

SAA 2015: “Women Making Texts in Early Modern England” Abstracts  
Seminar Leaders: Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich (Ohio State University) and Tara L. Lyons  
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Isabella Whitney and Inverted Petrarchanism

In his dissertation, currently the only complete edition of Isabella Whitney’s poetic works, Michael David Felker considers speculation that Whitney may have published other poetry with her printer, Richard Jones, after publishing her own two miscellanies with him. As Felker points out, several other poems in Jones’s miscellany *A Handefull of pleasant delites* (1565-66) have female speakers but seem likely to be the product of male writers (lxxiv). Taken alongside this seminar’s question about female interaction with the textual archive, Felker’s observation made me think about how women may often vanish from the archive because when they seek to avoid ‘feminine’ genres, they may be compelled to precisely duplicate ‘masculine’ writing or risk not being published. Whitney’s poetry stands out to us today in part because of her interest in inverting or subverting male-centered poetic structures: in *The Copy of a Letter* (1566), she inverts the male-centered Petrarchan poetic structure by presenting a female speaker complaining about an unfaithful lover. I am interested in considering Whitney’s collaboration with Jones, whom she speaks approvingly of in her famous “Wyll and Testament” (1573), in the context of the gendering effect of genres. Whitney’s work pushes against the boundary of what was permissible for women to write but does so by staying close to an established ‘masculine’ genre. Her inversion is possible because it stays close to the text.

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Women Making Texts Their Own

Scholarship over the last few decades has uncovered a wealth of new information about and examples of early modern women engaged in the activities of reading, writing and even making books. There is, however, still very little known about women readers in the early modern period. One way to begin exploring the questions of who early modern women readers were, what kind of books they read, and how they used these books is to track ownership of these books. However, apart from a few studies of particularly well known women readers and book collectors, there is still much that is elusive about the topic of women’s book ownership. My paper will address the challenges for both locating books owned by women and suggest some approaches to the question suggested by my work on the Provenance Online Project, a crowdsourced project focused on making past ownership marks available online to be identified by scholars and bibliographers. I will address the ways in which a digital project can offer greater visibility to ownership marks by women, making them available for scholars to comment on and use, as well as the potential for digital humanities projects like this one to unite resources

from geographically distant archives, providing a centralized resource that can hopefully expand our awareness of the women readers of the past.

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“I am not the Duchess of Malfi, nor was I meant to be”: Dorothy Osborne vs. John Webster

The masque of madmen that occurs in Act IV of *the Duchess of Malfi* makes the state of the Duchess’s mind and body matter. The scene suggests the radical possibility that *what a play is*—whether it is an antidote or a poison—depends on the prior mental and physical state of playgoers as they experience the drama. Webster belabors this possibility at length, and yet ultimately he suggests that the Duchess’s mind and body are unknowable, inaccessible, and that therefore we cannot know if the play has healed the Duchess’s grief, driven her closer to madness, or done nothing at all. I suggest that for Webster and other male playwrights of the period, a sense that female spectators possessed unknowable, unwritable minds and bodies actually inspired copious amounts of written text. The anxiety that this gap in their narratives produced was quite generative. This is one way in which women “made” texts in early modern England. But it was not, of course, the only way. My second object of analysis for this paper is a segment of one of Dorothy Osborne’s numerous letters to her future husband, in which she recounts an episode that is strikingly similar to Webster’s masque of madmen. My comparison shows that what appears superficially to be similar subject matter is, in the hands of a female writer prose writer of the period, an opportunity to display writerly control, while in the hands of a male playwright it is a site of radical ambivalence and epistemological uncertainty. Where Webster’s narrative reiterates itself obsessively around a seemingly irreparable lacuna, Osborne’s has no need to do so.

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A Shakespeare of One’s Own: Female Users of Playbooks from the Seventeenth to the Mid-Eighteenth Century

In this paper, women ‘making texts’ means not only writing, but also women creating their own volumes by annotating, editing, signing, and attaching bookplates to books. The aim of this paper is to understand women’s intellectual activities concerning Shakespeare’s playbooks by looking at these book-related activities. Although women’s participation in the development of Shakespeare’s canonisation has increasingly been noticed by researchers, bookplates and signatures have not been systematically studied in relation to gender, as compared to other resources. Discreet observations and evaluations, typified by reading, are rarely appreciated as a participatory or creative process. However, by focusing on women’s use of Shakespeare’s playbooks, I hope to give a voice to these seemingly quiet interpreters. For primary sources, I used over 800 pre-1769 copies of Shakespeare’s playbooks in major libraries throughout the

world, including the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Bodleian Library, the Huntington Library, and the Auckland City Library. I show that women were actively involved in book-related activities; for example, they exchanged Shakespeare's playbooks as gifts and preserved rare copies as family treasures. Some female readers even began to annotate Shakespeare's works earlier than we believed, approximately forty years before Harriet Bowdler's *The Family Shakespeare* of 1807.

