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Title of presentation: Passionate Attachments: Young Women and Amateur Poetry in the Eighteenth-Century and Now

Abstract

In the eighteenth-century, a phenomenon of miscellaneous books that blurred the lines between reader and creator were kept and compiled by everyday people, especially young women. These notebooks contained excerpts from poetry and prose, as well as original poetry, and decorative features, sometimes including drawings. Despite the difference in the cultural landscape, young women who dabble in original poetry in the twenty-first century create comparable notebooks. As Abigail Williams wrote in *The Social Life of Books*, these books are “a form of life writing” (129) and “autobiography” (135), “a thing of youth, capturing an era of passionate attachments” (137). My presentation will compare two eighteenth-century manuscripts to two twenty-first century notebooks. In drawing on the work of Abigail Williams and David Allan, I will argue for the self-development and expressive value of these hybrid artifacts, and evaluate the comparative subjects and functions of amateur poetry in the eighteenth-century and modern-day.