

SAA/SHARP workshop New Directions in the Study of Early Modern Female Book Ownership

Workshop leaders:

Sarah Lindenbaum

Tara Lyons

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ABSTRACTS/PROJECT PROPOSALS

Women Book Owners in the *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* (PLRE) Project

Joseph Black

What kinds of books did early modern women read? To what extent was their reading shaped by class, community, political or religious affiliation? Did the books women read change over time in response to the pervasive social, political, and religious changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? A generation or two ago, questions like these were considered largely unanswerable: evidence for women's reading and book ownership in this period seemed simply not to exist. But archival work in recent years has called attention to a wide variety of surviving documents that illustrate women's roles in making, reading, owning, and circulating books. The *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* (PLRE) database (plre.folger.edu) currently enables searches of nearly sixty booklists associated with early modern women, comprising more than 1550 edited records of book ownership. While some of these lists have been edited previously, many are edited here for the first time, and the database allows for comparative searches of a kind previously impossible. Preliminary research using this database has begun to provide a substantial evidential basis for generalizations about women's reading and book ownership in the period. This presentation demonstrates the PLRE database, and invites questions about ways to expand the scope of its coverage (including the kinds of records it edits) and about ways to put the project in productive conversation with other digital projects dedicated to early modern book ownership.

Proposal for a New Database of Early Women's Book Ownership

Sarah Lindenbaum

This project conceptualizes a new database of female book ownership in the medieval period, early modern period, and eighteenth century. It will facilitate a greater understanding of women's literacy, education, reading, and book use across different geographical areas and time periods by providing a centralized location from which to discover and study books owned by early women. The database would function much as a library catalog, but include specialized categories such as "women-authored texts," "books given to men by women," "Hebrew book owners," "Black book owners," etc. It will also account for race, both of books owners themselves and the contents of texts. Additionally, bibliographic entries will include images of inscriptions and bindings when possible to assist potential identification of owners. The entries

will be crowdsourced from a diverse pool of scholars, historians, librarians, students, book collectors, and booksellers.

What is the value of a book owned by a woman?

Tara L. Lyons

In this paper, I'll tell the tale of a copy of Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621) purchased for \$250 by Milner Library (Illinois State University) during the 1970s when Wroth was merely a footnote to English Renaissance literature. Sarah Lindenbaum's has recently shown that this copy of *Urania* was once owned by one of the most well-known female book owners of the seventeenth century: Frances Wolfreston. Indeed, the volume very clearly bears her signature and tag "her booke." Scholarship on women writers like Wroth combined with Lindenbaum's savvy work on Wolfreston has made ISU's *Urania* the most valuable book in the university's collections. With this case study in mind, I would like to consider the implications of our scholarship on early modern women and their books. How does our work affect the price, sale, and value of such volumes, especially as they circulate in auctions? In what ways do we anticipate our research contributing to an increase in demand for books with early women's provenance? And what does it mean for the future ownership of such books and who will have access to them in the future?

Cataloguing Female Book Ownership Inscriptions: Modelling Possibilities; Rethinking Practices. Selections from The University of Western Ontario's Milton and Miltoniana Collection

Scott Schofield

How might librarians better catalogue their copies with evidence of early modern female ownership marks and what protocols might be adopted to increase the searchability of such books? What are the possibilities for collaboration between patrons and librarians in the cataloguing of copy-specific data? How might scholars working on female book ownership best share and disseminate their findings? These three questions prompt us to reconsider the methods we use for provenance research and specifically, how we find, record, and disseminate our knowledge of books with evidence of early modern female ownership.

By looking at a small sample of early female ownership inscriptions in books from The University of Western Ontario's Milton and Miltoniana Collection, I will highlight the complexities of such inscriptions and the challenges they pose for cataloguers of copy-specific data. From there, I will consider how researchers might work with libraries to post their provenance findings as supplements to library catalogue records. To make this case we must start by modelling possibilities and rethinking familiar practices

SAA 2022 Workshop: Early Modern Women's Book Ownership

'Read on this book': The Princess Elizabeth, Lady Jane Grey, and the Authority of Ownership

