Mannheimer Proposal for ASECS 2024 session 80 Overdetermined and Under-determined Authorship: Methods and Progress in Identity [Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP)] - Katherine Mannheimer

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**Overdetermined and Under-determined Authorship: Methods and Progress in Identity [Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP)]**

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Paper Proposal: “Alexander Pope’s Cooperative Satire”

As Britain’s first self-supporting poet, Pope is often described as a poet of the self. Specifically, Pope’s reputation as the era’s preeminent satirist led to what Helen Deutsch calls an alternating stance of “self-defense” and “self-exposure,” creating an oeuvre in which Pope became “his own favorite subject.”

This critical focus on Pope as self-made and self-authoring, however, neglects the lessons of Margaret Ezell’s depiction of Pope as participating in the practice of “social authorship,” as well as, more recently, Joseph Hone’s analysis of Pope’s uses of “scribal publication,” especially in the first decade of his career: much of the early work (perhaps most famously *The Rape of the Lock*) circulated in manuscript prior to print publication.

While Ezell’s and Hone’s scholarship helps us to see Pope and his work within new literary-historical contexts, Pope Studies has so far been slow to apply these insights directly to the close interpretation (or reinterpretation) of individual poems.

In this paper I will read Pope’s *To a Lady* in such a way as to restore it to its original social setting (the poem notoriously begins, of course, by quoting a comment that Pope’s friend Martha Blount “once let fall”); indeed, I read the poem as in many ways *about* the collaborative and interactive nature of imagination—as a glimpse into how Pope wrote to, for, and with the women portrayed in the poem, even (or especially) those whom he vociferously disdains.