in Part One (54), in Part Three we learn a range of uses for and conceptualizations of the margin as an incitement to writing. Margins can be sites of annotation, performance, and/or counterpublication, and they can even serve as public spaces that are sometimes shared by multiple writers who inscribe them (163–170).

This keen attention to public and private registers of writing in the margins is but one facet of James’s achievement. Taking her cue from recent work yoking media studies to book history, bibliography, and paleography, she gets her reader to think about not only “the materials and practices by which manuscript texts were created . . . and the mechanisms by which they were commissioned, circulated, and consumed.” She also encourages readers of her book to think about how these materialities provide evidence of how writers theorized the manuscript object, showing how the textual artifact bears “examination of the relational economy of the manuscript: the aspects such as temporality and affect that have shaped understandings of the manuscript object from the early modern period into our own” (19).

As I was reading *English Paleography and Manuscript Culture* and thinking along with James, I found myself especially drawn to those moments when she describes paleography as a vital yet necessarily limited act of recovery:

The materials and practices of reading, writing, producing, and consuming text in 1800 were recognizably related to those of 1500 . . . By 1850 this familiarity had been effaced entirely—and forever—as had the pre-industrial, largely pre-imperial nation to which it belonged. A study of early modern English handwriting and documentary culture offers a glimpse into a moment by which England’s identity was and is still defined, in a world that is otherwise lost to us almost entirely. (18)

Here we see evidence of James’s archeological impulse in the study of early English manuscripts. Such moments remind me of Hilary Havens’s own impulse toward recovery in the opening pages of *Revising the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. James’s opening discussion recounts her use of a novel technique, digital paleography, to access a nearly obliterated passage from the manuscript of Frances Burney’s second novel, *Cecilia*. According to Havens, Burney obliterated the passage in response to pressure from family members to suppress experimental elements of her novel. Through paleography, Havens recovers not only the handwritten text, but evidence of the dynamism of social authorship, too.

Havens’s historicist anecdote is a perfect miniature of her larger approaches and arguments for rethinking the history of the novel and the history of eighteenth-

century authorship. Her approach “recovers and analyzes material from novel manuscript and post-publication revisions,” as well as from epistolary correspondences in manuscript letters and printed reviews. Drawing upon methods found in the work of scholars such as Ezell, Betty Schellenberg, David McKitterick, and Jerome McGann, for illuminating the interrelations among media. Havens takes a multimedial approach to textual recovery.⁶ Textual recovery also serves a larger recovery project, which is that of eighteenth-century authorship itself. She aims no less than to “construct a new narrative about eighteenth-century authorship and its dependence on the networks in which writers lived and worked.” In developing “a model of ‘networked authorship,’”⁷ Havens contributes to a growing scholarship that recovers eighteenth-century writing practices and book culture from overdetermined interpretations rooted in the “individualistic view of authorship that arose during the Romantic period” (2).⁸

In addition to her attention to manuscript drafts and post-publication revisions, Havens’s four chapter-length case studies supply an abundant picture of the networked and intermedial world of novelists: Samuel Richardson’s increasing rejection of public responses to his published works and his direct solicitation and control over reader suggestions via private networks, Frances Burney’s editorial practices, including her aforementioned obliterations and suppressions, as well as her familial and reviewer networks, Jane Austen’s juvenilia and her recycling practices, and Maria Edgeworth’s epistolary networks of readers and reviewers and her attempts at collaborative authorship across the composition stages of her works.

Havens shows how these writers, through close readings of the pre- and post-publication revisions of their works, were forced to negotiate pressures private and public, internal and external, that stemmed in part from their marginalizing experiences as occupants of economically marginal status or as women in patriarchal Britain. A final chapter branches beyond these socially marginal authors to demonstrate the applicability of her concept of *networked authorship* to writers traditionally seen as relatively independent actors due to their elite socioeconomic standing, such as Laurence Sterne, Matthew Lewis, and William Godwin.

Havens’s readings of the textual-material artifacts of revision processes strike me as a media-archeological approach to genre.⁹ Her approach serves the double meaning of her title well. “Revising” coordinates two key strains in her chosen historiographies, focusing attention on the importance of historicizing novelistic revision as a set of media-based practices, and revising “rise of” narratives that have dominated histories of the novel. Thus, while noting the importance of conduct books, history, romance, and periodical literatures including journalism to the development of the novel—genres are media, too, after all—Havens can simultaneously move away from singular, genre-based origin arguments about the novel and the stabilization of the generic category “novel.”