Deneen M. Senasi

This paper tells a tale of two books, a pair of prayerbooks owned by two queens, one by Lady Jane Grey, the so-called “Nine Days Queen,” and the other by the Princess Elizabeth, later the “Virgin Queen” who reigned for more than four decades. Though one reigned so briefly and the other so long, both lived in a kind of privileged precarity in which the constancy and companionship of books served as a counterpoint to the vicissitudes of their lives as women and as queens. Elizabeth created her book in 1545 as a gift for her father, Henry VIII. Known as *The Prayerbook of Princess Elizabeth* (BL Royal MS 7 D X), it features an embroidered cover, translations of Katherine Parr’s *Prayers or Meditations* in Elizabeth’s own hand, and a Latin preface addressed to the king. Jane’s three-inch prayerbook (BL Harley MS 2342) accompanied her to the Tower in 1554 where she inscribed it with messages of farewell prior to her execution; she gifted it to the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir John Brydges. This new project explores the relationship between women’s book *ownership* and *authority* in several senses, from the production of a book and its original content to inscriptions and annotations, as well as the authority to bestow the book upon another as a gift or an obligation. Examining these aspects of women’s book ownership in terms of the prerogatives they confer, I am particularly interested in how acts of making and inscription converge with acts of bestowal, as both prayerbooks were gifted to others at pivotal moments in Elizabeth’s and Lady Jane’s lived experience of precarity. Within that context, the paper follows these little books in transit from the intimacy of the personal prayerbook to the visibility of a public icon, positing them as not only something these women *owned*, but also as something they *deployed*. Instruments of authority (again, in several senses) through which the Princess Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey, otherwise immured in conditions of extreme precarity *take ownership* (also in several senses), acting *upon* and *through* the book for purposes of their own.

Finding Early Modern Women Readers and Owners of Playbooks in France and the Dutch Republic, 1600-1750

Martine van Elk

My paper aims to give an overview of provenance resources in England and the Low Countries. I am hoping to provide a review of existing literature on the topic as well as electronic tools and databases. I will also discuss how major library catalogs, such as the Royal Library in The Hague and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, allow us to trace provenance and female ownership and how we might fruitfully use other resources, like bindings and auction catalogs, inventories, and wills to uncover information. I will attempt to compare the resources at our disposal with what we have for English women, and by the end, I hope to provide a few specific examples of female ownership as found for the Low Countries and France. My paper will try to articulate, however provisionally, a methodology of uncovering female book ownership for those two countries, in order eventually to enable cross-cultural and transnational approaches to the topic. My main aim is to uncover female authorship of playbooks, but this may prove to be difficult, as just looking at digitized versions of physical copies of playbooks in the Royal Library

and in the BnF has turned up very little, suggesting either that women were not likely to mark their ownership in the same way as they did in England or that those marks have more routinely been bleached over the centuries. My question therefore is how we might arrive at a more nuanced grasp of practices of marking ownership in different countries.

On *Not* Owning Books: Patterns of Title Transfer by Early Modern English Female Booksellers
Mary Erica Zimmer

On 6 May 1625, the Stationers' Register records early modern English bookseller Elizabeth Adams as having "assigned" the cluster of titles remaining within her publishing purview to Andrew Hebb, a fellow stationer previously associated with both Adams herself and her deceased husband.¹ Yet her activity in the trade continues for more than a decade, in modes ranging beyond "savvy choices" to which Alan Farmer attests in his 2020 study of London's widow publishers to 1640.² The scope of her documented and ongoing activity—which appears to continue until death in 1638—raises the question of how divestment itself might be understood as a "savvy" choice: not only for those seeking to leave the trade, as one might surmise, but also and perhaps more importantly as enabling further choices for those whose networked connections in an early modern English bookselling world might facilitate alternate paths of action within it.

What factors may have governed when, where, and to what extent widow stationers chose to divest themselves of titles held, and what further choices might their actions have then tended to enable? Setting the groundwork for the first question is the purpose of this dataset, which has been created from the list of 847+ London stationers found in Edward Arber's *A Transcript of the Register of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640*, vol. 5. At present, the set includes only "nodes"—here, discrete actors—whose interrelations the network will track: when complete, the network will allow scholars to explore patterns of divestment among widowed female members of the book trade whose ongoing actions and choices are of interest for my work. Beginning to track the interpersonal connections that may have guided directions of divestment holds the potential to shed light on further actions then taken by these women about whose work there remains much to explore.

¹ See *A Transcript of the Register of the Stationers' Company of London, 1550-1640*, ed. Edward Arber, vol. iv, 139–40, both as noted by Arber [iv, 31] and in *A Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of Foreign Printers of English Books, 1557-1640* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1910), 1.

² Farmer, Alan. "Widow Publishers in London, 1540–1640." In *Women's Labour and the History of the Book in Early Modern England*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Bloomsbury 2020), 47–73. On Adams' ongoing activity, see Blayney, Peter W. M. *The Bookshops in Paul's Cross Churchyard*. Occasional Papers of the Bibliographical Society, no. 5 (London: The Bibliographical Society), 18–25.