

Milton, Shakespeare, Donne, Spenser, Jonson: these commonplace names from the Renaissance cannon have a common theme – they are all male. The *Pulter Project*, which I have spent my time as a summer scholar being a part of, aims to bring to light a divergent character from this time: that of Hester Pulter. What makes Pulter such powerful figure lies not only in her femaleness, but the obscurity surrounding her life and her writing, as it was only around thirty years ago, in 1996, that her manuscript was uncovered in Leeds.

My role was to edit a collection of emblem poetry for the amplified editions on the project's website, which provide readers with extensive annotation of each work. This poster provides a context for Pulter as a poet and details the project's intentions and the editing process I learnt over the course of the research period.

The Pulter Project



William Shakespeare



John Milton



Ben Jonson



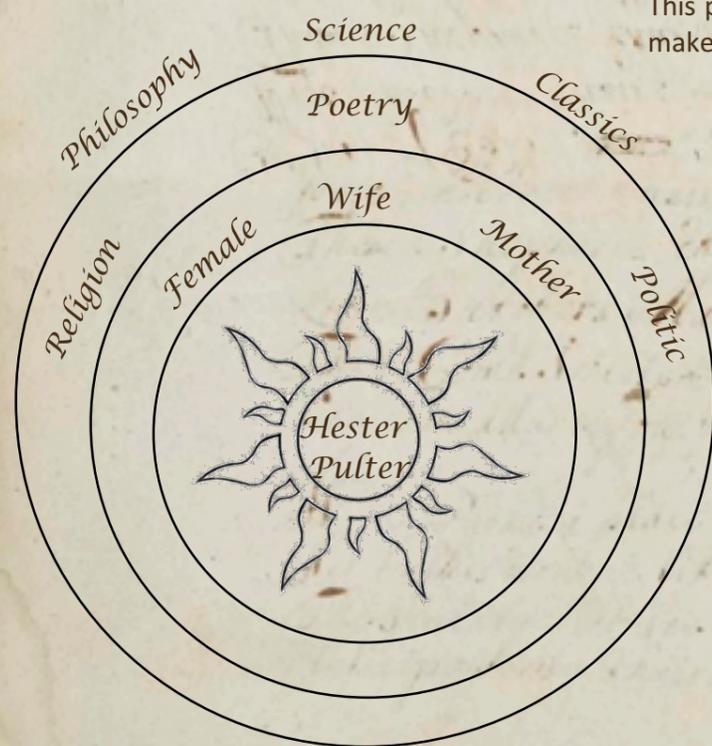
Process of editing:

Outlined below is my editing process:

1. Transcribe poems exactly as they appear on the manuscript
2. Modernize and regularize spelling, punctuation, and grammar
3. Research the historical, religious, political, literary and scientific contexts
4. Add relevant footnotes and a headnote to aid readers in the reading and interpretation
5. Send out to *The Pulter Project's* Directors and Peer reviewers
6. Once feedback is received, a final edit is required before the poems are sent to be digitalized for the website's second launch in June.

Who was Hester Pulter?

- Born circa 1605 and died 1678
- Married Arthur Pulter while quite young – possibly only thirteen (“Aletheia’s Pearl”, Poem 32)
- Mother of fifteen children, thirteen of which predeceased her
- Author of 120 known poems and an unfinished prose romance, collated in a manuscript. It is thought these poems were worked on between the 1640’s and 50’s, and then were copied by a scribe into the neatly bound manuscript in the 1660’s.
- Staunchly royalist, as often expressed in her poetry
- Pulter regularly draws on theological and scientific arguments to support her thematic concerns of transmutation between life and death. Below is a representation of the heliocentric model of the universe (which features a lot in Pulter’s poetry) reimagined to show that most salient to Pulter’s own life.



The Pulter Project: The Making of a Poet

This project, headed by Wendy Wall (Northwestern University) and Leah Knight (Brock University), aims to make Hester Pulter’s poetry accessible to readers through multiple representations and readings of her verse.

- The website is a digital collaboration which adopts an editorial policy of multiplicity, contestation, and conversation.
- Each poem provides an “Elemental Edition” edited by Wall and Knight which offers a pared-down modernization accessible to first-time readers of Pulter
- An “Amplified Edition” of the same poem gives a more in-depth reading by another Pulter scholar
- The website allows for side-by-side comparisons, contextual material in the form of “Curations” and “Explorations”, as well as visuals of the original manuscript

Visit <http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu/about-the-project.html>

Emblem Poetry

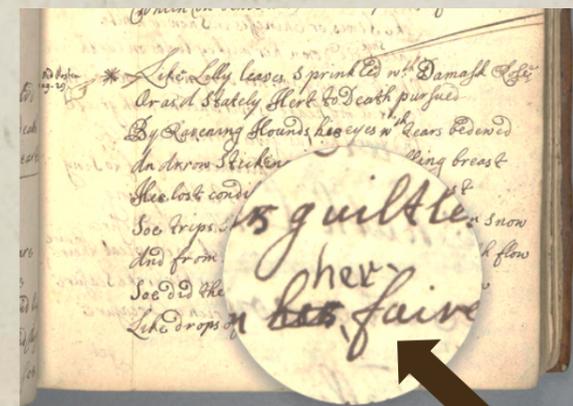
Originating in Italy in the 1500’s, emblem poems were traditionally comprised of three parts:

1. *Inscriptio*: A motto
2. *Picturae*: A printed image
3. *Subscriptio*: A short epigrammatic verse

Pulter is the earliest known female composer of an emblem series. She diverges from the traditional format, removing the *picturae* and *inscriptio* elements to create verbal images. Emblem poetry aims to invoke a didactic sense, providing its audience with moral, often religious, instruction.

Editorial dilemmas:

The act of modernizing a text is crucial, but also problematic, as it involves a significant act of editorial interpretation. Modernization targets spelling and punctuation in particular, while attempting to preserve the original intentions of the author. As an editor, the tiniest decision regarding the placement of a comma can change the way the poem is read. This is what makes my work for *The Pulter Project* so interesting, as it aims to display these conflicts and challenges to the reader.



Here is an excerpt from Pulter’s manuscript. “her” is inserted by a different hand (likely Pulter’s) to the scribal hand of the main text. It is the editors job to regularize this and add a notation for readers to alert them to this amendment.

Early Modern Woman’s Writing Today:

Platforms like *The Pulter Project* are enabling new ways to engage with works like Pulter’s, giving value to the way her poems provide female-authored accounts of the political, religious, scientific, and literary cultures of the time. Just as women like Pulter worked to carve their own voices in history, scholars of their work are today pushing boundaries in the editorial conversations surrounding representation and writer identity. *The Pulter Project* conflates Pulter with the digital age, visualising the process of scholarly reception to encourage a conversation between her work, the scholars and editors, and the readers.