Interestingly, however, Havens does not provide a sustained engagement with scholarship that considers the importance of the epistle to the development of characterological tropes and narrative structures found in novels. This silence is made conspicuous by her interest in looking to a range of epistolary correspondences in manuscript (letters) and print (reviews) in order to ground her close readings of revisions in manuscript drafts and post-publication texts. Perhaps the “epistolary novel” itself feels so naturalized in the scholarly literature that Havens resists it in order to point up the importance of epistolary artifacts and practices in the networks that she traces? The absence of an attention to epistolarity is nonetheless odd because the epistolary materials and media practices of manuscript letters¹⁰

and print reviews are both technology and archival trace of the very phenomenon she recovers: “networked authorship.” The generic formation of epistolarity itself, moreover, when considered in terms of its historically specific eighteenth-century protocols of private and public, internal and external, space and time, intimacy and absence, proximity and distance, is itself a genre-based theory of how networks work.¹¹

One of the great strengths of Rachael Scarborough King’s edited collection *After Print: Eighteenth-Century Manuscript Cultures* is an awareness of how media shapes scholarly inquiry. The collection’s organization and chapters foreground their relationship to both historical media *and* current media. This study of manuscript culture, as King puts it, “allows for ongoing views of continuity and change in the uses of and reactions to handwritten documents. . . . [T]he focus is on handwritten texts and practices, but these can never be isolated from the broader multimedia context of eighteenth-century literature and twenty-first century scholarship” (11–12). Moving beyond the mere acknowledgment that our own digital media shift has made us newly aware of multimedia contexts of the past, King builds this frame of reference into the three-part organization of the collection (plus the previously-mentioned epilogue by Ezell), each of which foregrounds a particular feature of an archeological approach to media.

The first section, “Coteries, Communities, Collaborations: Manuscript Publication,” situates manuscripts among a range of social contexts of publication. Chapters include studies of the role of manuscripts in religious and scientific communities as well as in genres such as natural history, memoir, letter, and notebook by the respective scholars Andrew O. Winkles, Beth Fowkes Tobin, King herself, and Michelle Levy. Genres, like communities, are social contexts that carry with them expectations of protocol and practice—behavioral norms by which we come to understand the affordances of manuscripts. In this way, the written artifact of the manuscript bears archeological traces of social behavior and cultural value. As Levy puts it in the opening paragraph of her contribution on Dorothy Wordsworth’s notebooks, “as artifacts that specially encode time, they [manuscripts] often record their own histories” (95).

The second section, “The Manuscript-Print Interface,” drills down into the dense layers of print and manuscript media’s complementarities and interrelations that characterized the multimedia eighteenth century. The section explores the connections that eighteenth-century writers and readers forged between handwritten and printed forms and formats by focusing on paratextual handwritten verse in printed books (Philip S. Palmer), manuscript newsletters (Leith Davis), printed letters in periodicals (Kathryn King), and scientific epistles (Colin T. Ramsey). Importantly, these chapters not only excavate these dense layerings of media but also demonstrate the “media self-reflexivity of the eighteenth-century,” forcing us to recognize the scribal subjects of their studies as on-the-ground media theorists in their own right (18).¹²

The third section explores how current-day, interdisciplinary approaches (digital and otherwise) can help us better recognize the eighteenth-century media practices of manuscript culture. Chapters focus on uses of digital databases for studying manuscript novels (Emily C. Friedman), computational methods for identifying variations in notational writing across print and manuscript texts, as well

as the incorporation of script notation practices in print (Collin Jennings), digital approaches that coordinate manuscript and print archives in the effort to trace postal transmission over continents and centuries (Brian Rejack), and incorporation of performance studies and material culture studies to better understand evidence of early modern food culture in manuscript and print artifacts (Marissa Nicosia). This section's particular attention to our own scholarly literacies, even as each author also excavates eighteenth-century manuscript culture, is suggestive of media archeologist Jussi Parikka's notion that "thinking media archeologically" necessitates "that you start in the middle—from the entanglement of past and present."¹³

Some of the best work in *After Print* reminds us that any history of a medium cannot be told honestly when it is limited to study of the medium itself.¹⁴ As King's collection makes clear, to study manuscript culture well today is potentially to study print and digital media, too. The benefits of *looking elsewhere* are also evident in the collection's respect for drawing upon a diverse range of theories and methods. Indeed, the entire third part of the collection is dedicated to interdisciplinary approaches to manuscript studies.

A particularly exciting example of looking elsewhere comes in Part Two: Kathryn King's application of affect theory to her work on the reader-correspondents of Frances Brooke's periodical *The Old Maid*. The readers' printed letters, argues King, remediate the affective registers of the handwritten, the metaphors and metonymies of manuscript's material practices, in ways that make public, as King puts it, "pockets of sensibility, sensation, and queerness" (178). The publicness of a queer community of readers in print, notes King, undercuts the assumption that there is a natural relationship between print and rational discourse in an eighteenth-century republic of letters.