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Text(s)(-)Making Woman in Early Modern England: or, Reading Anne Clifford, Self(-)Made Woman

To amplify what I see as the productive awkwardness of the motivating force behind this seminar's title, I have come up with two far more awkward titular phrases to describe my specific interests. I harp here upon such awkwardnesses only because I hope to let them unfold in the paper that shall follow, like the ugly duckling growing swanly, in my case study of the role of Anne Clifford (1590-1676) in making herself, and the ways in which that self has been made womanly by some studies of it, despite her own relatively a-gendered or even anti-gendered reading of her life story. But my subject is both Clifford as a "text-making woman" *and* the texts that made her, as well as those she made. Clifford deliberately understood herself, I contend, as a text composed to be read by posterity; I will therefore inventory the more remarkable ways in which Clifford arranged for texts to make the image of her we have now: that is, how she arranged to be read through the *poesis* of self she executed on paper, canvas, stone, and metal. While she is best known for her memoir and diaries, the texts Clifford made that I find the most convincing representations of the self she wanted to have read—those in the inscriptional and historiographic mode—are harder to read in terms of conventional roles for female heroines, which might be one reason why they have been relatively neglected: they are composed in genres and media we tend not to associate with women as makers of texts. I will distinguish and itemize two sets of these documents and offer a brief analysis of how a closer look at Clifford's production of them can render our understanding of early modern women making texts more robust.

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What Women Want: Catering to Women Readers in the Early Modern English Book Trade

In my paper, I plan to analyze examples of books that appear to have been repositioned over the course of their publication history to appeal to women readers. Changes to the books' title pages and prefatory matter reveal the changing ways in which publishers imagined and attempted to attract potential audiences. My methodology will not be one that reveals the contributions of individual women to the production of specific texts. Instead, I want to explore the ways in which publishers' assumptions about the preferences and tastes of women readers,

whether accurate or not, influenced their material presentation of the books they acquired, printed, and sold. While women may not have taken part in the intellectual and manual labor involved in “making” these texts, women readers as a group helped to physically shape the texts that were marketed to them. I’d like to test the boundaries of what we can argue about women’s participation in textual production—need it be individual, volitional, and tangible, or can it also be collective, second-hand, and to some extent, imagined? Can we claim that “texts made for women” constitute examples of “women making texts”? In order to give a sense of the possibilities of this type of inquiry, my paper will analyze representative examples from different genres, possibly including satires, medical treatises, and conduct manuals.

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Women as Readers, Writers, and Compilers in Early Modern Verse Miscellanies

This paper was originally conceived as part of a larger project studying the reception of John Donne’s poetry by early modern readers. Building upon the foundational work on women’s manuscripts by Victoria Burke as well as Heidi Brayman Hackel’s work on women’s reading, I set out to create a provisional narrative about early modern women’s involvement in manuscript verse transmission. However, compiling data about the sixty-four early modern women’s verse miscellanies raised several methodological questions and provided few literary-historical answers. Therefore, this paper both presents anecdotal findings and raises questions about the value of quantitative analysis in the study of early modern verse miscellanies.

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“Late Wyves”: The Elided Business Vectors of the Early English Book Trade?

Helen Smith asserts that “women’s labour is one of the material subtexts of the books we have inherited,” but in its dependence on title page and colophon data, quantitative methods of historical bibliography have largely elided women’s contributions to the early modern English book trade. Because women’s names are overwritten by their husbands’ on book title pages, and because the appendices in volume 3 of the Pollard and Redgrave *Short Title Catalogue* are organized by imprint data, “the STC is misleading to the extent that it suggests women were only involved in the trade during their widowhood” (109). As Maureen Bell and others have pointed out, the notion that women were absent from the trade prior to their husbands’ deaths is implausible given the extensive active engagement of both widows and wives in the activities of the Stationers’ Company. It is clear that women were a constant, though usually uncredited, presence in the material and business practices of early modern book making and selling.