Similarly, in Part Three, Marissa Nicosia's application of performance studies and material culture studies to the study of culinary manuscripts demonstrates how an archeological approach to manuscripts can draw energy from scholarship focused on social groups who did not possess normative alphabetic literacies and who are often recognizable as traces found among the alphabetic inscriptions of the privileged. In this respect, I also really appreciate Beth Fowkes Tobin's chapter on the North American work of the English naturalist John Abbot. When reading Tobin's work on how the manuscript practices of Enlightenment science were both technology and archival trace of the "sociable, collaborative, and collective" dimensions of eighteenth-century knowledge, I wondered how such manuscripts could be more explicitly framed in terms of the formation of white subjectivities (68). I wondered, moreover, how these materials could be read in terms of potential contributions by Indigenous people and other BIPOC to Enlightenment knowledge production. On these matters, Tobin herself recognizes the value of such questions, and she dutifully cites academic literature that treats such contexts, even as they are not the immediate brief of her collection essay.¹⁵

To put the importance of diversity another way, archeological discoveries are not products of methods alone. The sites at which we decide to dig matter, too. While the transatlantic approaches found in essays such as Ramsey's study of Franklin, Rejack's work on Keats, and Tobin's chapter on Abbot are expertly situated in the broader colonial and imperial dimensions of the Atlantic worlds in which manuscripts circulated, the presence of these approaches brings into relief the absence of the Atlantic world's BIPOC denizens from the books discussed in this essay. As readers of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* are undoubtedly aware, manuscript practices played vital roles in the lives and works of eighteenth-century Black Brit-

ish writers.¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is clear that James's, Havens's, and King's books are vital resources for conducting an archeology of British manuscripts, and as such will make valuable additions to scholars' personal and institutional libraries. I am glad to own them and am sure to return to them in my own scholarship.

NOTES

1. My sincerest thanks to Rob McLoone and Jennifer Thorn, whose missives delivered invaluable suggestions and patient encouragement.

2. See Peter Stallybrass, "Printing and the Manuscript Revolution," *Explorations in Communication and History*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New York: Routledge, 2008).

3. Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999). On applying intermedial and transmedial literacies, as well as the application of concepts such as remediation, morphomediality, and multimedia more generally, to the study of manuscripts, see Multigraph Collective, "Manuscript," *Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Era of Print Saturation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018), 185–203.

4. King, *After Print*, 11, quoting Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 10.

5. Bonnie Mak, "Architectures of the Page," *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2011), 9–21.

6. Particularly fascinating is Havens's use of McGann's "practice of 'versioning,'" an editorial-bibliographic method for the "control, comparison, or management of multiple [textual] versions" (2). See Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983).

7. I cannot help but think that Havens's "networked authorship" is the historically specific and rigorous version of a common exercise in introductory book studies courses, during which students first encounter Robert Darnton's communications circuit. When asked to revise the diagram based on what they have learned during the semester, students draw lines from the "author" node to every other node in the circuit, and when that does not suffice, they move the author node to other locations on the diagram. See Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 175–206.

8. Havens's work sits alongside recent work that takes media-based approaches to the history of novels in early modern contexts. See, for example, Jordan Stein, *When Novels Were Books* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2020).

9. To be clear, Havens does not engage with media studies scholars that explicitly take up archeological approaches. I consider this less a problem than an opportunity for further reading. For example, it would be great to read *Revising the Eighteenth-Century Novel* alongside media archeologist Matthew Kirschenbaum's scholarship, especially his book *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016).

10. James provides a crucial background on many of the materials, formats, and spaces involving the epistolary media practices taken up by Havens, making the two books a welcome pairing.

11. On the use of early modern epistolary networks to theorize how networks work, good places to start include Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) and Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2018). Also see King's excellent historiographic section on early modern letter-writing in her introduction to *After Print* (6–7).

12. For an excellent study of the self-conscious development and deployment of media literacies by eighteenth-century figures, see Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

13. Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 5.
14. For an example of this very point with regards to the history of print, see Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 370.
15. On page 72, for example, Tobin cites the work of Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006).
16. Notice the range of eighteenth-century manuscripts covered in the scholarship considered in the ECS review essay by Wilfred D. Samuels, "Enlightened black voices: witnesses and participants" (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, 2 (1997): 239–246). More recent attention to manuscript media and networks is observed by Matthew Wyman-McCarthy in his "Review of *Beyond Slavery and Abolition: Black British Writing, c.1770–1830*, by Ryan Hanley" (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 53, 4 (2020): 731–733). For less studied examples of Black British manuscripts, a good place to start is Nicole N. Aljoe, *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709–1838* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). For a programmatic study of eighteenth-century manuscripts in British contexts that incorporates study of Black Atlantic manuscripts, see Michelle Levy and Betty A. Schellenberg, *How and Why to Do Things with Eighteenth-Century Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021).