My paper for SAA 2015 outlines a methodology that could potentially uncover some of this uncredited women’s history by tracing the business patterns of printing and publishing houses associated with the same female agent, contending that stationer widows were vectors not only for the rights to title and to print shop furniture, but also to a considerable business acumen

acquired during previous marriages. Through a comparison of both quantitative and qualitative analysis of their various husbands' imprint data, along with bio-bibliographical research, "Late Wyves" considers the crucial role of widows, or self-declared "late wyves," in mitigating and informing a household's fiscal risk.

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Margaret Beaufort and the Birth of Tudor Romance

In 1489 Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby and mother of Henry VII, patronized William Caxton's *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, the printer's English translation of a French romance. Although her promotion of this secular text appears to be an anomaly, given Margaret's lifelong interest in devotional works, scholars have persuasively argued that its printing was politically motivated, insofar as the romance, in which the hero overcomes a series of obstacles before he can marry his princess, paralleled Henry's own personal trials before his marriage to Elizabeth of York. *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*—one of the first romances printed in Henry's reign—can thus be read as one example of the ways that the Tudors strategically employed specific images and narratives to promote and secure their fledgling dynasty.

What has been largely overlooked is that this text—like many of the romances printed by Caxton in the late fifteenth century—enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the late Elizabethan period. This essay surveys the evidence of this popularity, which include a tantalizing fragment in the Bodleian library, written very much in the style of modern "fan fiction." I argue that *Blanchardyn* and its Elizabethan afterlives forces us to reassess Margaret's literary legacy: in addition to being a book collector and translator, she seems to have also been a canny reader who accurately predicted that Caxton's text would resonate with English audiences, and perhaps women in particular. Furthermore, the late sixteenth-century reprintings of *Blanchardyn* indicate that when we omit fifteenth-century books from the study of early modern print culture, we severely compromise our understanding of Tudor book history and its major players.

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"To spill my Husbands blood": The Influence of Gender in Early Modern Ballad Printing

On July 12, 1628 Alice Davis was burned at the stake in Smithfield for stabbing her husband, a locksmith. This sensational event is the subject of two extant, anonymous ballads, "The Unnaturall Wife: or, The Lamentable Murther, of One Goodman Davis" and "A Warning for All Desperate Women." Though both ballads were printed in 1628, they are set to different tunes and have different lyrics and woodcuts. Most significant for this paper is the difference in their imprints. The former was printed by "M. T. Widdow," better known as Margery Trundle, the famous ballad seller and printer, and the latter was printed by "F. Coules," or Frances Coles, a rival ballad printer. Using information from historical and literary records to supplement my findings, my paper for our seminar will compare these two ballads in order to determine if

women's influence on print differed in apparent, material ways from that of male printers. These two ballads will thus serve as a test case for an examination of gender and printing.

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Recipes and the Intellectual Life of Making in the Early Modern English Kitchen

“The cook must be neither a madman nor a simpleton,” wrote Maestro Martino in a fifteenth-century Italian cookery book, “but he must have a great brain.”<sup>1</sup> In this essay I argue that early English “receipts,” as they were called, bear witness to a rich and previously unacknowledged literate (“brainy”) domestic culture, one in which women were predominantly, though not exclusively, involved. I take up three case studies that I’ve found in reading over 100 extant manuscript recipe collections (1600-1730): texts attributed to Elizabeth Okeover, Sarah Hughes (a bilingual collection), and Lettice Pudsey (which I interpret through the lens of a Ben Jonson poem and calligraphy manuals). My hope is to illuminate the “made” or “wrought” worlds in which women could engage in the early modern period.

What strikes me most forcefully in these texts is the fusion of mental and manual activities. The recipe archive thus points us toward a highly substantial and practical mode of thinking concocted out of embodied action and textual engagement. How could a recipe function simultaneously as scientific experiment and poetic exercise of wit? In what precise ways did housewives contemplate figuration, natural philosophy, education, and matter itself even as they seemingly conformed to traditional and presumptively passive norms of female behavior? What did recipes allow people to explore, think, do, consider, make, and taste (in its meaning of “sample”) in the early modern period?

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<sup>1</sup> Maestro Martino, *The Art of Cookery*, 130.